



*Sweeter
than
Honey*

D E V O T I O N A L 5



CHRIST
CHURCH

Psalm 119:97–128

MEM

⁹⁷ Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me
wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
⁹⁹ I have more understanding
than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.
¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
¹⁰² I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts
I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

NUN

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
¹⁰⁶ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to keep your righteous rules.
¹⁰⁷ I am severely afflicted;
give me life, O Lord, according to your word!
¹⁰⁸ Accept my freewill offerings of praise,
O Lord, and teach me your rules.
¹⁰⁹ I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.
¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.
¹¹¹ Your testimonies are my heritage forever,
for they are the joy of my heart.
¹¹² I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the end.

SAMEKH

¹¹³ I hate the double-minded,
but I love your law.
¹¹⁴ You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in your word.
¹¹⁵ Depart from me, you evildoers,
that I may keep the commandments
of my God.
¹¹⁶ Uphold me according to your promise,
that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!
¹¹⁷ Hold me up, that I may be safe
and have regard for your statutes
continually!
¹¹⁸ You spurn all who go astray
from your statutes,
for their cunning is in vain.
¹¹⁹ All the wicked of the earth
you discard like dross,
therefore I love your testimonies.
¹²⁰ My flesh trembles for fear of you,
and I am afraid of your judgments.

AYIN

¹²¹ I have done what is just and right;
do not leave me to my oppressors.
¹²² Give your servant a pledge of good;
let not the insolent oppress me.
¹²³ My eyes long for your salvation
and for the fulfillment of
your righteous promise.
¹²⁴ Deal with your servant according
to your steadfast love,
and teach me your statutes.
¹²⁵ I am your servant; give me understanding,
that I may know your testimonies!
¹²⁶ It is time for the Lord to act,
for your law has been broken.
¹²⁷ Therefore I love your commandments
above gold, above fine gold.
¹²⁸ Therefore I consider all your
precepts to be right;
I hate every false way.

Day 1

PSALM 119:97-104

MEM

- ⁹⁷ Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
- ⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
- ⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.
- ¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
- ¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
- ¹⁰² I do not turn aside from your rules,
for you have taught me.
- ¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
- ¹⁰⁴ Through your precepts I get understanding;
therefore I hate every false way.

Proverbs 4:7 beckons the young with these words, “*The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.*” Wise words. We desperately need wisdom in all areas of life. From the incredibly complicated fields of bioethics with gene therapy and humanzees (look it up!); to the important personal decisions, such as what to make our life’s calling, how to raise our children, etc.; to the more mundane daily decisions, such as what to eat, what to wear, or where to hang our art. Biblically, the concept of wisdom assumes the moral understanding of right and wrong and speaks more to the way in which we apply our understanding to the world around us. Here, in this section of Psalm 119, the psalmist is saying that he can exceed the aged—his teachers and his enemies—not so much in what he knows but in how he makes application of what he knows to his world.

The way in which the psalmist acquires this wisdom is through meditation (97, 99). Meditation translates the Hebrew root *hgh*, which has at its core “to coo or growl,” like a dog contentedly growls while gnawing a bone. Throughout the Scriptures, God’s people are encouraged to savor the Word (103), to allow it to saturate our being. Being sated with the Word is the path to acting in wisdom. It is not sufficient to simply be intelligent; being filled with the Word makes even the simple wise (Psalms 19:7; 119:130).

One last observation from this wonderful section is that our engagement with the Word is relational. Note what the psalmist says in verse 97: “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.” It is not duty that drives the psalmist to the Word (and hence to the acquisition of wisdom), but love. Thomas Cranmer, Reformation leader in England, articulated that what the heart loves, the will chooses and the mind justifies. The mind doesn’t direct the will. The mind is actually captive to what the will wants, and the will itself, in turn, is captive to what the heart wants. Here is how he puts it in his book *The Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love*: “. . . the passions of the heart ultimately determined human conduct, an affection could only be ‘overcome by a more vehement affection.’ “ May this be our prayer as we seek wisdom: Give us a heart set aflame by love for God and his Word, the affection that overrules all others.

Let Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians set our hearts aflame today:

Prayer

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14–21)

Day 2

PSALM 119:105-112

NUN

- ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
to keep your righteous rules.
- ¹⁰⁷ I am severely afflicted;
give me life, O Lord, according to your word!
- ¹⁰⁸ Accept my freewill offerings of praise,
O Lord, and teach me your rules.
- ¹⁰⁹ I hold my life in my hand continually,
but I do not forget your law.
- ¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Your testimonies are my heritage forever,
for they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the end.

