

PSALM 119

Eden to Exile Leader's Guide

John D. Morrison, PhD

OT LEADER'S GUIDE

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OT Leader's Guide: Psalm 119

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OT19

Greetings! Welcome to our journey through the Old Testament from Eden to Exile! I am so excited about what we are going to learn together and how we are going to grow together as we read God's Word together in these next twelve months.

Our reading the New Testament in a year as a church was a much broader and deeper success than we ever imagined. We saw God work in individuals and in relationships as his Word was made a daily priority. God tells us that his Word is powerful to accomplish his purposes (Isaiah 55:10-11), and we saw that on full display last year.

We believe that all of God's Word is, as Paul tells us, "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). It is our commitment as a church to the whole counsel of God that has led us to read the Old Testament this year.

I am even more excited about this year because of a new and added "twist." Each week you'll read from the Old Testament, but you'll also find a devotional for the end of the week written by a member of our Lakewood Team. These devotionals will draw the connection between what you read each day and the New Testament. We are about to discover more regarding the unity of the Scriptures. God's Word tells us the one story of salvation freely offered through Jesus Christ.

Please keep current and encourage others to read along with you. I would love to hear your thoughts and impressions as you reflect on each day's reading. Please email me at tsmiley@lakewoodlife.org

We are blessed as a ministry to have such a talented, gifted, and doctrinally sound staff who each have the competency to lead us into a deeper understanding of God's Word. As you read their devotional thoughts and commentary, consider letting them know how their words have impacted your daily walk of faith.

Enjoy our journey from Eden to Exile!

Dr. Tom

INTRODUCTION

Psalm 119 is about about God's Word. Many see in this psalm an extended meditation on Psalm 1:1-2, "Blessed is the man who . . . delights in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night." In Psalm 119, the psalmist shows what it means to delight in the law of the Lord as the psalm praises God for giving his Word to his people, admires God's Word itself, and prays that God's Word would form God's people into more faithful followers of him. To read Psalm 119 is to read the words of one who delights in Scripture.

First, the writer of this psalm recognizes that it is a marvelous thing indeed for the creator and sustainer of all the world to reveal himself to his people. While Psalm 19 and Romans 1 remind us that truths about God are evident in the universe around us, Psalm 119 highlights the need for the Lord to reveal himself to us in a special way in order for us to truly know him - that is, if we are to know him in a personal and saving way. This special reveal of God happens through his Word. In order for us to know God, he must reveal himself to us.

God's appearing to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3 is in many ways a model for how the Lord must show us himself if we are to know him. God initiated the encounter with Moses, and it is God himself who must tell Moses what he is like. Moses does not even know what to call the Lord, and so God must explain who he is to Moses:

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations (Exodus 3:14-15).

Even when Moses saw the Lord, he needed the Lord to reveal who he was. He could not describe or identify God on his own; he needed God to make it clear to him. So it is with us: in order for us to know God, he must reveal himself to us. This revelation of the Lord

happens in his Word, and so the psalmist in Psalm 119 praises God for making himself known. Only as the Lord shows himself to us in his Word can we know him.

Second and closely tied to praising God for his Word, this psalm admires God's Word itself. The Word is to be admired because it is how the Lord has made himself known. The psalmist recognizes the truth and beauty of God's Word, and he sees its value for life in this world. God's Word shows us God and shows us how to live in a manner that honors him.

Third, Psalm 119 is a prayer that God's Word would form God's people in their character and their conduct. The psalmist recognizes the practical value of God's Word for life. He prays that it would comfort God's people in times of trouble, that it would guide their lives, and that it would shape them into people who live in a manner that honors the Lord.

Form of Psalm 119

As Psalm 119 focuses on God's Word, the psalmist writes this psalm as an acrostic. The psalm consists of twenty-two stanzas of eight lines apiece. Each stanza corresponds to one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the first word of each line begins with the same letter. For example in 119:1-8, the first word of each line in Hebrew begins with the letter *aleph*. Then, 119:9-16, the first word of each line in Hebrew begins with the letter *beth*. This pattern continues all the way through the Hebrew alphabet. One goal of such a form is to communicate the completeness of a subject.

In writing on God's Word, the psalmist uses at least eight different words to describe God's revelation.

English	Hebrew
law	<i>torah</i>
word	<i>dabar</i>
rulings / ordinances	<i>mispatim</i>
testimonies	<i>bedot</i>

English	Hebrew
commandments	<i>miswoth</i>
decrees / statutes	<i>huqqim</i>
precepts / charges	<i>piqqudim</i>
sayings / promise / word	<i>irma</i>

Each of these eight words carries a different nuance, but in this psalm they serve as synonyms to describe God’s revelation of himself. One thing in particular to note is that as we read ‘law’ (*torah*), we need to think ‘instruction’ rather than ‘legislation.’ The idea with *torah* is more about how a father teaches and guides his children rather than legislation passed in Congress.

In addition to these words listed above, other words such as ‘way’ (*derek*) and ‘path’ (*natiyb*) are closely related to God’s Word as well.

