

Psalm 119 • The Nature of God's Word

Introduction

[Note to Group Leaders: Do not worry if you cannot get through all of these examples, odds are that because of group feedback you will not. Go through as many as possible and feel free to skip as necessary. This lesson really teaches as much about **HOW** to study God's Word as it does in explaining the nature of God's Word.]

What is God's Word supposed to accomplish in the believer's life? This question is nowhere more thoroughly answered than Psalm 119. What follows is just a sampling, but could if time allowed be undertaken for each of its 176 verses. Unless we pause long enough to actually study each verse, we will miss the fact that nearly every verse in Psalm 119 is almost an entire sermon unto itself. The examples in this lesson show what can be accomplished if we slow down and study God's Word rather than simply reading for reading's sake.

[Suggestion: If you memorize just one verse of Psalm 119 a day, within a few months you will have memorized the whole chapter.]

¹How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.

²How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
Who seek Him with all their heart.

¹²²Be surety for Your servant for good;
Do not let the arrogant oppress me.

[Read v.1-2 & 122]

Q: What are the keywords? What do they describe?

A: "Blessed" and "surety". They describe spiritual blessing and happiness.

Q: Is this an unconditional promise?

A: No. It is offered to those "whose **way** is blameless", "who **walk** in the law", "who **observe** His testimonies", "who **seek** Him with all their heart".

Application: The false Faith-Prosperity and money preachers are famous for claiming that blessings can only come if someone is willing to give material resources. Yet Scripture teaches it is actually those who give obedience to God's Word and ways.

⁹How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping it according to Your word.

¹¹Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.

[Read v.9 & 11]

Q: What is Scripture's definition of the term "pure"?

A: To best understand the Scripture's definition, whenever you come across the term "pure" simply substitute the phrase "unpolluted by sin".

Q: What specifically is meant by "way"?

A: It is the path one is on whether ultimately heading towards Christ or away from Him. This is describing a lifestyle that is consistently committed to Christ, neither straying to the left nor right.

Q: What is needed in order to effectively deal with sin?

A: Treasuring God's Word from the heart. In other words, not simply reading it or being aware of it, but sincerely and affectionately clinging to it.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

— Matthew 6:19–21

Application: Putting God's Word into practice is the cure for the habitual sin

²⁴Your testimonies also are my delight
They are my counselors.

which leads astray.

[Read v.24]

Q: What is the definition of “testimonies”? What is this referring to?

A: Think of it as “eye witness testimony”. It is a way of stating that God’s point of view on things is superior to any other, that His observations are the only ones which can really convey the truth of the situation.

Q: What is significant about the reference to “my counselors”?

A: It is very rare to find anyone who operates in a vacuum, completely alone. Everyone depends on the advice and guidance of experts, especially in the important things. God’s Word is the guiding of the Holy Spirit, the best help possible.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

— Romans 11:33

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

— 1 Corinthians 1:20–24

Application: When seeking direction and guidance, the best possible source is the Word over everything else.

²⁸My soul weeps because of grief;
Strengthen me according to Your word.

[Read v.28]

Q: Why does the Psalmist not ask to have his emotions changed from grief to joy?

A: To seek God’s strength through His Word means to learn how to deal with the situation regardless of the emotions involved. One of the core definitions of biblical faith and hope is to trust and continue obedience to His Word **IN SPITE** of our feelings.

Application: We do not escape from our problems in God’s Word but learn how to deal with them in spite of the circumstances.

³⁸Establish Your word to Your servant,
As that which produces reverence for
You.

[Read v.38]

Q: So what is one of the visible proofs of a life putting God's Word and ways into practice?

A: A right attitude toward God.

Application: *The biblical picture of a successful believer is that of a servant. Therefore application of God's Word results in Him becoming greater as we become lesser.*

⁴²So I will have an answer for him who
reproaches me,
For I trust in Your word.

[Read v.42]

Q: What exactly is a reproach?

A: It is an accusation that is aimed at you personally.

Q: So why would trusting in God's Word be a defense against accusations brought against us?

A: If we truly "trust" in God's Word that means we are actually living according to it. If we are living it, the only accusations which can be brought against us are false ones. A legitimate reproach is when we are living contrary to God's Word.