So much of Psalm 119 deserves a lot of dedicated thought and meditation. For instance, how do we reconcile some of the thoughts found here in Nun? *“I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep your righteous rules. . . . Give me life, O LORD, according to your word!”* (vv. 106-107). On the one hand, the psalmist has dedicated his life—everything—to the “righteous rules” of YHWH. Yet at the same time, he relies entirely on the word of YHWH for life itself. There is something beneath the surface of those statements worth gnawing on for a while.

Yet oftentimes, I find myself approaching God’s Word in the same way I would approach a text book. I’m looking for the “answers” or the golden nuggets to help me along my way. Certainly this is true of the Bible, but it’s not intended to be read that way. We live in a fact-based, scientific, research-oriented culture. We are constantly looking for “support” or “evidence” in all aspects of our lives. While I think this is a strength of our modern time, our strengths can also be our weaknesses. We carry this view of the world into how we approach and read the Bible. We look into God’s Word to provide us with the “answers” to life’s most important questions. Again, don’t hear what I’m not saying. It is true that the Bible will aid us in our journey through this land as sojourners; it will help us make sense out of life; it will provide joy amid the afflictions we encounter. Yet its purpose is to do this *through* story.

So what do we do? If we aren't to read God's Word as an answer book, then how do we engage with it? Just as the psalmist does. In a time before books (or scrolls) were everywhere, speaking with others and community storytelling were the common avenues for sharing this story. The Word is the meditation of our hearts, continually on and in our minds. It's the rule of our life through the example of its grand narrative passed down verbally from one generation to the next. It's the source of joy and peace that passes all understanding through comforting words to one another. It's the true truth, spoken and heard when the very notion of understanding and truth has become so difficult to pin down today. Ultimately, it's the telling of Jesus, the God-man who walked this earth in history, living out the climax of God's grand story. It's everything the psalmist looked forward to—the joy of our hearts, the one who gives life amid affliction, the one who lived out perfectly the righteous rule of God for you and me. Ultimately, he's the light through our dark paths.

Let the story of the Bible take hold of your life.
It's the most gripping story you will ever come across.

Prayer

Father in heaven, your story is amazing. It spans not only generations but nations as well. Thank you for our place in it. Thank you for King Jesus, our savior. Give us perspective today, that we might live for your Kingdom story. Grant us wisdom, discernment, grace, mercy, peace, and joy as we travel along the path you have laid for us. Holy Spirit, come. Renew us to be like our King. It's in his beautiful name, I pray. Amen.

Day 3

PSALM 119:113-120

SAMEKH

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

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

¹¹⁵ Depart from me, you evildoers,
that I may keep the commandments of my God.

¹¹⁶ Uphold me according to your promise, that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!

¹¹⁷ Hold me up, that I may be safe
and have regard for your statutes continually!

¹¹⁸ You spurn all who go astray from your statutes,
for their cunning is in vain.

¹¹⁹ All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross,
therefore I love your testimonies.

¹²⁰ My flesh trembles for fear of you,
and I am afraid of your judgments.

The verses for today are full of intense longing. The words used are so strong. The psalmist wants to be single-minded in his affections, and sees clearly what the end result of not being grounded in the word of God leads to. But he cries out to God because he isn't secure without him. Read the verses through again, then offer up a prayer of your own or use the one provided.

Prayer

Lord, may we love your law, may we hope in your word. We want to keep your commandments but find it so tempting not to. Uphold us--you promised you would--so we may LIVE! We want our hope in you to show the world that you're real, not be used to shame us. Hold us up so we're safe in you and make us have respect for your law morning, noon and night. We can't do that on our own. We need you to make us love your decrees. You're not near those who don't love your law, so we want to love your law. We see it's futile to try to get around your law in a sneaky way, yet we still are tempted to do that. Help us! When we choose to live apart from your law, that's also choosing to live apart from you! Make that real to us. We don't want to choose that, but yet we do, over and over. Even though your testimonies can seem so hard we do love them. We tremble before you and are afraid to be judged on our own merit because we wouldn't have a chance. So we are so glad that we are in Jesus. He did the work for us so we don't have to. But now we long to be made like him--every hour of every day. And we know you are doing that in us, because you promised you would. So uphold us in that promise and give us comfort today. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Day 4

PSALM 119:121-128

AYIN

- ¹²¹ I have done what is just and right;
do not leave me to my oppressors.
- ¹²² Give your servant a pledge of good;
let not the insolent oppress me.
- ¹²³ My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfillment of
your righteous promise.
- ¹²⁴ Deal with your servant according to your steadfast love,
and teach me your statutes.
- ¹²⁵ I am your servant; give me understanding,
that I may know your testimonies!
- ¹²⁶ It is time for the Lord to act,
for your law has been broken.
- ¹²⁷ Therefore I love your commandments
above gold, above fine gold.
- ¹²⁸ Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right;
I hate every false way.

