

# “Oh, How I Love Your Law!”

Psalm 119:1-176 (97-112)

Key verse 97

**“Oh how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”**

This past weekend we had “His Kingdom” Conference. A kingdom cannot function without laws. Suffering, misery and heartache result due to rebellion to law. Our King doesn’t rule according to his caprice, but according to his law. His kingdom is a kingdom of peace and order because everyone who will enter into it will have voluntarily submitted himself to the will of the King (Mt 7:21), revealed in his word. What better place to learn the laws of the king than Psalm 119 – longest chapter of the longest book of the Bible – which is all about the Word. Lord, bless our time in your word today.

## **Part One: Author, Organization and Main Point.**

There is no note to an author of the Psalm. Yet the language and terms used greatly align with David’s psalms, for example, Psalm 19<sup>1</sup>. How nice to think of David writing a masterpiece of love for the word of God!

Otherwise, I like to think it is one of thousands of nameless scribes in the history of Israel, who loved God’s word with all his heart (47). Like a priest or Levite (Num 18:20; Deut 10:9; 18:1-2), he found the LORD as his only “portion (57)” or “heritage” (111). He often identifies himself as the Lord’s servant (17, 38, 49, etc...), who struggled to be faithful to God’s word (45, 60, etc....). But his times were not conducive to such piety. He was persecuted and in need of saving from enemies (41-42, 61, 69, 78, 81-85, 95, etc...). Arrogant oppressors (the wicked) were not far away but near (150), even among his rulers (23, 122, 134, 139, 161). They ridiculed his beliefs (22, 42), seeking to put him to shame (31) and

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<sup>1</sup> Note some direct similarities: Psalm 19:7a and 119:96; 19:7b and 119:138; 19:7c and 119:130; 19:8a and 119:128; 19:8b and 119:111; 19:8c and 119:130; 19:10a and 119:127; 19:10b and 119:103; etc... However, some scholars suggest it may have been Ezra or even Daniel. We don’t know for sure.

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abandon the faith. To obey God was to take his life in his hands (109). He may be like Bible teachers, shepherds and disciples of our times, who are persecuted for living a godly life in Christ Jesus (2Ti 3:12). It can be discouraging, and cause us to compromise, or become a cynic who can only lash out in complaints and bitterness against the tide of societal shift. Either way, we lose all effective influence as salt and light, and work against the will of God in our times.

What did this Psalmist do? He re-dedicated himself to the study of the word (16,30, 48, 60, etc...). How many of you read your Bible every day, or at least regularly? My wife recently completed 368 days in a row of faithful Bible reading (app on her phone keeps track). How many of you attend a weekly Bible study? Has it become just a habit, something in your schedule? I earnestly pray that there may be a revival in our time, a revival of love for the deep study and obedience to the word of God – a passion to know God through his word. A desire to know and do God’s will proactively. To learn and adopt God’s mind, to be freed from the egocentric viewpoint of a self-centered mindset (29, 36), money (72, 127), and petty distractions (37), and see that **“Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens (89).”** As we do so, we find hope in God (49), who is good and working for our good (68), to refine us (71), make us holy (67), give us peace (165), comfort us in our suffering (50), and he will deliver us (117).

So how do we begin to take apart a passage of 176 verses? Charles Spurgeon wrote upon seeing it<sup>2</sup>: “Its dimensions and its depth alike overcame me...This marvelous poem seemed to me a great sea of holy teaching, moving, in its many verses, wave upon wave; altogether without an island of special and remarkable statement to break it up...Other psalms have been mere lakes, but this is the main ocean. It is a continent of sacred thought, every inch of which is fertile as the garden of the Lord: it is an amazing level of abundance, a mighty stretch of harvest fields...”

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<sup>2</sup> From Spurgeon’s seven volume “magnum opus”, entitled “The Treasury of David,” written in weekly installments over a period of 22 years in London. Released in 1885, seven years before his death.

