

1. We now begin the final of four lessons on Psalm 119. Let me start with my title. It is simply, "approaching the finish line". Yes it is far more than just finishing this long psalm. It has to do with understanding how God expects us to finish the rest of our lives. As it relates to this psalm and the bible, my point is that we can never exhaust what we learn from this psalm or this book, no matter how long we have been at it. I'll explain more in a moment.
2. For the sake of new readers, let me describe what is going on in this psalm.
 - a) Psalm 119 is the longest psalm (by far) and the longest chapter in the bible. In most of my lessons I cover anywhere from one to three psalms per lesson. Because this psalm is so long, I am taking four lessons to discuss it. The purpose of this psalm is about getting us to appreciate God's word. This psalm is written in groups of eight verses. Each group has it's own theme and all of them tie to the big theme of appreciating God's word.
 - b) Also know that each group of eight verses is tied to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Remember that the psalms were originally written in Hebrew. There are 22 letters in that alphabet and 22 groups of "eight verses". This lesson covers the last five groups. Every verse in every group starts with the same letter of that Hebrew alphabet of that group.
 - c) If you don't speak Hebrew, don't worry. My point is not to teach you Hebrew, but to just understand how this psalm is structured. For the original Jewish reader, that structure helped them to remember psalm lines by knowing what letter each line began with.
3. OK, now that I've got that out of my system, let me get back to my topic theme of crossing the finish line. Think about our entire life span as being a race. We don't know how long we are going to live. In that sense, seeing the finish line of life can be a scary thing. The key to finishing life well is to remember that for the believer this life is not the end, but only the beginning.
 - a) Ask yourself, "How long do we plan to live?" The correct answer is forever. The greatest purpose one can have for this life is to use it to make a difference for God. If we will live forever, it would make sense that the things we do for God now have eternal benefits.
 - b) This ties back to the study of Psalm 119. If it is the goal of the believer to live life pleasing to God, then His word should be our guide as to how He wants us to live. That is why we study our bible, not as an end to itself, but as a guide to how to live to be pleasing to Him.
 - c) Giving that reality, having the finish line of this life at some unknown date "right in front us", should be a motivation to want to finish well. Yes as we age, our bodies wear out and we can't do things like as when we are younger. That's not the point. The point is God calls on all of us to live to make a difference for Him. Finding out the specifics of what He wants each of us to do, is the great joy of living out our lives. That's why we study this psalm and the bible in general, to guide us as to how to make that difference for Him.
 - d) Now that I've stated the obvious, let me come back to crossing the finish line:
 - i) Obviously we can't change our past. However, we can affect our future if we are just willing to commit our future to Him by living for Him now. That decision is the best thing one can do for one's life. OK then what? Then simply make the decision to regularly spend time seeking Him through prayer, through His word and through time with other believers. If we make that commitment, I do promise that God will guide each of us to do His will for our lives.
 - ii) In other words, if we do that, we will finish well. The good news is living for God is actually easier and leads to a more productive life than any other goal we could possibly have that doesn't involve Him.
 - e) With that said, we have 48 more verses left to cover in this psalm. So one more time, let's get our now well-worn running shoes back on and make the run toward the finish line of this psalm by learning what God wants us to learn from studying His word.

4. Verse 129: Your statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them.
 - a) This next group of eight verses focuses on the desire to be lead by God. This group is a prayer for us to have understanding of His word. OK, we are now about three quarters the way through this psalm. Why state the basics here of appreciating His word?
 - i) It is best if I explain it through an example. Think about the act of reading a good book. We may pause in the middle of that book and think, wow, this is really good. I hope it lasts. That is sort of the sentiment here.
 - b) Now let me focus on this verse itself. When the writer says "wonderful", a synonym here is "miraculous" or maybe even supernatural. The idea is to think, "I could not have come up with anything this good myself. It is the realization that only God Himself could have designed these stories and these rules in order to teach us about life. This verse is about the psalmist appreciating how God's word is definitely supernatural in origin.
 - c) This leads to the second part of this verse: Therefore I obey them (God's laws).
 - i) It always amazes me to consider all the people who believe the bible is the word of God, yet never take the time to actually study what it says. The point of this verse is that we appreciate the fact that we realize that the God of the Universe ordains the bible and therefore we do study it and obey what it teaches us.
5. Verse 130: The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.
 - a) One of the great misconceptions about the bible is that one has to be a scholar in order to understand what it says. The bible is designed so anyone can read and learn from it. Believe me, if I can teach it, anyone else can also take the time to learn what it says.
 - b) Notice this verse calls the average bible reader "simple". Think of the word "naïve" here. Without the desire for God's influence in our lives, we will go down the wrong path in life. His word guides us to understand just how we should live our lives in the first place.
