

Psalm 119

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[0 : 0 0] uh it's a whenever that is announced uh people sort of have a bit of a giggle and we're going to start at verse one and we're going to finish uh at verse 160 but we won't read it all okay i just want to read the first two sections and the third section from the end which begins at page verse 153 so perhaps you can turn to psalm 119 and also to verse 153 keep your finger in that let's listen to god's word blessed are they whose ways are blameless who walk according to the law of the lord blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart they do nothing wrong they walk in his ways you have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed oh that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees then i would not be put to shame when i consider all your commands i will praise you with an upright heart as i learned your righteous laws i will obey your decrees do not utterly forsake me how can a young man keep his way pure by living according to your word i seek you with all my heart do not let me stray from your commands i have hidden your word in my heart that i might not sin against you praise be to you oh lord teach me your decrees with my lips i recount all the laws that come from your mouth i rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches i meditate on your precepts and consider your ways i delight in your decrees i will not neglect your word and moving over to verse 153 we'll just read down to verse 160 look upon my suffering and deliver me for i have not forgotten your law defend my cause and redeem me renew my life according to your promise salvation is far from the wicked for they do not seek your decrees your compassion is great oh lord renew my life according to your laws many are the foes who persecute me but i have not turned from your statutes i look on the faithless with loathing for they do not obey your word see how i love your precepts preserve my life oh lord according to your love all your words are true all your righteous laws are eternal perhaps you would turn to the bible to word that we read earlier and particularly to verse 153 and we'll be considering something of what this section is all about and what psalm 119 is all about as we go through this time together well on tuesday i am having a free national health check it says it's going to check me for potential for a potential for a stroke heart disease diabetes and kidney disease i don't know how many people have had these but i've had to fill in a little survey about how much one

intakes in terms of alcohol but it's available to people of a certain age and soyleyeen um i suppose it's all about allweits um your december uh... anything som enc Franklin said but umptal and uh...

if they find something wrong my reaction might well be i wish i hadn't bothered well i wish i hadn't bothered sometimes uh... ignorance uh... is bliss isn't it a physical uh... health check free on the national health i wonder often we have um a spiritual health check that's the question tonight one another, well how are you doing spiritually, is a bit of a fearsome thing to do, isn't it? Because there's a great danger of being very, very pious and sort of a little bit above the person you're asking the question of. But it's a very spiritual thing to do to actually give ourselves a spiritual health check. The Apostle Paul in Philippians says this, therefore my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

And the idea is a continual workout. It's going to the spiritual gym. It's a gymnastics word. And the Apostle is saying, well now I'm not with you, right? I was your trainer, now you've got to work it out yourself. And your salvation is important and what you believe is important and so you need to continually continue to do that. And Psalm 119 is really a spiritual health check. It's a spiritual audit and it's a magnificent psalm. But perhaps one maybe you've never read. Or if you started to read it, you've perhaps given up because you think it's, wow, it's a bit long, isn't it? It's the longest psalm in the Psalter, 150 psalms. It's by far the longest. It's also the longest chapter in the Bible. And it has a strange structure, doesn't it? It's got, I don't know if you counted them, but it has 22 segments which

we call stanzas. And each segment is a letter of the Hebrew. There are 22 letters in Hebrew and each section, and that's why you have those strange titles on the top, is a Hebrew letter. And more than that, each verse within each stanza reflects the letter that's being considered. So when we look at the first stanza, which is labelled Aleph, every verse in the Hebrew begins with the first letter with Aleph. We're so grateful that, well, you must be so grateful. That's the extent of my Hebrew, but we're very grateful that on Wednesday we discovered a Hebrew scholar amongst us. And John Woolen is going to do some lessons for us later on. However, the reason I say that is that whilst that sounds very technical, I don't think it affects how we should read it. Those things are lost, really, in the English translation, and I think we have to sort of take that into consideration. And as we look at this psalm, we'll notice that there's perhaps some repetition there. Maybe that's one reason it puts it off from reading it. It's a repetition of law and testimonies, commandments, statutes, words, rules. There's a lot of repetition there. And it's 176 verses. And it takes you, if you're reading moderately, quickly, about 20, 25 minutes to read it. And if you've got all this stuff going on, you perhaps lose track of where you are. So we lose that because we don't know Hebrew.

[8 : 19] But, like all scripture, if we make an effort to read it and to study it, we will receive a blessing. There's a blessing in it. Because what we'll do in Psalm 119, we'll come to understand that the longings of our hearts, the spiritual longings that we have, are exactly the longings that the psalmist have. I mean, he may seem as if he's way, way above us with his longings and his desires and his discipline. But the point is, for every Christian, there is that same echo that comes from reading this psalm. Just remember what we just sung, how lovely is your dwelling place.

