

Cultivate – PSALMS 101-125 by Tommy Lee

PSALM 101:

There are going to be verses in this Psalm that strike you as inappropriate for you to pray and sing and affirm, with reference to yourself. And that is a good instinct. So... what does that mean for praying the Psalter? It means we're about to learn something important. Look at the title. "A Psalm of David." This Psalm speaks of the high office of the king. And it is the king's duty to remove wickedness from the land (v.8, Romans 13.1-4). And, of course, remember that King David is merely a picture of the Greater King To Come, the Final and Forever King of the Universe, the Lord Jesus.

Psalm 101 is a "Psalm for Times of Trouble," and it shows us three parts of a godly king's agenda. We see the personal standards of holiness to which he commits himself in vs.1-4. Then, in vs.5-7, we see the standards to which he will keep his court officials; it is the king's duty to have a clean and honest administration, from the top down. Finally, in v.8, the king affirms the public duties of his office, dispensing justice throughout the land *"morning by morning."*

Of course, King David failed to meet all of these standards. Just read 2 Samuel. For the perfect king, we are forced to look beyond David... to Jesus, Great David's Greater Son. Let that longing for Christ and his purity characterize your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. How might this Psalm be applied today by those who are responsible for running *any* enterprise and choosing its officials?

PSALM 102:

Take a look at the title of this Psalm: *"A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord."* Could the original Psalmist have written this after the Babylonians reduced the stones of Jerusalem to dust (v.14)? Maybe. But regardless of original context, the people of God have this prayer to use in any circumstance of affliction, when one's heart is faint and when one needs to pour out one's complaints before the Lord. Welcome to 102.

Psalm 102 is one of the seven classic "Penitential Psalms," and when you are near the end of your rope and think you can endure no longer... take it in hand, fall to your knees, and let your heart rise to prayer. Have confidence that your Father in heaven *"regards the prayer of the destitute and does not despise their prayer"* (v.17).

Take note how the conclusion of the prayer begins to contrast our experience of time and the Lord's eternity. The opening chapter of Hebrews will quote from this conclusion, in praise of Christ. And that reminds us to look for ways in which this Psalm is "Messianic"—pointing to the

sufferings and afflictions of the Lord Jesus, and his own eager anticipation to see the kingdom of God come in its fullness to planet earth. Let that "Messianic" character of 102 fill your own prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. The Psalms and the many quotations of the Psalms in the New Testament never fail to show us how Christ truly is the fulfillment of *everything* for God's people.

PSALM 103:

This Psalm opens on a very personal note (vs.1-5), reminding one's self of what God's grace has accomplished in one's own life. And there is a matching conclusion (vs.20-22), but it's no longer strictly personal: now *all* of reality is called to join in and bless (worship, praise) the Lord! And in the middle verses (vs.6-19), we have an overflow of God's attributes: righteousness, justice, blessed self-revelation, kind-hearted acts, mercy, grace, compassion, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, perfect fatherhood, love, eternity, faithfulness, sovereignty, etc.

Psalm 103 is a "Psalm of Wonderment," and it's the first of six such Psalms in a row. Every single line shines with the beauty of praise and thanksgiving to the God of every grace.

This Psalm inspired one of the most beautiful hymns to ever grace the English language: "*Praise, My Soul, The King of Heaven.*" And matching each line of that hymn (google it!) with its corresponding line in the Psalm ushers one's soul to throne of grace, where we may bask in the glory of our God. Let that exercise soak your prayers in God's praise this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Seek to apply each and every Psalm to your heart (as a believer in Jesus) and to your life (as a follower of Jesus).

PSALM 104:

Here we find a delightful and exuberant poetic celebration of God's work of creation, recorded in Genesis 1. There are some great hymns that sing over the truth of God's creation (*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation; All Creatures of our God and King; O Worship The King*, etc.), but Psalm 104—bursting with wonder and praise—is by far the greatest. **Day 1 of Creation** (Genesis 1.3-5): Psalm 104.2... **Day 2** (Genesis 1.6-8): Psalm 104.3-4... **Day 3, Part 1**(Genesis 1.9-10): Psalm 104.5-13... **Day 3, Part 2** (Genesis 1.11-13): Psalm 104.14-18... **Day 4** (Genesis 1.14-19): Psalm 104.19-24... **Day 5 and part of Day 6** (Genesis 1.20-28): Psalm 104.25-26... **The Rest of Day 6** (Genesis 1.29-31): Psalm 104.27-30.

Psalm 104 is another "Psalm of Wonderment," and it fits well as a followup to Psalm 103. One praises God as Savior, the other as Creator. One as Father, the other as Sustainer. In the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy*, the Lord God Almighty is praised as "*merciful and mighty.*" That's Psalm 103 & 104, put together.

The Apostle Paul says that God's *"invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made"* (Romans 1.20). Let these attributes of God conduct you to praise and prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Pursue the praying and singing of the Psalter in your own private life with God, as well as in your family, and also within the church. That is the intention of our Lord.

PSALM 105:

Special Personal Note: I love Psalms 105 & 106! In fact, they were the first two sermons I preached after my ordination as a pastor. "Covenant FaithFULness" (105) and "Covenant FaithLESSness" (106). They go together, in just that way: the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of the people.

Psalm 105 dramatically sweeps through some of the foundational stages of the history of God's dealings with his people... **First**, the patriarchal period of Genesis 12-50 is summed up: the inauguration of the Abrahamic covenant (vs.7-11), the wandering in Canaan (vs.12-15), and the story of Joseph in Egypt (vs.16-22). **Secondly**, the period of Exodus 1-12 is summed up: Israel entering Egypt (vs.23-25), Moses and the plagues (vs.26-36), and Israel's exodus from Egypt (vs.37-38). **Thirdly**, we see wilderness journey of Exodus 13-19 summed up in vs.39-43 and then the entrance into Canaan (told in the book of Joshua) summed up in v.44. All of it told with an eye to the faithful, promise-making, promise-keeping character of our God. His ways may be mysterious at times, but he is always loving his people. He is mindful of their true needs and he is faithfully planning ahead for their good.

Psalm 105 is another "Psalm of Wonderment." So. Stand in wonder at the unfailing love of God for his people, from Abraham to the Promised Land.

This Psalm opens with *"Oh give thanks to the Lord,"* and it closes with *"Praise the Lord!"* May those bookends define the posture of your heart in prayer this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. One of the most practical things you can do as a Christian is to fill your heart with the Psalms.

PSALM 106:

Special Personal Note: I love Psalms 105 & 106! In fact, they were the first two sermons I preached after my ordination as a pastor. "Covenant FaithFULness" (105) and "Covenant FaithLESSness" (106). They go together, in just that way: the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of the people.

Psalm 106, like 105 before it, reviews much of Israel's history: **vs.6-12** speak of the Exodus (see

Exodus 14); **vs.13-18** speak of the wilderness (see Numbers 11.4-34; 16); **vs.19-23** speak of Sinai (see Exodus 32.1-6, 9-14); **vs.24-27** take us to the borders of Canaan (see Numbers 14); **vs.28-33** reviews the stories of Baal-Peor and Meribah (see Numbers 25.1-15; 20.2-13); and **vs.34-38** carry us to the entry into the Promised Land (see Judges 1.21,27-36; 3.3, 5). Last week we saw how 105 reviewed the covenant history between God and his people with an eye to the faithful, promise-making, promise-keeping character of our God. But this week the history is reviewed with an eye to our sin (v.6), our forgetfulness (vs.7,21), our short-lived reforms (vs.12,13), our self-focus (v.14), our petty jealousies (v.16), our tendency toward idolatry (v.19), our stubborn disobedience (vs.24,25), our consequent failure to live in the promises of God (v.26), our fickle hearts (v.28), our propensity to provocation (v.32), our willingness to compromise (vs.34,35), and our spiritual corruptions (vs.37-39). And yet, God's saving grace still breaks through (vs.8-11, 23, 30, 40-43, 44, and 45).

