

Building an Appetite for God's Word

Psalm 119:1-8

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*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

Well, last time that I had the opportunity to teach you on Sunday evening, we completed our study of the church. And as I mentioned to you, I'm gonna be away next Sunday night. The following Sunday night is our children's concert which I'm looking forward to. So we didn't have a chance to get back until two weeks from, actually three weeks from tonight. And so I didn't want to start in eschatology, the doctrine of last things, with, you know, this intervening time before I'm back. So I decided to wait on that and really this was on my heart to do anyway because it ties in nicely with what we studied last Sunday and that is the value of Scripture.

We all understand the value of Scripture. I mean, if you're in Christ, you understand that to be filled with the Spirit as Paul puts it in Ephesians is to be permeated by, dominated, controlled by the Word of God according to Colossians 3:16, the parallel passage. To be filled with the Spirit then is nothing else than to be dominated by and controlled by and permeated by the Word of God. And so nothing is more important to us in our growth as believers than that. It is, as we learned last Sunday morning, the means, one of the means of God's grace. If you want to grow as a Christian, then you must use the means that God has given us through which He mediates that growing, sanctifying grace to us. One of the primary means He uses is the Word of God. And so it's important that we learn to develop, to build, an appetite for the Word of God. In one sense, it's already there. Peter says "as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word." If you're in Christ, there is naturally within the spiritual life God has given you a desire for and an appetite for the Word of God. For many of you, that's why you're here tonight. But nevertheless, we can encourage that appetite and we can see it develop and grow. And that's what I want us to look at together tonight and I want us to turn to Psalm 119.

Now, first of all, you can be encouraged. As you see on the screen, we're only covering eight verses so you're not here for the duration. Psalm 119 is a really a fascinating psalm. George Wishart was the bishop of Edinburgh in the seventeenth century. He was condemned to death because of crimes of treason with his famous patron the Marquis of Montrose. And on the day that he was to be executed, Wishart was led to the scaffold and the executioner prepared to take his life. But before the sentence was carried out as was the custom at the time, he was allowed to

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choose a psalm to be sung. What would you have chosen before your execution? Perhaps Psalm 23, that wonderful psalm that we all have learned from the earliest ages, such a psalm of comfort and help. Or perhaps Psalm 103 that rehearses the character of God in His forgiving grace. Or perhaps Psalm 16 that talks about the glories of heaven and what we can anticipate at the right hand of God. What psalm would you have chosen if you had one psalm before your death? He chose Psalm 119.

Before the psalm was completed, a pardon arrived and George Wishart's life was spared. I'm not making this up. This is a true story. The truth is George Wishart, at least the one of Edinburgh in the seventeenth century, was not a deeply spiritual man. He had no real interest in Psalm 119, but he expected a pardon so he requested that psalm to buy the messenger some time to get there with the pardon. Sadly, many Christians' appreciation for this psalm goes only as deep as George's does. They know it's the longest one.

There have been a lot of critics to Psalm 119. Here are a few of the things they've said. One said, "It is a particularly artificial product of religious poetry." Another has said, "It is a many-colored mosaic of thoughts which are often repeated in wearisome fashion." Another said, "It is monotonous repetition." But that's like saying that all the green things God created bring only monotonous repetition. Instead, there are incredible and magnificent variations in the plant world. In fact, Claude Monet in his famous paintings, the impressionistic painter in some of his best loved paintings are primarily subtle variations of the same color.

The same is true for this magnificent psalm. The many slight changes in color provide a rich portrait of the beauty and the power of God's Word because Psalm 119 at its heart extols the Word of God. At least 171 of its 176 verses refer to the Word of God. Franz Delitzsch says, "We have here set forth in inexhaustible fullness what the Word of God is to a man and how a man is to behave himself in relation to it." This psalm, properly understood and properly used, will create in you an appetite for the Word of God. I can tell you that both because, as you'll see, that is laid out for us and even in the first stanza, but also I can tell you that from personal experience. When I was in college as a new Christian, it was this psalm that set me on a road of desire to know and understand the Scripture and to grow in my, not only my grasp of its truth but my obedience to its truth as well. And so, I really can't recommend it to you too highly.