6. Verse 131: I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.
 - a) The word translated "open" is like an animal dying for a drink of water. The idea here is that we should desire to study God's word as much as a thirsty animal desires a drink.
 - b) So does this mean I should be studying my bible all day and night? Of course not. God knows we still have a life to live. At the same time, we should make the study of His word such a part of our lives that we long for it like a thirsty animal longs for a drink.
7. Verse 132: Turn to me and have mercy on me, as you always do to those who love your name.
 - a) The first half of this verse has two requests: The first is that God look to us. The second request is for God to have mercy on us. Let me explain why each request is here.
 - i) If God knows all things, why should ask Him to look toward us? To answer, re-read the second half of this verse. It says in effect, "Look at me (referring to us) as You, God have looked at others who I know are also believers."
 - ii) In other words, the psalmist has seen God work in the lives of other people and the psalmist desires that He work in his own life like He has in other's lives.
 - b) Now think of a time when we are in trouble or have done something wrong. We ask for God's mercy because we know we are imperfect people. We know God has helped other people and therefore we know that He is capable of helping. Therefore, we ask that God work in our lives just as He has worked in others. That is how we ask Him to look at us.
8. Verse 133: Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.
 - a) To explain this verse, let me ask a simple question: Why do we sin? I would argue it is not due to temptation, as much as it is due to our human nature to want to sin.
 - i) To quote Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel, "I am not a horse theft because I steal horses, but I am a horse theft by nature and therefore I steal horses".
 - ii) Translation: It is our human nature to want to sin and therefore we do sin.
 - b) The point is when we wander away from God, we will sin because it is part of our human nature. We ask God to guide us according to His word, as that is how we avoid sin.

9. Verse 134: Redeem me from the oppression of men, that I may obey your precepts.
 - a) Translation: Protect me from evil people so I can live the way You desire me to live.
 - b) OK who is "oppressing" the psalmist here and why should I care? This gets back to the concept that if we are going to make a difference for God, we have to expect opposition. People may not realize how or why they are opposing us, but it is best for us just to accept the idea that forces exist that don't want us to do His will.
 - c) It is like the old saying, "To defeat our enemy, first we must know our enemy". If we accept the idea that evil exists and that God is our only hope to fight such evil, then asking for His protection also gives us the ability to focus on Him in the first place.
10. Verse 135: Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees.
 - a) I don't believe God has a literal face. Therefore, the first part of Verse 135 is simply an expression. The idea is "May God be happy with how I live my life." Let me explain:
 - i) Yes God loves us, but at the same time, He desires obedience. Therefore, God is happy with us when we are obedient to His desires for our lives.
 - ii) Asking God to help us understand the bible is one way we become pleasing to Him. That is why we ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we study His word.
 - iii) Bottom line: Dear God, I want You to use my life to make a difference for You. Therefore, teach me what you want me to learn today so I can be filled with joy. Remember joy is not based on circumstances, but based on one's attitude in life.
11. Verse 136: Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.
 - a) Translation: It hurts me to see people who don't care about obeying You. Further, it hurts me when I think about how I have been disobedient to You as well.
 - b) One of the things one gets from reading the bible is a comprehension of just how much God really hates sin. Once one realizes that, it should bother us when we sin, because if it is our desire to please Him, then we should love what He loves and hates what He hates.
 - c) To use another classical Christian expression: If you love God, how much do hate sin? That is the issue the psalmist is mentioning in this line and a good reminder for our lives.
 - d) This leads me back to the verse. The point here is that it bothers the psalmist that people willfully ignore God and that causes their (our) sin nature to come out. I suspect the writer is applying this to his own life as well as the lives of the people around us.
12. Verse 137: Righteous are you, O LORD, and your laws are right.
 - a) We now start the next section of eight verses. These eight verses use the word translated "righteous" to describe God four times (not always translated the same way). Therefore, I thought it would be best if I describe how God is "righteous":
 - i) This word means "God is right". The idea is that He can do no wrong and what He always does is the right thing. I've always argued that the God is perfect and therefore He cannot do any wrong by that definition.
 - b) This leads me back to Verse 137. If God is always right, and if we believe the bible is the Word of God, then the laws themselves are always right. But John, Christians are not under the law, but under grace. If those laws are so perfect, why are we Christians not subject to those laws? Peter said in effect that no man could live up to those standards. (See Acts 15:10.) Therefore we do live by His grace and not by obedience to those laws.
13. Verse 138: The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy.
 - a) My translation: Your laws are completely trustworthy.
 - b) OK, John, one more time, if these laws are so perfect, why are Christians not subject to them? The answer is we can learn from them, but that is different from trusting them for our salvation. They do guide us on how to best live our lives, but we trust in God's ability to guide us to obedience as opposed to trying to be obedient by will power.
