

# Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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## Psalm 119 — The Great Alphabet Psalm

### 1.0 Introducing Psalm 119

- Acrostic (= alphabetical) psalms include Psalms 9–10; 25; 34; 37; 111; 112; 119; and 145. These psalms use the Hebrew alphabet which contains 22 letters.
- The main theme of Psalm 119 is the Word of God, which is mentioned in 169 of its 176 verses. The psalmist utilizes 8 basic terms which occur 175 times in 176 verses — at least once in all except verses 3, 37, 84, 90, 121, 122, and 132:
  1. **“law”** (*torah*; v. 1), 25x; this word begins with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
  2. **“testimonies”** (*‘edut*, *‘edot*; v. 2, singular in v. 88), 23x.
  3. **“precepts”** (*piqqudim*, v. 4), 21x.
  4. **“statutes”** (*huqqim*, *huqqot*; v. 5, feminine in v. 16), 22x.
  5. **“commandments”** (*mitswah*, *mitswot*; v. 6, singular in v. 96), 22x.
  6. **“judgments”/“ordinances”** (*mishpat*, *mishpatim*; vv. 7, 13, singular in v. 160), 20x; see problem of translating verses 84 and 132.
  7. **“word”** (*davar*, *devarim*; v. 9, plural in vv. 57, 130, 139, 147, 161), 23x.
  8. **“word”** (*‘imrah*; v. 11, not actually plural in v. 103), 19x; this word begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- ✓ All 8 words occur one time in 8 verses of a stanza only at verses 57-64 (*heth*), 73-80 (*yodh*), and 81-88 (*kaph*). Verses 41-48 (*waw*) also contain all 8 words, one each per verse, but verse 43 contains two words, repeating “word” (*davar*) that already occurs in verse 42.
- ✓ Occurrences of “law” and “word” (*‘imrah*) total 44 (2 x 22).
- ✓ Occurrences of “testimonies” and “precepts” total 44 (2 x 22).
- ✓ Both “statutes” and “commandments” occur 22x each.
- ✓ Occurrences of “judgments”/“ordinances” and “word” (*davar*) total 43x — but see above.
- ✓ Should “ways” (vv. 3, 37) be included as a synonym for “law” or “word”?

- “LORD” (*Yahweh*) appears 24x; “God” only once (v. 115). However, “Your” occurs 211x. God Himself is the central theme of the psalm.
- The afflictions of the psalmist form a backdrop for this psalm (vv. 8, 20, 22, 23, 25, 28, 39, 42, 50, 51, 53, 61, 67, 69, 71, 75, 78, 81–87, 92, 94, 95, 107, 110, 115, 121–23, 134, 136, 141, 143, 145–47, 149, 150, 153, 154, 157, 161, 170, 176).

## 2.0 Reading Psalm 119 (NAU)

### *Aleph. א*

- 119:1** How **blessed** are those whose way is blameless,  
Who walk in the law of the LORD.
- 119:2** How **blessed** are those who observe His testimonies,  
Who seek Him with all *their* heart.
- 119:3** They also do no unrighteousness;  
They walk in His ways.
- 119:4** You have ordained Your precepts,  
That we should keep *them* diligently.
- 119:5** Oh that my ways may be established  
To keep Your statutes!
- 119:6** Then I shall not be ashamed  
When I look upon all Your commandments.
- 119:7** I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart,  
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
- 119:8** I shall keep Your statutes;  
Do not forsake me utterly!

### *Beth. ב*

- 119:9** How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By keeping *it* according to Your word.
- 119:10** With all my heart I have sought You;  
Do not let me wander from Your commandments.
- 119:11** Your word I have treasured in my heart,  
That I may not sin against You.
- 119:12** **Blessed** are You, O LORD;  
Teach me Your statutes.
- 119:13** With my lips I have told of Your mouth.  
All the ordinances of
- 119:14** I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies,  
As much as in all riches.
- 119:15** I will meditate on Your precepts  
And regard Your ways.
- 119:16** I shall delight in Your statutes;  
I shall not forget Your word.

**Gimel. ך**

- 119:17** Deal bountifully with Your servant,  
That I may live and keep Your word.
- 119:18** Open my eyes, that I may behold  
Wonderful things from Your law.
- 119:19** I am a stranger in the earth;  
Do not hide Your commandments from me.
- 119:20** My soul is crushed with longing  
After Your ordinances at all times.
- 119:21** You rebuke the arrogant, the cursed,  
Who wander from Your commandments.
- 119:22** Take away reproach and contempt from me,  
For I observe Your testimonies.
- 119:23** Even though princes sit *and* talk against me,  
Your servant meditates on Your statutes.
- 119:24** Your testimonies also are my delight;  
*They are* my counselors.

**Daleth. ד**

- 119:25** My soul cleaves to the dust;  
Revive me according to Your word.
- 119:26** I have told of my **ways**, and You have answered me;  
Teach me Your statutes.
- 119:27** Make me understand the **way** of Your precepts,  
So I will meditate on Your wonders.
- 119:28** My soul weeps because of grief;  
Strengthen me according to Your word.
- 119:29** Remove the false **way** from me,  
And graciously grant me Your law.
- 119:30** I have chosen the faithful **way**;  
I have placed Your ordinances *before me*.
- 119:31** I cling to Your testimonies;  
O LORD, do not put me to shame!
- 119:32** I shall run the **way** of Your commandments,  
For You will enlarge my heart.

**He. ה**

- 119:33** **Teach** me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes,  
And I shall observe it to the end.
- 119:34** Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law  
And keep it with all *my* heart.
- 119:35** Make me walk in the path of Your commandments,  
For I delight in it.
- 119:36** Incline my heart to Your testimonies  
And not to *dishonest* gain.

- 119:37** Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity,  
And revive me in Your ways.
- 119:38** Establish Your word to Your servant,  
As that which produces reverence for You.
- 119:39** Turn away my reproach which I dread,  
For Your ordinances are good.
- 119:40** Behold, I long for Your precepts;  
Revive me through Your righteousness.
- Waw. 7*
- 119:41** May Your lovingkindnesses also come to me, O LORD,  
Your salvation according to Your word;
- 119:42** So I will have an answer for him who reproaches me,  
For I trust in Your word.
- 119:43** And do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,  
For I wait for Your ordinances.
- 119:44** So I will keep Your law continually,  
Forever and ever.
- 119:45** And I will walk at liberty,  
For I seek Your precepts.
- 119:46** I will also speak of Your testimonies before kings  
And shall not be ashamed.
- 119:47** I shall delight in Your commandments,  
Which I love.
- 119:48** And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments,  
Which I love;  
And I will meditate on Your statutes.

*Zayin. 7*

- 119:49** **Remember** the word to Your servant,  
In which You have made me hope.
- 119:50** This is my comfort in my affliction,  
That Your word has revived me.
- 119:51** The arrogant utterly deride me,  
*Yet* I do not turn aside from Your law.
- 119:52** I have **remembered** Your ordinances from of old, O LORD,  
And comfort myself.
- 119:53** Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked,  
Who forsake Your law.
- 119:54** Your statutes are my songs  
In the house of my pilgrimage.
- 119:55** O LORD, I **remember** Your name in the night,  
And keep Your law.
- 119:56** This has become mine,  
That I observe Your precepts.



- 119:77** May **Your compassion** come to me that I may live,  
For Your law is my delight.
- 119:78** May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie;  
*But* I shall meditate on Your precepts.
- 119:79** May **those who fear You** turn to me,  
Even **those who know** Your testimonies.
- 119:80** May my heart be blameless in Your statutes,  
So that I will not be ashamed.

**Kaph. 2**

- 119:81** My soul languishes for Your **salvation**;  
I wait for Your word.
- 119:82** My eyes fail *with longing* for Your word,  
While I say, "When will You comfort me?"
- 119:83** Though I have become like a wineskin in the smoke,  
I do not forget Your statutes.
- 119:84** How many are the days of Your servant?  
When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?
- 119:85** The arrogant have dug pits for me,  
*Men* who are not in accord with Your law.
- 119:86** All Your commandments are faithful;  
They have persecuted me with a lie; help me!
- 119:87** They almost destroyed me on earth,  
But as for me, I did not forsake Your precepts.
- 119:88** Revive me according to Your **lovingkindness**,  
So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

**Lamedh. 5**

- 119:89** **Forever, O LORD,**  
Your word is settled **in heaven**.
- 119:90** Your **faithfulness continues** throughout all generations;  
You established the earth, and it stands.
- 119:91** They stand this day according to Your ordinances,  
For all things are Your servants.
- 119:92** If Your law had not been my delight,  
Then I would have perished in my affliction.
- 119:93** I will never forget Your precepts,  
For by them You have revived me.
- 119:94** **I am Yours, save me;**  
For I have sought Your precepts.
- 119:95** The wicked wait for me to destroy me;  
I shall diligently consider Your testimonies.
- 119:96** I have seen a limit to all perfection;  
Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

*Mem. 12*

- 119:97** O how I love Your law!  
It is my meditation all the day.
- 119:98** Your commandments make me **wiser than my enemies**,  
For they are ever mine.
- 119:99** I have **more insight than all my teachers**,  
For Your testimonies are my meditation.
- 119:100** **I understand more than the aged**,  
Because I have observed Your precepts.
- 119:101** I have restrained my feet from every evil way,  
That I may keep Your word.
- 119:102** I have not turned aside from Your ordinances,  
For **You Yourself have taught** me.
- 119:103** How sweet are Your words to my taste!  
*Yes, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!
- 119:104** From Your precepts I get understanding;  
Therefore I hate every false way.