Now as far as the background of the psalm, we don't know when it was written. We don't know what the circumstances were. We don't know who wrote it. The best suggestions are either David or perhaps Ezra, that wonderful scribe who had so much to do in postexilic Israel. But we just don't know.

Now in terms of the structure, you're familiar with this so I won't take long here, but let me just tell you about the structure. It is of course an acrostic poem. There are twenty-two stanzas corresponding to the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza consists of eight two-line couplets. And in Hebrew, in each of those stanzas, the first word of each of those eight verses begins with the same Hebrew letter. So for example if it were in English, every line of the first eight verses would begin with the English letter 'A'. That's how it works in Hebrew. And each successive stanza features the next Hebrew letter in alphabetic order.

Now why is that? Well primarily, it was designed almost certainly to improve (yes, I said this) memorization. There have been those even in modern times who have, or relatively modern times who have memorized it. Perhaps some of you did. David Livingstone received a Bible as a prize for reciting Psalm 119 from memory at the age of nine years old.

Now when you look at Psalm 119 and these stanzas, a different topic tends to dominate each stanza. But the topic, I should say that topic that is focused on in that stanza is usually intermingled with other topics that constantly recur. Sometimes it's easy to identify the stanza's theme as it is in the first stanza. We'll see that in a moment. Other times, it's extremely difficult.

Another thing you need to understand about this psalm before we look at it is there are a number of synonyms for Scripture. To fully appreciate this psalm, you have to appreciate these synonyms. He employs eight synonyms for Scripture, and they are truly synonyms. Don't try to find some specific meaning every time they occur. Rather, we are to understand them and taken together, each of them contributes to our total understanding of the value of Scripture.

The first word that he uses is 'law'. It's used twenty-five times. It's the primary term in twenty-one of the twenty-two stanzas. It simply means God's instruction or teaching, the Torah. You've heard that term before. The 'testimonies,' twenty-three times in the psalm. It means 'witness'. It describes Scripture as God's own testimony of Himself and of His character and of His ways.

‘Precepts’ occurs twenty-one times and it speaks of official orders from a ruler. The word ‘statutes’, twenty-one times, comes from a root word which means ‘to engrave.’ It typically speaks of the permanent, binding nature of God’s law. They are statutes that cannot be changed. They are engraved as it were in stone. ‘Commandments’ occurs twenty-two times. It emphasizes that there is authority in the Word of God. God has a right to give orders, and these are in fact orders. ‘Ordinances’ occurs twenty-three times. It speaks of judgments, the decisions of an all-wise judge about common human situations. The judge sets the standard for what is fair interaction between men. And then there’s the simple Hebrew word corresponding to our English word, ‘word’. It’s a general term for divine revelation. There’s a second Hebrew word that’s translated ‘word’ and it simply means anything God has spoken, commanded or promised. Now take those together, and that’s a description of the Scripture. It is God’s instruction or His teaching. It’s His testimony of Himself. It’s official orders. It’s permanent and binding. It’s authoritative. It’s God’s decisions about how we ought to think and live in the world. It is divine revelation. It is the speech and commands and promises of God. That is the Scripture.

Now let’s take a look for a moment at the theme of the entire psalm before we look at the first eight verses. The theme of the entire psalm is relatively obvious, but let me make a couple of special points. First of all, it is extremely personal. The psalmist mentions himself in these verses over three hundred times. It is also saturated with God Himself. There is not a single verse without reference to God. It is a prayer. Except for the first three verses of the psalm, the entire psalm is a prayer to God. But as you know and suspect, the focus of the psalm is obviously on the Word of God. So when you put all of those things together – the fact that it’s very personal, that God is at the core of this psalm, that it’s a prayer and that the Word of God is included – you come out with this theme for the psalm. The theme of Psalm 119 is the believer’s pursuit of a life dominated and controlled by the Word of God. It is your pursuit and my pursuit of a life that is dominated and controlled by the Word of God.