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But the author gives us help. Note the systematic organization of this Psalm. The NIV Bible has a footnote: [This psalm is an acrostic poem, the stanzas of which begin with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet; moreover, the verses of each stanza begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet]. So 22 stanzas for the letters of the alphabet, and each verse in the stanza begins with the same letter. I hope one of our praise leaders might write a Psalm like this in English, following the acrostic style, or perhaps you may use it as an icebreaker: “Starting with “A”, say 8 things about God’s word: Awesome, Almighty, absolute, abounding, etc...” Notice Shin and Sin? There are 3 other letters like that, which have a different letter: BET/VET, KAF/CHAF, PE/FE, and SHIN/SIN. Modern Jews learn these 26 letters singing the Alef Bet song<sup>3</sup>, much like we do, to educate. Can you imagine that the boy Jesus learned to speak, and to read, perhaps using this very Psalm? But this is more than just a game for children; it speaks to something very important about God’s word: we are to grow up with it. I’m blessed to have four sons, the youngest entering kindergarten and the oldest entering high school. I love them, but to communicate that love to them grows and deepens as we grow up. So it is with God’s word to his children: There are truths any child can grasp onto, while depths of insight even the highest scholar cannot plumb. God’s word is a life-long companion and understanding it a worthy pursuit. It is the ABC’s, 123’s, and the XYZ’s of life and relationship with God, and through the study of it we grow up in our salvation (1Pe 2:2). This leads to the main point of the Psalm. Verses 1-3 read, **“Blessed are those who ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart – they do no wrong but follow his ways.”** Seek him with all your heart, and you will find him (Jer 29:13), He who is known as the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end (Rev 22:13), whom we may know deeper as we struggle newly with his words in each stage of life, each new encounter, each new adventure.

Look again at the whole psalm and note repetitions. At first glance it may be easy to dismiss the entire Psalm as a mere repetition of a theme, and move on. To

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<sup>3</sup> Many examples: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-0LSBeX5uYw> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WBgqR-nqQsc> are good ones.

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quote Spurgeon again: “Those who have never studied it may pronounce it commonplace, and complain of its repetitions; but to the thoughtful student it is like the great deep, full, so as never to be measured; and varied, so as never to weary the eye. Its depth is as great as its length; it is mystery, not set forth as mystery, but concealed beneath the simplest statements...” So we have to be like treasure hunters, or deep ocean explorers, digging up treasure (Mt 13:44-46), wearying our eyes in pursuit of God’s righteous promise (123, 148). TLDR; (too long; didn’t read) won’t work with God’s word!

One treasure I found was the repeated synonyms for the word of God. Looking at them I realize the word of God is a multi-faceted jewel, not a pebble. It is a complex molecule, not a one-line formula. It is a multi-tasking, multi-threaded software behemoth, not a few lines of scripting. A manifold wisdom, not a pithy statement; It is an entire olympics, not a single soccer match. Depending on where you look, some say there are 10 different words<sup>4</sup>, others say 7<sup>5</sup>. Since they didn’t agree, I studied it myself and made my own table<sup>6</sup>. It took persevering and joyful labor to make.

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<sup>4</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1985 SP Publications

<sup>5</sup> The ESV Study Bible, 2008 Crossway Bibles

<sup>6</sup> The site <https://thebible.org> was very helpful in finding definitions and references for all words in the Psalm and different words used in different english translations.

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<u>English</u>	<u>Hebrew</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>References</u>
<b>Law</b>	תּוֹרָה (tôrâh)	Instruction	1, 18, 29, 34, 44, 51, 53, 55, 61, 70, 72, 77, 85, 92, 97, 109, 113, 126, 136, 142, 150, 153, 163, 165, 174; (25x)
<b>Testimonies</b> (NIV: Statutes)	עֵדָה (‘ēdâh)	God’s witness/testimony of his divine will	2, 22, 24, 46, 59, 79, 95, 119, 125, 138, 146, 152, 167, 168; (14x)
<b>Ways</b> (appears alone only in 3, 37)	דֶּרֶךְ (derekh)	Way, manner	3, 14, 27, 30, 32, 33, 37; (7x)
<b>Precepts</b> (found only in Psalm 19 and 119)	פְּקוּדֵי (piqqûdîm)	Poetic word for injunction: what God has appointed to be done	4, 15, 27, 40, 45, 56, 63, 69, 78, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 110, 128, 134, 141, 159, 168, 173; (21x)
<b>Statutes</b> (NIV: Decrees)	חֻקִּים (hūqqîm)	Always plural: literally “things inscribed”. What the divine Lawgiver has laid down	5, 8, 12, 23, 26, 33, 48, 54, 64, 68, 71, 80, 83, 112, 117, 118, 124, 135, 145, 155, 171; (21x)
<b>Commandments</b>	מִצְוָה (mišwâh)	What God has commanded: definite, authoritative command	6, 10, 19, 21, 32, 35, 47, 48, 60, 66, 73, 86, 96, 98, 115, 127, 131, 143, 151, 166, 172, 176; (22x)
<b>Judgments/Rules</b> (NIV: Laws)	מִשְׁפָּט (mišpōt)	What the divine Judge has ruled to be right	7, 13, 20, 30, 39, 43, 52, 62, 75, 84, 91, 102, 106, 108, 120, 121, 132, 137, 149, 156, 160, 164, 175; (23x)

