

Psalm 119

Everybody wants the best life that they can get. Is it best to follow God's plan; or is it better to follow what everybody else is doing to find happiness? Only God's plan will yield *the abundant life*. What is God's plan, and what are his set of directions to negotiate life's twists and turns?

This is the bible study group's *chapter of blessing*. Psalm 119 is basically a description of the benefits of studying and applying God's word. It is hidden in the middle of the bible. It is like a big bookmark in the center.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the bible. It has 176 verses. It has an interesting educational and training pattern. It is about the fundamentals of the faith. The 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet serve as the acrostic headings for each 8-verse stanza. The different letter headings of the Hebrew alphabet serve as the beginning letter of the first word in the first verse of each stanza. We do not see any of this in English.

You could say that this is a well-organized writing - written for those seeking more order and less chaos in their lives. Vince Lombardi preached that excellence comes from mastering the fundamentals. The solution for chaos is clear organization and clear direction. Note our central theme, based on the number of times a word is used in this chapter. It's all about God's written word and his revelation.

- God's precepts-used 21 times
- The Law (Torah) of the LORD-used 17 times
- God's testimonies-used 13 times
- God's ways-used 13 times
- God's commands-used 22 times
- God's judgements-used 23 times
- God's word-used 21 times
- God's statutes-used 1 time
- God's truth-used 5 times

Read Psalm 119:1-8: There is a pathway of blessings for those who stay on it. This compliance includes our intentions with intellectual honesty. Posers are not blessed.

Verses 1 and 2 tell us what it takes to be *a blessed man*. You could substitute the word *happy* for blessed to make it a more modern phrase. To be *happy* there are things that we must do, and things that we must not do. God has a *yellow brick road* for us to follow.

The required actions for blessings are listed: *walk, keep, seek, don't do, look, praise and learn*. Note that if we stop at bible reading or church attendance we are not making an adequate effort to match our calling.

Conversely, we are to prevent becoming contaminated. We are supposed to be *holy* and clean. When we *dumpster dive* into something on TV, or when we contribute to an unclean conversation; we come away feeling a little dirty and a little depressed. When I put somebody down (even if it is true) I feel like I just made God sad again. Likewise with our secret desires. The Holy Spirit is *trapped* inside of our body. The Holy Spirit can be compared to a pure and gentle dove that wants to fly away from unclean or threatening things. In a sense, believers have *the power to torture God*. That is why adultery is so bad. It is like it forces God to be in the same room with us.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22)

Being blessed or happy also has a lot to do with how we are *managing our faith*. Are we just letting life happen to us; and casually finding time here and there to know God better? It is better to manage our spiritual growth by going deeper into the word, and *leaning into new opportunities* to build the kingdom. Do we have a specific plan? Are we even dialed into the same frequency to respond when opportunities come around?

Our intentions may not work out as planned, but our prayerful intentions do matter. I have recognized that my quiet time can be more about studying the word, than to actually communicate directly with God. That was the problem with the church of Ephesus. They got it done; but it was not refreshing. I have made a few temporary adjustments to fix that. I can come away feeling anxious, and not happy if I *major in the minors*.

One red flag to me is when my study time is not something that I am looking forward to. The bible describes sin like *leprosy*; which includes a loss of feeling. We cannot allow our temporary feelings of ambivalence or preferred activities to steer us. Unfortunately, many people think the answer is to back off on their quiet time. This is why most people leave the church. *Because they feel like it*. To the contrary; our flesh is actively working at displacing our spiritual man and edging him out. We can easily find fault and imperfections in the church; but that is irrelevant to our calling.

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. (Galatians 5:16-17)

Blessedness requires that we are making an honest good-faith effort to connect and walk with God in every way. Going to church, without worshiping God is a missed opportunity. I frequently find myself thinking about whoever is leading worship on stage; rather than on God. I will commonly forget to pray before going to church; requesting a special time with God and his people. It is like I just show up with my daily activities on my mind, and I wonder why nothing is happening. It would be like going to a friend's house for dinner, and laying back waiting to be entertained. Joshua told the children of Israel to consecrate themselves before entering the promised land. Moses likewise told the people to consecrate themselves before there was a meeting with God. Just showing up *to see the magic show* does not cut it.

The ironic thing is that we are tempted to find happiness in the empty pursuits of this world; sometimes at the cost of spiritual opportunities. They are like *fools gold* that produce excitement in the moment of discovery. Then we realize that we just traded away something of value for what is worthless. Satan is an excellent trader. He will take your home, your marriage, your contentment and anything else that is good.