Now with that understanding, let’s look at the first stanza, at the first Hebrew letter ‘aleph’. This stanza introduces the psalm. It explains where we begin the journey to a life that is dominated and controlled by the Word of God. It’s the starting point to develop an overpowering appetite and hunger for it. This first stanza reaches its crescendo in verse 5: “Oh that my ways (were) established to keep Your statutes!” Do you want to develop that kind of hunger for a life

dominated by God's Word? Then this first stanza lays out for us four steps that will not only create that hunger in you if it doesn't exist as it ought to, but if it's already there, it will strengthen your appetite for a life that is dominated by the Word of God.

How do we get there? Well, very clearly in this first stanza, there are four steps that create that hunger. Let's look at them together. The first one in verses 1 to 3 is recognize its benefits. Notice the psalm begins: "How blessed." Now there are two Hebrew words for 'bless'. One is used of God blessing man or man blessing or returning praise to God. That's not the word used here. The word in verse 1 is never used of God blessing someone. Instead, it's like a congratulation. It's like an observation by a third party looking on to someone and their relationship to God. It's as if I were standing over your shoulder as it were looking at your relationship to God and I made the comment as a result of what I see, 'How blessed.' It could even be translated this way: 'oh to be envied', 'how enviable', 'how rewarding'.

If you want to develop an appetite for a life dominated by God's Word, you've gotta think about and consider the benefits that make it attractive, that make such a life attractive. That's what the psalmist does. That's where he begins. He begins, notice that in the first three verses all of the references are outside of himself to 'they,' 'those' and 'they'. He's observing a group of people and he is envying what he sees in them. This is where the pursuit of a life dominated by Scripture begins. It begins by making this very simple observation. There are people whose lives really are saturated with Scripture, and not just saturated with knowledge, but who live what Scripture teaches. And oh, the benefits that are there. How blessed, how enviable are those people.

Now what makes the lives of these people so enviable? Well, he outlines here for us in these three verses, three benefits. First of all, he says take a look at their integrity. He says, "How blessed are those whose way (the word 'way' simply refers to a well-worn path. It's speaking of, and I've made this point to you before. It's speaking of the habits or way of life of someone. How blessed are those whose habits of life, whose well-worn path, whose lifestyle) is blameless." Now this word 'blameless' is used frequently in the Old Testament to refer to the sacrificial animal that was to be without blemish, without spot, without defect. 'Irreproachable' is what it means: whole, complete. Or we could say 'having integrity.' Abraham is described this

way in Genesis 17. Job is described this way. But more importantly, this is how God is according to Psalm 18:30, and it's how His Word is according to Psalm 19:7.

The word in the Septuagint is the same word as is used in Ephesians 1:4. In fact, turn there with me. Keep your finger here in Psalm 119, but look at Ephesians for a moment. I want you to see how this word is used. Ephesians 1:4. We're gonna get here in a few months: "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." This is the very goal that God had for us when He saved us in Christ.

Turn over to chapter 5 of Ephesians, verse 27. You see this same point. This is the same Greek word that's used in the Septuagint to translate this passage in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Ephesians chapter 5, verse 27. Christ did all of this: "(He) loved the church... gave Himself up for her... that He might sanctify her...that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." This was the very goal God had for us when He saved us in Christ. And the Word of God will get us there.

Now how did these people become people of such integrity? Notice: "How blessed are those whose way is blameless (because they) walk in the law of the Lord." The verb that's translated 'walk' here refers to a pattern of life. They are walking in the law of the Lord. Every facet of their lives is governed by the Torah, the revealed will of God. They have integrity. They are what they seem to be. They are what they claim to be. They are in secret what they appear to be publicly. They're people of integrity. They're whole, blameless. Recognize the benefit of the Word of God. It will produce in you that kind of integrity.