Well, how many of us here who are Christians don't consider that a good thing? Don't consider that a longing that we have to be with God and to have just a day as a doorkeeper that the house of God is better than living in palaces, as we were hearing about this morning with Moses, who forsook the living of a palace and being a prince in order to identify with the people of God. And when we sing hymns like that, we identify with the goodness of God. And the psalm is a reflection of a man who is determined to follow Christ and to follow the word as much as he is able. And Psalm 119, therefore, is a deeply, deeply, deeply personal psalm. The personal pronouns of I and my and me occur nearly 300 times. Yes,

I did count them. I must admit I lost track at times. I did it more than once. And it's a psalm where there's an I and me and my of the psalmist 300 times in 176 verses. And it may seem in this self-centered culture that we live in, that's great, you know, because I is king. You know, it's me that matters.

I'm sure you've all been following I'm a celebrity, get me out of here. No? Okay, well, I'll tell you something about it. Candra Wilkinson, she's a glamour queen. That's what she's described as. She actually said this. She said, never live your life for other people. Those who live their lives for other people are fools. And there's a lady called Edwina Curry who dared to disagree.

[11 : 01] Don't read the dialogue. It's not very helpful. But the point is the fact that people can stand up and in a public way say that you must live your life for yourself and not for other people.

And if you live for other people, then you're wasting your time. It's just a reflection of really how we think. It's really how we are. We're self-centered. And so when there are nearly 300 references to I and me and my in the psalm, you might think, well, that's a bit self-centered.

But it's, no, it's deeply personal. It's deeply personal because it's not the only thrust that's in this psalm. It's also deeply relational. In the same number of 176 verses, there are over 250 occurrences of you and your referring to God. So there's I, me and my, and there's you and your. And this is what the psalmist is struggling. He's struggling with his relationship to God. He's working out his faith. And it's always done in reference to this great God that he knows and love. And the depth of this relationship in this is seen in a phrase that occurs about 11 times, 12 times, and it's the phrase, your servant, your servant. Verse 124 and 125, it says this.

It says, I am, deal with your servant according to your love and teach me your decrees. Three yours, sir, isn't there? And I am your servant. Give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.

[12 : 54] The psalmist is, it's deeply personal. It's deeply relational. But there's also this great depth of humility and love that he has towards God and towards God's word and towards God's law and towards God's commandments and towards God's statutes and towards God's testimonies. That's why there's a repetition because he's working out this relationship with the living God. And there are several more themes in the psalm and I just want to look at three this evening. And the

first one is affliction. There's a theme of affliction or suffering or opposition. There's a theme of joy and a theme of delight. And then the third one is a theme of personal revival. Now, let's look at this first theme, the theme of affliction. If you read through the psalm, you will, you think, oh God, what is happening to this chap? Well, this chap is living in the real world. The exercise of his faith is not in a monastery. The exercise of his faith is not as a recluse, it is in the real world. And he has real enemies and those who want to crush him, those who want to oppose him, those who hate what he stands for because he's trying to live a godly life. And we see this in several, well, many different ways, but I'll just point out one or two to you. Verse 67, this theme of affliction. Before I was afflicted,

I went astray, but now I obey your word. Just farther down, verse 71, it was good for me to be afflicted so that I may learn your decrees. And there we see the afflictions of God keeping him on the straight and narrow. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. Here's a man who is under great trial and yet he sees the providence and the blessings of God in it. Verse 75, I know, oh Lord, that your laws are righteous and in faithfulness you have afflicted me. This allowing God to be God is all part of this man working out his faith. It's not just me, what are you doing to me, God? He's saying, God, you are sovereign, you are Lord. I'm reading a book on the book of Job, picked up in the sale, I think. I don't think I paid for it, actually, but anyway. But it's called Let God Be God. And this is what he's doing in his affliction. He's letting God be God. Trusting in me is both faithful and that he is right in what he does. And in verses 86 and 87, he says this, all your commandments are trustworthy. Help me, for men persecute me without cause. [16:01] Does that remind you of the Savior? It does, doesn't it? Men persecute me without cause. They almost wipe me from the earth, but I have not forgotten your precepts. He's not forgotten God's precepts. In spite of all his difficulties, all his afflictions, all his sufferings, he's chosen the narrow way and he's found it to be the right way. He's chosen the hard path and found that it's a good path and he's not going to be moved forward. That's the first theme. The second theme is a theme of joy.