*Nun. 13*

- 119:105** Your word is a lamp to my feet  
And a light to my path.
- 119:106** I have sworn and I will confirm it,  
That I will keep Your righteous ordinances.
- 119:107** I am exceedingly afflicted;  
Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.
- 119:108** O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD,  
And teach me Your ordinances.
- 119:109** My life is continually in my hand,  
Yet I do not forget Your law.
- 119:110** The wicked have laid a snare for me,  
Yet I have not gone astray from Your precepts.
- 119:111** I have inherited Your testimonies forever,  
For they are the joy of my heart.
- 119:112** I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes  
Forever, *even* to the end.

*Samekh. 14*

- 119:113** I hate those who are double-minded,  
But I love Your law.
- 119:114** You are my hiding place and my shield;  
I wait for Your word.
- 119:115** Depart from me, evildoers,  
That I may observe the commandments of **my God**.
- 119:116** Sustain me according to Your word, that I may live;  
And do not let me be ashamed of my hope.

- 119:117** Uphold me that I may be safe,  
That I may have regard for Your statutes continually.
- 119:118** You have rejected all those who wander from Your statutes,  
For their deceitfulness is useless.
- 119:119** You have removed all the wicked of the earth *like* dross;  
Therefore I love Your testimonies.
- 119:120** My flesh trembles for fear of You,  
And I am afraid of Your judgments.

*Ayin.* 𐤀

- 119:121** I have done justice and righteousness;  
Do not leave me to my oppressors.
- 119:122** Be surety for **Your servant** for good;  
Do not let the arrogant oppress me.
- 119:123** My eyes fail *with longing* for Your salvation  
And for Your righteous word.
- 119:124** **Deal with Your servant** according to Your lovingkindness  
And teach me Your statutes.
- 119:125** **I am Your servant**; give me understanding,  
That I may know Your testimonies.
- 119:126** It is time for the LORD to act,  
*For* they have broken Your law.
- 119:127** Therefore I love Your commandments  
Above gold, yes, above fine gold.
- 119:128** Therefore I esteem right all *Your precepts* concerning  
everything,  
I hate every false way.

*Pe.* 𐤀

- 119:129** Your testimonies are **wonderful**;  
Therefore my soul observes them.
- 119:130** The **unfolding** of Your words gives light;  
It gives understanding to the simple.
- 119:131** I opened my mouth wide and panted,  
For I longed for Your commandments.
- 119:132** **Turn to me and be gracious to me**,  
After Your manner with those who love Your name.
- 119:133** Establish my footsteps in Your word,  
And do not let any iniquity have dominion over me.
- 119:134** **Redeem me** from the oppression of man,  
That I may keep Your precepts.
- 119:135** Make **Your face** shine upon Your servant,  
And teach me Your statutes.
- 119:136** My eyes shed streams of water,  
Because they do not keep Your law.



*Tsadhe.* ז

- 119:137** **Righteous** are You, O LORD,  
And upright are Your judgments.
- 119:138** You have commanded  
And exceeding faithfulness. Your testimonies in **righteousness**
- 119:139** My zeal has consumed me,  
Because my adversaries have forgotten Your words.
- 119:140** Your word is very pure,  
Therefore Your servant loves it.
- 119:141** I am small and despised,  
Yet I do not forget Your precepts.
- 119:142** Your **righteousness** is an everlasting **righteousness**,  
And Your law is truth.
- 119:143** Trouble and anguish have come upon me,  
Yet Your commandments are my delight.
- 119:144** Your testimonies are **righteous** forever;  
Give me understanding that I may live.

*Qoph.* פ

- 119:145** **I cried** with all my heart; answer me, O LORD!  
I will observe Your statutes.
- 119:146** **I cried** to You; save me  
And I shall keep Your testimonies.
- 119:147** I rise before dawn and cry for help;  
I wait for Your words.
- 119:148** My eyes anticipate the night watches,  
That I may meditate on Your word.
- 119:149** Hear **my voice** according to  
Your lovingkindness;  
Revive me, O LORD, according to Your ordinances.
- 119:150** Those who follow after wickedness draw near;  
They are far from Your law.
- 119:151** You are near, O LORD,  
And all Your commandments are truth.
- 119:152** Of old I have known from  
Your testimonies  
That You have founded them forever.

*Resh.* ר

- 119:153** **Look** upon my affliction and rescue me,  
For I do not forget Your law.
- 119:154** **Plead my cause** and redeem me;  
Revive me according to Your word.
- 119:155** Salvation is far from the wicked,  
For they do not seek Your statutes.
- 119:156** Great are Your mercies, O LORD;  
Revive me according to Your ordinances.

- 119:157** Many are my persecutors and my adversaries,  
Yet I do not turn aside from Your testimonies.
- 119:158** I behold the treacherous and loathe *them*,  
Because they do not keep Your word.
- 119:159** Consider how I love  
Your precepts;  
Revive me, O LORD, according to  
Your lovingkindness.
- 119:160** The sum of  
Your word is truth,  
And every one of  
Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.

*Shin/Sin.* שׁ/שׂ

- 119:161** Princes persecute me without cause,  
But my heart stands in awe of Your words.
- 119:162** I rejoice at  
Your word,  
As one who finds great spoil.
- 119:163** I hate and despise falsehood,  
But I love  
Your law.
- 119:164** Seven times a day I praise  
You,  
Because of  
Your righteous ordinances.
- 119:165** Those who love  
Your law have great peace,  
And nothing causes them to stumble.
- 119:166** I hope for  
Your salvation, O LORD,  
And do  
Your commandments.
- 119:167** My soul keeps  
Your testimonies,  
And I love them exceedingly.
- 119:168** I keep  
Your precepts and  
Your testimonies,  
For all my ways are before  
You.

*Taw.* ת

- 119:169** Let my cry come before You, O LORD;  
Give me understanding according to  
Your word.
- 119:170** Let my supplication come before You;  
Deliver me according to  
Your word.
- 119:171** Let my lips utter praise,  
For You teach me  
Your statutes.
- 119:172** Let my tongue sing of  
Your word,  
For all  
Your commandments are righteousness.
- 119:173** Let Your hand be ready to help me,  
For I have chosen  
Your precepts.
- 119:174** I long for  
Your salvation, O LORD,  
And  
Your law is my delight.
- 119:175** Let my soul live that it may praise  
You,  
And let  
Your ordinances help me.
- 119:176** I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek  
Your servant,  
For I do not forget  
Your commandments.

### 3.0 Understanding Psalm 119

#### Outline

- I. Abiding by Yahweh's Law (vv. 1–8)
- II. Behaving According to Yahweh's Word (vv. 9–16)
- III. Contemplating Yahweh's Commandments (vv. 17–24)
- IV. Directing One's Way by Yahweh's Precepts (vv. 25–32)
- V. Educating a Believer in Yahweh's Law (vv. 33–40)
- VI. Freeing a Believer by Yahweh's Word (vv. 41–48)
- VII. Generating a Memory of Yahweh's Law (vv. 49–56)
- VIII. Hastening to Keep Yahweh's Word (vv. 57–64)
- IX. Increasing Good by Yahweh's Word (vv. 65–72)
- X. Judging Situations by Yahweh's Word (vv. 73–80)
- XI. Keeping Oriented According to Yahweh's Word (vv. 81–88)
- XII. Living through Yahweh's Precepts (vv. 89–96)
- XIII. Mastering Understanding through Yahweh's Precepts (vv. 97–104)
- XIV. Negating Affliction by Yahweh's Ordinances (vv. 105–112)
- XV. Obtaining Comfort through Yahweh's Statutes (vv. 113–120)
- XVI. Praying in accord with Yahweh's Word (vv. 121–128)
- XVII. Quenching One's Thirst with Yahweh's Word (vv. 129–136)
- XVIII. Revealing Yahweh's Righteousness by His Word (vv. 137–144)
- XIX. Seeking Yahweh's Help According to His Word (vv. 145–152)
- XX. Tossing Oneself on Yahweh's Mercy by His Word (vv. 153–160)
- XXI. Uniting Hope with Love for Yahweh's Word (vv. 161–168)
- XXII. Voicing One's Plea According to Yahweh's Word (vv. 169–176)