There's another benefit that he identifies, not only integrity but, in verse 2, devotion. "How blessed are those (same word, how enviable are those) who observe His testimonies (that is, who watch or take care to obey)." But why do they obey? Notice their true mission in the rest of the verse: "How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart." They seek Him. What does that mean? Well, it means seeking to know His character. In Psalm 63, verses 1 and 2: "O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly." And what does he find when he finds God? Verse 2: "I have seen You in the sanctuary, (I have seen) Your power and

Your glory.” I’ve seen You, God. I’ve seen Your character. These people are seeking to know God and His character.

They’re devoted to know God’s will. Back in Psalm 119, verse 10: “With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments.” In other words, I am seeking You through Your commandments. I’m seeking to know what You have commanded me. And in so doing, I’m learning about You.

And it also means to enjoy, to seek God is to enjoy His person and His favor. Look over at verse 57: “The Lord is my portion; I have promised to keep Your words. I (have) sought Your favor with all my heart; be gracious to me according to Your word.” To seek God is to seek, to know His character, to know His will, and to enjoy Him. Sound familiar in any way? What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

You see, the Word of God will not only produce integrity in our lives. It will make us to become what we claim to be. It’ll make us whole. It will also give us a heart devoted to God. See, throughout Psalm 119, Scripture is revered for being His words. And so believers seek Him, not the book for its own sake. Our study of Scripture is not to accumulate information or satisfy our curiosity. Knowledge is never an end in itself. The purpose of knowing the Word of God is to know the God of the word.

Notice he ends the verse back in verse 2: “How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart.” This refers to an undivided passion, a complete commitment. You want to pursue God like that? You want to seek God like that? You really want to be devoted to God like that? How does it happen? It’s one of the benefits of the Word of God.

If you’re going to start on the path to a life dominated and controlled by the Word of God, you’ve gotta understand what it promises, what its benefits are. It’ll build integrity into your life. It’ll build devotion into your life. But not only will it build those. Thirdly, it’ll build obedience. This is another benefit: obedience. Verse 3: “They also (he’s still talking about those people out there whom he’s observing who are envied, who are enviable. They also) do no unrighteousness.” The word ‘unrighteousness’ refers to sins against other people. As one commentator says, “These are sins of social malpractice.” You see, apart from, and listen

carefully to this. Apart from a life dominated and controlled by the Word of God, none of our relationships will be right. Let me say that again. Apart from a life controlled and dominated by the Word of God, none of your relationships will be right. Can't happen. It's not gonna happen. But those who are ordered by the Scripture, whose lives are controlled and dominated by the Scripture, do have those relationships.

In fact, if we had time, I'd take you to Colossians chapter 3. I told you verse 16 says, "Let the word of Christ (dwell in you richly)." That is, be dominated and controlled by the Word of God. And what happens? What flows out of that? Verse 17 says you're gonna have these right relationships. And it goes through all the relationships we have in life and says those are all gonna be radically transformed if the word of Christ dwells richly within you.

He adds, notice the end of verse 3: "they also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways." 'His ways' is just a synonym for Scripture with a faint nuance of uniqueness. It means 'God's paths.' This is really an interesting thing to me. After, some of you are familiar of course with the murder of Nate Saint. And those of you who are familiar with that story will know that when his family members went back to the tribe to minister to those Auca Indians, they had the daunting task of creating a written language for the tribe first. There was no written language that the tribe had. So they had to somehow take the verbal language that they communicated in, translate it into a written form that could be understood, and then they translated the Scripture into that written language they had just created.

