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Walking in the Word - Psalm 119 / Psalm 119:1-8

Driven by Desire

> Intro

Desire drives our lives. How strong is your desire to know and understand and keep the word of the Lord.

Our lives are (driven) by desire. it's what gets us up in the morning. Desire is what we dream about, what we pray about, and what we think about when we are free to think about whatever we want to think about . . . In the jumble of longings and passions, how strong is your desire to know and understand and keep the word of the Lord The psalmist so desired the word of God, that he considered suffering to be a blessing if it helped him become more obedient to God's commands. (Kevin DeYoung, Taking God At His Word: Why the Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me))

We are beginning a series in [Psalm 119](#) this morning called Walking in the Word - [Psalm 119](#). Six times the Psalmist expresses his longing to keep God's commands. Fourteen times he states his longing to know and understand God's word.

We require the Holy Spirit to make the word alive to us otherwise, even though we may know it well, it will be a dead book to us, and we may remain spiritually dead. But if the Spirit is present we will look from the word to the Lord.

“Charles Spurgeon urged us to pray: O living Christ, make this a living word to me. Your word is life, but not without the Holy Spirit. I may know this book of yours from beginning to end, and repeat it all from Genesis to Revelation, and yet it may be a dead book, and I may be a dead soul. But, Lord, be present here; then will I look up from the book to the Lord; from the precept to him who fulfilled it; from the law to him who honoured it; from the threat to him who has borne it for me, and from the promise to him in whom it is “Yea and amen.” (quoted in Evangelical Pharisees: The Gospel as Cure for the Church's Hypocrisy by Michael Reeves)

God intends for us to delight in his law

God intends for his law to delight us. The writer uses eight different Hebrew words to describe the law, such as statutes, rules, commandment, law, and word. Together they reveal the richness of God's instruction and the flourishing it provokes in us.

But we tend to view God's law as inhibiting our freedom. In a 1933 letter to a friend C. S. Lewis said:

“God not only understands but shares the desire which is at the root of all my evil—the desire for complete and ecstatic happiness. He made me for no other purpose than to enjoy it. But He knows, and I do not, how such happiness can be really and permanently attained.” This is why God has given us his law—to guide us into full happiness as we trust and follow him.

Lewis goes on to say:

We may be quite rid of the old haunting suspicion (it raises its head in every temptation) that there is something else than God—some other country into which He forbids us to trespass—some kind of delight which He “doesn't appreciate” or just chooses to forbid, but which would be real delight if only we were allowed to get it. The thing just isn't there. Whatever we desire is either what God is trying to give us as quickly as He can, or else a false picture of what He is trying to give us—a false picture which would not attract us for a moment if we saw the real thing. (Dane Ortlund, *In the Lord I Take Refuge: 150 Daily Devotions through the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 345)

What we believe and feel about the word of God are absolutely crucial, if for no other reason than that they should mirror what we believe and feel about Jesus. DeYoung. (DeYoung, *Taking God At His Word*)

God leads us to value and revere Scripture because the words are God's words and so we seek him in it. We don't seek the book for its own sake.

[Psalm 119](#) an extended alphabet acrostic that combines elements of a wisdom psalm and an individual lament psalm. Each stanza of the psalm contains lines that in the Hebrew text all start with the same Hebrew letter. This continues until all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used. It focuses on the two-ways motif—the concept of following Yahweh's ways or the way of wickedness—and the transformative role of submission to Yahweh's instruction, and the desperate need for Yahweh's help. Faithlife Study Bible

How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to generate a longing in us to know God, know God's word, and to please him?

Cultivate a Longing to Reflect God's Character

Psalm 119:1-3 (ESV)

1 Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! 2 Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, 3 who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!

These are **statements about how the world actually works**. These are realities **whether they are acknowledged or not**. Blessed are those whose way is blameless, Blessed are those who keep your testimonies, blessed are those who seek God with their whole heart, blessed are those who do no wrong, but who instead habitually walk in God's ways.

The Hebrew word for blameless emphasizes a high degree of integrity and honesty rather than absolute perfection. Your trajectory matters more than your current location.

Thinking well about the **passage with the help of the Spirit creates humility** . No self-aware person thinks they are blameless. They may think they didn't cause a specific problem, but they know they are not blameless. So, to be singing this, to be praying this, does not overwhelm us with an impossible more to do list, rather it creates an aspiration. This aspiration does not exasperate us. It does not teach us to see God as an unpleasable parent. We know from other texts that our God is not unpleasable God. Without faith it is impossible to please God. [Heb. 11:6](#) That means with faith we *can* please God. Various passages speak of God's delighting in us. This represents a real possibility. But oh what a longing this creates in me, even this moment. This teaches us to not just hate our sin, in fact it's a far more positive sentiment. The text teaches us to long positively to honor God in every way.

