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TREASURING THE WORD

Psalms 119 is the longest book in the Bible, far too long for us to study the whole thing in one session. You will find great blessing if you take time to read and study it prayerfully. **For this Bible study, we will concentrate on three stanzas which talk about loving God's Word.**

NOTE: Torah is the Hebrew word for Law, but it encompasses the whole first five books of the Bible, also known as "the law of Moses." It is not, of course, Moses' law; he was only the recorder of what God gave him. We tend to think of the Ten Commandments as the Law, but in this context, "Law" and "Word" are interchangeable. All God's Words are powerful and creative, and can make us like Him when we immerse ourselves day by day in His Word.

FIRST: PRAYER

Always begin with prayer. Ask God to bless your study and discussion, and to help you to learn to love and treasure the Word of God.

PREPARATION

There are about a dozen psalms which are acrostics, each verse beginning with one letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 119 is one of these, except in this case its 176 verses are divided into 22 stanzas and each stanza begins with the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

This psalm contains other special literary factors in its composition. Possibly this is why, though no author is given, most scholars think it must have been David, the poet and singer. Almost every single verse contains some synonym for God's Law, the Torah, such as "word, promise," or "rulings." God's name is mentioned 24 times, and the psalm incorporates dozens of prayers. Often within each stanza, the first and fifth verses will state the same theme, followed by a statement that seems to conflict or oppose. Then the final verse, the eighth, is usually a transition introducing the next stanza.

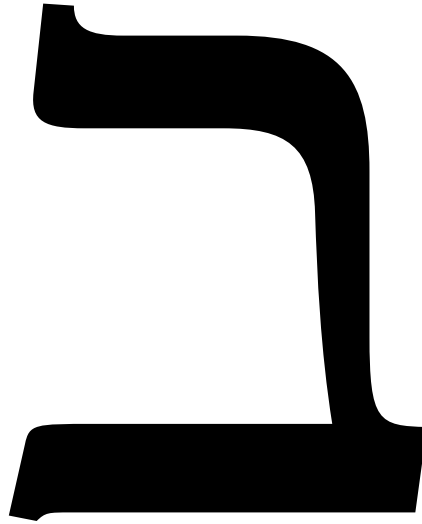
An important thing to understand about Hebrew is that, unlike alphabets such as English which are only symbols for sounds, each Hebrew letter has a meaning of its own. For our study, we will look at three stanzas which particularly emphasize love for God's Word. These three begin with the second letter, beth, the sixth letter, vav, and the thirteenth letter, mem. According to Rabbi Marcia Prager, in the book *The Path of Blessing*, from Jewish Lights Publishing, here are the meanings of these three letters:

1. **Beth or beyt—house;** “The letter beyt offers us the opportunity to experience all of Creation—from the cosmic to the subatomic—as a house of God, a dwelling place of divinity” (ibid., p. 34).
2. **Vav (in ancient Hebrew, waw)—**a hook or connection; in speaking of its use in the name of God (YHWH or Yahweh), Rabbi Prager says it connects “is, was, and will be” into one Eternal Being. (Drawn from pp. 84-91.)
3. **Mem—water;** “The letter mem evokes all that is fluid, creative, and fertile” (ibid. p. 122).

Bear these meanings in mind and see whether they add to the depth of the insights you will gain as you study these stanzas.

As you study, hold one overarching question in mind: is this psalm about loving God's Word, or is it about loving God? Or both?

Be prepared to discuss at the end.



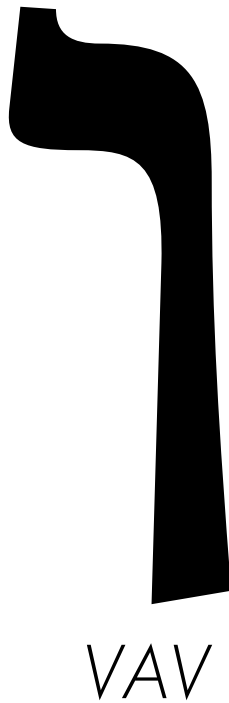
BEIT
(B/V)

READING ONE: **BEIT (B/V), PSALM 119:9-16**

Have different people read each verse in the stanza.

Discussion Questions:

1. In the first verse, remember that of course “young man” also means “young woman.”
2. Find the synonyms for God’s Law in this stanza and begin a list.
3. What is David’s first question in this stanza? What kinds of questions does this bring up in the group?
4. What does verse 10 teach us about personal choice and God’s work, working together?
5. What does it mean to “treasure” God’s Word? What do you do with things you treasure?
6. What would make a person rejoice in ordinances (rules) or testimonies?
7. List as many different kinds of actions (such as “meditate” or “tell”) as you can find in this stanza. What are some ways you can and do practice these actions?

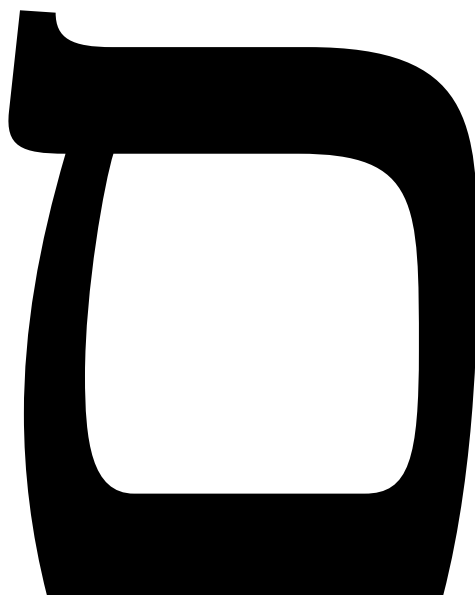


READING TWO: VAV, PSALM 119:41-48

Have different people read each verse in the stanza.