 - c) This leads us back to this verse. Yes God's laws are trustworthy. If those laws were not trustworthy in the first place, obedience to them would not be an issue. However, that is a separate issue from drawing upon His power in order to obey those rules.

14. Verse 139: My zeal wears me out, for my enemies ignore your words.
 - a) Having zealously for God is a good thing. Jesus was once associated with zeal. When Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the Jewish temple for cheating the customers. His disciples quoted Psalm 69:9, which is a reference to zeal. (See John 2:16-17).
 - b) OK John, you just lectured us in the previous two verses that it is not by our willpower that we draw close to God, but by our dependence upon Him. Now, here is a verse talking about having zeal for God. Can you explain the difference? I'm happy too.
 - i) We are not saved by willpower. If we care about pleasing God, then a byproduct of that care is we have a zeal for His will to be done. That is why Jesus had a zeal for cleansing the Jewish Temple. He wanted the right thing to be done for God.
15. Verse 140: Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and your servant loves them.
 - a) The point is the laws of the bible have been well tested over the millenniums, and the fact that the bible has stood the test of time should be a source of comfort.
 - b) OK, enough said on this verse, we can move on. We will make it to Verse 176 today. ☺
16. Verse 141: Though I am lowly and despised, I do not forget your precepts.
 - a) The psalmist is describing a time when he didn't think much of himself. The psalmist's solution to his dilemma is to get his focus back on God's commandments for his life.
 - b) Know that it doesn't matter what is our status in life when it comes to feeling "lowly and despised". It is a personal feeling and not a comment on how others actually see us.
 - i) The point is despite that lowly feeling, the author still trusted in God's word.
17. Verse 142: Your righteousness is everlasting and your law is true.
 - a) Ok, we are back to "righteousness" again. Again, that word simply means, God is always right. The point is that concept of God always being right goes on forever and we can always trust in that fact as well as trust in the idea that His Word is always true.
 - b) We all have our moments where we lack our trust in God. What we have to remember during such times is that He is still there, His word (i.e., the bible) can still guide our lives and He wants us to trust Him through such times in our lives.
 - c) One of my mentors, Chuck Missler is convinced that "God stays up at nights" thinking of new ways to ask him, "Hey, Chuck, do you really trust me? Even through this?" That is the idea of trusting in His righteousness even during the most difficult of situations.
18. Verse 143: Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands are my delight.
 - a) Here's a question to ponder: If this psalmist is so zealous for God, why does he constantly have trouble and distress? The answer comes back to the Chuck Missler's quote of "Hey Chuck, do you really trust me (God) or not?" Sometimes I suspect God allows bad things to happen in our life just to see if we trust Him or not to see us through those things.
 - i) I don't know if the psalmist was in trouble due to an enemy or due to his own actions. The point is simply that he was in trouble and needed God's help.
 - b) Now lets look at the second half of this verse, "your commands are my delight".
 - i) The point is if we want God's help, we need to seek Him. One way to seek Him is simply spend time in His word, even in tough times.
19. Verse 144: Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live.
 - a) Other English translations have the word "righteousness" used again instead of "statues". The idea is in effect, "God's laws are forever right, therefore, since I believe that, please God help me to understand what You want me to learn from those laws."
 - i) This is a reminder that first of all, anyone can learn what the bible teaches.
 - ii) Next it is a reminder that we ask God to guide us to better understand our bible.
 - iii) If you want to see God literally answer a prayer request, try asking Him to help you understand a particular passage of the bible. It never ceases to amaze me how and when God does answer prayers like that on a regular basis.
20. OK, we made it through another section of "eight". We have four more to go. Yes the finish line is in sight, so let's keep moving through these verses.

21. Verse 145: I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD, and I will obey your decrees.
- a) As we start another group of eight verses, the emphasis in this group is on our effort. The psalmist states how much of an effort he is making to seek God. The emphasis is not just on his current effort, but also on the fact that he has been doing this for a long time.
 - b) But John, you have been lecturing us that trusting God is about just that "trusting Him" and not based on our willpower. Yet here you are telling us here that the psalmist is describing all the effort he makes to seek God. Is he doing this to brag? No.
 - i) The psalmist is not trying to gain points with God by his efforts. The point is we are to seek Him in the first place. If we do have faith that God is who He is, then that knowledge should lead us to obedience. That is the point of this section.
 - c) All of this leads to Verse 145: To paraphrase the verse, "Dear God, I'm going to give it all I have to follow You. Therefore, dear God, help me to understand my bible better."
 - i) I have learned through life that God does respond to such an effort. If we tell God it is our desire to be His servant, I am convinced He responds to that request.
 - ii) How exactly do I become a better servant of God? It gets back to the idea of telling God we desire to do His will and change us to be more in conformity to His will. My point is it is not about trying harder, but letting God work through us.