This passages speaks to the **trajectory, the lifestyle, the path of our lives**. The path includes **confession of sin. The path includes delighting ourselves in the Lord. The path includes moments of repentance. It's the way that we live, it's the intention of our hearts, it does not imply perfection. That would describe exactly no one other than Jesus. Right now, we are freed from the power of sin but not the presence of sin.**

The parallel statement is: blessed are those who walk in the law of the Lord. We can't walk in it, like we walk through this room. No, to walk in the law of the Lord **is a metaphor, it is a word picture of our lifestyle, so to walk in the law of the Lord is to live informed by its truth and encouragements and commands. It's to have our ethics shaped by what God says in his word.**

Blessed are those who do no wrong. The passage creates motivation toward this. It creates a desire for this state, though it will never be achieved in this life. **John Wesley taught that sinless perfection was possible, but that is not the way that we understand this.** But instead of doing no wrong, they walk in his ways! So, what are those ways? How do we impress them on our souls. How are our minds captivated by this.

There is no one who is without sin.

[1 John 1:7-10](#) (ESV) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Jesus provided for our sin through his blood which cleanses us from all sin. So how do we reconcile this? Blessed are those who also do no wrong.

We have missed the point if we try to memorize every command in the Bible and then seek to obey that, like a list of do's and don'ts. No one could do that anymore than they could remember all of the laws of the United States and try to obey them all at once. That's not being a good citizen.

Our obedience matters, but it's impossible without the Holy Spirit at work in and through us. We tend to not emphasize both grace and obedience enough. We don't focus enough on grace and the Holy Spirit working in us so that we are resting in grace. But we do get just enough grace, or so it would seem, to cause us to go light on obedience. What a failed prospect!

Rather, God calls us to walk in his ways! This can't be done by pure human effort without faith and grace, but that does not mean that walking in his ways involves no human effort. We all require a fresh infusion of both of these.

How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to generate a longing in us to know God, know God's word, and to please him?

Grapple with God's perspective on our obedience

[Psalm 119:4](#) (ESV)

4 You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently.

The psalmist now speaks directly to God, not just about Him.

"You have commanded." This is a prayer. For the first three verses the writer speaks in the third person, but now he directly addresses God himself. You have commanded your precepts, your word, your wisdom, your instruction to be kept diligently. The Jewish leaders counted these laws and they tried to review them in a way that listed them out of context and made it a rule book. That was never the idea, but I can sympathize with them. I'd like to be able to make a list as a way of trying to exert control.

This reminds me of the C.S. Lewis concept of 3 kinds of people and that there is a way of viewing obedience as a kind of tax.

It's comes naturally to us to feel a tension between what God commands and our natural desires. As a result, we go back and forth between pursuing our own desires and following God. Lewis relates seeing the Christian life this way, similar to paying our taxes. We pay them faithfully, but we hope there's something left over for us in the end.

C. Lewis. 3 kinds of people. Not just those who obey & those who don't. 1stkind, ignore God's law. Obey it as tax. Pay but hope some left over. 3rd. Only Holy Spirit open eyes of my heart see God & obedience to him not as duty but desire. Not adding Christ to our life but collapsing into Christ as your life? Not new top priority in competition with reputation, finance, & sex. Abandon to him. Single minded allegiance.

The nuclear core of authentic Christianity is not simply doing what God says but enjoying God. "The price of Christ is something, in a way, much easier than moral effort—it is to want Him."

This still can't mean trying to keep them all in our conscious memory all the time. But these lines are meant to teach us to reflect on God's word, to know it in such a way that we know him and our maturity grows to understand what God calls us to be and to do. "You have commanded." **We have a lord who commands us. What God says are not suggestions. God commands us for his glory and our good. May we see that word *commandments* or see the word *command* and not water it down but recognize that we are not in control.** (Ortlund)

It appears to me that the hardest thing for most of us is to release not our money, not our time, but our control. We trust our own judgment more than we trust anyone else's, which is understandable, but we tend to trust our judgment over God's. We think that other people in the world are trying to trick us because often they are, or we believe that we're going to miss out on something. But God has the right to command us, and he has done so. That means that we're commanded to know what he says and to have our sensibilities shaped by his commands. Not thinking of God as an unpleasable parent that we have to carefully keep all the rules but to want to know what he desires and what is his will and what is his character because we know him, and we love him, and we want to please him.

[Matthew 28:19-20](#) (ESV) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Father, please grant me fresh wisdom to know what this would mean.

How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to generate a longing in us to know God, know God's word, and to please him?

Cry for mercy and help to crush shame

[Psalm 119:5-8 \(ESV\)](#)

5 Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! 6 Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. 7 I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous rules. 8 I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me!

The Psalmist knows and he grieves that his obedience is imperfect. He longs to be consistent in obeying God's statutes and for his life to conform to God's will. He prays that God would establish him, so that his steps will be steady on his way (cf. v. 133). (Kidner)

Meditation on these lines heightens desire. It puts fuel into your heart and mind to want to do what God is prompting you to do. "Oh that my ways." Do you hear that passion in the heart of the psalmist? It speaks to longing. It speaks to desire. It it's a prayer for help. Help me Lord. Help me, that my ways may be steadfast, that not just my actions but my path, my mode of life, my thinking, my way of being, the very atmosphere in which I lead this life. May my ways be steadfast, may they be sure, may they be determined, may they be persevering. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes in obeying them in knowing them and remembering them and in living them, in internalizing them in such a way that I more naturally and culturally do what you have called me to do. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes.