Psalms 105 and 106 are another "Psalm of Wonderment." It's the darker side of the Psalm 105/106 partnership, but the light cannot be fully appreciated until one is mindful of the darkness.

And yet, for all of its exposure of our sullen hearts, this is actually a Psalm of praise! The deeper theme here is the long-suffering grace of God. That's the basis of the final two verses. Let those verses give heart to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Seek to truly inhabit this Psalm in your personal communion with the Lord this week.

PSALM 107:

Psalms 107 begins Book V, the final book of the Psalter. And one of organizing features of this Psalm is repetition. Note the repeated depictions of threatening and frightening situations (vs.4-5,10,17-18,23-26) Also the repeated resort to prayer (vs.6,13,19,28). And then the repeated responses of God (vs.6-7,13-14,19-20,28-29). Finally, take note of the repeated calls to thanksgiving (vs.8,15,21,31).

Psalms 107 is the fifth of six "Psalms of Wonderment" in a row. There are four word-pictures in 107, all of which describe—in different ways—the plight from which God's people have been delivered. The wanderers have been retrieved (vs.4-9), the prisoners have been released (vs.10-16), the sick have been restored (vs.17-22), and the storm-tossed have been rescued (vs.23-32).

The final section poetically elaborates on the reversal of fortune which God delights to give in his saving grace. And then the final verse (v.43) tries to make sure we don't miss the lesson! Let that lesson give shape and form to your prayers this week. Maybe there's a verse or two here that you would really benefit from memorizing this week?

PSALM 108:

Psalm 108 has three stanzas. In each stanza a truth is declared and a petition is prayed. **In Stanza One** (vs.1-5), the truth is centered on God's steadfast love and faithfulness (v.4) These attributes of God are above the very highest things we know! The prayer for Stanza One comes in v.5: that God would be glorified **In Stanza Two** (vs.6-9), the truth is that God has committed himself by his promises (vs.7-9), and there's nothing in this current crisis that his promises haven't covered. The prayer of Stanza Two comes in v.6: that God's people would be delivered. **In Stanza Three** (vs.10-13), the truth is that God's power is sufficient (vs.10,13), and the prayer is that this current crisis would be met with God's help and favor (v.12).

Psalm 108 is the last in this series of six "Psalms of Wonderment." And what David has done here is this: he's taken two parts of previous Psalms he had written (Psalm 57.7-11 and Psalm 60.5-12) and fashioned them together, to describe and pray through this new crisis he was now facing. That's the life of faith, isn't it? If we're walking with Christ thoughtfully, we'll often find that the lessons God taught us years ago now need to be dusted off and applied yet again, to this similar (but new) circumstance.

These truths and these petitions (noted in the first paragraph, above) still need to be believed and prayed today! Let these truths and petitions give life to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday Ponder these things in your own hearts, in your own beds, and be silent and at peace before the Lord (Psalm 4.4).

PSALM 109:

If we are unfamiliar with the imprecatory Psalms, our first response to reading this might be, "What is going on with Psalm 109?" That's a good question. Here are a few things that are going on... **1.** David is affirming his duty to love his enemies (vs.4,5), even when they hate him. **2.** David is taking absolutely no vengeance upon his enemies himself. Rather, he gives himself to prayer for them; v.4 literally says "*I am prayer.*" When attacked and hurt, he does not retaliate; he brings it all to God in prayer, and leaves it there. See Romans 12.19. **3.** In asking God to deal with his enemies, David is indeed quite specific. But it's a specificity that comes from knowing Scripture. The things David prays are what the Bible says will happen to those who live in this manner, without repentance. We might pray for God to deal with our enemies in a general way. David was praying the same, but in a more specific way, shaped by the realism of the Scriptures. **4.** Also note that according to Acts 1.16-20, there's one more thing going on here: a picture of Jesus loving Judas, v.8 being quoted in Acts 1.20.

As stated above, Psalm 109 is an "Imprecatory Psalm." If the command of Romans 12.19 is to be

confidently obeyed, no matter what the enemies of God's people may do, we're going to need to pray some strong prayers. Strong prayers have been provided.

The link below will take you to a memorable example of using such prayers for me: the day my wife and I prayed this sort of prayer with our children, on behalf of God's persecuted people. Let the imprecations in the Psalter remind you of an often-politely-ignored side of the Holy One to whom we pray. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Turn to Psalms 3 and 5 if you want to see what kind of mood David often woke up to, early in the morning. Even during those times when his enemies were hunting him down. How could he be so confident? Because he prayed these Psalms.

<http://www.ransom-road.com/2014/08/a-day-for-praying-strongest-prayers-god.html>

PSALM 110:

Psalm 110 points to one of the great mysteries of the Bible: *"You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"* (v.4). But, like all the Bible's mysteries, the riddle is worked out through Christ. Take a deep breath...

Melchizedek appears suddenly in the Scriptures, unexpected and unheralded, in Genesis 14.18-20. Abram (later, Abraham) has just shattered a coalition of evil kings, and *"Melchizedek king of Salem"* (later, Jerusalem) brings him bread and wine, blessing him in the name of God Most High. At which point Abram presents his tithe (!), since Melchizedek is also the priest of God Most High. In v.22 of Genesis 14 Abram affirms (again) that Melchizedek's *"God Most High"* is indeed Yahweh, the Lord. David (the author of Psalm 110) later takes Jerusalem, sitting on Melchizedek's former throne, and becomes something of the fulfillment of Melchizedek's priestly-kingship before Yahweh. Hence we have every single verse in Psalm 110. But David is only **something** of the fulfillment of Melchizedek's priestly kingship. The Final and Forever Priest-King (before whom David was merely a shadow mysteriously cast beforehand) was still to come. Remember: Jesus, the Final, Forever, and True Priest of this world, did not descend from the priestly tribe of Levi. So, how is he even a priest? In this way... Jesus is the True Melchizedek! Please read Hebrews 6.20-7.28. Jesus is the fulfillment of a mystery that reaches back through David to Abraham himself. Abraham met and paid tithes to a prototype, a shadow, a picture, a prophecy of a Coming Reality—a reality that by far supersedes the privileges of the tribe of Levi. Jesus is that Reality.

Psalm 110 is, of course, a "Royal Messianic Psalm."

To see something of the weight the New Testament lays on this Psalm, read Mark 12.35-37 and then Acts 2.33-35. Let that weight give power to your prayers this week. We'll pray it

together on Sunday. And may we offer ourselves freely (v.3), in the service of our mighty Priest-King, Jesus the Christ.

PSALM 111:

Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 go together, and they go together in two different ways. First of all, they are both acrostics, meaning that they both have 22 lines in the Hebrew, each line starting with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters. They are both perfect A-Z poems! And secondly they go together in theme. Psalm 111 describes the Lord, as he has revealed himself in both deed and word. Psalm 112 describes the Lord's people, viewed as a representative "man," who in deed and word has grown to resemble his Lord.

Psalm 111 is a "Psalm of Revelation," inviting us to study our God, with deep delight and open praise. In fact, it begins with a summons to "*Praise the Lord!*," as does Psalm 112, as does Psalm 113.

There are also a number of matching ideas in both Psalms, as we would expect, if the people of God are truly learning godliness. See if you can line up the two Psalms and pick out the similar phrases and related themes. Let the "like Father, like son (people)" nature of these matching Psalms give direction to your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. And if your heart hungers to give further praise to the Lord, turn to Psalm 3 or Psalm 5, and sing and pray. Particularly turn to those two Psalms early in the morning! They were written for mornings.

PSALM 112:

As we noted last week, Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 go together. Not only are they both acrostics, perfect A-Z poems (in Hebrew), but they are also paired together in themes. 111 is all about the Lord. 112 is all about the people of the Lord, considered as a representative "man." And note the resemblance. The "man" (people) has (have) grown, in character and conduct, into the likeness of his (their) Lord.