 - iii) Does this mean we wait for God to verbally speak to us on some issue? No. Remember that God is not under any obligation to work on our timing. He will not respond if we try harder or even shut up so He can speak at a given moment.
 - iv) The point is simply that if we are willing to make the effort to seek Him, He does guide our lives and He does give us understanding of His word.
 - d) I have to admit, there are moments when I am frustrated with people and want to yell at them, "God gave you a brain, go use it." Then I hold my tongue and remember it is not my job to fix people. He gives us the ability to think, reason and make good decisions based on principals taught in His word, so we should do so.
 - i) That leads us to obedience to His word, which is the point of this verse.
22. Verse 146: I call out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes. ¹⁴⁷ I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. ¹⁴⁸ My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.
- a) In these verse, we read of the psalmist, discusses his efforts to seek God.
 - i) In Verse 146, the psalmist makes the statement in effect that he calls out to God.
 - ii) In Verse 147, he makes the statement that he rises before dawn to seek God's help.
 - iii) In Verse 148, he says he stays up late to think about God's promises.
 - b) OK John, other than the fact the psalmist doesn't get a lot of sleep, what is it I should take away from these three verses? Does God want me to be up all the time seeking Him and reading my bible? No, God created us with the need for sleep, so that is not the issue.
 - i) This leads back to the issue of "faith versus works". We are not saved based on how much or how hard we study our bible. We make the effort to study because we are saved and because we are grateful for God's salvation.
 - ii) I get that. ☺ Still, how much should I study my bible? I believe God will make it obvious to us what amount is right amount. If we are willing to give God part of our day, I have watched Him bless the rest of my day and He will bless yours too.
 - c) Now let's look at the second part of these three verses:
 - i) In Verse 146, the psalmist says he will keep obeying God's laws.
 - ii) In Verse 147, the psalmist says he puts his hope for the future in God's word.
 - iii) In Verse 148, the psalmist says he will think about God's promises for our lives.
 - iv) It is best if you do not see these three verses as a specific checklist. The idea is that if we trust in God, then we should desire to seek Him. One-way in the bible we seek Him is simply to spend time thinking about how His laws apply to our lives. This is the concept of not just reading our bible, but thinking about its meaning.

23. Verse 149: Hear my voice in accordance with your love; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your laws.
- a) It is best if I freely translate here: "Dear God, I believe You love me, because You have called me to Your salvation. Since I belong to You, it is my desire to do Your will. Hear my plea for help and answer me based on what You believe is best for my life."
 - i) Well John, that is a pretty long paraphrase for this one verse. I hope you work faster through the rest of the lesson or we may never get done. ☺
 - ii) My point here is simply that if we do belong to God, we don't seek Him in order to get more "stuff" in this life. We seek Him in order to do His will for our lives.
 - b) The other point of this verse is that the psalmist asks God to preserve his life according to His laws. The idea here is that if we are going to live to make a difference for Him, we need to study our bible in order to understand how to make that difference. Also note that learning God's will is not about randomly opening to a bible page for guidance, but about regular study in order to learn the principals that God wants us to live by.
24. Verse 150: Those who devise wicked schemes are near, but they are far from your law. ¹⁵¹ Yet you are near, O LORD, and all your commands are true.
- a) These two verses are interesting to compare and contrast to each other:
 - i) Verse 150 says wicked people are usually far away from studying God's laws.
 - ii) Verse 151 says God is near to us who believe His commands are true.
 - b) OK, explain to me how God is near to us who do trust in Him. The idea gets back to our love relationship with Him. If we love God, we develop that relationship by spending time with Him through prayer and time in His word. The realization that His word is true should make us want to draw close to Him through that love relationship.
25. Verse 152: Long ago I learned from your statutes that you established them to last forever.
- a) The psalmist is saying that he has been studying God's laws for a long time now, and he knows that the laws of the bible are as good today as when he first started studying them.
 - i) So are you saying that if we haven't been studying God's word since say, our youth we are in trouble? Of course not. I am saying one can study God's word for many, many years and never stop learning from them.
 - ii) Think of a newspaper: How interesting would it be to read the same paper, every day for many years? Even a good book gets boring after reading it a number of times. Yet God's word never tires, even if one has been studying it for years.
 - iii) In summary, this verse is about appreciating the timelessness of God's word.
26. Verse 153: Look upon my suffering and deliver me, for I have not forgotten your law.
- a) I would summarize this next section with the statement: "I can see the difference between how people who trust in God live, versus those who don't. Therefore, protect me from those who want to hurt me and help me to stick close to Your word".
 - b) I suspect during this section, the psalmist is thinking about how much he has suffered at the hands of enemies. Instead of seeking revenge, he turns the situation over to God.
 - c) I am convinced the psalmist had a regular life, and depended upon God for that life. He did somehow literally suffer from those who didn't trust in God. He is saying in effect, "Those enemies of mine are Your problem God, as I can't deal with them".