“The ships of Tarshish were carriers of your merchandise. You were filled and very glorious in the midst of the seas. Your oarsmen brought you into many waters, But the east wind broke you in the midst of the seas. “Your riches, wares, and merchandise, Your mariners and pilots, Your caulkers and merchandisers, All your men of war who are in you, And the entire company which is in your midst, Will fall into the midst of the seas on the day of your ruin. (Ezekiel 27:25-27)

Psalm 119:9-16: This psalm is about getting back to the fundamentals. To do so, we need to go back to the most basic elements of our *faith-walk* with God. God’s word is a lamp unto our feet. It increases our awareness. Why would we stumble around at night if God has given us a flashlight? That is a picture of the lazy christian. Our actions reveal our trust level. We can believe that God’s word is true, but still entrust ourselves to a different course of convenience. Noah spent much of his life building a massive ship; because he trusted God more than he wanted to be a successful grape grower. When we ignore biblical directives or neglect to cultivate our daily walks with God we are only taking half-measures. This will produce mediocre and uninteresting lives. In fact, your interest in the things of God will completely diminish over time as the flesh takes back full control.

Also He said to them, "Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." (Mark 24:21-25)

It is tempting to take shortcuts to increase in understanding. Learning about God is all about building upon the basics. Isaiah was ridiculed for trying to teach the basics of scripture to grown men. He was compared to a kindergarten teacher. Once we become too proud to subject ourselves to God's daily lessons we become disconnected.

"Whom will he teach knowledge? And to whom will he make to understand the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts? For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." (Isaiah 28:9-10)

If we just study the word academically, and then live our lives as normal we can become gradually depressed. The lesson plan is not about having the right answer. Its about doing the thing with that answer. Depression often is the result of *living a lie*. We might fool others, but we cannot fool ourselves. We tend to think that our outrage comes from others who fail us. More often our anger is about our role (or absence) to own up to the challenge at hand or to affect change. Deep down, we know that we are not moving the needle back the other way. We can only blame so much on others and circumstances. Getting mad at others becomes exaggerated, because there is something inside of us that knows that we did not contribute to the solution.

Spiritual growth is more than stopping bad behavior. We need to understand that we sin because we are sinners. We are not sinners because we sin. There is something that wells up inside of us that desires to do evil. It is like a bottomless pit, that never runs out of corrupting thoughts and desires. Religion would point us to just choke these thoughts out and deny ourself. The word teaches us that the only way to have wholesome thoughts is to put God in your sights, and keep moving towards him. The bad stuff does not cease to exist. It just becomes displaced. God will take care of our mistakes if we are moving towards him.

We need to fill ourselves with things that will strengthen us; even while we still have a bunch of bad stuff in us as well. The medicine of God's word cures the disease. The self-medication distractions as painkillers do not heal us.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)

Our mind is like a city with walls. The enemy sends in images and sounds and sights through our open eye gates and our ear gates all day long. Godly thought control requires that we stop everything else that wants to enter and occupy; and reset our minds. If we invest in bible time we will get to a more biblical place. If we let our daily observations fill our mind, without restraint we will fold into the popular culture. I need to adjust my focus and my expectations every day to avoid this trap. I can be winning in Christ, but feel like I am losing. The following clinical research was helpful to me to read:

Here are some parallel thoughts from the world of psychology: Research is stating that each of us has approximately 60,000 thoughts a day, of which 90% are repetitive (Dr. Fred Luskin of Stanford University). Think about the reality that 90% of our daily thoughts are repetitive. I don't know about your mind, but mine is filled with *lots of thoughts at the same time*. In meditation, it's called "*monkey mind*," which I can attest keeps me very busy. These thoughts are:

- what I need to do,
- what I didn't do,
- what someone else is thinking,
- anxiety around the future and
- the monkeys keep jumping around.

Some of my thoughts are juicy creative ideas, and I write them down immediately because I know *the monkeys in my mind* will crowd out the creativity that is there as well. That is why it's important to start on *a path of awareness*, as it helps each of us either remove the negative monkeys or to redefine the thoughts towards actions that support us. Our thoughts throughout the day can support us to do our best or hinder our ability to move forward in our lives.

Our thoughts impact the choices we make each day.

How powerful would it be if we became aware of our repetitive thoughts and then decide what to keep and what to let go? *If a specific thought has been repeated several times, the brain puts it in a particular groove, and it goes on autopilot.* For example, if you think “I’m not good enough,” your mind will repeat it automatically when you try to do something. This thought *impacts your ability to act positively* in your life. Don’t get upset with your brain because that’s its job to streamline functions.