Psalm 112 is a "Wisdom Psalm," inviting us to study the blessed man. Think of it as a development of the last verse of the previous Psalm: "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!*"

The Scriptures everywhere promise great blessing to those who fear the Lord. Pore over that blessing here. Let that blessing make your prayers mighty this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. To keep in view the eternal blessing promised to God's people, take in Psalm 23 sometime this week as well.

PSALM 113:

Psalms 113-118 is a collection of Psalms / songs / prayers that the Hebrews used every year at Passover. Please read Alec Motyer's introduction to this run of six Psalms...

"Anything that relates to the Lord Jesus Christ is of supreme value and attractiveness for the Christian. Consequently, the strong likelihood that this group of Psalms formed part of his Passover celebrations enhances their interest and importance. At the last Passover, the first Supper, he and his company would have sung Psalms 113-114 before the meal and 115-118 would be the 'hymn' they sang at the end (Mt.26:30). No doubt each psalm in the group had its own literary history but together they are well called 'the Egyptian Hallel / Act of Praise', a commentary in song on Exodus 6:6-7."

Psalm 113, as the opening note of "The Egyptian Hallel," grounds the whole run of six Psalms in the Lord. He is exalted, as the transcendent God of the universe! And yet, he himself exalts the poor and the needy and the broken-hearted. He is sovereign over all, yet good to each individual child. He is indeed both "Heavenly" and "Father." Nothing is too great for him; no one is too small for him.

These Psalms have great relevance for the original Exodus (from Egypt, through Moses), of course. But they have even deeper relevance for the Greater Exodus (from sin and death, through Jesus). Let that Christ-centered relevance transform your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. If this is more a week of sorrow than joy for you, start with Psalm 42. Let it lead you in lament, but also stir you toward the hope and expectation of 113.

PSALM 114:

Last week we introduced the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118)—the Psalms that were traditionally sung by the Hebrews every year at Passover. They would sing 113-114 before the meal and 115-118 after (see Matthew 26.30). Psalm 114 celebrates God's glory in the Exodus out of Egypt. There the Lord showed himself to be the true king of all nations (v.1), compassionate to the downtrodden (v.2), sovereign over all creation (vs.3-7), and more than ready and able to provide for the needs of his people (v.8).

Psalm 114, part two of "The Egyptian Hallel," demonstrates that everything said of God in Psalm 113 is true. Our faith is not based on wishful thinking; it is grounded solidly on historical revelation.

I love how Derek Kidner describes this Psalm: *"A fierce delight and pride in the great march of God gleams through every line of this little poem—a masterpiece whose flights of verbal fancy would have excluded it from any hymn book but this. Here is the Exodus not as a familiar item in*

Israel's creed but as an astounding event: as startling as a clap of thunder, as shattering as an earthquake." Let that thunder and that earthquake strengthen your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Are you encircled by fear and upheaval, difficult circumstances and contentious trials? God is your true and only security, your refuge, and your strength. Follow up 114 with a good dose of 46.

PSALM 115:

We are in the midst of a group of Psalms known as the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalm 113-118), and we've said that 113-114 would traditionally be sung by faithful Hebrews right *before* partaking of the Passover meal, every year. Once the meal was over, they would then sing 115-118. This is the post-Passover "*hymn*" you see mentioned in Matthew 26.30 & Mark 14.26. So, the first part of this "*hymn*" was Psalm 115. What is it about? Verses 1-3 and 16-18 are all about praise given to God. Verses 4-8 are about idols and those who trust them. Verses 9-15 are about the Lord and those who trust him.

Psalm 115, part three of "The Egyptian Hallel," sings of God's invincible glory and the blessings he gives to the faithful.

Notice the three groups referenced in vs.9-11. "*O Israel... O house of Aaron... O you who fear the Lord.*" That phrase "*you who fear the Lord*" (or, later, "God-fearers") becomes the name given to non-Israelite converts, those Gentile believers who worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This has always been a gracious reality, from the very beginning of God's people (see Genesis 15.2; Exodus 12.48f; Ruth 1.16; 2 Samuel 11.3; etc). Let God's gracious world-wide gospel intentions encourage your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday On that note of God's concern for all the peoples of the earth, take in Psalm 47 this week as well.

PSALM 116:

We have now come to the fourth song of the "Egyptian Hallel," which was also sung by faithful Hebrews after the Passover meal was celebrated. I hope we'll all soak in this Psalm for a while. There's a great threat to life here (vs.3,8,15), and it seems to be have surfaced due to human deceitfulness (v.11) and personal foolishness or lack of discernment (v.6). But prayer is made (vs.1-4), and a gracious and righteous and merciful God has heard (v.5). All the other verses are basically taken up with descriptions or consequences of God's mighty deliverance.

Psalm 116, part four of "The Egyptian Hallel," is bursting with the delight and gratitude of one who realizes that the Lord answered his prayer with overwhelming grace.

Do you, like me, sometimes feel that you need help sufficiently expressing your thanksgiving to

God? Well, welcome to 116. Here you will find strong help. Let that help give form and shape to your prayers this week. Sin and its consequences are very real. But so is the great power of our God in heaven! Along those lines, perhaps throw in a dash of Psalm 71 as you exercise your soul in prayer this week.

PSALM 117:

Welcome to the shortest Psalm in the Psalter! (*Enjoy how its brevity allows you to comprehend the theme fairly quickly. Though it is an enormous theme! But enjoy this brevity while it lasts, because we're two Psalms away from the tour de force of the Psalter...*) Psalm 117 takes the Exodus truths—remember, we're still in the "Egyptian Hallel" Psalms, closely associated with Passover—and extends their promise to the gigantic whole of the world. What God has done for Israel is not limited to Israel!

And to that point, the Apostle Paul quotes this Psalm in Romans 15.11, in support of his insistence that Jesus is the Messiah for the whole world, all the Gentile nations included! We see the world-wide aim of 117 fulfilled in Revelation 7.9, by the way. This part of the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118) reveals something essential to understanding the heart of God. It's just as God promised Abraham way back in Genesis 22.18: *"in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* God's grace intends to reach into the remotest regions of the earth. King Solomon prayed in this way (see 1 Kings 8.41-43). Indeed, once you find this theme in the Bible, you see it everywhere! Psalm 47.9, Psalm 96-98, Romans 4.11-12, Galatians 6.16—the whole of the world can become *"the Israel of God."*

There truly is one Lord, one world, and one joy. And that joy is Christ! Let that joy fill your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. This is a very small Psalm, to be sure. But the faith it expresses is great. And its reach is vast.

PSALM 118:

We now come to the final "Egyptian Hallel" Psalm, these six Psalms which were sung by the Hebrews at every Passover. Having sung through the previous five Psalms, 118 now brings us right up to the very gates of the Lord's presence (vs.19 & 20), that we may enter through them and give him thanks, even at the very horns of the altar (v.27).

And as the final song sung at the Passover, it looks both backwards (to commemorate) and forwards (to expect and hope). Towards what is this Psalm expecting and hoping? Towards the One who would come, the One in whom all the details of Psalm 118 would finally come fully true. We meet that Long-Expected One in the opening verse of the New Testament.

Do you see echoes of Psalm 118 in Palm Sunday and in the Passion Week? Perhaps read 118 several times, and then work through the Passion Week in one of the gospels in the next few days. "*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me*" (Jesus, in John 5.39).

PSALM 119.1-8:

In Psalm 117 we found the shortest Psalm in the Bible. In Psalm 119, we find the longest. 176 verses long, arranged into an acrostic (moving A-Z, right through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, eight verses at a time, each of the eight verses beginning with the very same letter: Aleph, Beth, Gimel, etc., all 22 letters—you can see and note the Hebrew letter divisions as subheadings in your English Bibles).

This giant, tour de force of an acrostic took great skill, but it serves a great subject: the eternal Word of God. Note the many synonyms this Psalm uses to refer to the Word: *the law, his testimonies, his ways, your precepts, your statutes, your commandments, your righteous rules...* and that's just from vs.1-8!