 - i) This gets back to the idea that we can't fix other people. All we can do is ask for God to give us the strength to deal with such people and ask that He be our defender when we are dealing with attacks. That is the essence of this section.
 - d) Now let's focus on Verse 153 itself. The idea of this verse is in effect to ask for God to protect us from those who want to hurt us because we obey Your laws".
 - i) I have to admit this verse appears a little arrogant. Is it saying, "We are better than nonbelievers because we study God's word?" No. God does not have favorites amongst people. We are better than nonbelievers in that if we belong to Him, then He cares for us and in effect, "Has our back" in dealing with our enemies.

- ii) Part of the idea of trusting in God is that if we do trust in Him, then we are one of His. If we are His, then we can trust in Him to give us the wisdom to deal with those who want to hurt us. I've seen cases where God somehow just fixes the situation without our involvement and I've seen cases where He has guided believers through difficult situations involving those who want to hurt them.
 - iii) The point is our dependence is upon Him, not ourselves to get through life.
 - iv) With that said, let's move on to the next verse in this section.
- 27. Verse 154: Defend my cause and redeem me; preserve my life according to your promise.
 - a) This verse has a "court room" tone to it. It is saying in effect, "Dear God, I feel like my life is on trial. I need You to defend me and see me through it."
 - i) OK, I don't think this prayer will cause God to speak audibly to those who want to hurt us. That's not the point. The point is that we are asking God to work in our situation to guide us through our lives. We trust in God to work out our situations for His glory if we are willing to trust in Him.
 - ii) But John, you always preach that God knows all things. Yes He does. But with turning our situation over to Him, it reminds us that it is His desire to take the lead in whatever we are dealing with. Praying for God to be in charge of our situation is not for His sake, but for ours. It is to remind us God is leading us.
 - b) That little speech leads us to the word "promise". The King James Version says "statutes". In essence it is saying, "The bible promises us that trusting in Him leads to our victories."
 - i) Let me explain: The bible is not just a bunch of general principals to live by. It teaches us that God is a living force (for a lack of a better term) that does desire to guide our lives. That is the promise to the believer who does trust in Him.
- 28. Verse 155: Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek out your decrees.
 - a) Does this verse mean that a person who does not read their bible will never be saved? Let me answer that question with this illustration:
 - i) God never calls on us to judge other people's salvation. Since heaven is in effect His home, He decides who will be with Him forever. On the other hand, it is acceptable to judge behavior. There is nothing wrong with judging other people's behavior. Jesus and the disciples did it all the time. Jesus told Peter in effect that church members decide who can and cannot join its ranks. (See Matthew 16:19).
 - a) My point is we have to judge behavior in order to determine who can and cannot join our specific church. It is an example of judging behavior.
 - b) This leads back to this verse. The idea is, "show me a person who doesn't care about studying the bible and show me a person who doesn't care about living a life that is pleasing to God and I will show you a person that is not saved yet.
 - c) OK, now that I know this verse is about the salvation of others, how does it affect me?
 - i) It is another reminder of the benefit of seeking God's word in our lives. Yes we are only saved by Jesus payment for our sins. If we do trust in that salvation, we would want to seek God with our lives. That is the idea of this verse.
- 29. Verse 156: Your compassion is great, O LORD; preserve my life according to your laws.
 - a) The idea here is that God promises good things for those who do trust in Him. Not only do we benefit from salvation itself, but God also promises to bless our lives now.
 - i) But John, a lot of people suffer terribly as believers. How can one guarantee one will be blessed in this life by trusting in Him? God never promises us a pain free life. God promises us joy during the best and worst of times.
 - ii) On a related note, I find it interesting that the suicide rate amongst those who are handicapped is essentially nonexistent. Despite all of that suffering for those who are handicapped, you don't hear of them killing themselves.
 - b) The point is one can have joy in one's life even during the worst of suffering. The idea is we can't always change our circumstances, but we can always control our attitude.

30. Verse 157: Many are the foes who persecute me, but I have not turned from your statutes.
- a) I don't believe the psalmist lived in any sort of monastery studying his bible all day. I do believe the psalmist lived in a "regular world" and had multiple foes persecute him.
 - b) OK John, the psalmist lived and died 3,000 years ago. Explain how this affects me?
 - i) We may or may not have human foes in our lives. We may have to deal with people who want to put us down or we may not at a given moment.
 - ii) Besides my usual statement that making a difference for God will make us deal with evil forces. We depend upon God for the strength to face such forces.
 - iii) What about human enemies? Are demonic forces always behind such people? The short answer is we don't know. All we know is that we encounter people and forces that in effect want us to change our behavior away from trusting in God. They want us to take them without God's help. That is always the danger in life when we try to do things based on our own strength.