### 4.0 Singing Psalm 119

#### How Can I, Lord, Keep My Way Pure?

(Tunes: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" and "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee")

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1 How can I, Lord, keep my way pure?<br/>To Your Word I must be true.<br/>So I seek You with my whole heart;<br/>Do not let me stray from You.</p> | <p>2 Your Word's hidden in my heart, Lord,<br/>That I might not go astray.<br/>Praise to You, O Lord, my Father;<br/>Teach me Your decrees each day.</p> |
| <p>3 With my lips I recount gladly<br/>All the laws You've giv'n to man.<br/>I rejoice in all Your statutes,<br/>As in wealth too vast to scan.</p>   | <p>4 Meditating on Your precepts,<br/>I consider all Your ways.<br/>I delight in Your decrees, Lord;<br/>I will never turn away.</p>                     |

— Susan H. Peterson (1998)

### 5.0 Praying Psalm 119

- Establish my ways so I can keep Your Word. [v. 5]
- Thank You, Father, for helping me learn Your Word. [v. 7]
- Do not let me wander away from Your Word, Lord. [v. 10]
- Teach me Your Word, O God. [v. 12]



#### 4.0 More Singing Psalm 119

##### My Grieving Soul Revive, O Lord

(Tunes: “At the Cross” — verse tune minus refrain)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1 My grieving soul revive, O Lord,<br/>According to Thy Word;<br/>To Thee my ways I have declared<br/>And Thou my prayer hast heard.</p> <p>3 Keep me from falsehood, let Thy law<br/>With me in grace abide;<br/>The way of faithfulness I choose,<br/>Thy precepts are my guide.</p> | <p>2 Teach me to know Thy holy way<br/>And think upon Thy deeds;<br/>In grief I ask for promised grace<br/>According to my need.</p> <p>4 I cleave unto Thy truth, O Lord,<br/>From shame deliver me;<br/>In glad obedience I will live<br/>Through strength bestowed by Thee.</p> |
|---|--|

— Author unknown

#### 5.0 More Praying Psalm 119

- Give me a delight in Your Word so I never forget it. [v. 16]
- Lord, help me to learn wonderful things from Your Word. [v. 18]
- Father, strengthen me with Your Word. [v. 28]
- O God, turn my eyes away from worthless things. [v. 37]

#### Notes

##### I. Abiding by Yahweh’s Law (vv. 1–8) [⌘, Aleph]

Key verse: v. 2

- **vv. 1, 2** “blessed”
  - This is the first Hebrew word in these two verses. The word begins with the Hebrew alphabet’s first letter. It is the same Hebrew word as the first word of the entire Psalter (1:1).
  - It is the Word of God in the believer’s life that produces the life of blessing.
- **v. 2** “with all *their* heart”
  - This phraseology occurs 6 times in Psalm 119. See verses 10, 34, 58, 69, and 145.
  - Compare Deuteronomy 4:29; 5:29; **6:5**; 10:12; 11:13; 13:3; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10; 32:46. This is just one of many phrases and themes that the psalmist draws from the Book of Deuteronomy.
- **v. 3** “His ways”
  - God’s “ways” (Hebrew, *derek*) involve who God is with regard to His character. God desires His people to reflect His character in how they live. Compare 1 Peter 1:14–16.
  - Psalm 119 focuses on living the Word by obeying it, not just knowing it. Compare James 1:22.

- **v. 4** “You have ordained”
  - Literally, “You Yourself have commanded.” “You” is the first word in Hebrew and emphatic because it is also included in the form of the verb. God authors, reveals, enjoins obedience to and fulfills His Word.

## II. Behaving According to Yahweh’s Word (vv. 9–16) [ב, *Beth*]

Key verses: vv. 11, 12

- **v. 9** “his way”
  - In Hebrew the word is distinct from the term used in verse 3. This word (Hebrew, *’orach*) refers more specifically to a course, journey, or pilgrimage. See Psalms 19:5; 119:15, 101, 104, 128.
- **v. 10** “Do not let me wander”
  - Such wandering can be unwitting and accidental (Num 15:22) or knowing and intentional (Deut 27:18; Ps 119:21, 118) disobedience to the Word of God.
- **v. 11** “Your word I have treasured in my heart”
  - The Hebrew letter *beth* is a word that also means “house.” This verse focuses on making the Word of God a home in our heart.
  - The heart (mentioned in vv. 10 and 11) is where purity must begin (see v. 9). God’s Word in our heart will enable us to live without constantly sinning.
    - ✓ Compare Matthew 5:28; 12:34.
  - How to live for God through His Word:
    1. Obey the Word of God (v. 9).
    2. Seek God wholeheartedly (v. 10).
    3. Memorize the Word of God (v. 11).
    4. Be taught by God from His Word (v. 12).
    5. Teach the Word to others (v. 13).
    6. Rejoice in living the Word of God (v. 14).
    7. Meditate on the Word of God (v. 15).
    8. Delight in the Word of God (v. 16).



## III. Contemplating Yahweh’s Commandments (vv. 17–24) [ג, *Gimel*]

Key verse: v. 18

- **v. 17** “Your servant”
  - “Servant” in Hebrew has a wide range of meanings that can include “slave,” “bond slave,” “servant,” “workman,” and “worshipper.” Context determines the meaning.
  - When the psalmist identifies himself as the Lord’s “servant,” he indicates that he is submitting himself to the Lord’s sovereign lordship. In the Psalms, the phrase involves the following:

- ✓ Dependence upon God and His Word to preserve him from sin (Psalm 19:11–13).
  - ✓ Redeemed by the Lord (Psalm 19:14).
  - ✓ Dependence upon God to deliver him from danger, disaster, and death (Psalms 27:9; 31:16; 69:17; 86:2; 119:84, 122, 176; 143:12).
  - ✓ Trust in the Lord (Psalm 86:2).
  - ✓ Dependence upon the Lord for grace, gladness, good, and forgiveness, strength, mercy, hope, and loyal love (Psalms 86:3–5, 16; 119:49, 124).
  - ✓ Freed from bondage by the Lord (Psalm 116:16).
  - ✓ Being taught by the Lord through His Word (Psalm 119:124, 125, 135)
- **v. 18** “Open my eyes”
    - Like the prayer that God might “teach” him (vv. 12, 26, 33), this does not eliminate Bible study.
    - The Holy Spirit’s teaching ministry makes our Bible study more effective. Compare John 14:26.
  - **v. 19** “I am a stranger”
    - In this stanza the psalmist reveals the extent of his sufferings.
      - ✓ He is not at home on this earth — he feels out of place (v. 19).
      - ✓ Others are slandering him (vv. 22–23).
      - ✓ The powerful are against him (v. 23).
    - Note the psalmist’s response to his sufferings. He does not sink into despair and depression; he becomes all the more determined to hold on to God’s written promises.

**IV. Directing One’s Way by Yahweh’s Precepts (vv. 25–32) [𐤇, *Daleth*]**  
Key verse: v. 27



- **vv. 26, 27** “ways . . . way”
  - One of these two forms is the first Hebrew word in verses 26, 27, 29, 30, 32. It begins with the Hebrew alphabet’s fourth letter. The Hebrew word is *derek*, the source for the English name Derek.
  - See the note on verse 3 with regard to the meaning of “way(s).”
- **vv. 29, 30** “false way . . . faithful way”
  - “False” and “faithful” relate to the covenant relationship the psalmist has with God.
    - ✓ See Psalms 25:10; 44:17; 78:10, 37; 103:18.
  - The two paths are characteristic of wisdom literature in the Old Testament.
  - Our path in life is not automatic. We must
    - ✓ choose the right path (v. 30),
    - ✓ cling to the Word (v. 31), and

✓ run vigorously in God’s path (v. 32).

- **v. 31** “cling”
  - In Hebrew this verb is the first word in both verse 25 (“cleaves”) and here. It acts as an inclusio, bracketing verses 25–31.
  - “When the psalmist is so down, and *clings to the dust*, the way up is to *cling to your decrees* instead . . .” — Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73 – 150*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 198.