And yet, it seems odd, doesn't it, that here's a man suffering great affliction, but he's also found great joy. Verse 35, it says this, direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. So, he's looking at God's commands, what God has ordered for men to do, and he finds them his delight. In verse 69 and verse 70, he says, though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart.

Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law. And of course, the world is like that, isn't it?

The world wants us to go its way. The world really knows no bounds. We see that lawlessness and sin, they just slip and slip and slip away. And so, the law of God disappears as an irrelevance, which is a culture in which we live in today. And we were discussing at lunchtime about one of the politicians who used the word pleb. And there's a lot of fuss about this, and a man spent three and a half million losing a court case for calling a policeman a pleb. But there's no issue about the word that comes before pleb. You know, the language and the mindset of our nation is that swearing is just what we do.

[18:15] Boy, you can't call somebody a pleb. You know, and we have such wrong standards. But here, we find that this trouble doesn't draw him away from God, it draws him towards God, because he knows that his ways are right. And it's a delight to him, because he's found something that gives him great joy. Verse 111, your statutes are my heritage forever. They are the joy of my heart.

I want to ask a question, well, how are you doing? How are you doing with this spiritual health check so far? Are we afflicted? Do we suffer as Christians? Well, all who trust in Christ will suffer affliction of some kind. We are not in the world, we're in the world, but we're not of it.

And so, we will always be sort of looked at sideways by those around us. And if we're living true to God and true to his word, we will have trouble. So, maybe we'll tick that box in one way or another. Yes, I have known opposition in my life, but are you joyous? You know, do we really sort of take the arrogance of the wicked, as we've read, and make the law of God our delight and our joy?

Well, it's a challenge, isn't it? It's a challenge. And that's why the psalmist just seems to be so above us, doesn't it, in terms of his spirituality. But the third theme is really the one I really just want to spend a bit more time on, and it's the theme of personal revival, the theme of personal revival. And this is what Psalm 119 really is all about. There are 11 occasions where the word revive is used. If you've got the NIV, you'll find it's zero, because normally it translates the word revive by using the

word renew or preserve. It does that twice, and the rest it says renew. But the word is revive, and we'll look at some of these as we go through. The word means a quickening. It means a desire for an invigorating new life, a refreshing of the soul. This is the longing of the psalmist, for a refreshing of his soul. Well, the question is, do you long for a refreshing of your soul?

[20 : 56] I'm sure you do. Maybe not at this very moment, but surely as we look at God's word, and as we reflect on life, that we have these times where we just, oh, I just wish that I had a closer relationship to the Lord. I just wish I could pray. You know, I come to the Lord and pray, and I find such a struggle, and I go away so discouraged. And we long to be refreshed. Well, the stanza that we looked at, that I've pointed towards, which is verse 153 to 160, has this word revive three times. And it has the word revive to three different areas which are separate, but they interlink. And the first one is to be revived in accordance to God's promise.

The next one is to be revived in accordance with God's law. And the third one is to be revived in accordance with God's love. So it's a word this evening of personal revival. And the first verse is found in verse 154, first reference, rather. He says this, defend my cause and redeem me. Revive, not renew, revive my life according to your promise. And the psalmist has made several statements regarding the promises of God. The prayer is for renewal based according to God's promises. One of the hymns we sang had a reference to the promises we have in Jesus. In verse 116, we find that the promises of God sustain him in trouble. 116 says this, sustain me according to your promise, and I will live. Do not let my hopes be dashed.

Promises of God sustain him. He has hopes. He has spiritual hopes. He has great longings. And he's asking, well, don't let me be dashed. Verse 103 says this, how sweet are your promises to my taste. They are sweeter than honey in my mouth. They make him happy. They make him happy. They are sweet.

They are a delight. Having a good sugar snack is good, doesn't it? It makes us feel better. Perhaps we shouldn't, but there we go. 162 says this, I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil. It's a treasure trove. And the promises of God are a treasure trove. And the treasure trove, because they are righteous. And they are good promises. God doesn't make bad promises. We can make bad promises. We can make promises to our children which are not good for them. We can make promises promises which are hurtful, revengeful perhaps. But God's promises are righteous. Verse 123 says this, my eyes fail looking for your salvation, looking for your righteous promise. He's longing for God to to make his good promises good. But we may have to wait. As we heard this morning, Moses had to wait 40 years for the right time, didn't he? Here he's saying, my eyes fail longing for your salvation. He's longing to be right with God and to have this relationship he's yearning for. But he may have to wait. But these,

[24 : 46] God's promises are righteous. But verse 140 says this, your promises have been thoroughly tested and your servant loves them. If you've got another translation, it may say your promises have been, are very pure.