 - c) The point is we never know what it is we have to face on a given day. All we do know is that God wants to lead us through those situations. We make the commitment to study His word as one significant way of staying close to Him and trusting in Him.
31. Verse 158: I look on the faithless with loathing, for they do not obey your word. ¹⁵⁹ See how I love your precepts; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your love.
- a) I put these two verses together so that one can see the contrast:
 - i) Verse 158 says that "I see those who don't trust in God and I loathe their behavior."
 - ii) Verse 159 says, I trust in You. Preserve me because I trust in Your love."
 - b) With that said, let's discuss "loathing" those who don't trust in God.
 - i) This is not about wanting others to go to hell. This is about seeing the behavior of nonbelievers and saying in effect, "I never want to live that way."
 - ii) I stated earlier that it is acceptable to judge behavior and this verse is an example.
 - c) An important concept to get across is that God does not want us to have a judgmental attitude about people, but at the same time, we are to judge others.
 - i) The idea is that we are not to spend our lives thinking we are better than others because for example we do read God's word. At the same time we can want others to change and desire to not live like someone who ignores God.
 - ii) What does that mean practically? It means we don't try to fix others. It means we don't want to live like them, but we don't put people down who live differently.
 - iii) We become a good witness for Jesus by showing love to others, not be acting in a way that comes off as superior to others.
 - d) All of this leads me to Verse 159. The psalmist asks God to preserve his life because he loves studying the bible. The idea is we look to God as our source of joy. If we depend upon God for our joy, then it is ok to ask Him to supply that joy to us.
 - i) OK, John, one more time how do I that practice that? The idea is we don't look at the circumstances of our lives for joy, but from God Himself. Good and bad things are going to happen to our lives. We can't always control what happens to us, but we can control our attitude. We look to God to supply that good attitude in order to deal with life, and that is the idea of wanting His love in our lives.
 - ii) Yes we also ask for God's help in dealing with our issues, but over and above that, we ask God's help to preserve us through our lives and ask Him to bring us joy.
32. Verse 160: All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.
- a) This section of eight verses finishes with the reminder that all the words of the bible are true and stand the test of time. They are as true today as they were thousands of years ago. This verse fits in this section as we as believers trust in His words to guide our lives and we know that they stand the test of time.

33. Verse 161: Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word.
- a) As we approach the end of this psalm (two sections left), the psalm starts to build up some momentum. He is saying in effect, "I love Your word, and even with all of these verses so far, the fact comes down to the idea that I never get tired of appreciating it."
 - b) To say it another way, the more I trust in God, the more I appreciate what Your word teaches me. The more trust in You the more I separate myself from nonbelievers.
 - c) This is sounding like a Christian is to act superior to the nonbeliever. Didn't you just condemn such an act a page ago? No, and let me explain why:
 - i) This verse says that rulers persecuted the psalmist without any good reason, and that the psalmist trusts in God's word. That doesn't mean we walk around all day putting down people who don't live the way we do. Yes we may have to defend ourselves at times, but the issue is about thinking one is superior to others.
 - a) The psalmist is somehow hurt by others and instead of lashing out at them, he trusts in God's word as his source of comfort and joy.
 - ii) In other words, we don't fix our enemies by throwing the bible in their face. We simply trust in God to lead us down the path He desires for our lives. We also trust in Him in terms of how to deal with those who want to hurt us.
 - iii) When others hurt us, we should turn to God in order to have joy in our lives. Through God we then have the strength to face whatever it is we have to face.
34. Verse 162: I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil.
- a) Earlier in the psalm, there were statements that the psalmist loves God's word more than gold or silver. (See Verses 72 and 127). So John, is the psalmist running out of things to say here and is in effect repeating himself by saying God's word is greater than "spoil"?
 - b) The key is to read each verse in context. In this verse, the word "spoil" is associated with rewards in war. This verse is not condoning such wars. The verse is saying that the joy we have over God's word is as bountiful as getting a lot of stuff in our lives.
 - i) This leads me back to the gold references. The earlier references were in effect that we should love God's word more than gold or any material thing. The idea of this verse is that we should treasure God's word like receiving a big pile of "loot".
35. Verse 163: I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law.
- a) The idea of "falsehood" is also translated "lying". This is much more than simply telling the truth in life. The idea of "falsehood" is about the realization that going down any path in life that is in opposition to God's word or His will is in effect, falsehood.
 - b) So how do we know what is "falsehood"? The second half of this verse gives the answer. It is that God's laws guide us into what is true in life. For example, it "truth" is trusting in God's son as payment of our sin. Truth is realizing that the God of the bible wants to be in charge of every aspect of our lives and lead us down a path He desires for us.
