



Women's Bible Study  
A Godly Response to Life's Realities: A Study in the Psalms  
Psalm 119: Longing for the Word  
September 20, 2006  
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Good morning/evening and welcome to Women's Bible Study. What a joy to see so many of you back this week to continue our study in the book of Psalms. Our text this morning/evening is Psalm 119. Little did I know my supposedly random choice of summer reading material would greatly enhance my ability to provide contemporary applications to our study today. Each summer I try to read at least one classic. I am amazed at the number that I somehow missed growing up.

This summer I read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. The Ten Boom family were devoted Christians who dedicated their lives to serving others. During the Second World War, their home became a refuge for Jews and members of the Dutch underground resistance. On February 28, 1944, the Gestapo raided their home and arrested and imprisoned many of their family and friends. Corrie and her sister Betsie spent 10 months in three different prisons.

### **The First Day of School**

Corrie recounts this story of her very first day of school. It was 1898 and she was six years old. After an elaborate description regarding the process of getting ready for the day she describes the breakfast scene. "When Mama had poured their coffee, Father put on his rimless spectacles and began to read: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path . . . Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word . . ."

What kind of hiding place? I wondered idly as I watched Father's brown beard rise and fall with the words. What was there to hide from? It was a long, long psalm; beside me Nollie (her sister) began to squirm. When at last Father closed the big volume . . . <sup>1</sup>

Her father was reading Psalm 119 and it is a long, long psalm; in fact the longest psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible, 176 verses. It takes almost 20 minutes for me to read it aloud. I am sure some of you are squirming a little in

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<sup>1</sup> *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. 1971. Chosen Books a division of Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI page 39.

your seats because you know from past experience that it is my custom to read our Bible text aloud before teaching on it. There is just something about hearing the word of God read aloud that far supercedes anything I can say. While, it is still my preference to read the entire Psalm; I am going to compromise and read only selected portions.

Before we do I want to provide a few facts about this Psalm. Remember from last week's lecture, that the Psalms are poetry. Psalm 119 is an incredible elaborate example of poetry. It is an acrostic. It has twenty-two stanzas. If you look in your Bible you may see the Stanzas actually labeled: Aleph(alif), Beth(fet), Gimel(gimmel). These are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet and there are twenty-two corresponding stanzas in the Psalm. Each stanza has eight verses. Each verse of each separate stanza begins with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and follows in sequence. So the first stanza is Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and all the verses in the segment or stanza begin with the letter aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The second stanza is Beth, which is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, so each verse in that stanza begins with the Hebrew letter Beth. That pattern continues through all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and thus the twenty-two stanzas.

Another interesting feature of this Psalm is that each verse with only a few rare exceptions (and even those are debatable) refers to the Word of God, the Bible. You will see the Word of God called by many different synonyms such as: law, word, rulings, ordinances, testimonies, commandments, decrees, statutes, precepts, charges, sayings, and promise.

Psalm 119 beginning with Verse 1:

**? ALEPH (alif) 1**

1 Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD!

2 Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!

3 They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways.

4 You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently.

5 Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes!

6 Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments.

7 I will praise You with

uprightness of heart, When I learn Your righteous judgments.

8 I will keep Your statutes; Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

**? BETH (fet) 2**

9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

12 Blessed *are* You, O LORD! Teach me Your

statutes.

13 With my lips I have declared all the judgments of Your mouth.

14 I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as *much as* in all riches.

15 I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.

16 I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.

**? GIMEL (gimmel) 3**

17 Deal bountifully with Your servant, *That* I may live and keep Your word.

18 Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things

from Your law.

19 I *am* a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me.

20 My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times.

21 You rebuke the proud—the cursed, who stray from Your commandments.

22 Remove from me reproach and contempt, for I have kept Your testimonies.

23 Princes also sit *and* speak against me, *but* Your servant meditates on Your statutes.

24 Your testimonies also *are* my delight and my counselors.

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### g KAPH (11)

81 My soul faints for Your salvation, But I hope in Your word.

82 My eyes fail *from* searching Your word, Saying, "When will You comfort me?"

83 For I have become like a wineskin in smoke, *yet* I do not forget Your statutes.

84 How many *are* the days of Your servant? When will You execute judgment on those who persecute me?

85 The proud have dug pits for me, which *is* not according to Your law.

86 All Your commandments *are* faithful; they persecute me wrongfully; Help me!

87 They almost made an end of me on earth, but I did not forsake Your precepts.

88 Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

### ? LAMED (12)

89 Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.