Read and sing and pray it, with great gratitude in your heart for the Word of God, which is so central to the lives of God's people. Our God speaks; he reveals himself! And we have his revelation right here, in front of us.

This week we'll limit our consideration to the first eight verses. The big theme here is that obedience to God's Word is the key to a life of blessing. The first four verses are objective: this is simply God's truth. And then, in vs.5-8, we turn to the subjective: *oh that I might live in this obedience to God's Word more steadfastly!*

Psalm 119 is actually my favorite Psalm of the Psalter to pray through, taking it just eight verses (one Hebrew letter's worth of the acrostic) at a time. Enjoy it this week. We'll pray it together this Sunday.

PSALM 119.9-16:

Psalm 119 refers to the Word of God, in one way or another, in almost every single one of its 176 verses. But in doing so, it uses nine primary words. One of these words is simply the word "*word*"—which we find in v.9, for instance. "How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your *word*."

The theme in vs.9-16 (which is the "Beth" acrostic) is *the engaged and captivated heart*. Pray these verses for your heart. Pray these verses for my heart. Pray these verses for the corporate

heart and life of Decatur Presbyterian Church. *"Where the Spirit reigns, a love for God's Word reigns."* — Kent Hughes

Notice how the opening verse poses the case of *"a young man."* Why is this particular case presented, we might wonder? Perhaps because this is a context in which the life of purity (v.9) is under constant and relentless attack. I say this with vivid memories of my former life as a young man, as a father of young men, and as one who engages in meaningful conversation with young men as often as I can. But this is just an exemplary, "strong case" scenario. The truths found here apply to all.

Our outward way of life rises out of and is shaped by inner factors of the heart (v.10a), the will (v.10b), the mind and memory (v.11), the mouth (v.13), the things we love (vs.14,16), and the things we think about (v.15). So, what should all of these inner factors be centered upon? *"Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes!"* (v.12).

The heart that is stored up with the word (v.11) is the antidote to all the destructive impurities of sin. Let us pray, pray, pray these verses this week.

PSALM 119.17-24:

As we've mentioned over the last couple of Psalm 119 studies, this Psalm makes some reference to the Word of God in almost every single one of its 176 verses. Another one of the nine major terms by which it does so is the word *"promise."* See, for example, v.50: "This is my comfort in my affliction, that your *promise* gives me life." Let's consider what theme of God's "promise" meets us in vs.17-24, which is the Gimel acrostic...

We are here reminded—in multiple ways—how completely dependent we are upon the Lord, if we would live before him and keep his Word. He must *"deal bountifully"* with us (v.17), making full provision for us, if we would live the life of God in the midst of a fallen earth. He must *"open"* our eyes (v.18), if we would understand his Word to us, in all of its beauty and wonder. In other words, God must fully enable our obedience.

In vs.19 & 20 we are reminded of our true situation: we are alien sojourners in this life; this fallen world is not at all the reality for which we were made. And if we wish to live in that wisdom, we must cultivate an all-consuming longing for knowledge of and love for God's Word. If this is not a priority for us, consider the prayerful warnings of vs.21 & 22.

Finally, in vs.23 & 24 we see that even though the circumstances of this fallen world will not

make a life of holiness easy, even though we will encounter opposition of various sorts, the servant of the Lord will endure whatever cost may come. The life-giving Word of God must become our delight, our counselor, and that which rules over heart and mind.

PSALM 119:25-32:

Another one of the nine main words that this Psalm uses to refer to the Word of God is the word "*rules*." For instance, v.30: "I have chosen the way of faithfulness; I set your *rules* before me." The word "rule" in the Hebrew rises out of the verb "to give judgement, to make a decision about what is right and what is wrong." This word affirms to us that this Word of God that we are praying that we might set before us is, in fact, the very expression of the mind of God. In learning God's rules, we are learning how to think his thoughts after him. We are being renewed in his image.

In verses 25-32 we have come to the Daleth acrostic, where all eight of these verses begin with the Hebrew letter Daleth. Part of the theme of this acrostic can be discerned by examining the realities described therein: humiliation (v.25), weariness (v.28), temptation (v.29), and the fear of disappointments (v.31). These realities are a part of life in this fallen world.

What is the Christian's response to these realities? Well... we are looking at a Psalm... so the central response we see here is simply prayer! But what kind of prayers, in particular? Good question. Daleth gives us seven answers.

1—prayers for renewal of life (v.25), **2**—prayers for growth in knowledge (vs.26,27), **3**—prayers for a mind that is fixed on God's Word and works (v.27), **4**—prayers for strength (v.28), **5**—prayers for grace, for God's favor to those who deserve none (v.29), **6**—prayers for enablement to choose and set our hearts on the way of faithfulness before God (v.30), **7**—prayers that we might meet trouble with obedience (v.31a), that we might have a heart for strong effort in obedience (v.32), and see a positive, favorable outcome (v.31b).

PSALM 119:33-40:

So far, in taking a look at the nine major words which refer to the Word of God in Psalm 119, we've considered *word*, *promise*, and *rules*. The fourth defining word of this Psalm is "*statute*" (in the ESV, often translated "testimony"). I don't hear us using this word in casual conversation very much, so let's consider it carefully. "*Statute*" comes from the verb "to bear witness" or "to bear testimony." In his Word, God is bearing witness and testimony to himself, to his nature, to his character, to his truth, to his covenant. Consider v.36, from the verses we're praying this week: "Incline my heart to your *testimonies*, and not to selfish gain!"

Remember: this 176-verse Psalm is made up of 22 acrostics, going right through the 22 letters

of the Hebrew alphabet, and each acrostic is eight verses long. Verses 33-40 all begin with the Hebrew letter *He*. In these eight verses, we find nine requests.

The background against which we find these nine requests is the sad reality of our lame hearts. We're called to run in the way of God's commandments (v.32), and part of our heart wants to obey (v.34)... but we also realize that our hearts are so very easily drawn away to selfish ends (v.36). How easily our eyes are turned from looking at the Lord to looking at worthless things (v.37).

Do you feel that tension in your own wayward heart? Loyalty to God versus disloyalty to God? I feel it in mine.

What is the solution? This Psalm points us to sincere and bold prayer.

Only God can help us keep the way (v.33). Only God can give us a whole heart (v.34). Only God can give us true delight in the path of his commands (v.35). Only God can keep us from getting lost in unworthy pursuits (vs.36,37). Only God can eternally confirm his promises to us (v.38). Only God can save us from our reproach and disgrace (v.39). Only God can renew and preserve to us the springs of life (v.40). Therefore, let us pray.

PSALM 119.41-48:

Another significant part of the vocabulary of Psalm 119, which builds up our understanding of the Word of God, is the word "*decrees*." Strangely, every single time the Hebrew points to the word "*decree*," the ESV translates it as statutes (vs.5,8,12,16,23,26,33,48,54,64,68,71,80,83,112,117,118,124,135,145,155,171). There is more to that discussion than my diminishing Hebrew skills allow me to understand, but the word decree comes from the verb "to engrave." Think of something "engraved in stone," as we say, something that is decreed forever.

In vs.41-48 we are considering the Waw acrostic, which features the very same Hebrew word at the beginning of each of the eight verses: the word "And." But that's not just an easy or lazy way to start each verse with the Hebrew letter Waw. It's actually part of the point of these eight verses. These are things which follow one another in sequence. Verse 41, following the last few acrostics—which have been wrestling through different problems that the Christian faces and prays through—starts off: "*And let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise.*"

As if to say, "*And don't forget this! In the midst of all the other petitions and requests I have made, this one is the greatest and most important of all! I need your steadfast love and*

salvation!"

Then comes, in vs.42-48, the steady progress of all the good things that accompany the gift of God's salvation in our lives.