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

— Colossians 1:21–22

Application: *One of the main reasons we are to strictly adhere to God's Word and ways is so that we will be set apart for service to Him ("holy and blameless") and a visible testimony to the rest of the world ("beyond reproach").*

⁴⁵And I will walk at liberty,
For I seek Your precepts.

[Read v.45]

Q: What exactly are "precepts"?

A: The responsibilities God has laid upon His people **AFTER** they have come into a personal relationship with Him. The Hebrew word is derived from a word meaning "to inspect".

Q: Why might someone from the outside looking in see this as incongruous with the concept of "liberty"?

A: The world sees God's rules as restrictions when in reality they actually set us free spiritually.

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

— John 8:31–32

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

— Romans 8:2

Application: *Obedience to God's Word provides freedom in this life from the enslavement of sin in this life and the one to come.*

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⁴⁹Remember the word to Your servant,
In which You have made me hope.
⁵⁰This is my comfort in my affliction,
That Your word has revived me.

¹¹⁶Sustain me according to Your word,
that I may live;
And do not let me be ashamed of my
hope.

[Read v.49-50 & 116]

Q: How does Scripture define “hope”?

A: It is best understood as “future fact”. Regardless of what present circumstances may look like, biblical hope knows without a doubt that God will bring all things to fulfillment according to His Word and ways.

For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

— Romans 8:24–25

For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness.

— Galatians 5:5

Q: What might be hinting here as to the kind of believer who has biblical hope?

A: “Your servant”. The biblical definition of a servant is someone who lives in their master’s house and is primarily concerned about their master’s business. It is someone no longer living their life according to their own whim or desire but exclusively for the Master.

Q: How does “hope” work in concert with “comfort in my affliction”?

A: It is the expression of faith **DURING** times of trial and hardship. God’s Word is not a guarantee to be removed from a situation but assisting to endure and persevere.

Q: How is this further affirmed in v.116?

A: The request is “sustain me according to Your word”. This is enduring circumstances and seeing beyond them because one’s vision is fixed firmly on the future fact of the fulfillment of His Word.

Application: *Because of the fact that God has fulfilled every Word to date, we can trust as future fact that what has been promised to come is already as good as fulfilled as well. Incorporating God’s Word into our life is not as much an exercise of knowledge as it is of faith.*

⁶²At midnight I shall rise to give thanks to
You
Because of Your righteous ordinances.

[Read v.62]

Q: What is the definition of an “ordinance”?

A: The Hebrew word “mishpat” is alternatively translates as both “ordinance” and “judgment”. We would call this “case law”, the verdicts, outcomes, or formal decrees established by cases brought before the court. It describes the practical application of God’s Word in situations not specifically detailed word for word in Scripture.

Q: So why should this produce a thankful heart?

A: It is the assurance that God’s Word can be applied to every life situation. Anything not specifically detailed in Scripture can be derived from an application of it and it will always fit with God’s justice and mercy.

Application: *There is nothing we will encounter or experience in life which cannot be understood or explained within the context of God’s Word.*

³⁷Turn away my eyes from looking at
vanity,
And revive me in Your ways.

⁶⁷Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.

[Read v.37 & 67]

Q: What is Scripture describing when it uses the term “vanity”?

A: It sums up the spiritual value of earthly pleasures and institutions. In this case it describes having taken one’s eyes of God’s Word and ways in favor of the world’s.

Q: And how does v.67 describe what happens when someone fixates on the world instead of Christ?

A: “I went astray”.

Q: What does it mean, “Before I was afflicted”?

A: This expresses having to experience God’s discipline in order to bring someone back into a right relationship with Him, to fix one’s gaze on spiritual things instead of earthly.

Application: *The cure for disobedience to God’s Word is always obedience; the cure for faithlessness to God’s Word is always faithfulness. No true spiritual revival is experienced without a sincere return to God’s Word. (This is how we can tell whether what someone calls a “revival” is authentic or not.)*

⁷⁰Their heart is covered with fat,
But I delight in Your law.

[Read v.70]

Q: What does “covered in fat” mean?