90 Your faithfulness *endures* to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.

91 They continue this day according to Your ordinances, For all *are* Your servants.

92 Unless Your law *had been* my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction.

93 I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have given me life.

94 I *am* Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts.

95 The wicked wait for me to destroy me, *but* I will consider Your testimonies.

96 I have seen the consummation of all perfection, *but* Your commandment *is* exceedingly broad.

### ? MEM (13)

97 Oh, how I love Your law! It *is* my meditation all the day.

98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they *are* ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies *are* my meditation.

100 I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.

101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word.

102 I have not departed

from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me.

103 How sweet are Your words to my taste, *Sweeter* than honey to my mouth!

104 Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

### ? NUN (14)

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

106 I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments.

107 I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.

108 Accept, I pray, the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your judgments.

109 My life *is* continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law.

110 The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not strayed from Your precepts.

111 Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they *are* the rejoicing of my heart.

112 I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes Forever, to the very end.

### ? SAMEK (15)

113 I hate the double-minded, but I love Your law.

114 You *are* my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.

## Longing for the Word

Our theme this morning/evening is *Longing for the Word*. There is an outline in your materials if you would like to follow along. It is helpful for us to remember that when the Psalmist writes of his longing for the Word he was speaking at most of the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These were the mere beginning of the glorious era of history that God would unfold to his people. How much more should we as possessors of the complete revelation of God long for it.

We are so Long for the Word of God because through it we deepen our relationship with God. Through this passage we are going to look at four ways that we develop and strengthen our longing for the Word. They are: Hearing the Word, Meditating on the Word, Obeying the Word, and Observing the Resulting Blessings that come from this kind of attention to the Word.

## **Hearing the Word**

Hearing the Word is where we begin. Hearing the Word is how we learn of our Savior. Hearing is how we understand the nature of God and understand what He expects of us. There are many subtle references to this in the Psalm.

### **The Birthday Party**

A contemporary example of Hearing the Word is found in the pages of Corrie Ten Boom's life. Many years have passed since that first day of school and Corrie is now in her mid 40's. It is 1937 and the Boom family is celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their watch shop. The celebration is a community event with florists and others making their deliveries even before 7:00 a.m. The family could hardly dress and have breakfast without the doorbell ringing. But at 8:30 sharp they fell into their established routine.

"Father stood up and took the big brass-hinged Bible from its shelf as Toos and Hans rapped on the door and came in. Scripture reading at 8:30 each morning for all who were in the house was another of the fixed points around which life in the Beje revolved. Father opened the big volume and Betsie and I held our breaths. Surely, today of all days, when there was still so much to do, it would not be a whole chapter! But he was turning to the Gospel of Luke where we'd left off yesterday—such long chapters in Luke too. With his finger at the place, Father looked up. . . . polished his glasses with his napkin and started to read, his deep voice lingering lovingly over the words".<sup>2</sup>

I found it very inspiring and convicting that in the ten Boom family Bible reading was an anchor point around which their family revolved. She could remember readings on special days whether she was 6 or 45.

We have many opportunities to hear the Word of God. We hear the word when we open our Bibles to read from them in our daily quiet times. We hear the Word when we turn on a CD with recorded portions of the Bible and listen while we drive. We hear the Word as it is read in Sunday morning church services. We hear the Word through hymns and songs.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom. 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. 1971. Chosen Books a division of Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI page 23-24.

Where are you Hearing the Word? Have you taken responsibility for hearing the Word of God or are you still dependent on others exposing you to God's word? Do you have a regular daily habit of hearing the word or is it reserved only for special occasions when it fits conveniently in your schedule? Are you providing opportunities for others in your circle of influence to hear the word like your children, your grandchildren, family members and friends. Maybe helping others to hear the word is as simple as the Ten Booms who read aloud a Chapter at Breakfast.