In vs.42-43 we find the theme of God's people giving spoken testimony of his love and salvation. In vs.44-46 we find ourselves promising to live obedient lives; the kind of lives that demonstrate the wide and true freedom of the children of God. The kind of freedom that makes us fearless, even in bearing witness to kings. In vs.47-48 we see the theme of a genuine love for the Word of God.

Lips that speak the Word (vs.42-43) and a life that lives the Word (vs.44-46) will rise out of a heart that loves the Word (vs.47-48).

PSALM 119.49-56:

We continue to study and celebrate and pray through the **FULLNESS** of God's Word, using the 22 acrostics of Psalm 119. Remember, that's the whole point of an acrostic, to consider something "A to Z" (in it's fullness!), or—using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet—Aleph to Taw.

But Psalm 119 isn't your normal acrostic, like you find in other places in the Scripture. In this acrostic each of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are given **EIGHT** verses, in which to set before us some aspect of the Word of God, poetically and beautifully and fully. So far we have considered the Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Daleth, He, and Waw acrostics. Now we come to Zayin, in which vs.49-56 all start with a word beginning with the Hebrew letter Zayin, giving us yet another marvelous aspect of God's Word to contemplate, pray over, and revel in.

What is the theme of the Zayin acrostic? Let me ask you this question. Have you ever been in a low place where you asked yourself, "*Why should I even bother anymore?*" If so, you can probably remember what prompted that moment of despair. Some affliction (v.50), insolent opposition (v.51), perhaps witnessing others forsake (*not bother with*) following God or caring about his way (v.53).

What do we do in those times? We still center our lives and order our loves around God and his Word. And—when we genuinely do so—we are given comfort (vs.50,52). We find that the time of opposition is actually the very time in which we **most firmly** need to hold to God's Word (v.51). We discover that life's frustrations are a test of faith and love to see how seriously we intend to keep God's Word (v.55), to our great blessing (v.56). And it is in this way that God makes us to hope (v.49). And that is, in fact—in the wisdom of our God—the most effective way

for sojourners (v.54) to learn hope.

So. Keep the Word! And do not forsake it. No matter what.

The sixth main vocabulary word of Psalm 119, describing what the Word of God is, is "*law*." This word points to the authority of God's Word, to its teaching and instruction, and to the love of a Father (Proverbs 3.1) which prompted him to give it to his children. You find it, for example in vs.51, 53, and 55 of the Zayin acrostic.

PSALM 119.57-64:

After *word, promise, rule, statute, decree, and law*, the next of the nine words that Psalm 119 uses to shape and form our understanding of the Word of God is "command" or "commandment." This term reminds us that the Word of God is designed for practical application to all of life. For example, v.60: "I hasten and do not delay to keep your *commandments*."

With verses 57-64, we have now arrived at the Heth acrostic. These verses are organized around the theme of ordering our entire lives around the Lord, whose faithfulness and love are celebrated at both the opening and closing of this acrostic. What's an appropriate response to One like the Lord? Heth provides us some guidance...

We pledge our allegiance, that we will keep his Word (v.57). We seek his favor and his grace with all of our hearts (v.58). We are genuinely thoughtful about our lives, wanting to re-form our ways, so that they are true to God's testimonies (v.59). We obey God's Word promptly (v.60).

However, none of this will always be easy, and Heth lets us know that! There are those who will oppose us (v.61). Will we face these opponents in a way that pleases the Lord?

But a zeal for the Lord (v.62) and godly friends who strengthen us along the way (v.63) will encourage us. For in every situation and in every place we will meet the steadfast love of the Lord (v.64). It fills all of life! We are like the tribe of Levi (Joshua 13.14,33; 18.7); we need nothing else but the Lord and what he has graciously promised.

PSALM 119.65-72:

The eighth of the nine words that give shape to our understanding of God's Word in Psalm 119 is "*precept*." Like last week's word ("commandment"), this word also carries the general meaning of "practical application to life." But while commandment points to the simple idea of faithfully doing what God tells us to do, the word "*precept*" focuses in on applying the Word of

God to the minutiae of life—to every single detail of life, regardless of how large or small, how important or unimportant we may consider it to be. That's what we do with those things that we receive as "*precepts*." For example, v.69: "The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your *precepts*."

We have now come to the ninth of the 22 acrostics which make up Psalm 119, the Teth acrostic. Notice the centrality of the word or idea of "good" in this section. We see it translated as the word "well" in v.65: "*You have dealt well with your servant.*" We see it defining what the Lord is and what he does in v.68: "You are good and do good." We see that good is what he bestows on us in vs.71,72: "It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better [think "gooder," with apologies to all grammar nazis] to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces."

But *where* does the Lord often bestow all of this good upon his people? This is the surprise of Teth.

He often bestows it upon us when we are in the school of *affliction*. Yes, the experience of affliction in a fallen world is often a school for God's children. We are the students and he is the teacher.

In vs.65-67 we see the surprising benefit of affliction, when it is received with faith that God really does deal "well" with his servants (v.65). So, we ask for more of his teaching (v.66). And sometimes we find that good teaching in the school of affliction (v.67).

In vs.68-70 we are reminded that, come what may, a resolute and rejoicing heart that truly delights in God's law (v.70) will find God to be good and to do good (v.68), in any circumstance (v.69).

In vs.71-72 it is affirmed again that affliction can be a very effective school in which to learn the goodness of God's Word. It is "*better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*"

PSALM 119.73-80:

By way of introducing ourselves to Psalm 119, we've been looking at nine main words that this Psalm uses to refer to the Word of God—as it does, one way or another, in almost every one of its 176 verses. So far we've considered the words *word, promise, rules, statues, decrees, law, commandments, and precepts*. Today we briefly examine the final of the nine words: regarding God's Word as his "*ways*." His "lifestyle," we might say.

Verse 3: "[Blessed are those] who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!" Verse 15: "I will

meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your *ways*." Verse 36: "Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your *ways*." We are blessed when we walk in God's ways, when we fix our eyes on his ways, and when we seek to find life in his ways. And really what this is referring to is walking in his Word, fixing our eyes on his Word, and seeking to find life in his Word. *Is that our lifestyle?*

Today we come to the Yodh acrostic, which is found in vs.73-80. In the Teth acrostic (last week) we learned that affliction is often a school in which we learn more and more of God's goodness. But is the way that we live—in the midst of affliction—meant only for *our* benefit? Or is it also meant for the benefit of *others*?

That's the question taken up by Yodh. We see that the *agent* of affliction is the same for the Psalmist, this week and last: "*the insolent*" (see v.78 and v.69). But here we find the Psalmist praying that he will bear with the hostility of the insolent in such a way that "*those who fear*" God (v.74) may see the steadfastness of his hope in God's Word and rejoice. Then he prays that, having rejoiced in his strong hope, "*those who fear*" God may even turn to him, that they may learn more of God's testimonies (v.79).

Notice that at the beginning (v.73), middle (v.76), and end (v.80), the Psalmist is praying for himself. But a big reason why he's praying for himself is so that he might be a channel of blessing for others, through the influence of his good example of faith, even in the midst of considerable affliction (v.75).

The great theme of his prayer for himself is that he would love and appreciate God's Word. Before God's Word, he longs to experience understanding and learning (v.73), hope and confidence (v.74), knowledge (v.75), delight (v.77), meditation (v.78), and a blameless heart (v.80). What great prayers Yodh provide for us!

PSALM 119.81-88:

We've looked at nine words that Psalm 119 uses to deepen our understanding of God's Word. All through the use of those nine words, we find certain prominent ideas. One of those ideas is *a genuine love* for the Word of God. See, for example, vs.16, 30, 54, 70, 127, 140, 159, & 167. If Psalm 119 helps you love God's Word more, then you can be sure that you are using it rightly.

In verses 81-88, we arrive at the Kaph acrostic. Over the last two acrostics, we've seen the theme of affliction repeated, and that theme continues here. And yes, it's still "*the insolent*" who are at the root of the affliction (see v.85 in this acrostic, and previously: vs.69 & 78). They have smeared the Psalmist with lies (v.69), they have wronged him with falsehood (v.78), and now, in v.85, they have dug pitfalls for him. They plainly do not live according to

God's law.