And the word is an assaying word. The word is to do with the blacksmith, with the smelter of ore. Melting the rock and extracting the gold. That's what it's about. He says your promises have been thoroughly tested. It's a testing of metal that's been, that's been assayed, that's been brought out of the rock and brought into a pure lump of gold. And we all love God's promises, don't we? Your favorite verses will contain a promise. If you've got a favorite verse, it'll be a promise, almost certainly.

And we hold on to these promises in times of difficulty, don't we? And it's through the promises in times of difficulty that we come to own them. Suddenly they become real. Maybe they become real because we're in trouble. We'll read God's word and we say, ah, that's me. Gosh, isn't that good? That really helps me. And we've tested them. We've assayed them. And we find that they are dependable. Your promises have been thoroughly tested so your servant loves them. And he longs for this reviving according to God's promises. And the word of God has so much to say about promises, has so many promises. We're considering Moses this morning. And in Joshua chapter 23, this is Joshua giving his final address, which is almost a replication that comes from the lips of Moses.

He says this, and now I'm about to go the way of all the earth. And you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one word has failed of the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you. Not one of them has failed. Can there be a more certain word of scripture? Here's this man, Joshua. He's about to go the way of all the earth. He's

about to die.

[27 : 13] And he says, every promise that has been given from Moses onwards has been fulfilled. Not one has failed. And that's why we are revived by the promises of God. That's why the promises of God, when we assay them to ourselves, are wonderful promises. They are food to our souls. And this is what he's longing for. I'll revive my life according to your promises. And of course, the promises are all founded in Jesus Christ, aren't they? The apostle Paul says, he says, for no matter how many promises, God has made. They are yes in Christ. And through him, the amen is spoken to us of the glory of God.

All the promises of God are found fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And it's through them that we know that the amen is there. They let it be. So be it. Because God has promised through Jesus Christ. And they warm our souls, don't they? And the promises of God are an incentive towards God the living. The apostle Paul says this, because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God. They are God's incentive for godly living. If we go the way of the world, the promises of God cannot be for us. But if we go the way of the psalmist, the promises are yea in Christ and amen in him too. That's the first one. Revive my life according to your promise. Verse 156 says, your compassion is great, O Lord. Renew my life according to your laws. Revive my life according to your laws.

Notice he says, your compassion is great, O Lord. Revive my life according to your laws. Well, why does he say, your compassion is great? Why does he say that? Well, he may have been reflecting on the giving of the law. When it was given by God, he had promised good to Israel.

[29 : 43] If they showed a right spirit and sought to keep his law, then there were promises there by God. And it was all to do with the keeping of the law. This is what Deuteronomy, it says in Deuteronomy chapter 30.

Now, what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven so that you have to ask who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we might obey it. Nor is it beyond the sea so that you have to ask who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it. No. The word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it. See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.

For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws, and then you will live and increase.

And the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. Promises of God according to God's law. Revive my life according to your law.

Why? Because your compassions are great. Why are God's compassions great? Well, Israel did not love the Lord their God. That's why his compassions are great. They broke his law. They went after idols and they were punished for it.

[31 : 12] They lost the land. They were exiled. They forfeited physical blessings. But far worse, they forfeited spiritual blessings as well.

And they lost that relationship with God. But God's compassion is great because he chose not to destroy them. But he sent his beloved son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it was Jesus who fulfilled the law and bore our punishment for sin. So that's why the compassion of God is great.

And why we should ask God to revive us according to his law. Not our keeping of the law, but Christ's keeping of the law. It was Jesus Christ who kept the law. And he did that as a perfect son of God and became the perfect sacrifice.

1 Peter 2 says this. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross. So that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.

[32 : 14] By his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray. But now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

It's Jesus Christ who bore our sins in his body on the cross. And we have been given his righteousness. Revive my life according to your laws.

And the third one is verse 159. Where he says, see how I love your precepts. Preserve or revive. Revive my life, O Lord, according to your love.

Now love is mentioned 18 times in Psalm 119. And most of these refer to the psalmist's love for God's word.

Verse 97. Everybody, I hope, knows this. And it's so simple to this. Oh, how I love your law. And that's usually how the word love is used in Psalm 119.

[33 : 18] Oh, how I love your law. In verse 159 though, he desires revival. A quickening of his soul in response to God's love for him.

There's a similar verse in verse 88. Where it says, preserve my life according to your love. Again, it's revive my life according to your love.