 - i) The easiest way to know what is "false" is to spend a lot of time with the real thing. As an example, bank tellers spend a lot of time working with cash. All of that time handling money helps them to recognize the real thing. That same concept applies to our study of God's word. The more time we spend with "the real thing", the easier it is to spot what is false.
 - c) If you were to ask me Satan's greatest "falsehood", it would be the lie that our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds. That we can get to heaven by being a good person.
 - i) Salvation is based on faith, not being a good person. That faith is simply the concept that God exists and He wants to be in charge of our lives. By trusting in His forgiveness only then can we live the life of obedience that God desires for us.
 - ii) It seems like a simple concept, but in life we constantly need to remind ourselves of that fact because we easily develop the desire to want to prove to God how good we are through our works. We can't please God by being a "good person". We please God by trusting in Him and letting Him work through us.

36. Verse 164: Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws.
- a) This verse does not mean we literally have to count seven times a day to praise God. The idea is we love His word so much that we regularly and constantly praise Him for the gift that is effect in our laps that guides our lives.
 - b) I also figure that when we get to heaven we are going to be spending a lot of time praising God, so I might as well get used to that concept now, in this lifetime.
37. Verse 165: Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble.
- a) Let me explain God's peace and believers: The idea does not mean we never have bad days. The idea is we can have peace in our hearts despite our problems because we can have assurance of our salvation. In other words we trust in God's word, and therefore we can be assured of salvation. That is where our joy comes from.
 - b) This leads me back to the great lie of trying to please God by trying harder. The mistake we make is that we can think God will only be pleased with me if I do this or that good thing. The truth is God can't love us any more than He already does. He simply wants us to do His will, which is what His word teaches us.
 - i) That is why we can have peace by trusting in His word. It is not by trying harder to obey it, but by trusting that He is guiding us to live, as He desires us to live.
 - ii) But what if I don't know what God wants of me today? As I like say, welcome to the club. The answer is simply to keep reading where you left off last time, and trust that through His word as well as through prayer and guidance of other believers God will make it obvious to us just what it is He wants for our lives.
 - iii) The answer in effect is to ask God to guide our lives and trust that He is doing so.
38. Verse 166: I wait for your salvation, O LORD, and I follow your commands.
- a) Let me quickly state my "three fold view of salvation": We were saved when we first trusted in Jesus payment for our sins. We are continued to be saved as we daily trust in God to guide our lives. We will be saved when we go to heaven one day.
 - i) With that said, this verse is focusing on "part 3", which is our eternal salvation.
 - ii) The idea is I'm trusting in You for my eternal salvation, and You know when that moment will happen. In the meantime, because I am trusting in Your love, I will obey whatever it is You want me to do today, and I learn that from my bible.
 - b) Obedience to God is not a list of "do these 10 things and you are in the club". Obedience is trusting in God to guide our lives. To explain, think of how our lives have changed since we first trusted in Him. It is always easiest to see in hindsight how God has worked in our lives. If we have trusted God "this far", than that trust should continue forever.
39. Verse 167: I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly. ¹⁶⁸ I obey your precepts and your statutes, for all my ways are known to you.
- a) To explain, let me state again what are God's "precepts and statutes".
 - i) "Precepts" is what God has appointed to be done.
 - ii) "Statues" is what the divine lawgiver (God) has laid down for us.
 - iii) Both terms are similar and teach us what God desires for our lives.
 - iv) My source for the two definitions given here is the English Study Bible (ESV).
 - b) The idea to God knows every aspect of our lives and He knows what is best for our lives. Therefore, He gives us His word because it is best way for us to live to lives.
 - i) In other words, we obey God's laws not because we have to, but because we want to. We "want to" because it is the best way for us to live.
 - c) OK it is time for one final lecture on Christians and obedience to God's laws:
 - i) First of all, we study God's laws in light of the New Testament. God's laws in the Old Testament guide us as to how to live. However, we don't earn points with God by being obedient to those laws. What we should do is trust in His love for us. The way we return that love is by being obedient to Him.

40. Verse 169: May my cry come before you, O LORD; give me understanding according to your word.
- a) We now come to the final section of this psalm. Getting back to my "finish line" analogy, that finish line is now in effect a page away, and it is time to make the sprint to the end.
 - i) That concept of "we are almost there, let's give it all we've got" ties well to this final section of eight verses. They are saying in effect, "I've run out of reasons to explain why I love God's word, so let me just say how much I appreciate it for my life and it is my desire to trust in God's word for the rest of my life."
 - ii) In other words, as we make that dash to the finish line of our lives, our trust is in that God is guiding us and it is our desire to do His will for our lives.
 - b) Notice the hunger for more understanding in this verse. After 168 verses and presumably many years of bible study by the psalmist, He still wants more. This gets back to the idea that one can never exhaust what one learns from studying one's bible.