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<b>Word</b> (NIV: word or promise)	דְּבָר (dābār)  and  אִמְרָה (’imrâh)	What God has spoken (sayings, revelation)	9, 16, 17, 25, 28, 42, 43, 49, 57, 65, 74, 81, 89, 101, 105, 107, 114, 130, 139, 147, 160, 161, 169; (dābār 23x) 11, 38, 41, 50, 58, 67, 76, 82, 103, 116, 123, 133, 140, 148, 154, 158, 162, 170, 172; (’imrâh 19x) – 42x
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**Law** (תּוֹרָה (tôrâh)) – Usually laws are simply the “Do this/don’t do that” type burdensome parts of the Bible. It denotes instruction or direction; it is the word used to represent the covenant word of the Living God to his chosen people, and is commonly used to refer to the OT teachings, primarily in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. These are God’s instructions to his people saved by his one-sided grace alone. These laws show us the way life is lived best. Imagine you have a iPhone, and you don’t understand something. You could try your luck at Google or YouTube, but Apple.com is the creator of the iPhone, and will know best how to use it. So it is with the Law of the Lord. Due to stubborn pride and rebellion, we ignore this law to our peril. But by his grace he has given his law to all who would receive it. What will you do with his law?

**Testimonies** (עֲדָה (’ēdâh)) – This is the solemn attestation or declaration of the will of God, his standard of conduct, usually rendered “statutes” in the NIV (but not to be confused with the ḥūqqîm). Since January 1 I’ve prayed every day, multiple times a day, “Father, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Generally, I’ve felt his will to be aqueous or subjective. But over these past 8 months, praying for his will to be done in my life, family, world, my Bible reading has been transformed as well. I’ve found he clearly testifies to his will through his words. But it isn’t something to be found through casual or agenda driven reading. Rather, it requires submission to his will (Jn 7:17), the renewing of our minds (Ro 12:2), in order to know God’s will. As I surrender to trust his will above my own ideas, desires, and reason, he reveals it.

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**Ways** (דֶּרֶךְ (derekh)) – This word and its parallel “path (’ōrah)” is a metaphorical term describing the pattern of life marked out by God’s Law. This pattern was difficult to discern, but it has now been laid out clearly in the gospel truth through the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus said, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mt 16:24).”** This sounds like a burdensome thing, but it is the opposite. Verse 14 reads, **“I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.”** When Peter and John were flogged for testifying the gospel truth to their people, they were not upset or discouraged; rather they left rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:41). Jesus introduced himself to me in 1997 as “the Way.” I was a restless wanderer, who suffered so much because I didn’t know the way, following the desires of my sinful nature like a dead fish driven down stream. But since Jesus said, “Follow me,” over the past 20 years my life has been radically changed. My way of life is so different, in 1999 my close friends hardly recognized me, as they saw the heavy metal guitarist dancing ballet on stage. I can testify that the word of God is a great grace, and to know the way of salvation is the greatest gift anyone can receive. God has given us this way for free in his word. Will you follow it?