When it came time for them to translate the expression or the phrase 'Scripture' or 'the Word of God', they thought long and hard about what to use because there was nothing, there had not been any writing even prior to their creating this language. And so they decided to use an expression that was very common in that tribe, and it was the expression 'God's markings'. You see, wherever they went, that image, it was a powerful one to them because when they travelled through the jungle, they would mark their way with their own kind of sign, whatever their particular sign was, to show them that they had travelled that way and to show them their way back home. And so they used the expression 'God's markings' because they wanted to drive this point across. If we follow God's markings, i.e. His Word, we will stay on God's paths and we will end up at God's home.

That is really the image behind ‘God’s ways’. It refers to Scripture as God’s self-revelation. If we follow God’s instructions, then we’ll begin to walk on His path, to follow His well-worn ways, that is, God’s habits of acting, God’s patterns of behavior. In other words in New Testament language, we’ll learn to live and act like Christ.

Now let me ask you a question. Do you really believe that the Bible will produce those benefits in your life? That it will produce in you a life of integrity, a life of devotion to God and a life of obedience that’s even characterized by relational joy and right relationships? And you need to think about those benefits like the psalmist did because this is where the road to a Scripture-saturated life begins, is to realize you’re missing out. Oh, to be envied are those who are characterized by these things. And how did they get there? They got there through the Word of God. If you want to move toward a life permeated by the Word of God, you’ve got to recognize these benefits.

There’s a second step we have to take. It’s found in verse 4 and that’s we must embrace God’s authority. You see, so far it’s all selfish. It’s what I can get out of this. But now the psalmist comes to realize there’s something more involved. Notice in verses 1 to 3, he refers to ‘they’ or ‘those who’. Now the psalmist turns to directly address God Himself. And the word ‘You’ in verse 4 is emphatic: “You (‘and You alone,’ would be a good way to translate it) have ordained Your precepts.” You have ordained Your precepts. The word ‘ordained’ literally means to command or order. ‘Precepts’ is really just a noun that’s a synonym. So he’s saying, ‘You have commanded or ordered Your orders that we should keep or obey them diligently.’

You see, what the psalmist realizes, he suddenly comes to the realization not only are there wonderful things to desire in the Word of God, wonderful benefits for him, but he comes to realize that God expects to be taken seriously, that He expects to be obeyed. You have commanded Your commandments. You know, it’s like the human parent who says, ‘Do you think I said that just to hear myself talk?’ You know, there are parents who train themselves, we as parents do train our children when to obey us. In my home when I was growing up, I was the last of ten children. My dad, in my entire life, never told me to do something more than one time and I never failed to do it. I can never remember a time when my dad told me to do something that I didn’t do it because I knew that I wasn’t gonna get a second chance. There are parents,

however, who train their children that they really don't have to respond until about the third or fourth time. You know, like the, I love the title of the book that says 'Don't Make Me Count to Three'. What have you trained your child to do? Wait till three. He can make it through two, but he'd better give in before you get to three.

God's not like that. He commands once and He expects to be obeyed. You have commanded, You have commanded Your commandments "that we should keep (or obey) them diligently." The word 'diligently' literally means very much or exceedingly. It means that we are to keep them not formally or superficially, but really and thoroughly. Albert Barnes in his commentary puts it this way: "All this is here traced to the command of God, to the fact that He has required it (listen carefully to this; this is so important and so out of step with our times). It is not mere human prudence. It is not mere morality. It is not because it will be for our own good. It is because God requires it. This is the foundation of all true virtue. And until a man acts from this motive, it cannot be said that he is in the proper sense a righteous man." In other words, if you only do what's right because of what you're gonna get out of it, you're not a righteous person. But when you come to realize that God is God and that He has set commandments and authority that we have to obey, then when we obey that, we're demonstrating a righteous heart.

For the first decade or so that I lived in California, jury duty was a joke. If you got a jury summons, you could get out of it with a song and a dance. I mean, basically you could write any reason, any excuse on the form and you could get out of your jury duty. And so what happened over time was there were really only two groups of people sitting juries in California. One of them was postal workers and the other was, the other was a large automotive company. That was it.