Change implies effort so to *redirect our thoughts towards more productive or creative thinking will take a committed intention on your part.* You can start small by evaluating one thought, how often you think it and then decide to change it and this can make a difference. All efforts to change helps us move forward towards the life we envision for ourselves. So, change your thought: “that small changes don’t matter” to “small changes are creating a new pathway in your brain.”

Read Psalm 119:17-24: Wisdom is required to be at peace with God and your surroundings. Focusing on the truth will eventually cause us to let go of the inflated view of ourselves. Once we do that, our neighbor looks a little more acceptable. Unbelief is more about looking around at everybody else who you would like to trade places with. All of that thought is misplaced and irrelevant. We start to see that we are desperately in need of God’s blessings and gifts. This only happens as we consume a steady diet of truth,

I need to begin each day by recognizing that only God can give me peace with him and with myself and with my surroundings. People and events that upset me are ultimately serving to mess with my expectations and plans for my day and my life. That is why I need to base my hope on something more than my vision for my life. Technically, my future and what is coming my way from God cannot be diminished. If I am never losing anything of value; then what am I grieving about?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:3-7)

It is true that my repetitive thoughts are like *monkeys jumping around in my mind*. When I am having an ADD quiet time and focused on my responsibilities - my peace is just gone.

Can we say that we are longing for righteousness; or do we still want some latitude to experiment and entertain ourselves outside of the lines? Are we sweating over our earthly inheritance or our heavenly inheritance? Truth dispels illusions, imagination and mirages about our life. We need to understand that other people do not have it better than we do. Things do not bring peace. Things stir up what is already inside of us.

This world is selling us the trash that God does not want. It is being re-marketing as being valuable. A cursed relationship or an unequal yoke or a tainted financial gain will not bring peace of mind. Most of the shiny things in this world have a bad aftertaste. Most unbelievers have no idea how much trouble they are in.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, And He adds no sorrow with it. (Proverbs 10:22)

Only God offers financial gain with peace. In fact, his peace does not require financial gain. Some people are better off without much financial gain. We all have an *altitude* that we thrive at spiritually. Like Thanksgiving turkeys, we need a certain temperature to properly cook. We may not like being under the heat and pressure to earn money; but the absence of that results in minimal prayer time. Easy street does not have too many focused and growing believers living on it. God's word is the roadmap to joy and contentment. God's prescription for Adam and Eve's discontent with perfection was pressure and pain on a daily basis. Every eco-system and fishery needs to manage the predator to prey ratio. The predators serve a valuable role. The parable of the tares and other teachings from Jesus tells us that. God has purposefully allowed problematic people and the needy in our lives until the end of this age. There are underlying reasons that we need people who can overturn our plans and people whose lives we can impact.

Read Psalm 119:25-32: Much of our mental and emotional health is according to our perspective. That equates to our quality of life amidst distressing events. The normal Christian life has both highs and lows. You don't get the green pastures without the Valley of the Shadow of Death as an option. There are times that none of us feel well about ourselves or our situation.

We need to begin with an understanding that there is no life outside of *God's rescue breaths*. We are literally under his physical and spiritual CPR. How foolish is it for the patient to escape from the doctor? If we wander away, it is only because he is giving us a little time to do so. We do not seem to lose sleep over how God is keeping our subatomic particles in perfect orbit. We do not lose sleep over the thousands of germs in our throat at any given time that could kill us. We do not lose sleep over the impossible mutually existing universes and planetary positioning. We worry about very small things in our little lives. In the tribulation men will focus on crashing meteorites and world water supplies and plagues. How much failure do we need to wake up and succeed? How big does the threat need to be to turn to God?

Restoration and renewal amidst surrounding failures is our dichotomy. There is always plenty to get worked up over. There is also plenty to give thanks for. A lot of our quality of life equates to our selected perspective. God has given us a map and a toolbox full of coping skills. The question becomes: how relevant are our disappointments? Are they just threats to our vision of the future? Is it ultimately healthy to always be happy? Can a man actually even maintain pure happiness indefinitely?

The psalmist is sharing that a steady diet of scripture is helping him keep his head on straight and to have a stable heart. The devil is allowed to play *horror movies* to us in the news and in our thoughts. "All that you care about is lost"! God is showing us a more beautiful thing amidst all of this misinformation. We are finding blessings amidst the wreckage. It is a choice to focus on the wreckage or the things that are beautiful in their own time.

You shall stand before Me; If you take out the precious from the vile, (Jeremiah 15:19)