Discussion Questions:

1. Find the synonyms for God's Law and continue your list.
2. What is David praying for, and what reason does he give for asking this favor?
3. Are there troubles implied in this psalm? If so, what are they? Do you face troubles like these?
4. How can a person keep the Law and also "walk at liberty"?
5. What are some ways you "delight in" God's commandments?
6. In the Native American communities of the Pacific Northwest of the United States and Pacific Southwest of Canada, to say "thank you" one raises one's hands. What do you think the psalmist meant when he said he raises his hands to God's commandments? Does raising hands have a meaning in your culture?



MEM

READING THREE: MEM, PSALM 119:97-104

Have different people read each verse in the stanza.

Discussion Questions

1. Find the synonyms for God's Law. How long is your list now?
2. What does it mean to "meditate all day," since obviously everyone has many other things to do over the course of the day? How can you help each other in this practice? What difference do you think it would make in your life?
3. How can God's Law make a person wiser than teachers or elders?
4. What image does David use for the sweetness of God's Law? Why is it so sweet to him?
5. What things does this stanza speak against?

CONCLUSION

Remember our overarching question about loving God or loving His Law?

1. What do you think now? To whom is every single stanza addressed?
2. Can you imagine reading this as if it is only about a set of laws, with no reference to a loving Lawgiver?
3. What would happen—what does happen when people try this?

As you can see, there is a great depth and breadth to the passages in this Psalm. It will help bless you if you study the whole thing. Perhaps prayer partners or small groups could take on the challenge.

1. Make a list of principles you have found in this study that will help you to love and treasure God and His law.
2. Make a pact with one other person to practice this love and all-day meditation in your daily lives.
3. Keep in contact and encourage each other.

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION

Here are two things to try.

1. Individually or as a group, try rewording the themes of your favorite stanza, beginning with the equivalent letter of your own alphabet. For a bigger challenge, try to begin each verse of the stanza with that letter!
2. Go back over all the imagery the psalmist used for the Law of God. Choose your favorite(s) and create something that represents that to you. Take your creation home and keep it where it will remind you to treasure God's Word.

CLOSING PRAYER

Praise God for creating us and all that is with His Word. Praise Him for sending us, through many prophets, over many centuries, the Laws we can live by to be fully loving children of God. Praise Him even more for sending His Son Jesus to live out that Law of Love and show us once and for all that it is not an arbitrary set of rules and limitations! Be specific in asking Him to bless each person as they learn to treasure His words.

SEVEN DAYS OF SOUL FOOD

SEVEN DAYS' WORTH OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind (Luke 10:27). To put it another way, body + heart + mind = one living soul.

We can't really divide ourselves into different sections, but it's useful to look at these different aspects of ourselves and be sure we have a well-balanced faith that uses all the avenues of a soul. Each of these starter kits will include a week's worth of food for your soul in each of these four methods of understanding and expression.

Write about each of the following in your prayer journal this week. Strive to use language of emotions, thought, physical health and strength, or spirit on the given days.

DAY ONE: Read fairly quickly over the whole psalm, in order to choose three stanzas that particularly speak to you. Choose one that especially reaches your heart, one that stretches your mind and makes you think, and one that you believe will make you stronger if you apply it. Use these three stanzas for your personal study this week.

DAY TWO: *Heart:* Read prayerfully, verse by verse, through the stanza you chose for your heart and emotions. Why does it speak to you in this way? Write in your prayer journal about the feelings it evokes. Prayerfully connect with these emotional themes and consider how God wants to work in your heart this week.

DAY THREE: *Mind:* Read prayerfully, verse by verse, through the stanza you chose because it appeals to your mind, the logical, thinking part of you. Write about how it challenges and stretches your thinking. Do you perhaps have questions about the historic context or the original language of some of the words? You can look these up in concordances, commentaries, or online. How does God want to work in your mind this week?

DAY FOUR: *Strength/body:* Did you find a stanza that you believe can strengthen you? This wouldn't have to be physical strength, but if you use your imagination it could be. What if you chose a particularly rhythmic stanza to exercise or walk to? For one thing, you would soon learn it by heart. How does God want to strengthen you this week?

DAY FIVE: *Soul/spirit:* Soul or spirit, of course, is not a part of you. It's your whole self. But it's your whole self with a spiritual twist. It's your whole self choosing to be godly. Read through your three stanzas again, finding the verses that appeal to your spirit, that encourage your faith and trust and make you want to treasure God and His Word as David did. Can you find a promise or promises that will help you do this?

DAY SIX: As you think about your family, community, and church, can you tell which people treasure God and His Word? What visible difference does it make in their lives? Bear in mind that only God can see hearts, but you can usually tell when someone is trying to follow Him. How can you be a light in your community this week?

DAY SEVEN: Use day 7 to create something beautiful that reflects what you have learned.

- Write a poem or song or story.
- Create a poster.
- Write a letter.
- Paint or draw a picture.
- Make a sign.
- Do some sidewalk chalk art or writings.
- Build something.
- Create a podcast or blog post or Twitter post(s).
- Make food and give it to someone in need.

Use whatever creativity God has given *you*. We all have something.

Share the love!