**V. Educating a Believer in Yahweh’s Law (vv. 33–40) [𐤇, He]**

Key verse: v. 34

- **v. 33** “Teach me the way”
  - By employing the key word from the preceding stanza, the psalmist transitions to a prayer in verse 26 of that stanza. However, he uses a different word for “teach” — this one related more to the giving of instruction and pointing the way. *Torah* (“law”) is derived from the same root.
  - The first seven verses of this stanza use causative verbs as the first word in each verse. These verbs reveal the psalmist’s main prayers:
    - ✓ “Teach me” (v. 33).
    - ✓ “Give me understanding” (v. 34).
    - ✓ “Make me walk” (v. 35).
    - ✓ “Incline my heart” (v. 36).
    - ✓ “Turn away my eyes” (v. 37).
    - ✓ “Establish Your word” (v. 38).
    - ✓ “Turn away my reproach” (v. 39).
- **v. 35** “path”
  - This is the third Hebrew word (*nathiv*) employed in Psalm 119 for the concept of “way” or “path.” It refers to a visible path due to either a wake behind something in water (Job 41:24) or to the fact that it was a well-worn path (Job 18:10; Jer 6:16, “ancient paths”).
- **v. 40** “Behold”
  - The first word of the final verse of the stanza is the same as in English. It introduces the psalmist’s summary for the preceding prayers.

**VI. Freeing a Believer by Yahweh’s Word (vv. 41–48) [𐤅, Waw]**

Key verse: v. 41

- **v. 41** “lovingkindnesses”
  - First occurrence of *hesed* in Psalm 119 (7 times: vv. 41, 64, 76, 88, 124, 149, 159). Verse 41 associates the Lord’s “loyal love” with deliverance (“salvation”) “according to Your word [’*imrah*].”

- Note the plural — God repeatedly shows Himself loyal in His covenant love for His people by delivering them from various distresses.  
✓ See Psalms 25:6; 89:49; 107:43; Isaiah 63:7; Lamentations 3:22.
- **v. 42** “So I will have an answer”
  - The letter *waw* is the conjunction (“and”) in Hebrew and is always attached to the following word. In this stanza NAU translated it with “also,” “so,” and “and.” Once it remains untranslated (v. 47).
  - Eight times in this stanza the *waw* introduces first person statements: “I will have an answer” (v. 42), “I will keep” (v. 44), “I will walk” (v. 45), “I will speak” (v. 46), “I shall delight” (v. 47), “I shall lift up” (v. 48a), and “I will meditate” (v. 48b).
- **v. 43** “wait for”
  - Another translation is possible: “hope for.” It occurs also in verses 49, 74, 81, 114, and 147. It refers to waiting patiently. Interestingly, the same Arabic root means “to get stuck in the mud.”
- **v. 45** “walk at liberty”
  - Literally “in spaciousness” or “in a wide place” — depicting freedom and relief from stress, pressure, and anxiety.
- **vv. 47, 48** “Which I love”
  - This dual reference to the psalmist’s love for God’s Word are the first references out of eleven in this psalm. Once (v. 132) he speaks of love for God’s name.
  - “The more we know the Word of God, the more we will love God. The more we love God, the more we will love the Word of God. It is a spiral stairway to glory.” — John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms: An Expository Commentary*, 2 vols., John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 2:271.



## 6.0 Applying Psalm 119

- *Aleph*: God’s Word bears full authority over my life — I must obey.
- *Beth*: God’s Word cleanses — I must be pure.
- *Gimel*: God’s Word provides counsel — I must be wise.
- *Daleth*: God’s Word reveals the way to live — I must walk it.
- *He*: God’s Word gives understanding — I must yield to it.
- *Waw*: God’s Word conquers fear — I must hope.

The psalmist knows and thinks with the theology and vocabulary of Deuteronomy. The great exhortation of Deuteronomy 6:1–9 to love the LORD by keeping and teaching his words is the central impulse of the psalmist’s religion.

— James L. Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 384



#### 4.0 More Singing Psalm 119

##### “Lord, Thy Word to Me Remember”

(Tunes: “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” or “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken”  
or “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship”)



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 Lord, Your Word to me remember,<br>You have made me hope in Thee;<br>This my comfort in affliction,<br>That Your Word has quickened me. | 2 Mocked by those who are unrighteous,<br>Still to Your commands I cleave;<br>Thinking on Your former judgments,<br>Help and comfort I receive.  |
| 3 Wicked men, Your law forsaking,<br>Stirred my indignation strong;<br>For in all my pilgrim journey<br>Your commandments are my song.    | 4 Your have been my meditation<br>And Your law has been my guide;<br>I have kept Your righteous precepts,<br>And have found them true and tried. |

— Author unknown

#### 5.0 More Praying Psalm 119

- Thank You, Father, for comforting me with Your Word. [v. 50]
- Help me to always be quick to obey Your Word. [v. 60]
- Lord, I thank You for allowing me to experience trouble. [v. 71]
- Increase my faith and hope in Your Word, so others see and rejoice. [v. 74]
- 

#### Notes

##### VII. Generating a Memory of Yahweh’s Law (vv. 49–56) [†, *Zayin*]

Key verse: v. 55

- **v. 49** “Remember”
  - This is the first Hebrew word in verses 49, 52, and 55. It begins with *zayin*. Remembrance characterizes this stanza and this is the stanza’s only prayer. Since God never forgets, “remember” means something more like “pay attention to” or “fulfill.”
  - The covenant relationship is two-sided:
    - ✓ The psalmist prays that God would act in a fashion consistent with His verbal commitment (v. 49).
    - ✓ For his part, the psalmist professes a long dependence upon God’s Word (v. 52).
  - For the psalmist to keep God’s Word he must focus on God’s “name” (v. 55) — who and what God is.
- **v. 49** “made me hope” — See comment on verse 43.
- **v. 50** “my comfort in my affliction”
  - As he faced affliction, the psalmist turned to the Word of God.

- The Hebrew word for “comfort” occurs only here and in Job 6:10 (“consolation”). Its meaning involves encouragement, not merely consolation. See Psalms 23:4; 86:17; and 119:52 for related verbs.
- **v. 53** “Burning indignation”
  - Used of a whirlwind (Ps 11:6) and of famine-induced hunger (Lam 5:10), this unusual word describes the psalmist’s great agitation with the wicked who have abandoned God’s Word.
  - Compare 2 Corinthians 7:11 (“indignation”) speaking of a feeling or expression of strong opposition and displeasure aroused by something thought to be wrong.

### VIII. Hastening to Keep Yahweh’s Word (vv. 57–64) [⌈, *Heth*]

Key verse: v. 57

- **v. 57** “my portion”
  - Having a closer relationship to God (see comments on v. 49) means possessing God Himself. Like the Levites, individual believers must not tie themselves to this world, but to God alone (cp. Num 18:20).
  - How do we make God our “portion”?
    - ✓ Seek His favor wholeheartedly (v. 58).
    - ✓ Follow His Word (v. 59).
    - ✓ Don’t delay obedience to His Word (v. 60).
    - ✓ Don’t forget God’s Word (v. 61).
    - ✓ Thank God for His Word (v. 62).
    - ✓ Seek the right companions — obedient believers (v. 63).
    - ✓ Pray for God to teach you more of His Word (v. 64).
  - Compare Psalm 16:5.
- **v. 58** “I sought Your favor with all *my* heart”
  - “Sought” is a Hebrew word meaning to “appease” or to “beseech.” “Seek” in verse 2 and “sought” in verse 10 are not the same Hebrew verb as here.
  - For “with all *my* heart,” see comment on verse 2.
- **v. 59** Four Aspects of Obedience (Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2:315-16)
  - *Deliberation*: “I considered . . .” — Stop and think.
  - *Destination*: “I considered my ways” — Where am I headed?
  - *Determination*: “And turned my feet . . .” — Deciding to obey God.
  - *Discrimination*: “And turned my feet to Your testimonies.” — I am going to follow God’s ways rather than mine or another person’s.
- **v. 61** “The cords of the wicked have encircled me”
  - “Nevertheless, the man of God did not resort to retaliation but to revelation . . .” — George J. Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God* ([Mango, FL]: George J. Zemek, n.d.), 174.



- **v. 64** “Your lovingkindness”
  - This stanza began with the theologically significant term “portion” (*heleq*) and now concludes with yet another such term, “lovingkindness” (*hesed*).
  - It is actually a surprise not to see either or both of these terms employed more often to begin this stanza’s verses. Utilizing these two words to bracket the stanza, the psalmist signals the intensely personal nature of this stanza and the psalmist’s relationship to God.