He began this section describing the obedience of all, blessed are those, but now he is praying personally for this to be happening in his life. These statutes are the same thing as God's commands about what God is calling him to do with the instructions that God has given him.

Verse 8: Words of Jesus on the cross. "My God, my God . . .

He neither underestimates God's awesome requirements nor overestimates his ability to obey. **This man of God, understanding the will of the LORD and the weakness of man. So he rushes to the God of grace pleading for His power to enable him to obey .**

Psalm 119:6 (ESV) Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.

Contrary to the way unbelievers see scripture, fixing our eyes on all God's commands does not lead to shame. Long before the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and then the New Testament writers who thought through the implications of the doctrine of atonement, the Psalmist still speaks accurately about how this works because he was carried along by the Holy Spirit in his writing.

If we stare at the list of mistakes we have made, or think often about all the ridiculous things that we do, or realize how far we still have to go in many areas of our lives, then that does indeed lead to feeling overwhelmed. If we stare at our responsibilities, if we look at the imperfections of our body, if we stare at or think about what we don't like about ourselves, then that will lead to greater shame.

But when we, as genuine believers, fix our eyes on God's commands with the help of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit whispers to our spirit, better than any person ever can, that he loves us. He is able to prove that his interest in guiding us is for God's glory and for our good. Furthermore, they are his instructions. They are not random rules that a faceless bureaucrat wrote throwing their weight around just because he or she could. God has no lack, he acts with complete freedom to give to those he loves. Our disobedience always, always, always harms us and harms others. Inherent in his instructions comes his promise to empower us to obey and to love us and forgive us when we don't. But that never means that what he commands doesn't matter.

Then I shall not be put to shame. This is only possible ultimately by resting in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, of knowing the truth that God grants to us the imputed righteousness of Christ. But rightly reading these lines and mediating on them again does not create unrealistic demands, rather they create a hunger and a longing that causes God's people to know intuitively that they are moving in the right direction. The very desire causes us to know that we are alive. We have the sense that we are on the right track. After trying so many wrong roads, we can sense that this path, that God's ways actually satisfy and even though we know that we will never be absolutely blameless or sinless in this life, the very desire within us to move in that direction causes us to know we are on the right path. God's spirit witnesses with our spirit to remind us that we are his children, and we can actually operate with a clean conscience. That verse could come in to play as well.

Getting close and getting to know God causes us to begin to sense that his commands are not burdensome, they are for our good. See [Matthew 11:28-30](#). Staring at to do lists creates more anxiety. Staring at God's commands has the opposite effect. The Holy Spirit working in and through his commands, they actually contain within themselves the power to move us along; to provoke us to want what God wants and to empower us to do what God wants. God's word works on our hearts to cause us to want what is good for us.

Staring at a list of foods that are good for me doesn't automatically make me want them. The idea, the pictures, none of that makes me want them unless they are sautéed in butter or something. But God's word, looking at it, having my eyes fixed on all God's commandments; because ultimately staring at God's word is a way of looking unto Jesus. I wonder if you've thought much about that and thought what that means? The gospels themselves provide plenty of material for thinking about Jesus, because our minds are always going to dwell on something. Your mind is working on something. Your mind is turning over something. This text tells us that we are to fix our eyes on all God's commands. And there is very, very real

sense, that fixing our eyes on any of God's commands, on any of God's word, is a way for us to fix our eyes on Jesus as [Hebrews 12:1-2](#) encourages.

Hebrews 12:1–2 (ESV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

How can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to generate a longing in us to know God, know God's word, and to please him?

Early in our time in Virginia, Kat and I rented a home for one year, that was about 100 years old. I loved the idea of the house, but the reality was less than desirable. It wasn't one of these houses that had been upgraded with all the latest features of heat and air conditioning and so it both looked old and it felt old. But that wasn't the biggest problem. The biggest problem was that the landlord was mean. She seemed pleasant enough in the beginning but as the year went on I realized that she appeared to have her lawyer on speed dial, and she often threatened to take people to court for this or that way they had slighted her. Once or twice, she threatened to sue me for some reason I don't know. At one point in time there was a leak underneath the house. I don't remember how she found out about it, but she did, and she called me, and I don't remember where I was or what I was doing but it was impossible for me to rush home right at that moment and take care of the problem. She was aghast that I didn't leave right at that moment but I simply couldn't and that was one of those times that she threatened us. She threatened to sue us for damaging the house. I got out of the house as quickly as I could!

We wanted to get away from that landlady as soon as possible, because we believed she wanted to harm us. We know God intends our good because Jesus suffered for us and even prayed a version of that final prayer from the cross. The Psalmist prayed, do not utterly forsake me, thrusting himself on God's mercy. But Jesus cried from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" Jesus was forsaken so we could be accepted and included in God's family. We can trust him.