**Precepts** (פְּקֻדֹת (piqqûdîm)) – This Biblical word appears only in the Psalms as a poetic word for Injunction: this is what God has appointed to be done. These are warnings for us, and the Bible, especially the Old Testament, are full of them (1Co 10:11). So the Psalmist takes time to meditate on the precepts of God (15), to know God’s ways, his wonderful deeds (27), to be preserved in life (40). These warnings may seem to curtail freedom. But the opposite is true. Verse 45 reads, **“I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.”** It is through accepting and considering God’s precepts that we understand what is right and wrong (128). Those who seek out God’s boundaries in life have the joy of freedom to live and act within them. The man and woman in the garden were free to eat from any tree, just not that one (Ge 3:16-17). Having the boundary gave them freedom, until Satan deceived them into doubting God’s good love. Some think freedom of choice is evil; not so – it is the gift of God. In fact, freedom and love go hand in hand, as

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our freedom is to act in love for one another, thus fulfilling of the law (Gal 5:13-14). Love does no harm to its neighbor, so love fulfills the law (Ro 13:10).

*Statutes* (חֻקִּים (hūqqîm)) – As plural “decrees”, these are the things God, as the divine Lawgiver, has set down, decreed, laid out. These were enacted laws to govern God’s people and the world. Although decreed, the Psalmist didn’t simply read them. He asks God again and again: “teach me your decrees.” In the dark ages of superstition and mystic legend, people were governed by all kinds of weird ideas. But the early fathers of science came to believe that if the God of order created the world systematically in such a way that we are able to understand, it stands to reason we ought to take time studying it. This paved the way for the scientific method, which has at its foundation an assumption that can only be guaranteed by a God who has laid forth statutes that cannot be altered or ignored. Why is it we don’t go flying out into space when we get up in the morning and walk out our doors? God’s decrees. In view of these statutes, we are blessed to “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground (Ge 1:28).” This gives meaning and purpose to every study and labor as part of missional humanity. Do you feel like a “wineskin in the smoke” sometimes (83), bearing with proud and overbearing people? Don’t forget God’s decrees: **“Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor (Prov 18:12).”** [Also: Ps 119:118, 155]

*Commandments* (מִצְוָה (miṣwâh)) – These are definite, authoritative commands of God, often combined with “statutes” and “judgments”. Simply speaking, God is the commander in chief over all commanders. Those who stray are rebuked (21), while those who trust his commands find knowledge and good judgment (66), finding a delightful path that broadens our understanding (32, 35). Sometimes, as we wait deliverance or salvation, we don’t know what to do. It is in those times that God’s commands in the Bible are so important to obey (166), as they help us know that our God is not distant, but so near (151).

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**Judgments/Rules** (מִשְׁפֹּט (mišpot)) – No one likes to be judged, but the Psalmist found delight in God’s judgments and rules. There are many reasons, but two really stood out to me. Verse 120 reads, “**My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws.**” In the Bible we are told not to live according to the flesh, but by the Spirit to put it to death (Ro 8:13). This fear of the Lord, in awe of his rules/judgments, create a right motivation to keep the flesh in check, as God himself is working toward that goal: our sanctification, so in faithfulness he afflicts us (75). In 1999, as a 22 year old Senior, there were so many temptations. I held to Romans 6:13 at that time, even making it my password on my bank account, so that before depositing or withdrawing money I had to recite it. You can imagine the response from the tellers at that time! But this fear of God, this decision to abide by God’s rules, made my flesh tremble and withdraw. This is one reason. The second is the powerful truth that God will judge the world. He has done so in ancient times (52) and he will do so again (160). Often we feel the wicked thrive at our expense (84). But God will not leave us to our oppressors (121). He will have mercy, as he always does to those who love him (132; Ro 8:28). One day Jesus will come again and judge the world. In the meantime, we put our hope in his judgment (175).