41. Verse 170: May my supplication come before you; deliver me according to your promise.
- a) OK, what is a supplication? It is a type of prayer. Prayer is classically divided into four categories: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Adoration is about praising God for who He is. Confession is about confessing our sins. Thanksgiving is about telling God what we are grateful for. Supplication is simply asking God for things.
 - b) With that said, the psalmist is asking God via a supplication for deliverance. So what does he want deliverance from? A clue comes from other translations that say "deliver me according to your word." We are back to asking God to guide us based on principles of His word. The psalmist is saying in effect, "Dear God, guide the rest of my life based on principles taught in this book."
42. Verse 171: May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees. ¹⁷² May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous.
- a) I stated a moment ago that two types of prayer are adoration and supplication. I find that they best go together. If we spend time praising Him and desiring His will for our lives, it helps guide what to ask for our supplications.
 - b) This leads me to Verses 171 and 172. They both praise God for teaching us His word. By the time one gets through this many verses, the key point is about appreciating all God's word teaches us, and understanding how it guides our lives.
 - i) Verse 171 is a final reminder that God does teach us through His word.
 - ii) Verse 172 is a final reminder that all of God's commands are right for our life.
 - c) I feel the need to explain one last time, how a Christian should see all of those laws, as we constantly need to avoid what scholars call "legalism". The idea is if we have faith in God, we would naturally want to do something about that faith. That is where the law comes in. It guides us to how to live. It is not about gaining points by living by those laws. It is about trusting God to work through us to live the type of life He desires us to live.
43. Verse 173: May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.
- a) My translation: Dear God, I have chosen to live to serve You. I can't live that lifestyle without Your help, so please guide my life in order to do Your will.
 - b) Personally, I think that is a prayer God can't resist. If you want a prayer that you know God will answer, ask Him how we can serve Him better and just watch Him work.
 - c) If it is our desire to be used by Him, I can promise all of us that God will fulfill that desire and show us ways how we can be used by Him for His glory.
44. Verse 174: I long for your salvation, O LORD, and your law is my delight.
- a) OK John, you've beaten into our heads that salvation is past tense, present tense and future tense. What is in view here? I believe the point is the psalmist longs for the day when He will be with God forever in heaven, but in the meantime, the closest thing the psalmist has now in being close to God, is learning from His word. As for the present tense, the idea is again we draw close to God from learning from His word.

45. Verse 175: Let me live that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me.
- a) When the psalmist says, "let me live", I don't know if that is a request to live longer on earth or a request to be with God in heaven now. Either way, it is a request to draw close to God and that should be the desire of our life now as well as for eternity.
 - b) The idea comes back to the concept that in order to make that difference for God, it does require us to draw close to Him and that is what the psalmist meant by "your laws sustain me". For the Christian it is not about trying to remember and obeying each law. It is about trusting God to guide our lives and knowing that those laws teach us how it is best for us to live that life.
46. Verse 176: I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.
- a) I've taken the view that whoever the unnamed psalmist is, he wasn't living in the Jewish equivalent of a monastery, studying his bible all day. He lived a "normal" life and had problems just like the rest of us. At times, he, like us have strayed away from God.
 - i) Think about this as we wrap up the lesson: Here is this psalmist, who we logically presume has spent years studying God's word. He knows it well enough that he has written this very long psalm. Yet, he too, as wandered away from what it teaches at times and he confesses that sin here in this verse.
 - ii) My point is if someone "that close to God" can mess up, that means we do to.
 - b) I suspect this gets back to my concept of "legalism": The constant danger the Christian faces is trying to please God based on our will power, as opposed to trusting in God to work through us. I suspect that is why the psalmist strayed away from God. That is why he asks God to "seek him (psalmist) again".
 - i) In other words this verse is saying, "Dear God, I think about Your commands, and therefore, I do ask for Your guidance as to how to best live my life". The concept of trusting God, worshipping Him and dependence upon Him are intertwined in order for our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) In closing end, the call to all of us is to study His word, live to make a difference for Him, but at the same time worship God and trust in Him to work through us in order to make that difference.
47. OK, we made it to the finish line. While we are all catching our breath at this point, ☺ let me wrap up this four lesson adventure with this closing thought:
- a) One thing I have learned from my years of running long distance races and also from accomplishing big goals is that the true joy is not crossing the finish line, as much as it was the journey itself. As I said in the introduction, one can never exhaust what we can learn from studying our bible.
 - b) Psalm 119 is by far the longest journey in the bible. It's lessons on trusting in God's word for our lives are immeasurable. I hold the view that my life should never be over until God says it is so, no matter how good or bad it is at any one moment. With that said, I hope we have all grown as a believer over these 176 verses and continue to grow and trust in Him as God uses each of us for His glory.
 - c) That is my closing prayer, and hopefully, we'll talk again as we go through the last 31 (much shorter) psalms of this book.