A: In the language of the Old Testament “fat” is an expression of an abundance of worldly riches. This is describing a heart which is glutted with the things of this world to the point of becoming proud and therefore willfully ignorant of God’s Word and ways.

Q: What is the proper way to deal with earthly things?

A: “I delight in Your law”. We keep things in their proper perspective by not allowing ourselves to be mastered by things, but to keep the Master superior to all of our things.

*For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,
— Romans 7:22*

Application: *It is the proper application of God’s Word which develops within us the ability to use the things of this world for the Master instead of being mastered by the things of this world.*

⁹⁸Your commandments make me wiser
than my enemies,
For they are ever mine.
⁹⁹I have more insight than all my
teachers,
For Your testimonies are my meditation.
¹⁰⁰I understand more than the aged,
Because I have observed Your precepts.

[Read v.98-100]

Q: How is a “commandment” different from all of the other terms used to describe God’s Word?

A: These are the specific obligations of a covenant relationship. In such agreements, the responsibilities of each party are spelled out. In the Old Testament we see this embodied in the Ten Commandments, but Hebrew scholars tell us that through Moses a total of 613 commandments comprise the Old Testament covenant. In the New Testament Christ summarized them all together into the single commandment to love others as He loved.

Q: What are the three groups specifically mentioned by which the wisdom of God's Word can exceed their influence?

1. "...my enemies". (v.98) Obedience to God's commandments – keeping a covenant relationship with Him – is the ultimate protection from both earthly and spiritual enemies.
2. "...my teachers". (v.99) Earthly teachers can only provide "testimonies" from their own limited experience, whereas meditating on the greater "testimonies" of God provides greater "insight". ("But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers." – Mt. 23:8)
3. "...the aged". (v.100) The biblical meaning of the word "understand" is always an expression of proving you have heard God's Word by doing it. In this case, observing God's "precepts" – the responsibilities His people have been given **AFTER** they have entered into a relationship with Him – expresses the difference between merely living a long life ("the aged") versus living a quality life which is consistently obedient on a daily basis.

Application: *Spiritual wisdom does not come about purely as the result of study or education, but exceeds such worldly standards by being the inevitable result of keeping a covenant relationship, meditating on God's explanation of life, and being faithful to live like a biblical Christian should. This results in wisdom, insight, and understanding that far exceeds worldly standards or limitations.*

¹⁰³How sweet are Your words to my taste!
Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

[Read v.103]

Q: What is one of the most common metaphors for God's Word used throughout Scripture?

A: Food, especially bread, grain, manna, etc. Jesus (the Word) refers to Himself as "the bread of life". (Jn. 6:35)

"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.

— Deuteronomy 8:3

Q: What is being conveyed by the use of "sweet" and "taste"?

A: It means that God's Word is pleasant to learn, to memorize, to put into practice.

*Your words were found and I ate them,
And Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart;
For I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.*

— Jeremiah 15:16

Application: *The application of God's Word to one's life is not onerous or burdensome, especially when compares with the weight of the alternative.*

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

— Matthew 11:29–30

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.

[Read v.105]

Q: What is the other most common metaphor used in Scripture to describe God's Word?

A: A lamp or light.

*For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light;
And reproofs for discipline are the way of life.
— Proverbs 6:23*

Q: Why is the light of God's Word directed at "my feet" and "my path"?

A: This is an expression of one of the eight categories of God's Word used in Psalm 119, "way". God's Word is what keeps us on the right spiritual path leading not just through this life but into the next.

Q: What is implied for those whose feet and path are NOT illuminated by God's Word?

A: They are walking in spiritual darkness.

*Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."
— John 8:12*

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

— 1 John 1:5-7

Application: We have the assurance that we are walking the right spiritual path according to God's will when it conforms to His Word and ways.

¹¹⁴You are my hiding place and my
shield;
I wait for Your word.

[Read v.114 & 74]

Q: What is being conveyed by "hiding place" and "shield" where warfare is concerned?

A: They are defensive in nature, things which protect from the enemy's attack brought against you. "I wait for Your word" expresses resting in God's protection and waiting for Him to take the appropriate action at the appropriate time.