The Psalmist has done nothing to merit this treatment (see v.86), it's been dragging on for a long while (see v.84), and he now seems to be near the line of despair, at the end of his rope. In vs.81-84, the Psalmist is urgently longing for deliverance and pleading with God to rise up and change the situation. And then, in the second half of the acrostic, the Psalmist prays for help and renewal: "*In your steadfast love give me life, that I may keep the testimonies of your mouth*"(v.88).

Note how the whole of the prayer alternates, verse for verse, between statements (setting the facts before the Lord) and pleas: pleas for comfort, for judgment of the insolent, for help, and for life. When we get to the end of our rope, what should we do? We should pray. We should pray like Kaph prays.

But for some crazy reason (of sin), in the midst of affliction, prayer is sometimes the first thing that we abandon. And yet, in prayer we find hope (v.81), comfort (v.82), continued faithfulness and obedience (vs.83,87), and perseverance (v.88).

PSALM 119.89-96:

Last week we saw that one of the major ideas that gets sustained emphasis in Psalm 119 is a genuine love for the Word of God. *Another* major emphasis of this Psalm is the believer's commitment to *obey the Scriptures*. See, for example, vs.17, 34, 60, 100, 106, & 129. This is another indication that we are using Psalm 119 rightly: it is encouraging and strengthening our desire to "*keep*" God's Word, in every aspect of life.

In verses 89-96, we encounter the Lamedh acrostic. Notice the word "*forever*" in v.89, and then notice the word "*never*" in v.93. These words would seem to be pointing in opposite directions, but ultimately they are reinforcing one truth. God's Word is "*forever*" firmly fixed in the heavens, and I "*never*" forget his Word, for by his Word he has given me life.

But here we discern the two parts of Lamedh. Verses 89-91 are concerned with the Lord's Word itself, and in those verses we learn some mighty truths about the Scriptures. Verses 92-96 are concerned with the believer's personal response to the Lord's Word. Is this your response? Pray that it will be! That's part of the function and application of 119 in our lives.

Note also the movement of thought in this acrostic. First we consider the Word as something firmly fixed in the heavens (v.89). But then this Word that is firmly fixed in the heavens is considered as something that is personally enjoyed here on earth (v.92). And then the movement of thought goes from the Word personally enjoyed on earth (v.93) to a

consideration of the Word in its own boundless nature (v.96). In everything finite there is a limiting factor. But in God's Word there is no limiting factor. There is only boundless and true freedom.

PSALM 119.97-104:

Another prominent emphasis of Psalm 119 is the believer's need to resolutely hold to the Word of God during times of difficulty. Remember: there is no such thing as an untested faith. And when the test comes, where will you be? What will you do? Consider verses 51, 61, 83, 87, 95, 109, 110, 143, 157, and 161.

In verses 97-104, we discover the Mem acrostic. The theme of Mem is delightful. Literally. The Word is a delightful Word, and that is how this Word is celebrated in Mem. Contemplate the similar beginnings of vs.97 and 103: *"Oh how I love your law!... How sweet are your words to my taste."* The Word of God is objectively beautiful.

In the first three verses of Mem (97-100) we are taught how this Word informs our minds. Because we love the Word, we meditate on it in a protracted way (v.97). Because we meditate upon it in this manner, it imparts to us a wisdom that is greater than the evils that threaten us in this world (v.98). We gain an understanding that is superior to mere human wisdom (v.99). Word-centered understanding even rises above the most venerable of human tradition (v.100).

The next three verses (101-104) show us how the Word imparts direction to us, for all of life. It teaches us what to avoid. It teaches us what to keep. It is the Word of God Himself, our Great Teacher, and it is sweeter than anything found on earth.

Mem concludes in v.104: *"Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."* How do we understand what is true? How do we know what to hate? How do we know which way to take? Mem has shown us.

Consistent meditation on the Word (vs.97-99) becomes obedience (v.100). Obedience transforms our lives (v.101), for we understand Who is really speaking in the Word (v.102). And that's what makes the Word a delight (v.103).

PSALM 119.105-112:

How does a believer plead for compassion before God? In Psalm 119, one perfectly legitimate grounds for such pleading is concern for God's Word. *"Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight"* (v.77). We see the same thing in v.153: *"Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law."* Sometimes it is said of an honest man: "He's as

good as his word." Well, the same is true of God (and much more literally), and that's why concern for his Word is solid and sound grounds for such pleas. See vs.41, 65, 76, 116, 154, and 170.

In verses 105-112, we meet the Nun acrostic. Notice that affliction (v.107) and enemies (v.110) are still present; whatever Nun has to say to us, it's not meant for some theoretical, ideal, perfect world. It's meant for real life in the real world, as you and I know it.

Verses 105 & 106 remind us that the Word of God is meant to act as a guide for our life, and that such a guide calls for a solemn response from us. An "*oath*," in fact. The whole idea of a deliberate, strong, confirmed commitment to God's Word is very vivid in Nun.

Verses 107 & 108 show us how God intends to give us life, to renew us, to teach us—through his Word—even in the very midst of life's trials.

Verses 109 & 110 return to the theme mentioned earlier: a deliberate, strong, confirmed commitment to God's Word. "*I do not forget your law... I do not stray from your precepts.*" We must remember that never, in all of recorded history, from Genesis 3 onward, has there ever been someone who just accidentally drifted into an intelligent, resolute, sincere, and firm-hearted devotion to God's Word.

And finally, in verses 111 & 112, we see the proper and fitting response to receiving the Word of God as a guide for life: a heart of joy! If the Word is your heritage (your possession!) forever, if the Word is directing your future... what a precious gift! For what is joy without committed obedience? Mere flippancy. And what is committed obedience without joy? Bare legalism. But God calls us to something so much greater: "*Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart*" (v.111).

PSALM 119.113-120:

I hope we're all getting a strong sense of the inexhaustible treasures of Psalm 119 for our faith. What a rich and profound prayer this is, addressed to the Lord of the Word, called out from the heart of a believer who desperately wants to love and keep the Word of God more and more and more deeply. I am striving to make this prayer my own, every week of this exercise. I hope you are doing the same!

This week we turn to the Samekh acrostic, found in verses 113-120. The theme of this acrostic has been described as "Singlemindedness, Not Compromise." The prayer of the Psalmist here stands in great contrast to the lives of the undecided, the evildoers, the straying wanderers, and the wicked.

What is it—exactly—that makes the Psalmist distinct from these others? Love for the Word (vs.113, 119). Receiving the Word as a place of refuge and hope (v.114). A determined intention to keep the Word (v.115). The practice of a focused, steady regard for the Word (v.117). All of which rises from a godly and healthy fear of the Lord (v.120).

For the solemn truth is that those who spurn the Word—note again the four categories of such spurning that are mentioned in this Psalm and in the second paragraph above—will, in the end, be spurned by the Lord (v.118). If we are wrong with his Word, we cannot be right with him... for he is the Personal Reality found in the Word! Therefore, love for the Word is not optional, it is not negotiable, it is not a side order for the Christian life. Rather, it intrinsically belongs to the very nature of the Christian life.

Let's seek to be well-disciplined by Samekh this week, to the glory of God.

PSALM 119.121-128:

One thing that we've seen in Psalm 119 is that the human heart is frail, it is "prone to wander" (as a great hymn puts it), and it is fraught with failures. Psalm 119 may strengthen our aspirations to obey, keep, and love our Lord's Word more fully, but—in the end, as the very last verse of Psalm 119 will put it—*"I have gone astray like a lost sheep."* We need the Good Shepherd's grace and care. Our hope is not grounded in our great love for his Word; saving hope is grounded in God's great faithfulness to his Word.

This week we uncover to the Ayin acrostic, found in verses 121-128 Here's the situation in Ayin: the Psalmist has been determined to live as a light in this dark world. But it's still a dark world! And often it seems that the oppressor and the arrogant and the insolent are winning the day. How much longer can he hold out?