**IX.** Increasing Good by Yahweh’s Word (vv. 65–72) [ט, *Teth*]

Key verse: v. 71

- **v. 65** “well”
  - “Well” is the Hebrew word “good” (*tob*) which begins with the letter *teth*. It is the first word in verses 65, 66 (*tub*), 68, 71, and 72. Obviously, it is a key theme in this ninth stanza of Psalm 119.
    - ✓ Note how the first two and the last two verses begin with a form of *tob* to bracket the stanza and how the other occurrence (v. 68) is near the middle and includes both the adjective and verb forms of the word.
    - ✓ This central verse is then itself sandwiched between two references to the psalmist’s affliction (v. 67) and his afflictors (vv. 69–70).
  - As the key verse (v. 71) indicates, God determined good for the psalmist in and through his afflictions. God’s purposes in afflictions are the following:
    - ✓ To dispense good through His dealings (v. 65).
    - ✓ To give discernment and knowledge (v. 66).
    - ✓ To recover from straying (v. 67).
    - ✓ To make God Himself the best end — He Himself is good (v. 68).
    - ✓ To bring about wholehearted obedience (v. 69).
    - ✓ To cause delight in His Word (v. 70).
    - ✓ To cause the learning of His Word (v. 71).
    - ✓ To cause the prizing of God’s Word (v. 72).
  - Compare Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 3:11–12; and Romans 8:28.

**X.** Judging Situations by Yahweh’s Word (vv. 73–80) [י, *Yodh*]

Key verse: v. 75

- **v. 73** “Your hands”
  - The Hebrew word for “hand” (*yadh*) sounds almost like the name of the first letter for each verse in this stanza: *yodh*. Verses 73 and 74 (“those who fear You”) are the only verses in this stanza not to commence with a verb.
  - God’s hands are all-powerful. The One who made the psalmist can give him understanding.
  - Compare Psalms 8:6; 138:8.



- **v. 74** “May”
  - In English translations of this stanza “May” or “Let” are employed 6 times as a means of expressing the psalmist’s supplications. In the Hebrew the *yodh* is the prefix letter on 3rd person verbs presenting requests. These verbs are the first words in five verses (vv. 76–80).
  - One commentator counts 70 prayer requests in Psalm 119. — W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms*, 4 vols. in 1 (1948; reprint, Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1973), 3/178.
  - Consider the prayers of the psalmist in this stanza:
    - ✓ *He prays for fellow believers* to be glad that he waits for (has hope in) God’s Word (v. 74) and that his faith will encourage them to follow his example (v. 79).
    - ✓ *He prays for evil doers* to be put to shame (v. 78).
    - ✓ *He prays for himself* that God’s loyal love will comfort him (v. 76), that he will experience God’s life-sustaining compassion (v. 77), and that his heart will be blameless in keeping God’s Word (v. 80).
- **v. 78** “I shall meditate”
  - The Hebrew is emphatic: “As for me, I shall meditate.”
- **v. 79** “turn to me”
  - “By both life and lip this disciple wanted to convey to the covenant community the sustaining power of God’s sufficient revelation for real life.” — Zemek, 203.



**XI.** Keeping Oriented According to Yahweh’s Word (vv. 81–88) [כ, *Kaph*]

Key verse: v. 88

- **v. 81** “languishes”
  - In the Hebrew this is the first word in the verse and it begins with the letter *kaph*. A form of *kalah* occurs again as the first word in verse 82 (“fails”) and as the second word in verse 87. A similar sounding word “all” (*kol*) is the first word of verse 86.
  - *Kalah* means “come to an end,” “stop,” or “be finished,” then to “vanish away” or “perish.” When we say, “I’m finished,” to mean that we are done in, destroyed, or dying, it is very similar. Since this word characterizes the stanza’s tone, we can sense the psalmist’s dire circumstances.
- **v. 84** The Psalmist’s Complaint
  - This verse is the first in Psalm 119 not to include mention of God’s Word. Such an omission highlights the psalmist’s circumstances.
    - ✓ “Judgment” in this verse is not a reference to God’s Word, although some commentators count it as such.



- “How many are the days of Your servant” expresses an implied answer that his days are indeed few. If God does not act quickly to deal with the psalmist’s persecutors, it will be too late.
- In this stanza, near the center of Psalm 119, the distressed psalmist pours out his prayer for deliverance from his dire circumstances.
  - ✓ His soul languishes (v. 81).
  - ✓ His eyes fail (v. 82).
  - ✓ His body ages like a wineskin hanging in smoke (v. 83).
  - ✓ His life is quickly slipping away (v. 84).
  - ✓ His life is threatened by the traps of the arrogant (v. 85).
  - ✓ His persecutors wield lies against him (v. 86).
  - ✓ His life has almost been destroyed (v. 87).
- v. 87 “But as for me”
  - The emphatic personal pronoun provides a stark contrast. In spite of the persecution he suffers, the psalmist clings firmly to God’s Word. He is determined to persevere in His commitment to the Word.

## XII. Living through Yahweh’s Precepts (vv. 89–96) [לָ, *Lamedh*] Key verse: v. 89

- v. 89 “Forever”
  - “Forever” is the first word of this stanza.
  - Hounded by unanswered questions (cp. vv. 82 and 84 in the preceding stanza) and unrelieved persecution (cp. vv. 84–87), the psalmist seeks stability. He finds it in the eternal Word of God.
  - “Voltaire held up a copy of the Bible and said, ‘In fifty years I’ll have this book in the morgue.’ In fifty years he was in the morgue and the Geneva Bible Society owned his house and used it as a place to store Bibles.” — Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms*, 2:344.
- v. 90 “Your faithfulness”
  - Some commentators include this term among those referring to God’s Word. However, this verse is actually the second verse in Psalm 119 not to have a direct reference to the Word of God.
  - “Faithfulness” is one of God’s eternal attributes — He is always faithful and true. The Hebrew word is related to “Amen.”
- v. 90 “throughout all generations”
  - This phrase starts with a *lamedh* and begins this verse. Two verses in a row focus on the concept of infinity.
  - With such phraseology the psalmist continues to depict permanence — first with reference to God’s Word and then to God’s faithfulness.
  - By contrast, the psalmist himself might have quickly perished without that permanence (v. 92).

- **v. 93** “never”
  - This is the exact same Hebrew word that is translated “Forever” in verse 89. In this verse it is also the first word. In this fashion the two verses introduce the two halves of the stanza.
  - The two uses of this Hebrew word are counterparts: the psalmist is determined that God’s Word will be settled permanently in his heart and mind, just as God has settled His Word permanently in heaven.
  
- **v. 96** “a limit to all perfection”
  - The Hebrew word for “perfection” occurs only here. It has two potential meanings:
    - ✓ Completeness of knowledge — meaning that the psalmist’s understanding is limited as compared to God’s Word.
    - ✓ Completeness which is perfection — meaning that everything apart from God is finite, limited, incomplete.
  - The second meaning is preferable since verse 96 probably echoes the concept expressed in the first verses of the stanza (vv. 89–91). The “all” could be a reference to “all things” in God’s created universe (see v. 91). As marvelous as God’s creation is, its perfection is superseded by His Word.

## 6.0 Applying Psalm 119

- *Zayin*: God’s Word encourages — I must be encouraged.
- *Heth*: God’s Word establishes a relationship — I must be faithful.
- *Teth*: God’s Word is good — I must delight in it.
- *Yodh*: God’s Word teaches prayer — I must pray.
- *Kaph*: God’s Word promises hope — I must cling to it.
- *Lamedh*: God’s Word is eternal — I must never forget it.

Like others of God’s servants, David knew that he was not at home in this world, but a pilgrim through it, seeking a better country. He did not, however, sigh over this fact, but he sang about it. He tells us nothing about his pilgrim sighs, but speaks of his pilgrim songs. Even the palace in which he dwelt was but “*the house of his pilgrimage*,” the inn at which he rested, the station at which he halted for a little while.

— C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprinted; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 3:1/241-42 (on v. 54)

Grace *unstinted* must be followed by growth *unstunted*.