**Word** (דְּבָרָה (dābār) and אִמְרָה (’imrâh)) – “Your word”, and its poetic parallel “your sayings” are by far the most repeated phrase in the psalm, 42x. The emphasis here is on the spoken word, that God’s word did not come from the invention or creativity of human beings, but from God’s own mouth (13, 72, 88). Although so many of the above words could have been used, when God gave Moses the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20:1, it is this word that is used: “**And God spoke all these words:**” It is no accident that Jesus himself is known as the Word of God (Jn 1:1,14; Rev 19:13, 16). Our God is the God who communicates with us, to make himself known, to have relationship with us. He wants us to know him as Father (Mt 6:9), and ourselves as his children (Ro 8:14-16). Each of us here have come to know this God through his words. In fact, since God is invisible, we only know him through his words, which he initiated towards us in sending his Son, Jesus. This is why Bible study is so important, not only for us, but for all people. Sometimes we take this word for granted, since many of us have several Bibles,

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and we’ve read it through once or twice, studied some books, and it doesn’t have the initial glory it once did. We forget our first love, that precious encounter with God’s word, and need to be reminded of it. I recently met a young man who was raised up with UBF Bible study, and so didn’t see it as so exciting anymore. But his wife, who had not been taught the Bible so systematically, was amazed. Although half a continent away, she called her mother-in-law to ask for Bible study. That missionary recounted to me her great joy in seeing the word of God come to life in the eyes of her daughter in law.

How should we respond to the word of God? The Psalmist has so many: love, obedience, trust, hope, faith... Generally they fall into two categories: Decisions, and pleas. **First, pleas.** With the exception of four verses, the Psalmist is speaking to God, so the psalm is a prayer, or a song to God. What were his requests? For what was he pleading with God for? Of the 66 individual pleas I found in the chapter, 30 of them were pleas for help, deliverance, preserving and saving his life from enemies<sup>7</sup>. These pleas are intimate confessions of loving need from a person to their God, in all areas of life. We can relate to them. For example, none of us likes to be shamed, scorned, or held in contempt. Yet living in this world full of self-absorbed people of fragile ego, it is hard not to be wounded, or become hard hearted. Like the Psalmist, we can cry out to our God in those times: **“Remove from me their scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes (22).” Or “Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good (39).”** We can cry out to God to put vengeance in his hands (78), or even vent out frustration: **“How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors (84)?”** Sometimes we are exhausted from suffering. We can cry out to him: **“I have suffered much; preserve my life, LORD, according to your word (107).”** Other times sorrow comes: **“My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word (153).”** We may be lonely, or misunderstood in the community of believers. He cries out: **“May those who fear you turn to me, those who understand your statutes (79).”** And **“May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word (74).”** Another big issue we

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<sup>7</sup> These are the pleas for help I found: 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41-42, 74, 78, 79, 80, 84, 86, 94, 107, 116, 117, 121, 122, 133, 134, 146, 153, 154, 159, 170, 173

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all deal with is temptation. Do you struggle alone? The Psalmist cried out to God: **“Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain (36).”** And **“Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word (37).”** And **“Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me (133).”** In all these cases, God gives an answer; God’s word provides a way. Verse 9 reads, **“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.”**

The second set of pleas are to know God and be taught by God. He asks this in different ways over 36 times<sup>8</sup>! Pinnacle of these requests is 119:18, **“Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.”** In the early days of our staff Bible study, we always sang this hymn for every Bible study. It is such a pure expression of desire to know God, but it is also an expression of helplessness: unless God reveals himself through opening my eyes, I won’t be able to see the wonderful things in his law. For many of us Bible study has become a regular activity or meeting, or perhaps a tool to use for our ministry. The Bible can easily become just another subject to study: Biology 101, Algebra 2, English 172, and Bible study with David Won. That way of approaching the Bible leads to Phariseeism, who diligently studied the Scriptures, but refused to come to Jesus for life (Jn 5:39-40). But for some of us that isn’t enough. We long to know more of God, his ways, his truth, his words. This requires humility and submission, a request to God, pleading with him, **“Teach me your decrees!”** But it must be followed with a decision of faith.

**Second, Decisions.** The Psalmist pleads with God, but in the midst of that, he makes decisions of faith. I found 19 of them<sup>9</sup>. He made decisions of faith to praise the Lord: **“I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws (7).”** Mostly he made decisions to obey and not neglect God’s word (8, 16, 44, 60, 106, 112, 117, 145, 146), for example: **“My heart is set on keeping your**

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<sup>8</sup> These are the pleas to know God and his word I found: 8, 10, 12, 17, 18, 26, 27, 29, 33, 34, 35, 38, 43, 49, 58, 64, 65, 66, 68, 73, 76, 77, 88, 108, 124, 125, 132, 135, 145, 149, 169, 171, 172, 174, 175, 176;