### **Meditating on the Word**

As important as it is to Hear the Word of God, we must move yet further in our longing. We must also meditate on the Word of God. The Psalmist mentions this often.

<sup>97</sup>Oh, how I love Your Law! It is my meditation all the day.

<sup>148</sup>My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on Your Word.

Meditating is a step beyond just reading the word. It requires us to turn it over in our minds, to think about it, to ponder its meanings and implications. I think this is a discipline even harder than learning the daily discipline of reading our Bibles because when we mediate we have to remove ourselves from daily distractions. That is not easy in our modern multitasking instant accessibility world. Be sure not to confuse the Biblical sense of meditation with the Eastern Religions' concept of meditation. Other religions define meditation as a practice of emptying one's mind. Biblical meditation however, requires us to fill up our minds and we should be filling them with the Word of God.

Commentator, James Boice, says, "if we are to meditate on the Bible day and night, we must have at least some of it committed to memory, which is what Christians in past ages of the church did."<sup>3</sup> He goes on to give some examples one of which is William Wilberforce.<sup>4</sup>

Wilberforce was the British statesman who was largely responsible for the abolition of the slave trade throughout the empire. He wrote in his diary in the year 1819, "Walked today from Hyde Park Corner, repeating the 119 Psalm in great comfort". Did you catch that? Wilberforce had memorized the 119 Psalm (all 176 verses) and he knew it with such familiarity that he could say it on his walk.

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<sup>3</sup> Psalms: Volume 3. James Montgomery Boice. 1998. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, MI. page 972.

<sup>4</sup> Psalms: Volume 3. James Montgomery Boice. 1998. Baker Books. Grand Rapids, MI. page 973.

Another example of Biblical Memorization is from an entertaining book, called Ten P's in a Pod.<sup>5</sup> It is the story of the Arnold Pent Family consisting of Mr. Pent, his wife and their eight children. He felt called to be an evangelist; but instead of his work taking him on the road away from his family; he simply took his family on the road with him to work. They traveled together sharing the gospel all over the United States in the 1940's and 1950's.

The children had a peculiar ability to quote mind boggling amounts of the Bible in accordance with their ages. For example, some of the younger children had committed to memory the Psalms of Ascent which are Psalms 120-134 which the Israelites would say on their way to worship at the temple. The older children could quote multiple books of the Bible, others could have someone read a few verses from a chapter in the Old Testament and then could begin quoting exactly from that verse forward chapter by chapter. As you can imagine this was an astounding feat at local evangelist meetings.

Their nineteen year old son; however, thought this not very unusual and simply pointed out that in their family they were so regularly reading the Bible that truly it was not difficult to commit it to memory. "As soon as we reached reading age, Father instructed us to get up before breakfast and have at least fifteen minutes of Bible reading quietly to ourselves. Then he would add dryly, "You can have more time reading the Bible if you want to, but it has to be at least fifteen minutes." It might be noted right here that if we read over the required fifteen minutes, it was purely by accident; . . . At the age of nine, our time increased to thirty minutes before breakfast. By thirteen, at least an hour was required of Bible reading before breakfast.

". . . we had half an hour of devotions after each meal. We would read the Old Testament in the morning after breakfast. Then at noon we read the New Testament, and at night after supper it was the Old Testament again".<sup>6</sup> He estimated that by the age of 21 each child in their family had been exposed to more than 22,000 hours of Bible Reading.<sup>7</sup>

Again we are reminded that Meditating on the Word and Memorizing it flows from Hearing the Word. I want to take a moment to encourage you in this spiritual discipline of memorization. I came to Bible memorization very late in my spiritual growth. I had heard of people who could memorize large passages from the Bible, I even observed them on the stage at conferences. But in my

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<sup>5</sup> Ten P's in a Pod: A Million Mile Journal of the Arnold Pent Family. Arnold Pent III. The Vision Forum, Inc. San Antonio, Texas.

<sup>6</sup> Ten P's in a Pod: A Million Mile Journal of the Arnold Pent Family. Arnold Pent III. The Vision Forum, Inc. San Antonio, Texas, page 189.