— John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2 vols., John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988), 2:319 (on v. 64)



#### 4.0 More Singing Psalm 119

**“O Word of God Incarnate”** (Tune: “The Church’s One Foundation”)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1</b> O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,<br/>O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark<br/>sky:<br/>We praise You for the radiance that from the hallowed<br/>page,<br/>A Lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age.</p> <p><b>3</b> The Scripture is a banner before God’s host unfurled;<br/>It is a shining Beacon above the darkling world.<br/>It is the Chart and Compass that o’er life’s surging tide,<br/>Mid mists and rocks and quicksands, to You, O Christ,<br/>will guide.</p> | <p><b>2</b> The Church from You, our Savior, received the Gift<br/>divine,<br/>And still that Light is lifted o’er all the earth to shine.<br/>It is the sacred Vessel where gems of truth are stored;<br/>It is the heaven drawn Picture of Christ, the living Word</p> <p><b>4</b> O make your Church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold<br/>To bear before the nations Your true light as of old.<br/>O teach your wandering pilgrims by this their path to<br/>trace,<br/>Till, clouds and darkness ended, they see You face to<br/>face.</p> |
|--|--|

— **Words:** William W. How, 186’

#### 5.0 More Praying Psalm 119

- Thank You, Lord, for wisdom from Your Word. [vv. 98–100]
- O God, accept my offering of praise to You. [v. 108]
- Keep my heart inclined to obey Your Word every day. [v. 112]
- Father, don’t let me be ashamed of my hope in You and Your Word. [v. 116]

#### Notes

**XIII.** Mastering Understanding through Yahweh’s Precepts (vv. 97–104) [2, Mem]

Key verse: v. 97

- **v. 97** “O how I love Your law!”
  - This stanza of the psalm has been described as “a quiet interlude without petition, meditating on the Torah as the source of true wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 1:18–25) and singing its praises.” — Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 143.
  - It focuses upon what God’s Word accomplishes for believers:
    - ✓ It attracts their love and gives them delight, resulting in their meditation upon it (vv. 97, 103).
    - ✓ It instills wisdom (v. 98).
    - ✓ It gives insight and understanding (vv. 99–100, 104).
    - ✓ It provides direction, resulting in restraining them from sin (vv. 101–102).
    - ✓ It initiates a personal relationship with God Himself (v. 102).
  - This stanza teaches that there is no higher education than what the Word of God imparts:
    - ✓ A Higher Love: Scripture Provides a Grand Object (v. 97).
    - ✓ A Higher Learning: Scripture Provides Greater Wisdom (vv. 98–100).

- ✓ A Higher Leading: Scripture Provides a Greater Way (vv. 101–102).
- ✓ A Higher Loathing: Scripture Provides a Grander Obsession (vv. 103–104).
- **v. 98** “wiser than my enemies”
  - Increased and superior wisdom is fulfillment of Deuteronomy 4:6 on the individual level.
    - ✓ Wiser than Enemies (v. 98).
    - ✓ Wiser than Educators (v. 99).
    - ✓ Wiser than Elders (v. 100).
  - In other words, “teach me a different wisdom and a better wisdom than theirs; not one which consists in policy, or craft, or human prudence.” — J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols. (1878; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 2:360.
  - What is biblical wisdom? It is right thinking leading to right believing, resulting in right living.
- **v. 102** “You Yourself have taught me”
  - “You Yourself” translates the emphatic personal pronoun. Another way to word it would be “You, You *and no other*.”
  - This “makes it clear that it is no do-it-yourself manual which God has handed over to man to use as best he can. It is the written part of a lifelong teach-in.” — Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 143.
- **v. 104** “I hate every false way”
  - This stanza began with a declaration of love for God’s Word and concludes with a declaration of hatred for every evil path (see comment on v. 9 for *’orach*; cp. v. 29).

#### XIV. Negating Affliction by Yahweh’s Ordinances (vv. 105–112) [1, *Nun*]

Key verse: v. 105


- **v. 105** “lamp”
  - In most Israelite households the lamp consisted of a small clay dish like receptacle filled with olive oil. Normally the dish was pinched at one end to form a kind of spout into which they inserted a wick. Sometimes lamps would possess as many as four different spouts to multiply the burning wicks and the light they provided. A one-wick lamp produces as much light as one candle.
  - Compare 2 Samuel 22:29//Psalm 18:28; Proverbs 6:23.
- **v. 109** “My life is continually in my hand”
  - English may have borrowed this phraseology from the Bible. It appears to have arisen from the concept that what we carry in our hand can easily slip from our grasp. In other words, the psalmist thinks that his life is at risk and his situation precarious. Verse 110 confirms the peril.





- “The man who carries his life in his hand, should carry the law in his heart.” — Scroggie, *The Psalms*, 3/184.
- This stanza began with the psalmist’s feet (v. 105), continues to his mouth (v. 108), then his hands (v. 109), and concludes with his heart (vv. 111, 112).
- **v. 112** “I have inclined my heart”
  - Such phraseology speaks of a determined mind-set focusing on God’s Word. See verse 36.
  - Compare Proverbs 2:2.

**XV.** Obtaining Comfort through Yahweh’s Statutes (vv. 113–120) [D, *Samekh*]  
Key verse: v. 116

- **v. 113** “those who are double-minded”
  - “Double-minded” is a Hebrew word used only here in the Old Testament. It means “divided” or “disunited,” incapable being wholly committed.
    - ✓ Hebrew words meaning “branches” (Isa 10:3) and “clefts” (Isa 2:21) are related to this word. This type of person can never decide — they are too occupied with the rabbit trails radiating out from the key point like branches in a tree. See 1 Kings 18:21 where “opinions” is a related term.
    - ✓ Compare James 1:7-8.
  - Note the characteristics of the wicked in this stanza:
    - ✓ They are double-minded (v. 113).
    - ✓ They are doers of evil (v. 115).
- **v. 113** “I love Your law”
  - This stanza is nearly bracketed by the psalmist’s declaration of love for God’s Word (vv. 113 and 119).
  - Note the contrast between hatred for evil and love for the Word (cp. v. 104). The psalmist knows that what we love determines what we hate.
-  **v. 114** “You are my hiding place and my shield”
  - In his time of danger, the psalmist trusted God for his protection.
  - See Psalm 32:7.
- **v. 115** “my God”
  - “God” as a title of deity occurs nowhere else in Psalm 119. “My God” testifies to the deep relationship between the psalmist and God.
- **v. 116** “Sustain me . . . my hope”
  - “Sustain” (“support” or “help”) is from the same Hebrew root as the name of the Hebrew letter employed as the first letter in each verse of this stanza.

- “My hope” employs a rare word for “hope,” which occurs only here and in Psalm 146:5. The word possesses an air of an expectancy that anticipates proof or evidence that the hope is realizable.



- **v. 120** “My flesh trembles for fear of You”
  - “My flesh trembles” depicts what we refer to as “goose bumps” or as “my flesh creeps.” In Job 4:15 the term is used of making the hair stand on end or bristle because of fear.
  - Love for the Lord’s Word is the topic at the beginning of this stanza. The psalmist fears the judgment of the God Who is his protection and security.
  - Placing loving God alongside fearing Him “is a healthy recognition that to be committed to God brings with it awesome responsibilities which must never be taken lightly. God asks for an exclusive loyalty” — Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 400.
  - Compare Deuteronomy 10:12–13.

**XVI.** Praying in accord with Yahweh’s Word (vv. 121–128) [א, *Ayin*]

Key verse: v. 123

- **vv. 121–122** No word for the Word
  - Some commentators choose to take “justice” in verse 121 as a reference to the Word. However, like verse 84, the overall statement makes it clear that it is not. All commentators recognize that a reference to the Word is absent in verse 122.
  - The absence of references to the Word in the first two verses of the stanza sets the stage for the psalmist’s expressive statement in verse 123.
- **v. 122** “Your servant”
  - This phrase is key to this stanza (vv. 122, 124, 125). See comment on verse 17.
  - What characteristics of servanthood does this stanza reveal?
    - ✓ Acting with justice and righteousness (v. 121a).
    - ✓ Depending upon his Lord (vv. 121b, 122, 126).
    - ✓ Longing for his Lord’s work and word (v. 123).
    - ✓ Being taught by his Lord (vv. 124–125).
    - ✓ Loving His Lord’s Word (vv. 127–128a).
    - ✓ Hating anything contrary to His Lord and His Word (v. 128b).
- **v. 123** “My eyes fail”
  - “My eyes” is the first word in the verse and “eye” is the meaning of the Hebrew letter’s name (*‘ayin*). As in verse 116, the psalmist cleverly

employs the pertinent Hebrew letter's root or name to introduce the key verse in its stanza.

- See the notes on verse 81 (v. 82 also has “My eyes fail,” but puts the verb first in the Hebrew).
- **v. 126** “It is time for the LORD to act”
  - The psalmist knows his Lord so well that he understands the serious nature of violating God's law. He is troubled more by the treatment of God's authoritative Word than he is by his distressing circumstances.
  - Compare Psalm 102:13 and 1 Peter 4:17.