<sup>9</sup> Here are the 19 decisions I found: 7, 8, 16, 23, 30, 44, 45, 46, 60, 61, 78, 93, 95, 106, 109, 112, 117, 145, 146

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**decrees to the very end (112).**” There is also a set of decisions that were in direct conflict with his human situation: **“Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees (23).”** **“Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law (61).”** And **“May the arrogant be put to shame for wronging me without cause; but I will meditate on your precepts (78).”** And again, **“The wicked are waiting to destroy me, but I will ponder your statutes (95).”** All of us are busy, and have crises going on at any given time. It is easy to become overwhelmed with the demands and burdens of life, and allow them to dictate our world. Yet here I’m rebuked to spend more time “meditating on your decrees/precepts,” and “ponduring your statutes.” For months leading up to the conference, I knew that my time in Chicago was drawing to an end. I began from February to delegate my tasks. With Amy and Matthew in Toledo, I was very protective of my time, but also dedicated at least one hour to personal Bible study and prayer each morning in Proverbs, Revelation, the conference messages, and lately Psalm 119. I felt like a parched man finally getting a drink, or a starving man finally getting a bite. Many a morning I shed tears at how many years I allowed the busyness of life in Chicago to dictate my schedule, instead of obeying my yearly decisions to devote myself to God and his word. I repented that he had to go to such drastic measures to draw my attention fully and personally to him. I had figured since I did so much Bible study in service to Chicago UBF and his sheep, and did daily Bible reading it was enough. But what a difference it makes to make time in this way! This is God’s calling for me, and like the Psalmist, I will guard that decision in prayer before my God. What decisions will you make in response to the word of God? Perhaps to remember God’s word by memorizing (93; 109)? Proclaim it fearlessly (46)? Or embrace the freedom the gospel brings to love one another (45)? Whatever it is, let’s make a decision and keep it.

### **Part Two: Loving and meditating on “Your Law”.**

Now that we have finished the overview, we have the privilege to begin systematic study of the passage verse by verse. We already explained the blessed life in the author’s main point. I’ll skip the first 12 stanzas (1-94) and the last 8 (verses 113-176), and focus on ם Mem and ן Nun (verses 97-112).

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Let's read verse 97. **“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”** Does anyone here love law? I recently had to sell my house and work with a lawyer. He was well established when he helped us buy the house nearly 15 years ago, so he's been practicing law a long time. However, even he complained to me how complicated the laws are. Even a lawyer doesn't love the law! Sometimes love the law when someone gets what is coming to them, like an aggressive driver getting pulled over, or we may love it when we get praised or recognized for keeping it. But that isn't what the verse says, is it? It says, **“Oh, how I love your law!”** And this isn't the only place; the Psalmist often confessed his love for God's word<sup>10</sup>, at least 11 times! What makes it loveable is that it is **“your law”** – God's law. In fact, **“you”** or **“your”** are repeated 254 times in this Psalm. He loves this law because it is **“YOUR LAW.”** Do you love the Bible because it is so helpful, useful, and required to be a good disciple, or do you love the word of God because it IS the word of God?

Since we cannot see God, nor hear his voice physically, the only way to know him as he wants to be known is through his word. When I taught the Bible to my best friend, he struggled to even read the Bible. After a few weeks he asked me, “Why do I have to study this book about all these ancient people? Can't I just love Jesus instead?” If you have felt that way, take heart. Bible study is not easy. But imagine you were interested in another person. Perhaps they gave you a letter, with your name on it, from them. Would you simply appreciate the gift, and leave the letter on the shelf? Or would you read it over and over? My friend thought about it. When I came the next week, his TV was pushed into the corner, and there were Bibles open in every room. He later became a pastor. To know the words from the mouth of God is to hear his voice, and to know the law is to learn of the lawgiver.