<sup>7</sup> Ten P's in a Pod: A Million Mile Journal of the Arnold Pent Family. Arnold Pent III. The Vision Forum, Inc. San Antonio, Texas, page 86-87.

mind they were in a category of “professional speakers” not ordinary everyday Christians. They were so far ahead of where I was I didn't even consider trying to imitate them.

However, slowly I began to grasp the importance. I remember Gretchen saying in a Bible Study here about 10 years ago just in passing that she had memorized a chapter in Hebrews during a very sorrowful time in her life and it sustained her. I was touched. Then I attended a Navigators Family Conference in Colorado and it hit me right in the face. These people knew a lot of scripture and they knew how to use it in an effective way. The light bulb suddenly went on. This was important and I should be doing it to. But where do you start when you are 30 years old and all this time has passed and all you have to show for your Bible memorization is a few verses you learned in Vacation Bible School?

The answer is you start where you are. Don't allow the fact that you haven't memorized much or any scripture make you feel defeated. Begin where you are. Set some goals. Perhaps your goal is to learn one Bible Verse this whole year. You can do that. Maybe it is to learn a new Bible Verse a month. If you have a child in Awanas you have the perfect opportunity to learn the very same verses as your child and so hide the word in two hearts instead of just one.

There are lots of resources to help you in Bible memorization, most Christian Bookstores have resources to help you in this area. But be careful that you don't expect the tools to do the work for you. No matter how neatly packaged a Bible Memorization strategy is it will still come down to you setting aside the time and effort to do it. I have found it just as effective to write down key verses that have meaning to me on index cards and keep them in my purse when I have unexpected downtime to review them.

For those of you who are well disciplined in Bible memorization and have been faithful in adding to your verses for decades, challenge yourself to learn larger segments of scripture: perhaps a prayer from one of the Old Testament Kings during a key time in Israel's history, perhaps the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm, perhaps a whole book from the New Testament.

## **Obeying the Word**

Once we make it a practice to hear the word and then to meditate on it; we begin to understand what God expects from us in our daily lives. For example, we will understand that God expects us to love our enemies, to abstain from sexual relationships before marriage, to share our faith with others. We will no longer be able exist in the ignorance of not knowing what the Bible says or what God expects. We will be confronted with a choice. Will we obey the word of God?

<sup>101</sup>I have restrained my feet from every evil way, That I may keep Your word.

<sup>112</sup>I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes Forever, to the very end.

We see this subject with alarming clarity in an ancient example from the life of Jeremiah. The citizens of Judah had been taken captive to Babylon, only the poorest people were left to tend to the land. The leader the Babylonians had put in place to govern the city had just been assassinated and the people feared reprisals from Babylon so they began to head to Egypt.

Then they have an idea. They will ask God if this is a good plan. They will ask if they should head to Egypt. So they enlist the help of the prophet Jeremiah and ask him to inquire of the Lord, Jeremiah 42:5, "So they said to Jeremiah, "Let the Lord be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not do according to everything which the LORD your God sends us by you. <sup>6</sup>Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God."

After 10 days, God provides the answer to Jeremiah. The people are not to go down to Egypt. They are to stay in the land. God promises to save them, deliver them, and show them mercy; but that wasn't the answer the people wanted. They were already headed to Egypt and well, it seemed to them likely that the Babylonians would return in force to deal with the assassination.

Jeremiah's response to their attitudes, begins in verse 20, "For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us to the LORD our God, and according to all that the LORD your God says, so declare to us and we will do it. <sup>21</sup>And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed . . .

Isn't that just like us? We deceive ourselves into thinking that it is because we don't understand the Word of God that we can't obey it. But many times we do in fact understand it. We hear it, meditate on it, even memorize it; but are we willing to obey it?

We don't have a prophet to inquire of the LORD for us. Actually, we have sixteen prophets that have already inquired of the LORD and we have the written record of their requests and God's responses. We have thousands of years of the lives of the Jewish people recorded for us, and God's response, discipline, and direction to them. We have the words of God's own Son. They are all here for us, but we must choose to obey them.