*For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
— Colossians 3:3*

Q: What is being expressed by "I wait"?

A: This is an expression of biblical hope. Believers are not simply sitting around but trusting in the promise of God's Word to supply grace, strength, and comfort for the present circumstances and what will ultimately come in eternity.

⁷⁴May those who fear You see me and be
glad,
Because I wait for Your word.

Q: Why would it be favorable to be seen by “those who fear You” and that they should “be glad” as a result?

A: It would be the confirmation and witness of those who are also adhering to and putting God’s Word into practice, a confirmation of the quality of our own obedience.

Application: *God’s Word is both a protection and a refuge for this life and the one to come.*

¹⁶⁵Those who love Your law have great peace,
And nothing causes them to stumble.

[Read v.165]

Q: What quality of a biblical Christian is this actually expressing?

A: Faith. Earthly circumstances cannot shake the overriding peace a believer experiences by their faith in God’s Word to see beyond them to what God is actually working. This is why believers have such a deep affection for God’s Word.

Q: When Scripture uses the term “peace”, is it referring to an absence of conflict?

A: No, it is referring to the inability of the world to disturb a believer by temptation, trial, or hardship. Nothing “causes them to stumble” so as to depart from God’s Word.

so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,

— *Philippians 2:15*

Application: *The visible evidence of a faithful life in Christ is one which in spite of earthly circumstances continues to live according to God’s Word so as to be a visible witness to God’s Word in the midst of everything around them.*

¹⁷⁰Let my supplication come before You;
Deliver me according to Your word.

[Read v.170]

Q: What is meant by “supplications”?

A: This expresses bringing something to the Lord not just in prayer but in earnest humility with the goal of seeking God’s guidance.

Q: What is the “supplication” which is being brought before God in this particular case?

A: “Deliver me”.

Q: Why is it important that the supplication “deliver me” is further qualified by “according to Your word”?

A: It is an attitude which is not seeking escape according to one’s own wishes but that everything conform to God’s will as specified in His Word.

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

— *Romans 12:2*

Application: *Our prayer life is to be guided by the boundaries provided by God’s Word in order for all things to work out according to His will instead of ours.*

⁴⁶I will also speak of Your testimonies
before kings
And shall not be ashamed.

¹²⁰My flesh trembles for fear of You,
And I am afraid of Your judgments

[Read v.46 & 120]

Q: What is the dual aspect of respect that is being addressed in these verses?

A: A life putting God's Word into practice will be a visible testimony to earthly authorities (v.46) as well as heavenly. (v.120)

Q: But what is the dual effect of obedience to God's Word when it comes to our appearance before these authorities?

A: Before earthly authorities our obedience to God's Word and ways ensures we "*shall not be ashamed*" because our personal faithfulness to His Word will confirm our witness; when standing before the ultimate spiritual authority our obedience likewise confirm the quality of our faithfulness to His Word.

Application: Obedience to God's Word is the only way we can stand before authorities whether they be based on earth or heaven.

¹⁴¹I am small and despised,
Yet I do not forget Your precepts.

⁸³Though I have become like a wineskin
in the smoke,
I do not forget Your statutes.

[Read v.141 & 83]

Q: What does it probably mean to be "small and despised"?

A: It is most likely looking at things from an earthly perspective, that in man's estimation one is of marginal importance or stature. It reflects how one is treated by the world.

Q: So how does this fit in with "Yet I do not forget Your precepts"?

A: It is a statement of faith and adherence to God's Word and ways in spite of how one is treated in the view and at the hands of the world.

Q: What does it mean to "become like a wineskin in the smoke"?

A: Wine was stored in bottles made from the skins of animals and this describes how it would become dried out and ultimately useless if hung near a fire or chimney. It expresses a very uncomfortable condition in which a person finds that from an earthly point of view they have little or no value or purpose or is considered worn out or no longer useful.

Q: So how does this fit in with "I do not forget Your statutes"?

A: It is another statement of faith and adherence to God's Word and ways in spite of how one is viewed and treated by the world and expresses finding worth according to God's standards instead of man's.

Application: Regardless of ill-treatment by others in this life, we do not forsake God's Word and ways but cling to them even tighter.