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<sup>10</sup> Confessions of love for God's word: “I love them (47, 167)”; “which I love (48)”; “I love your law (97, 113,163)”; “I love your statutes (119)”; “I love your commands (127)”; “your servant loves them (140)”; “I love your precepts (159a)”; “who love your law (163)”

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Look at verse 97 again. **“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”** This may be possible in a monastic life, but who has time to meditate on the word of God all day long? Granted, it may be artistic license. However, meditating on God’s words is an often repeated idea in this chapter<sup>11</sup> so I don’t think this is hyperbole. This meditation is not: “Empty your mind.” That may work for learning fighting, but not for learning God’s words. We cannot meditate on God’s words without engaging our minds. To meditate requires us to consider (15). This also requires our eyes to be open to read (148), at least sometimes. Sleeping during the message may not be the best way to meditate on it all day long.

The point seems to be that God’s word becomes a part of our every situation and experience. Not that we ignore our responsibilities at work so we can read the Bible; rather, the Bible we did read and study alters our thinking and perspective on work: we work as for the Lord, not people (Col 3:23). We see people around us not as coworkers, but as those whom God wants to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1Ti 2:4). To decide to meditate all day long is to trust that God’s word has something to say about everything we may encounter, experience, or obstacle we may face. There is something about God’s word that will apply here, something I will learn. Some places this is more natural than others. When I married, God’s word came to life in ways I could not have understood without a wife. The same is true when my son was born; I came to understand more deeply God who gave his one and only Son as an expression of love (Jn 3:16). Other areas are not so easy, until after the fact. I’ve been reading one chapter of Proverbs a day since last year, and there are many times I read a passage and think, **“Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands (5-6).”** Especially about things that I say to people, or my quarrelsome tendencies. Yet this kind of self-reflection and examination is part of meditating on it all day long (26, 59).

In what ways can this kind of love for and meditation on God’s word impact our lives? Verse 98. **“Your commands are always with me and make me wiser**

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<sup>11</sup> References for “meditate”: 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148

## **“Oh, How I Love Your Law!”**

**than my enemies.”** There is a saying<sup>12</sup>: “Never interrupt your enemy while he is in the process of destroying himself.” God’s word gives great wisdom in dealing with enemies: Proverbs 25:21-22 reads, **“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.”** How so? He will prepare a table for us before the presence of our enemies (Ps 23:5a). Verse 99. **“I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes.”** We generally think to become just like our teacher is a good goal. But for one who loves God’s word, meditating on His statutes, God’s word is boundless (96). This is the downside of being a teacher. I once heard a professor explain teaching this way: “The first year is hard, as you compile your materials. But after that it is easy; you just teach from last year’s notes, tweaking as you go.” But we may have more insight than all our teachers if we meditate personally all the more. I’m sure there is far more treasure to dig out of this Psalm than I could ever hope to teach, so keep meditating! Verse 100. **“I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.”** A common problem of elders (not our elders) is to expect others to act while we take credit, which leads to misunderstandings. The way we may avoid this problem is to meditate on God’s word in order to obey it, not to make others obey it. Then we can shepherd God’s sheep, serving as overseers, setting an example for the sheep. It is like children: they learn from what we do, not what we say. I’m constantly yelling at my boys: “You don’t listen to me!” But they are also yelling all the time. I finally put the two together: they don’t hear what I’m saying, they are following my example! Oops! Please pray for me to have more understanding by obeying God’s precepts as an example.

Look at verses 101 and 104. **“I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.”** And **“I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.”** So which came first, God’s word, or hating evil paths? They go together. Verse 9 reads, **“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.”** The Bible says **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10).”** We fear God to live

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<sup>12</sup> Generally attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte

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before him, keeping out of every evil path to obey his word, while at the same time, the more we study and obey his word, the more we become like him in character, hating every wrong path. This doesn't mean to hate sinners on that path. After hearing about a sin committed, I said: “How could they do that?” completely forgetting that I had done far worse for far longer! Instead, it is better to remember God's grace, since it was he who taught me through his servants and the Holy Spirit (102), and his grace through his word that is so sweet like honey (103).