And so as a result of that, the legislature passed a law, that for all practical purposes, only allowed those people who were dying within the next twenty-four hours to be excluded from jury duty. And the new law came with a stiff penalty. I think it was a \$1,500 fine for the first infraction because of contempt of court and even possible jail time. Suddenly, those jury summons became much more serious. Everybody became more serious about jury duty. They had embraced the authority that lay behind the summons.

And if you and I are going to develop a life saturated by the Word of God, we have to come to the point where we embrace the reality that God has authority, He has a right to command us, He has commanded us, and we have a responsibility to take that seriously. Do you really take the Bible seriously in what it commands you to do? This is the second step to a life dominated and controlled by the Word of God.

The third step is to seek God's grace. Not only must we recognize its benefits, not only must we embrace God's authority, but we must also seek God's grace. The verse says: "Oh that my ways (verse 5, oh that my ways) may be established to keep Your statutes!" Now the psalmist understands God's authority now. He understands the benefits and he responds to that. And in his response, you can see his heart. Specifically, in this prayer which is what it is, he identifies, he admits to his need of God's grace and he does so in three ways.

He, first of all, points out his own sense of personal failure. "Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!" You see, in that entire phrase, he is acknowledging (what?) that it's not currently true. All his ways aren't established to keep God's statutes. He is expressing with himself a holy dissatisfaction. 'I don't like where I am, God. I have failed to be this enviable person. I have failed to acknowledge Your authority and I have failed to keep Your word.' He knows his temptations. He's confessed them to God. But as James Montgomery Boice says, "He is very much like ourselves. He has not yet gotten to be like the happy, blessed ones he is describing. He wants to be, but he's not yet." You have to admire his honesty.

But he not only admits to a sense of personal failure. In this verse, verse 5, he also admits to a desire for personal holiness. You see those first two words 'Oh that'? That is a Hebrew, translating I should say a Hebrew interjection. It occurs only here and in 2 Kings 5:3 where it is translated 'I wish'. It speaks of an intense desire - and in this case, an intense desire for personal holiness. "Oh that (I wish that) my ways (were) established to keep Your statutes!"

Do you have that kind of desire? Is that true of you? Do you have a sense of personal failure and do you have a desire for personal holiness? Spurgeon said that this desire for personal holiness is "the truest sign of a believer." You see, even an unbeliever can desire to be done with certain sins because they're embarrassing, because they're enslaving, but he doesn't want to give up his autonomy. He doesn't want to give up his self-rule. The surest sign of a believer is one who not

only wants to be done with a few troublesome sins, but who wants to be like Jesus Christ, who wants to be holy.

But desire isn't enough. Notice the psalmist not only has a sense of personal failure and a desire for personal holiness, but he turns that desire into a prayer, a prayer for personal obedience. "Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!" We've already identified 'my ways,' that's my normal patterns of behavior. 'Oh, that my lifestyle, that my normal ways of acting.' And then he says "may be established." That's a very interesting expression. It's what theologians call a divine passive. The word 'established' means arranged or directed.

Basically, this is what he's saying: 'Oh that You, God, would direct my obedience to Your statutes.' He's confessing his own utter inability to obey God. It sounds like Paul in Romans 7, doesn't he? This is a prayer for God's intervention. You see, understanding the magnitude of what God expects from him, the psalmist rushes into God's presence and begs for enabling grace. He needs grace to understand the Word of God. Look at verse 18: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law." But he also needs grace to obey the Word of God. Look at verse 10: "With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments." Don't let me stray. Keep me on the path of obedience. Both understanding the Word of God and obeying the Word of God are impossible apart from God's enabling grace.