How much longer can you and I hold out? Consider v.123: *"My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise."*

The Psalmist knows that God's Word has been long-ignored and brushed aside Now, he feels, it's time for God to act (v.126)! What's interesting here is that the verb for "act" in v.126 is the same verb for "done" in v.121. The sense seems to be, *"I have done all I can do. It's time for YOU to do something!"*

It's helpful to read v.126 as the climax to which vs.121-125 have been building. And then, following that climactic appeal, we find in final two verses of Ayin a pledge of allegiance. *"Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. Therefore I*

consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way" (vs.127,128). Is God's Word our chief treasure? Do we believe it to be right in every single precept?

Events belong to the Lord; duties belong to us. And here in Ayin we meet several duties: prayer, knowledge and love of his truth, hatred of every false way.

PSALM 119.129-136:

As we've seen, each one of these acrostics (of eight verses in length, all beginning with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet) is a carefully composed section of teaching, opening up some vital aspect of the Word of God for us. Today we meet with the Pe acrostic, in verses 129-136.

In last week's acrostic (Ayin), we saw the Psalmist trying to live as a light in a dark world and wondering how much longer he could hold out. But this week, in Pe, we see that light has broken through for him: *"The unfolding of your words gives light"* (v.130). And then, having received some light, he prays for more: *"Make your face shine upon your servant"* (v.135).

The Psalmist loves and appreciates God's Word: *"Your testimonies are wonderful; therefore my soul keeps them"* (v.129), and he is sincerely grieved to see it scorned: *"My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law"*(v.136). And between those two verses—the two bookends of Pe—we find the great themes of this acrostic: the light of God's Word (v.130), the grace of God to give us his Word (vs.131,132), God's promise to redeem his people (vs.133,134), and the shining light of God's favor and love (v.135).

Some edifying notes on the vocabulary of Pe:

- in v.129 the word *"wonderful"* is not merely a synonym for great. In the ancient world wonderful meant something like our word "supernatural."
- in v.130 we see that when God's Word is *"unfolded,"* it gives light. The literal Hebrew here is "door, opening." The idea is that when the Word is opened, it's as if a door has opened and the light of the Lord floods through. Remember v.129: the Word is supernatural!
- also in v.130, see the word *"simple,"* which is found frequently in the Proverbs. Left to ourselves, we are simple. We lack understanding and wisdom.
- in vs.131 & 132 we see that a *"longing"* for the Word and a *"love"* for the Lord's name go together. And it is the way of God's grace to give his Word to those who love his name.
- in v.133 we see that if iniquity gets *"dominion"* / rule / mastery over us, our souls will not have the freedom to keep God's Word (v.129). This is a strong prayer for sinners like us to pray!

- in v.134 we find that wonderful word "*redeem*." It means to pay the ransom price, to take upon yourself whatever cost is required. Remember Boaz redeeming Ruth and Naomi. Remember Jesus, the Greater Boaz, redeeming all of his people.

PSALM 119.137-144:

Charles Spurgeon, of the 19th century, remains one of the most famous pastors of all time. He alone is known as "the prince of preachers." He once wrote a book on Psalm 119, and the title alone is worthy of word-by-word reflection: *"The Golden Alphabet of the Praises of Holy Scripture, setting forth The Believer's Delight in the Word of the Lord: being a Devotional Commentary upon the One Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm."*

In our own reflections on "The Golden Alphabet," we come now to the Tsadhe acrostic, in verses 137-144. The plain theme of this section is "*righteousness*." See how that word is used throughout: *God is righteous, his rules are right, he has appointed his testimonies in righteousness, his righteousness is righteous forever, his testimonies are righteous forever.*

Remember that the Lord is perfectly and eternally revealing himself to us in his Word. And if the Lord is righteous (*which he is!*), then that righteousness is perfectly expressed and conveyed through his Word. That's what Tsadhe is emphasizing, over and over. God's rules (v.137), his testimonies (vs.138 & 144), his words (v.139), his promise (v.140), his precepts (v.141), his law (v.142), his commandments (v.143)... they are all righteous. God and his Word match perfectly, because one perfectly reveals the other.

Do you love his Word (v.140b)? Does zeal consume you when his Word is forgotten (v.139)? Have you "*tried*" his Word thoroughly (v.140a)? Does his Word occupy your mind (v.141b)? Are personal considerations regarded as nothing compared to holding the Word clearly in your mind (v.141a)? Is his Word your delight (v.143b)? Even in times of trouble and anguish (v.143a)?

O Lord, give us understanding, that we may live (v.144b).

PSALM 119.145-152:

From Charles Spurgeon's preface to his book on Psalm 119: *"The One Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm is of such a size as to stand out from all the rest, and claim a separate treatment. It is known among the Germans as 'The Christians' golden A B C of the praise, love, power, and use of the Word of God'; and from them I have borrowed the title of this volume."*

In our journey through these "A B C" acrostics, we have now come to the Qoph acrostic, in vs.145-152. This section has two parts, and it has been pointed out that these two parts

correspond to the two parts of James 4.8a: "*Draw near to God [Part I], and he will draw near to you [Part II].*"

The "**draw near to God**" part of Qoph is vs.145-148. Notice the verbs of this section: "*I cry... I will keep... I call... that I may observe... I rise... and cry for help... I hope in your words... my eyes are awake... that I may meditate.*" Reflection on these verses reminds us that true prayer is bound up with obedience. It is seeking the Lord for *his* sake, not for *our* sake. It also involves self-sacrifice, a sacrifice made in loving response to the Lord's self-sacrifice for us. And it is inseparable from God's Word (here reverently referred to as "*your statutes... your testimonies... your words... your promise*").

The "**and he will draw near to you**" part of Qoph is vs.149-152. Here we are reminded that, in spite of all the things that "*I*" may do (see again the verbs in vs.145-148), prayer does not and cannot be founded upon my many pledges of loyalty and love. Prayer is actually our response to God's love. 1 John 4.19: "*We love because he first loved us.*" And we see that right off the bat, in v.149: "*Hear my voice according to your steadfast love.*" God's initiating Word to us is actually the eternal foundation of everything (v.152).

In vs.150&151, notice the two "*near*" verses. Our enemies may "*draw near*" to persecute us with evil purpose. But God **is** near. Rejoice. And do not fear.

PSALM 119.153-160:

I hope we've all gotten a good sense of how amazing Psalm 119 is. It's the longest chapter in the Bible, it's a fascinating and impressive literary accomplishment, it's a poem, it's a prayer, it's a super-acrostic marching right through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet giving 8 verses to each letter, it's a 176-verse-long love story, it's a profound expression of an unbridled passion for God's Word, it's absolutely marvelous in every way. "*I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments*" (Psalm 119.131).

This week we will find ourselves in the Resh acrostic (vs.153-160). In trying to get a sense of theme, we note that the Psalmist is in the midst of great affliction (v.153), surrounded by persecutors and adversaries (v.157). But in the midst of this trial, he is determined not to forget God's Word (v.153b). He knows the Lord has promised redemption to his people (v.154), is great in mercy (v.156), and delights to give life, according to his steadfast love (v.159). And he also knows that the Word of God is truth, through and through (v.160).

In vs.153 & 154, the Psalmist is praying for redemption. In the Bible your "redeemer" (think Boaz, in the book of Ruth) is the one who makes your trouble his own trouble. He completely identifies with you in your afflictions and does all that is necessary to take on your debt and

wholly discharge it. He personally sees to it that all your needs are met.

In vs.156 & 157, please read "great" as the very same Hebrew word as "many." For it is the very same word! We might have many enemies, but the Lord is full of many mercies, many compassions, many graces and kindnesses. His active love is more than equal to all the threats against us combined, and (like David against Goliath) he runs out to join the battle, on our behalf

Let vs.155 & 158 inform your theology of sin and the consequences for those who choose to remain in their sin. They ignore God's Word; they can expect no salvation.