Imagine, you are eight years old. Your mom just made her signature peanut butter chocolate chip cookies in preparation for your upcoming vacation. Mom gave you and your older brother each one ooey-goey cookie fresh out of the oven, and sternly told you that the rest were not to be touched until vacation started tomorrow. Next came the classic test. A house empty of parental supervision—just the kids and the cookie jar.

It's a rare beautiful spring day in Michigan, so you and your brother decide to play catch outside. "I'm gonna run inside to go to the bathroom," your older brother says. A few minutes go by, and when he comes back outside you notice that he's got a streak of chocolate on his cheek and crumbs on his shirt. The evidence spoke for itself, you just caught him stealing cookies from the cookie jar.

What would you have done in this situation? Would you have joined in on the mischief and had some for yourself? Or would you have told on your brother the moment your mom got home? Suppose you were the rule keeping type and you told on your brother. What would your motivation have been? Spite for your brother, you couldn't bear to see him be let off easy. Or perhaps you hoped that if you told on him and proved that you had been good unlike him, then your obedience would be rewarded with a cookie!

The psalm singer is faced with a situation where God's proverbial cookie jar has been ransacked. So much so that the cookie famine was oppressive to him. Furthermore, he is crying out to God because he is genuinely offended that God's rule was broken (see verse 126). He is filled with a righteous anger, not out of ulterior motive of resentment and self-betterment, but because the "cookie thief's" disobedience spat on God's kindness.

We live in a cultural moment that is filled with cries for justice. People are mourning inequality, inequity, and violent acts of hate. As children of God—as people in covenant with the Lord by the blood-bought redemption of Jesus—we are called to mourn wrong-doing not out of resentment for the cookie thief or out of a selfish desire to get ahead ourselves. No, in the face of wrong-doing we cry out to God for Him to make things right because it is His law that has been broken. It is an unwavering passionate love for God and His commandments that motivates the psalmist.

- Are there ways that you are feeling the weight of oppression and wrong-doing?
- If not personally, are there ways that you see these in the world around you?

Prayer

Father Almighty, we ask you, O Lord, to reorient our loves around your great love. We confess that in the face of wrong-doing, too often our hearts are pendulums swinging between flares of selfish entitlement and cold apathy. Fix our eyes on your salvation and the fulfillment of your righteous promise. Thank you that those who are clothed in the righteousness of Christ can confidently pray these words of Psalm 119, because it is not our own but Jesus's perfect record that assures us of Your good pledge. By the power of your Holy Spirit, make your people to be faithful to your commandments. Give us understanding of your Word that we may be transformed daily to embody your goodness, mercy, and justice. We ask these things for Jesus's sake. Amen.

Day 5

PSALM 119:97-128

Here again are the four sections of Psalm 119 that we looked at this week. Read through and savor again a verse or two or three that really connected, convicted, or encouraged you.

MEM

⁹⁷ Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.
⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me
wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.
⁹⁹ I have more understanding
than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.
¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged,
for I keep your precepts.
¹⁰¹ I hold back my feet from every evil way,
in order to keep your word.
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¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
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and a light to my path.
¹⁰⁶ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it,
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¹¹⁵ Depart from me, you evildoers,
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of my God.
¹¹⁶ Uphold me according to your promise,
that I may live,
and let me not be put to shame in my hope!
¹¹⁷ Hold me up, that I may be safe
and have regard for your statutes
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¹¹⁸ You spurn all who go astray
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¹²⁵ I am your servant; give me understanding,
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for your law has been broken.
¹²⁷ Therefore I love your commandments
above gold, above fine gold.
¹²⁸ Therefore I consider all your
precepts to be right;
I hate every false way.

As you contemplate the graciousness of a God who has initiated a relationship with you and made himself known through his Word, pray your own prayer of response.