Augustine in *The Confessions* put it this way. He said, "Give me the grace, O Lord, to do as You command." Let me say that again. Listen carefully. "Give me the grace, O Lord, to do as You command and then command me to do what You will." O holy God, when Your commands are obeyed, it is from You that we receive the power to obey them. That's what the psalmist is saying. That should be our prayer.

Now before you cancel out your own responsibility though, understand that our inability and our dependence on God and His grace does not cancel out our responsibility. In fact, he notes that here in Psalm 119, verse 7: "when I learn." How do you learn something? You study it. You're diligent about applying yourself to it. Verse 11: "(I have treasured Your word) in my heart." Verse 15: "I will meditate..." Verse 16: "I will delight (I will not forget)..." So the fact that he's acknowledging his dependence on God doesn't cancel out his responsibility. It's just like we've talked about so often with sanctification. We must expend the maximum effort, but what we can

never do is change ourselves. So we expend the maximum effort to obey and as we expend the maximum effort to obey, God does what we cannot do. He changes us. And that's what the psalmist is acknowledging here.

So if you want a life that's dominated and controlled by the Word of God, you must first develop a hunger for it. How do you do that? Recognize its benefits, embrace God's authority, seek God's grace and, number four, anticipate God's response. In verses 6 through 8, notice he changes to 'then': "then I shall not be ashamed..." "If God will establish My ways," he says, "there will be some wonderful results." And like the psalmist, we should live in anticipation of benefitting from these results. What are the results that he's anticipating from God? First of all, a decreasing pattern of sin. Verse 6: "Then (I will not or) I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all Your commandments." 'When I look upon all' pictures a careful, sustained examination of God's entire revelation. And he says when I look at everything you said, God, I will not be ashamed. I will not be disgraced. I will not in a public way be exposed to disgrace.

George Zemek in his excellent commentary on Psalm 119 writes: "The psalmist dreaded the worst kind of disgrace – an internal and painful exposure of his own nonconformity to the Scripture in the presence of an omniscient God." But here, we learn that if God grants us the capacity to obey, then like the psalmist, we will have no shame when we look into the mirror of God's Word. Because when we look in the mirror of God's Word, what we'll see is a decreasing pattern of sin.

Secondly, we'll see a heart of worship. This is another result we can anticipate from God: a heart of worship. Verse 7: "I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments." 'When I learn,' literally 'as I go on learning'. It describes a continual process. And as God continually teaches us, our growth is to be accompanied by continual praise. 'I will give thanks' is literally 'I will keep on thanking You.' As I keep on learning, I will keep on giving thanks.

In the Psalms, this word 'give thanks' is a key word for praise. It's the public proclamation of God's attributes and His works. It is a confession or a declaration of who God is and what He does. Because of what You're doing in me, God, because I am learning Your Word – therefore I will keep on publicly declaring who you are and what You've done. And I'll do it, notice the

verse, with “an upright heart.” It’s probably synonymous with the Old Testament expression ‘a whole heart’. You see, as we learn from God through His Word, we will constantly praise Him with an undivided heart. We will have a heart of worship.

There’s a third response from God we can anticipate. Not only will there be in our lives a decreasing pattern of sin, a heart of worship, but a spirit of dependence. Verse 8: “I shall keep Your statutes; do not forsake me utterly!” Literally it says ‘I will consistently obey Your statutes.’ You see, when God grants us the power to obey and we do obey, our desire to obey and our commitment to obey grows as, they grow as well. But at the same time that he commits himself to live in obedience, notice how he balances it immediately with the second half of the verse: “do not forsake me.” He says, ‘God, I’ve committed to do this, but don’t You forsake me.’

This word ‘forsake’ is the same Hebrew word that’s used in Psalm 22:1, you know, that cry that Jesus uttered on the cross? It could be translated: ‘Do not completely abandon me.’ The psalmist became convinced that without God’s enabling presence, there was no hope for him to live obediently. He could make the resolve to, till he was blue in the face, but if God didn’t enable him, he was hopeless. He developed a spirit of dependence. The same is true for us. When God enables us to walk in His ways, it always produces this sense of absolute dependence. The more you grow in Christ, the more you realize you can’t do it. You realize the truth of what Christ said: “(without Me or) apart from Me (what?) you can do nothing.” This comes with a life dominated and controlled by the Word of God.