But let vs.159 & 160 shape you and your love for God's Word. Let them build, affirm, and form your love. God's Word is life-giving truth, forever.

PSALM 119.161-168:

The 21st letter of the Hebrew alphabet is sometimes known as Sin (pronounced "seen") and sometimes known as Shin (pronounced "sheen"). It's like the difference in our "s" sound, from the word "sour" to the word "shoe." And this letter gives us the acrostic we encounter in vs.161-168.

Verses 161-163 (all using the Sin pronunciation, by the way) are concerned with the development of a steadfast and loyal heart. What does such a heart fear (v.161)? What does such a heart treasure (v.162)? What does such a heart love (v.163)?

Verses 164-166 (all using the Shin pronunciation, by the way) deal with the development of a steadfast and loyal life. With what is such a life filled (v.164)? What characterizes such a life (v.165)? What does such a life "do" (v.166)?

Verses 167 and 168 (back to Sin) celebrates that which is "kept." And this keeping / obeying flows naturally from love for God's Word (v.167) and a desire to please God (v.168). Notice the word that appears three times, one in each section: it is found in vs.163, 165, & 167. This is the word that shapes all.

If you have faithfully studied Psalm 119 with us these last several weeks, you will be in an excellent position to appreciate these words from Charles Spurgeon:

"This psalm is a wonderful composition .Its expressions are many as the waves, but its testimony is one as the sea.It deals all along with one subject only; but although it consists of a considerable number of verses, some of which are very similar to others, yet throughout its one

hundred and seventy-six stanzas the self-same thought is not repeated: there is always a shade of difference, even when the color of the thought appears to be the same.

"Some have said that in it there is an absence of variety; but that is merely the observation of those who have not studied it I have weighed each word, and looked at each syllable with lengthened meditation; and I bear witness that this sacred song has no tautology in it, but is charmingly varied from beginning to end.

"Its variety is that of the kaleidoscope: from a few objects innumerable permutations and combinations are produced. In the kaleidoscope you look once, and there is a strangely beautiful form: you shift the glass a very little, and another shape, equally delicate and beautiful, is before your eyes. So it is here. What you see is the same, and yet never the same: it is the same truth, but it is always placed in a new light, put in a new connection, or in some way or other invested with freshness.

"I do not believe that any subject other than a heavenly one would have allowed of such a psalm being written upon it; for the themes of this world are narrow and shallow. Neither could such a handling have been given even to a sacred subject by any mind less than divine; inspiration alone can account for the fulness and freshness of this psalm."

PSALM 119.169-176:

We have made it! Today we come to the last of the 22 acrostics that make up this Alphabet of Praise. What note do you think 119 will end on?

Derek Kidner: *"The note of urgent need on which the psalm ends... is proof enough that the love of Scripture... need not harden into academic pride. This man would have taken his stance not with the self-congratulating Pharisee of the parable, but with the publican who stood afar off, but went home justified."*

James Montgomery Boice: *"Verse 175, the next to last verse, is a good biblical statement of what the Westminster Shorter Catechism calls 'the chief end of man,' namely, to glorify God and enjoy him forever: 'Let me live that I may praise you.' But verse 176, the last verse, reminds us that this praise comes from poor, weak, lost, and straying sinners like ourselves."*

Verses 169 and 170 share a common beginning: *"Let my cry / my plea come before you,"* and a common ending: *"according to your word."* In 169 we are asking the Lord, according to his word, to give us understanding In 170 we are asking the Lord, according to his word, to deliver us. One is inward; one is outward; both are needed.

Verses 171 and 172 share strong references to our speech: *"My lips will pour forth / My tongue will sing."* In both we are praying for a heart of faithful response to God's Word. *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks"* (Matthew 12.34). May we recognize God's Word for the great treasure that it is.

Both 173 and 174 are longing for God to extend his hand to help and save. And upon what are these requests based? Upon our response to God's Word (see the previous paragraph). We have chosen God's precepts. His law is our delight.

Finally, in the closing two verses of the Psalm, we plead with God that we might be revived. Our vitality is ebbing; we feel our proneness to wander. What will revive us? What will restore us? What will bring us back? What will recenter our affections?

It is the preserving and unforgotten Word. Which is everywhere celebrated and prayed over in Psalm 119.

PSALM 120:

Psalm 120 is the first of what are called the *"Songs of Ascent,"* which range from 120-134. God's people would sing these songs together while on pilgrimage, making their way up to Jerusalem, where they looked forward to worshiping and feasting at the temple. Therefore, we might best classify 120 as a *"pilgrim psalm."*

Christians are pilgrims in this world as well. Peter refers to God's people as *"elect exiles"* in 1 Peter 1.1. Later he writes, *"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles,"* in 1 Peter 2.11. Hebrews 13.14 reminds us, *"here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."*

So we also need to learn to pray like a pilgrim, on a journey. Enjoy praying through this Psalm this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God so loved you that he gave you these Psalms, breathed out by his own Spirit, for your prayers and worship.

PSALM 121:

Psalm 121 is the second of these *"Songs of Ascent,"* which—as we said last week—range from 120-134. Remember... God's people would sing these songs together while on pilgrimage, making their way up to Jerusalem for worship and feasting. So we'll also classify 121 as a *"pilgrim psalm."*

The theme of Psalm 121 is learning to rest in the providence of God. Lift up your eyes; the Lord is the one who helps and keeps you. Protection is a significant concern from pilgrims!

Enjoy resting in God's care as you pray through this Psalm this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God gave you these "*songs of Zion*" (Psalm 137.3) for a reason! That reason is love.

PSALM 122:

We are still in the "*Songs of Ascent*," the Psalms the Israelites would sing together while traveling to the temple, "*the house of the LORD*" (v.1).

In 122 we are exhorted to pray for the peace of God's people. In the psalmist's time this meant praying for the peace of Jerusalem. Today we pray for the peace of the church. And yes, that kind of prayer for the church is still very much needed.

Pray through this Psalm faithfully this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Praying and singing these Psalms together is God's intention for his people; it's one very rich way he intends for us to be vitally connected to both him and to one another, by faith.

PSALM 123:

This is the fourth of the 15 "*Songs of Ascent*," which would be sung by God's people as they "ascended" the road to Jerusalem, so they might worship and feast before the Lord, together.

Note the "mood" of 123. It's a cry from the heart, when God's people are surrounded by contempt and persecution from the world. In addition to applying this to our own circumstances (which are transcended in vs.1&2), we need to pray this for the persecuted church around the globe.

Let this Psalm lead your prayers this week. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Praying this way is one way God intends to enlarge our hearts: "*I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!*" (Psalm 119.32)

PSALM 124:

We now come to the fifth of the 15 "*Songs of Ascent*," these poems / prayers / songs for pilgrims, which are brief, characterized by repetition of the main theme, and full of hope... while not at all denying the hardships of being a pilgrim in a land that is not your true home.

124 is quite honest about the perils of following Jesus in the midst of a world that opposes his kingship. Remember Jesus' words to us: "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*" (John 15.18,19).

Does following Jesus ever put you at odds with the world? Do not fear. Pray. Pray 124. We'll pray it together on Sunday. God gave you this prayer to strengthen your faith: *"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God"* (Psalm 42.5,11).

PSALM 125:

This is the sixth of the *"Songs of Ascent"* that range from 120-134. The emphasis of all these Psalms is on Mount Zion, *"which cannot be moved, but abides forever"* (v.1). Praying this Psalm all week will give you a real taste for the eternal realities that are often symbolized with the imagery of Mount Zion in the Scriptures.

125 is focused upon the security and assurance and peace of the believer... something which is a great comfort to the pilgrim, who often feels displaced in this world. Remember: *"the Lord surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore"* (v.2).

Pray with an upright heart this week (v.4). Pray in the way of righteousness. We'll pray it together on Sunday. Praying like this is one very central way in which the Lord is drawing our affections to himself.