And I will obey the statutes of your mouth. The psalmist is feeling distant from God. And he longs for restoration.

And he's saying to God, well, revive my life, O Lord, according to your love. Not according to my love. My love is fleeting.

My love vacillates. My love is not like your love, Lord. He knows it's limited. And he feels it. But he wants his life to be revived according to God's love.

[34 : 21] And he knows that God's love is boundless. There is no limit to God's love. And he's saying, I don't want this relationship to be based on my love.

I want it to be based on your love. He knows that God's love is boundless. And he wants to experience that. And surely that's right, isn't it?

You know, we love him because he first loved us. You know, we're always the lovers of Christ because he's placed that love in our hearts.

Peter discovered this in John 21. We all of us know this, don't we?

Peter's fall and then restoration. And the Lord said to Simon, he said, Simon, son of John, do you truly love me more than these?

[35 : 23] And I always remember a sermon by John MacArthur where he explained these verses. And what he's saying here is the word that's used there is the word agapea.

And he's saying, Simon, son of John, do you super love me? And Peter says, Lord, you know I love you.

But he doesn't use the same word. He uses the word phileos. Phileos. So Jesus says to him, well, do you super love me? And he said, well, you know I like you a lot.

You know I have a strong affection for you. And then the second time, the Lord Jesus says the same thing. Do you truly love me?

Do you super love me? And Peter, again, is forced to say, he can't say I super love you. He says, well, I have a great affection for you.

[36 : 19] It's the same word. But then Jesus cuts to his heart. And he then says, do you have a great affection for me?

Do you phileos me? Not do you super love me? Okay, you said twice that you have a great affection for me. Well, do you? And the response of Peter is a broken heart because he says, Lord, you know all things.

You know that I have a great affection for you. He couldn't call himself to say I've got the same love that you have for me. My love is a fickle love.

My love is a changing love. And that was a challenge that Jesus gave to Peter. But we know it all ends well, don't we? We know that he was restored.

And Peter, humbled as he was, was restored with an amazing ministry. See how I love your precepts.

[37 : 21] Revive my life according to your love. Christ's love humbled Peter. And it should humble us as well. And yet our love for him, poor as it is, should always be an encouragement as it was with Peter.

Jesus is able to take our little love and to cause it to grow and to use us to bring him pleasure and glory and to advance the kingdom.

God can take our little love and according to his great love, his agapeo love, his super love. He can use us and make us valuable in the work of the kingdom.

This section, it has a wonderful summary by Matthew Henry and his concise commentary.

This verse 153 to 160. Let me just read it to you. It says, The wicked not only do not know God's statutes, but they do not know God's statutes, but they do not know God's statutes.

[38 : 58] They do not even seek them. They flatter themselves that they are going to heaven, but the longer they persist in sin, the further it is from them. God's mercies are tender.

They are a fountain that can never be exhausted. The psalmist begs for reviving, quickening grace. A man, steady in the way of his duty, though he may have many enemies, needs to fear none. Those who hate sin truly hate it as sin, as a transgression of the law of God and a breaking of his word. Our obedience is only pleasing to God and pleasant to ourselves when it comes from a principle of love.

All in every age who receives God's word in faith and love find every saying in it faithful. I just thought it was just a wonderful summary.

But the psalmist himself has a summary. And it's in the last stanza, which I think is such an encouragement to us, and particularly the last verse.

[40 : 10] But let me just read the stanza to you, verse 169. It's a prayer, it's an exclamation of praise, and it's a plea for preservation.

So it's a prayer, it's praise, and it's a plea for preservation. And he says this, May my cry come before you, O Lord.

Give me understanding according to your word. May my supplication come before you. Deliver me according to your promise. May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees.

May my tongue sing of your word, for all your commands are righteous. May your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen your precepts.

I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight. Let me live, that I may praise you, and may your laws sustain me.

[41 : 13] I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands. Well, we all stray, don't we?

Doesn't that bring the psalmist down to our level? After soaring so high with his great desires for God and for his words and real spirituality, he ends it by saying, I've strayed like a lost sheep. He knows the difficulty of his own heart, but he knows the grace of God. He knows the mercy of God. He knows the love of God, which is boundless. And so he then says, well, seek your servant. Come after me. I have not forgotten your commandments. The good shepherd comes after his sheep, doesn't he? And the good shepherd loses none of his sheep.

His sheep are his, and we're each of us known by name. And so even though we stray, the Lord comes after us, and he brings us safely to himself.

[42 : 19] May that be so, even as we continue. Last, hey.