Let me ask you. Do you want to develop a consuming desire for a life that is dominated by the Word of God? Then commit yourself to these fundamental first steps laid out in this great psalm that tells us about the power and beauty of the Word of God. You need to start by recognizing its benefits. It produces integrity and devotion to God and obedience. You need to embrace God’s authority. He has a right to tell us what to do. He has a right to tell you what to do and you are responsible to do it. We have to seek God’s grace because we have already a sense of personal failure and we have a desire for personal holiness and we need to turn that into a prayer for personal obedience. “Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!” And then we have to expect and anticipate God to respond as He’s promised, with a decreasing pattern of sin in our lives, a heart of worship and a spirit of dependence.

Now let me answer this basic question for you. What can you do this week to begin to cultivate that kind of hunger for the Word of God? Let me just give you a few practical suggestions.

Number one, and this is key: if you don't already have some appetite for the Word of God, then you better make sure that you really have a new heart, a new heart that desires the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2) and that can understand God's truth. 1 Corinthians 2:14 tells us that the natural man can't. So you need to start by making sure that you really belong to God. If you don't have an appetite for God's Word, it may very well be that you don't.

Secondly, make time, and this is foundational. I can't stress this enough. Make time this week, five days, to slowly, meditatively express the words of this psalm to God in prayer. I can tell you again on a personal note I did this in college for a couple of weeks just going through this psalm, the entire psalm, every day in prayer pouring out my heart to God and the process was life-transforming. It began to create in me an understanding of and a desire for the Word of God. You see, if you'll really take time to think about the words of this psalm rather than just reading it in a rote sort of way that doesn't pay any attention to its meaning – if you do it that way, then of course you won't appreciate its richness. But if you will take the time to prayerfully, carefully, slowly, meditatively express these words back to God, I can promise you it will change your thoughts and your attitudes about the Scripture.

Number three: read, reread, study, meditate on those passages like this one that exalt the sufficiency of God's Word. There are a number of them obviously: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1, Psalm 19, Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Hebrews 4:12-13. All of those passages remind us of the sufficiency of God's Word. Read and reread them. Study and meditate on them.

Number four: pray for illumination. Here in Psalm 119, verse 18, the psalmist prays: "Open my eyes (God), that I may behold wonderful things from Your law." The same thing in Ephesians 1:18, Paul prays that "the eyes of their heart may be enlightened." You and I will only come to understand the truth as the Holy Spirit of God opens our understanding to it. Pray for God to use His truth to sanctify you. This is not an intellectual exercise. Jesus in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17:17 said, "Sanctify them (by means of) the truth; Your word is truth." If you are not made progressively more holy by your study of, your reading of, your meditating on the Scripture, then

something is either wrong with you or it's wrong with how you're approaching the Scripture because that's how God intends to use His truth.

Live in anticipation that God will honor your request and He'll honor His Word. Just as the psalmist who wrote Psalm 119 started out on the outside looking in to a life dominated and controlled by the Word of God but ended up inside appreciating the richness of the Scripture, so can you and so can I. I hope the only appreciation you have for Psalm 119 isn't that it's the longest one, but that in this psalm is the truth and the power to begin the journey of a Scripture-dominated and controlled life which is nothing other than a Spirit-controlled and filled life. Let's pray together.

Father, what an incredible treasure You have given us in Your Word. It's impossible for us to adequately thank You, even for these eight verses, for the richness that's there. Lord, if this was all we had, it would fill and energize our hearts and lift us up into Your presence. We thank You that this is merely a drop in the ocean of Your truth and I pray that You would enable each of us to jump in. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.