## XVII. Quenching One's Thirst with Yahweh's Word (vv. 129–136) [ד, Pe]

Key verse: v. 131

- **v. 130** “The unfolding of Your words”
  - Literally, “the opening” or “the door.” In ancient Israelite homes there were few windows. If they lived in tents, their situation was basically the same. Most interior illumination during the day came from the light entering the open door.
  - Compare verse 18 with verses 129–130.
- **v. 132** “Turn to me and be gracious to me”
  - Verses 132–135 express a series of prayer requests:
    - ✓ Give me Your gracious favor (v. 132; cp. 25:16, an acrostic at the same Hebrew letter; 86:16).
    - ✓ Guide and stabilize me — steady my steps (v. 133a).
    - ✓ Preserve me from iniquity (v. 133b; cp. 19:13).
    - ✓ Deliver me from oppression (v. 134).
    - ✓ Give me Your blessing (v. 135a).
    - ✓ Teach me (v. 135b).
- **v. 132** “those who love Your name”
  - Some commentators take the “name” as a reference to God's Word (Lawson, 257), but it is best taken as a reference to God Himself.
- **v. 135** “Make Your face shine upon”
  - This is an allusion (common in the Psalms — cf. 31:16; 67:1; 80:3) to the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:22–27.
- **v. 136** “My eyes shed streams of water”
  - The psalmist weeps, not because of persecution, but because his persecutors do not obey God's Word. Their treatment of God's precious Word grieves him (cp. v. 126). He sorrows over them. “The sins of sinners are the sorrows of the saints” (Matthew Henry).



## XVIII. Revealing Yahweh's Righteousness by His Word (vv. 137–144) [ש, *Tsadhe*]

Key verse: v. 137

- **v. 137** “Righteous”
  - The very first word of this stanza establishes the theme of divine righteousness (vv. 137, 138, 142, 144). Scripture reflects the character of its ultimate Author.
  - “Notice how the psalmist cannot separate the Word of God from the God of the Word. What the Word says of God is always true, and everything about God’s person perfectly agrees with the Word.” — Seth Kniep, *Loving God’s Word: 7 Strategies for Slaying Bible Apathy* (Somis, CA: LifeSong Publishers, 2007), 73.
- **v. 137** “upright”
  - God’s Word possesses a number of attributes that the psalmist identifies in this stanza:
    - ✓ It is “upright” — meaning “right,” “straight,” “honest” (v. 137).
    - ✓ It is righteous (vv. 138a, 144).
    - ✓ It is faithful (v. 138b).
    - ✓ It is “pure” — referring to its lack of any impurities, “refined” or “tested” (v. 140).
    - ✓ It is “truth” (v. 142).
- **v. 139** “My zeal has consumed me”
  - Compare verse 136. The psalmist passionately responded to his enemies’ disregard for God’s Word. He cared deeply about such a thing. Do we? See, also, Psalm 69:9.

### 6.0 Applying Psalm 119

- *Mem*: God’s Word provides wisdom — I must behave wisely.
- *Nun*: God’s Word gives light — I must walk in its light.
- *Samekh*: God’s Word sustains and stabilizes — I must lean on it.
- *Ayin*: God’s Word is priceless — I must prize it.
- *Pe*: God’s Word is desirable — I must long for it.
- *Tsadhe*: God’s Word is righteous — I must behave righteously.

The Bible . . . lights the sinner’s path to Christ; it lights the believer’s path to glory.

— John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2 vols., John Phillips Commentary Series  
(Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1988), 2:360

A secular worldview is bound by what we can see and by the here-and-now. A biblical worldview sees all things in the light of God and from the perspective of God’s revelation.

— James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 3:1030

## More Singing Psalm 119

### “O Lord, Your Perfect Righteousness”

(Tune: “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” or “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 O Lord, Your perfect righteousness<br>Is in Your judgments shown;<br>In Your unchanging faithfulness<br>Your truth You have made known. | 2 Because Your foes forget Your law<br>My soul is greatly stirred;<br>Your servant loves the purity<br>Of Your most holy Word.  |
| 3 Though I am humble and despised,<br>I strive Your will to do;<br>Eternal is Your righteousness,<br>And all Thy law is true.             | 4 Delight amid distress and pain<br>Do Your commandments give;<br>Your Word is righteous evermore,<br>Teach me that I may live. |



— Author unknown

## 5.0 More Praying Psalm 119

- Lord, cause me to meditate on and keep Your Word day and night. [vv. 147–148]
- Revive my heart, O God, through Your Word. [vv. 154, 156, 159]
- Oh Lord, how great are Your mercies to me! [v. 156]
- Forgive me, Father, for going astray like a lost sheep. [v. 176]
- 

## Notes

**XIX.** Seeking Yahweh’s Help According to His Word (vv. 145–152) [פ, *Qoph*]  
Key verse: v. 149

- **v. 145** “I cried with all my heart”
  - Verses 145 and 146 begin with “I cried” (Hebrew, *qara’ti*). In a similar vein, verse 149 commences with “voice” (Hebrew, *qol*).
  - **Prayer should be earnest, wholehearted.** If we doubt that God will answer our prayer, we will not “receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-8).
- **v. 146** “save me”
  - Earnest prayer is often pithy rather than prolonged, vital rather than verbose. Simple prayers get directly to the heart of the matter.
- **v. 147** “I rise before dawn”
  - Verses 147, 148, and 152 all start with some form of the Hebrew root *qdm*.
  - **Prayer must be continual as well as earnest.** The psalmist took every opportunity to pray — whether in the quiet before dawn at the beginning of his day or in the silent hours of the night before he fell asleep.
  - *What times of the day can you reclaim for praying?*



- **v. 148** “the night watches”
  - According to Allen (*Psalms 101–150*, 138), “The last watch from two to six o’clock is meant in the context. The plural indicates that the small hours were regularly used in this way.”
  - However, instead of the final watch of the night, the psalmist might speak of anticipating each changing of the watchmen throughout the night. See Psalm 63:6.
- **vv. 150, 151** “draw near . . . You are near”
  - Both verses begin with the Hebrew word for “near” (*qarab*). The enemy has drawn near to the psalmist, but God is even nearer to him.

**XX.** Tossing Oneself on Yahweh’s Mercy by His Word (vv. 153–160) [7, *Resh*]  
Key verse: v. 156

- **v. 153** “Look”
  - Five rapid fire imperatives dominate the start of this stanza, stressing the psalmist’s sense of urgency:
    - ✓ *Regard* (v. 153a, “Look”)
    - ✓ *Rescue* (v. 153b)
    - ✓ *Redress* (v. 154a, “Plead”)
    - ✓ *Redeem* (v. 154a)
    - ✓ *Revive* (v. 154b)
  - The *Resh* stanza depicts God in the following roles:
    - ✓ Caretaker (v. 153a)
    - ✓ Savior (v. 153b)
    - ✓ Law Giver (v. 153b)
    - ✓ Advocate (v. 154a)
    - ✓ Kinsman-Redeemer (v. 154a)
    - ✓ Life Giver (vv. 154b, 156b, 159b)
    - ✓ Judge (v. 156b, “ordinances”)
    - ✓ Mercy Giver (v. 156a)
    - ✓ Covenant Keeper (“LORD,” vv. 156, 159)
    - ✓ Teacher (v. 159, “Your precepts”)
    - ✓ Loyal Lord (v. 159, “Your lovingkindness”)
    - ✓ Truth Speaker (v. 160)
- **v. 153** “my affliction”
  - As the psalmist’s prayers become more urgent, he draws some contrasts in this stanza between **His situation** and **the Lord’s supply**:
    - ✓ “my affliction” (v. 153)                      “Your mercies” (v. 156)
    - ✓ “my cause” (v. 154)                          “Your lovingkindness” (v. 159)
    - ✓ “my persecutors” (v. 157)                  “Your word is truth” (v. 160)
  - Our troubles will never transcend God’s treasures.



- **v. 154** “Plead my cause and redeem me”
  - First the psalmist requests that God act as his defense attorney in a figurative court setting. The phraseology identifies a lawsuit intended to enforce covenant stipulations and terms.
    - ✓ Compare Psalms 35:1 and 74:22.
  - “Redeem” is the verb (*ga'al*) related to the noun “kinsman-redeemer” (*go'el*; Ruth 2:20; 3:12; 4:4-6, 9–14). Such redemption involves a close relationship, not just the payment of a redemption price (a commercial concept represented by a different Hebrew word, *padah*, in v. 134).
    - ✓ Compare Psalms 69:18; 103:4; 107:2.
    - ✓ See Proverbs 23:11 which speaks of both roles (Advocate and Redeemer).
  