New Testament Connection

Psalm 119 continues to be true for New Testament believers, and through Jesus Christ we have an even greater understanding of the truths this psalm teaches.

Looking back at this psalm through the lens of the New Testament, we can see that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this psalm. That is to say, Jesus is the fullest revelation of God. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1, 14). He reveals God to us, so that if we have seen him, we have seen the Father (John 14:9).

Today, we see Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, as we read about him in the Word of God in Scripture. The gospel we proclaim is the good news about God’s Word come in the flesh to redeem us from sin and death. As Psalm 119 describes the transforming power of God’s Word, so in the New Testament we see that God continues to work through his Word and by the power of his Holy Spirit to transform lives. As we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, God works through that Word proclaimed to redeem people and to transform their lives.

PSALM 119:1-96

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Discussion Questions

- Ps. 119:1-8 | What does it mean to be ‘blessed’? What is the key to experience God’s blessing according to these verses? Consider Philippians 3:8-9 and how we are made righteous before God through Christ. Why does having Christ’s righteousness given to us NOT cancel out the call in Psalm 119 to keep God’s statutes?
- Psalm 119:9-16 | Consider what it means to *store* God’s Word in your heart (v. 11), to *meditate* on his Word (v. 15), and to *delight* in his Word (v. 16). What do these three words tell us about what we should do with Scripture? How can we do these things well?
- Psalm 119:17-24 | The prayers of vv. 18-19 ask God to reveal and to illuminate his teaching. Why do we need God’s help to know and to understand his Word? How does that help come today?
- Psalm 119:25-32 | The psalmist sees God’s Word as a source of comfort in times of trouble. How have you experienced comfort from God’s Word in times of difficulty?
- Psalm 119:33-40 | We think of teaching (v. 33) and understanding (v. 34) as intellectual pursuits, but the psalmist also prays, “Incline my heart to your testimonies” (v. 36). Why is it necessary that our hearts (our will and our affections) as well as our minds be inclined toward God’s Word?
- Psalm 119:41-48 | How do we see God’s love (v. 41), salvation (v. 41), and hope (v. 43) in the Old Testament?
- Psalm 119:49-56 | What is the basis of the psalmist’s prayer in v. 49? How can we use God’s Word to be the grounds of our prayers?
- Psalm 119:57-64 | In v. 63, the psalmist says that his companions are those who fear the Lord and follow his precepts. Do we share a love and loyalty with God’s people simply because they are God’s people? Sometimes people in the church can be hard to love, and yet we are called to love Christ’s church because he loves her and gave his life to redeem her.

- Psalm 119:65-72 | Why does the psalmist say in v. 71 that it was good for him to be afflicted? How have difficult times helped you learn God's Word?
- Psalm 119:73-80 | What does the psalmist mean when he writes, "in faithfulness, you have afflicted me" (v. 75)? Who does he see as responsible for his affliction? How are his afflictions a manifestation of God's faithfulness? Why does he see these truths as comforting?
- Psalm 119:81-88 | In the midst of difficulties, how can we join the psalmist in longing for the Lord's salvation and for his promises?
- Psalm 119:89-96 | What attributes of God's Word in vv. 89-91 allows the psalmist to delight in it and be comforted by it?

PSALM 119:97-176

OT19 WEEK 13

Discussion Questions

- Ps. 119:97-104 | The psalmist loves God’s Word and describes it as sweeter than honey because it gives wisdom and understanding. What is the wisdom and understanding the psalmist describes and how do we see it at work in this psalm?
- Psalm 119:105-112 | What does it mean for Scripture to be “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”? How does God’s Word guide us in our every day lives?
- Psalm 119:113-120 | Compare v. 114 and v. 120. How can the psalmist both hope in God’s Word (v. 114) and be afraid of God’s judgments (v. 120)? Do you tend more toward hope or fear? Why might we need to have both in our relationship with the Lord?
- Psalm 119:121-128 | The psalmist writes that he loves God’s Word more than gold, even very fine gold. Do we pursue God’s Word with as much energy and effort as we put forth in other areas of our lives (work, family, school, sports, hobbies)? What would it look like for you to treasure the Word of God?
- Psalm 119:129-136 | What does it mean to be blessed by God? In v. 135, the psalmist speaks of the blessing of God’s presence coming through God’s Word. How do we experience God’s presence through his Word?
- Psalm 119:137-144 | In the face of being insignificant and despised (v. 141) as well as suffering trouble and anguish (v. 144), where does the psalmist turn? Why do the righteousness and faithfulness of God provide him so much hope?
- Psalm 119:145-152 | What do these verses teach us about how to pray?
- Psalm 119:153-160 | In v. 156, the psalmist pairs God’s ‘mercy’ and his ‘rules.’ How have you found God’s rules to be filled with his mercy?

- Psalm 119:161-168 | How can love for God's law bring great peace (v. 165) even when all the authorities in your life persecute you (v. 161)?
- Psalm 119:169-176 | According to vv. 171-172, why is the Lord worthy of praise? Do we focus enough in our public and private worship in praising God for these truths?



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