## **Resulting Blessings**

There are many blessings in living a life Longing for the Word of God. My Bible has a helpful chart listing 14 Blessings contained in this Psalm.<sup>8</sup> We have peace, power to resist sin, joy, understanding, strength, freedom, hope, comfort in

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<sup>8</sup> Nelson Study Bible. NKJV page 1009.

suffering, no shame, reverence for God, a thankful heart, a worshipful heart, a clean life, and personal renewal. God is determined to bless us, often in ways we cannot fathom and in circumstances we would not choose.

I would like to close with one last story from Corrie Ten Boom's life that illustrates how all these points fit together. She and her sister Betsie have just arrived at Ravensbruck a concentration camp in the heart of Germany.

"And so Betsie and I arrived in Barracks 8 in the small hours of that morning, bringing not only the Bible, but a new knowledge of the power of Him whose story it was." They now are shown their permanent living quarters. "On either side doors opened into two still larger rooms—by far the largest dormitories we had yet seen. Betsie and I followed a prisoner-guide through the door at the right. Because of the broken windows, the vast room was in semi-twilight. Our noses told us, first, that the place was filthy: somewhere plumbing had backed up, the bedding was soiled and rancid. Then as our eyes adjusted to the gloom we saw that there were no individual beds at all, but great square piers, stacked three high, and wedged side by side, and end to end with only an occasional narrow aisle slicing through.

We followed our guide single file- the aisle was not wide enough for two—fighting back the claustrophobia of these platforms rising everywhere above us. The tremendous room was nearly empty of people; they must have been out on various work crews. At last she pointed to a second tier in the center of a large block. To reach it we had to stand on the bottom level, haul ourselves up, and then crawl across three other straw-covered platforms to reach the one that we would share . . . Suddenly I sat up, striking me head on the cross-slats above. Something had pinched my leg. "Fleas!" I cried "Betsie the place is swarming with them!" . . . Betsie, how can we live in such a place?"

"Show us. Show us how." It was said so matter of factly it took me a second to realize she was praying. . . "Corrie!" she said excitedly. "He's given us the answer! Before we asked, as He always does! In the Bible this morning. Where was it? Read that part again!"

I glanced down the long dim aisle to make sure no guard was in sight, then drew the Bible from its pouch. "It was in First Thessalonians," I said. We were on our third complete reading of the New Testament since leaving Scheveningen. In the feeble light I turned the pages. "Here it is: "Comfort the frightened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all . . ." It seemed written expressly to Ravensbruck.

"Go on," said Betsie. "That wasn't all." "Oh yes: '. . . to one another and to all. Rejoice, always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus—" "That's it, Corrie! That's his answer. 'Give thanks in all circumstances!' That's what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks!"

I stared at her, then around me at the dark, foul-aired room. "Such as?" I said. "Such as being assigned here together." I bit my lip. "Oh yes, Lord Jesus!" "Such as what you're holding in your hands." I looked down at the Bible. "Yes! Thank You, dear Lord, that there was no inspection when we entered here! Thank You for all the women, here in this room, who will meet You in these pages."

"Yes," said Betsie. "Thank You for the very crowding here. Since we're packed so close, that many more will hear!" She looked at me expectantly. "Corrie!" she prodded. "Oh, all right. Thank You for the jammed, crammed, stuffed, packed suffocating crowds." "Thank You," Betsie went on serenely, "for the fleas and for —" The fleas! This was too much. "Betsie, there's no way even God can make me grateful for a flea." "Give thanks in all circumstances," she quoted. "It doesn't say, 'in pleasant circumstances.'" Fleas are part of this place where God has put us." And so we stood between piers of bunks and gave thanks for fleas. But this time I was sure Betsie was wrong."<sup>9</sup>

As time went by however they discovered that Betsie had indeed been right it seemed the fleas were a strong deterrent to the guards. The guards would rarely enter the living space in the barracks because of their fear of being infested with the fleas. This provided the sisters with great opportunities for others to Hear the Word of God read aloud, for the sisters to teach, and for many women to come to know Christ even in horrible unspeakable living conditions. God was faithful to those who longed for his word.

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<sup>9</sup> The Hiding Place by Corrie Ten Boom. 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. 1971. Chosen Books a division of Baker Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI page 205-210.