- **v. 154** “Revive me”
  - The three occurrences of this prayer act almost like a refrain within this stanza (vv. 154, 156, 159; cp. vv. 25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149).
  - “Revive” means to “keep alive” or to “give life.”
  - Who or what threatens the psalmist’s life and well-being?
    - ✓ affliction (v. 153)
    - ✓ the wicked (v. 155)
    - ✓ persecutors and adversaries (v. 157)
    - ✓ treacherous people (v. 158)
  - Consider a potential chiasmic structure in this stanza:  
Look, and give me life (vv. 153–154)!  
    The wicked care nothing for your word (v. 155);  
    yet there are many compassions,  
    **so give me life (v. 156)!**  
    Still, there are many foes (v. 157);  
    the faithless care nothing for your word (v. 158);  
look, and give me life (vv. 159–160).  
    — Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms 73–150*, 216
  
- **v. 156** “Great are Your mercies”
  - Literally, “Many are Your mercies” — note the plural. “Many” at the start of verse 157 is the same Hebrew word translated “great” here.
  - God is merciful again and again and again. Compare 2 Samuel 24:14; 1 Chronicles 21:13; Isaiah 55:3; and 2 Corinthians 1:3.
  
- **v. 160** “The sum of Your word”
  - Literally, “the beginning of Your word.” In this way the psalmist conveys the concept of “from start (to finish)” — that is, “all.”
  - Psalm 139:17 employs the same phraseology: “How vast is the sum of them!” (lit., “How vast is the head of them”).

**XXI.** Uniting Hope with Love for Yahweh's Word (vv. 161–168) [שׁ/שׁ *Shin/Sin*]

Key verse: v. 166

- **v. 161** “Princes persecute me”
  - This reference to “princes” (cp. v. 23) reveals the source of some of the psalmist’s sufferings. It is difficult to understand how this might fit David (if he is the psalmist), unless it is a reference to Saul pursuing him (1 Sam 20–26) or to his exile because of Absalom (2 Sam 15–17).
  - Several pictures of the psalmist occur in this stanza:
    - ✓ He is a *persecuted* man (v. 161).
    - ✓ He is a *praising* man (vv. 162–164).
    - ✓ He is a *peaceful* man (v. 165).
    - ✓ He is a *patient* man (v. 166).
    - ✓ He is a *passionate* man (v. 167).
    - ✓ He is a *perfect* man (v. 168).

— Phillips, *Exploring Psalms*, 2:411



- **v. 161** “my heart stands in awe”
  - Literally, “my heart is terrified” or “my heart trembles” or “my heart is startled (with horror).”
  - Note the psalmist’s responses to God’s Word:
    - ✓ He trembles at the Word (v. 161).
    - ✓ He rejoices at the Word (v. 162).
    - ✓ He loves the Word (vv. 163, 167b).
    - ✓ He obeys the Word (vv. 166, 167a, 168).
- **v. 163** “I hate and despise . . . *But* I love . . .”
  - See notes on verse 113.
- **v. 164** “Seven times a day I praise You”
  - A number of commentators take this figuratively rather than literally, suggesting continual praise. — James H. Waltner, *Psalms*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 586; also, Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, 356-57.
  - Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “pray without ceasing.”
- **v. 165** “great peace”
  - Literally, “abundant peace” or “abundant well-being.” See comment on verse 156. Compare Psalm 37:11 (“abundant prosperity”).
    - ✓ Or, “ample security.” — Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 133.
  - Such a statement reminds current readers of Philippians 4:7.
- **v. 166** “I hope”
  - Half of all occurrences of this verb occur in the Psalter’s three references: 104:27 (“wait for You”), 145:15 (“look to You”), and here.
  - See notes on verse 116 where the noun occurs.



- **vv. 167–168** “keeps . . . keep”
  - At the close of the stanza the psalmist stresses obedience to the Word of God.
  - Compare Deuteronomy 6:1–5 and James 1:22.

**XXII.** Voicing One’s Plea According to Yahweh’s Word (vv. 169–176) [ת, *Taw*]

Key verse: v. 174

- **v. 169** “Let my cry come before You”
  - Literally, “come near before You” — compare 1 Kings 8:59.
    - ✓ The preceding stanza closes with a reference to God’s presence (v. 168, “all my ways are before You”). The psalmist opens his final stanza with that same sense of divine presence (vv. 169–170).
    - ✓ The two phrases employed in these three consecutive verses occur nowhere else in Psalm 119.
    - ✓ Compare Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 (cited in Heb 13:5).
  - In this final stanza the psalmist voices several prayers:
    - ✓ LORD, hear me (vv. 169a, 170a).
    - ✓ LORD, give me understanding (v. 169b).
    - ✓ LORD, deliver me (v. 170b; the only occurrence of this specific prayer in the Hebrew of Ps 119).
    - ✓ LORD, let me praise You (vv. 171–172).
    - ✓ LORD, help me (vv. 173, 175b).
    - ✓ LORD, revive me (v. 175a).
    - ✓ LORD, seek me (v. 176).
  - This stanza summarizes the whole of the psalm, reverberating with previous prayers and pronouncements.
    - ✓ Praying for understanding (v. 169; cf. vv. 27, 34, 73, 125, 144).
    - ✓ “according to Your word” (v. 169; cf. vv. 9, 25, 28, 65, 107).
    - ✓ “according to Your word” (v. 170, a different Hebrew word than that used in v. 169; cf. vv. 41, 58, 76, 116).
    - ✓ Reference to divine teaching (v. 171; cf. vv. 7, 12, 26, 64, 66, 68, 71, 73, 99, 108, 124, 135).
    - ✓ “Your statutes” (v. 171, masculine form; cf. vv. 5, 8, 12, 26, 33, 54, 64, 68, 71, 83, 112, 135, 145, 155) — a phrase occurring only in Psalm 119 and 1 Chronicles 29:19 in the Old Testament.
    - ✓ “all Your commandments” (v. 172; cf. vv. 6, 86).
    - ✓ “are righteous” (v. 172; cf. vv. 75, 138, 144).
    - ✓ “help” (vv. 173, 175; cf. v. 86).
    - ✓ “I have chosen” (v. 173; cf. v. 30).
    - ✓ “I long” (v. 174; cf. v. 40).
    - ✓ “for Your salvation” (v. 174; cf. vv. 123, 166).
    - ✓ “Your law is my delight” (v. 174; cf. vv. 77, 92; cp. vv. 24, 143).
    - ✓ “my soul” (v. 175; cf. vv. 20, 25, 28, 81, 109, 129, 167).
    - ✓ “live” (v. 175; cf. vv. 17, 25, 37, 40, 50, 77, 88, 93, 107, 116, 144, 149, 154, 156, 159).

- ✓ “praise You” (v. 175; cf. v. 164).
  - ✓ “gone astray” (v. 176; cf. v. 110).
  - ✓ “lost” (v. 176; cf. vv. 92 [“perished”], 95 [“destroy”]).
  - ✓ “Your servant” (v. 176; cf. vv. 16, 17, 23, 65, 84, 122, 124, 125).
  - ✓ “I do not forget You” Word (v. 176; cf. vv. 61, 83, 109, 141, 153).
- **v. 170** “my supplication”
    - Literally, “my plea for grace.” In the preceding verse the psalmist’s prayer is called his “cry” (literally, “a ringing shout” — normally a shout of victory and celebration).
      - ✓ Psalm 106:44 also uses the same “ringing shout” in a situation of distress and lament.
      - ✓ See 1 Kings 8:28 where both terms occur.
    - The psalmist knows that he does not deserve God’s gracious deliverance and mercy, but he fervently cries out for it.
  - **v. 171** “Let my lips utter praise”
    - “Obviously, here the heart’s intention of the child of God was that his lips might become a gushing vehicle for praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to God.” — Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, 374-75.
  - **v. 173** “I have chosen Your precepts”
    - Choosing God’s Word and God’s way over all others reveals the true heart of the psalmist. See comments on verses 29, 30.
    - *What choices did you make this week?*
  - **v. 176** “I have gone astray like a lost sheep”
    - Compare Isaiah 53:6 and Luke 15:1–7.
    - “In what sense can one who has so repeatedly declared his love of God’s word, who has asserted that he has kept God’s precepts, make this confession?” — Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, 2:367.
    - “This could be the psalmist’s confession of a sense of failure in keeping all of God’s law. Or the metaphor may depict defenselessness, that like a lost sheep, the writer needs the protection of the shepherd (Ps 23; Isa 53:6; Jer 50:6; Ezek 34:16). Yet the final word is not that of failure, but the affirmation of loyalty of intention and purpose: *I do not forget your commandments!*” — Waltner, *Psalms*, 586.
    - Psalm 119 ends on a note of humility and hope.
    - Psalm 119 began with believers wholeheartedly seeking God (v. 2) and concludes with a prayer that God would seek one of His servants.



## 6.0 Applying Psalm 119

- *Qoph*: God’s Word is irrevocable — I must trust it.
- *Resh*: God’s Word revives — I must live it.
- *Shin/Sin*: God’s Word is awesome — I must love it.
- *Taw*: God’s Word delivers — I must praise it.