Ever struggled with commitment, or really the fear of committing? I know I do, and it isn't because I'm not faithful or I'm fearful, I'm just not sure which is the best way. For example, when I was looking to buy a car after the Corolla was totaled, I spent days and days looking at many cars. After looking at one nice and cheap car, I wanted to take more time to think about it. The owner was shocked; “If you want it, just buy it!” In the same way we want to serve God, but how? Where? What? James tells us, **“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God (Jas 1:5a).”** But how will God give this wisdom we so desperately need in order to make decisions? Let's read verse 105 together. **“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”** The mistake I made was to assume this wisdom would just magically appear, regardless of objective reality, like a big blinking sign from heaven. Or I want a how to with 5 steps and lots of pictures, or maybe a YouTube video. C. S. Lewis observed in ancient times “the cardinal problem of human life was how to conform the soul to objective reality, and the solution was wisdom, self-discipline, and virtue. For the modern [person], the cardinal problem is how to conform reality to the wishes of man, and the solution is a technique.”<sup>13</sup>

The wisdom God gives through his word transforms and enlightens the person from the inside out, to see the next step, and have a vision for the long distance. This requires faith that it is always **“the LORD's purpose that prevails (Pro 19:21).”** Like we see in the lives of the Patriarchs, no matter their mistakes nor others' interference, God's plan won. Likewise, **“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in**

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<sup>13</sup> Quotes from Timothy Keller: “God's Wisdom for Navigating Life”, quoting from C.S. Lewis, Abolition of Man, page 80.

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**advance for us to do (Eph 2:10).**” And **“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps (Pro 16:9).”** Instead of fearing commitment, trust God. Believe that God has given you the wisdom in his word to take this step in obedience. Don’t just sit on the sidelines watching others live courageously for Christ. One story that boggles my mind of such faith is the story of Jonathan. His father King Saul was hiding under a pomegranate tree in fear because his army was ill equipped and shrinking in number. But Jonathan wasn’t with him, he was attacking the Philistine fort, located at the top of the cliff! He says to his armor bearer, **“Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few (1 Sam 14:6).”** And the armor-bearer says, **“Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.”** What a couple of lunatics! Is that responsible decision making? Yet their victory there turns the tide of the war, resulting in a major victory for Israel (1Sam 14). Jonathan was a man of wisdom; he had one word of God as a lamp for his feet: **“Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.”** He also trusted God’s plan to install David as king: the light for his path. Of course, we all wish we could know all the possible outcomes and then choose the best, but only God knows that, and he doesn’t share that knowledge. Instead, he calls us to trust him. If we make a mistake, God like a good Father will be there to help us, to correct us, discipline us, and restore us. The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, one word of God, the lamp for our feet. For me, this one word was John 14:6, where Jesus says, **“I am the way.”** For the first 20 years of my life, I had lived basically my own way, but it led to slavery to sin and a heavy metal lifestyle. But in 1997 I heard Jesus’ words and decided to take that step by faith. Now, 20 years later, I cannot believe who God has made me to be, how he has used me, and the blessings I’ve received from following him. It isn’t easy, it requires exercising my freedom of choice courageously to obey God’s word. Sometimes it is clear, like leaving my engineering career 10 years ago to work with Pastor Ron. Other times it requires obedience first, and then understanding of his will comes later, like moving to Toledo. I’m excited to see what the next 20 years hold for me, following Jesus on this path, illuminated by the word of God.

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Verse 111 reads, **“Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.”** What heritage have you received that you want to keep forever? Legacies of this world, from our family, culture or ministry will all perish spoil and fade away. But God’s words bring joy to the heart in every generation. One man I respect said the word of God is the only inheritance he will have to give to his children. It is not a small thing.

I should end here, but there is one more verse I want to share, the last verse: **“I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands (176).”** We’ve talked a lot about obeying laws, listening to God’s word. We may get the idea that the Bible is a story of good vs. evil, obedience vs. rebellion, righteous vs. the wicked. While those things are all there, the main point is the same as it is has ever been: The Bible is a story of redemption: Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10). On what basis is there hope for the wandering sheep? The word of God. All of us are straying sheep, but we also have loved ones who have strayed. There is hope, for our God is a good shepherd. John Newton, on a slave ship in a storm, remembered his mother’s Bible teaching and hymns from when he was 7 and younger. It was enough to help him submit to God, and be transformed. This is why we so desperately need shepherd-like parents who teach the word of God to our children, and parent-like Bible teachers who teach the word of God to those who have not heard. There is hope and salvation in this book, the Bible, because the author is seeking his lost children. **“Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.”**