

THE LOOKOUT

OCTOBER 2022

Unit: Psalms (Part 1)

Theme: Rooted

Overview: “Texts have tunes,” preacher and professor Fred Craddock said. That is especially true of Psalms, the hymnbook of the Bible. Most biblical psalms were sung or prayed. They are poetic in genre and speak to every human emotion. Psalms (the book) consists of five sections—Psalms 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106; and 107–150—which makes it similar to the five books of the Pentateuch and the five discourses of Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel. The main imagery of the book of Psalms coincides with a Middle Eastern agrarian culture, and the main characteristic of Psalms is parallelism (rhetorical pattern of likeness). In October, students will learn how righteousness, reality, repentance, reason, and worship are “rooted” in God.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Arrows point to the 'STUDY' and 'DISCOVERY' tabs on the right side of the page, indicating they indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Arrows point to the 'DISCOVERY' section, indicating that users should use the Discovery questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 23, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Meditate on God's Word
and ways in order to grow
your life around him.**

UNIT: Psalms (Part 1)

THEME: Rooted

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 119:9-16, 89-96, 129-136

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 119; John 17:17; Matthew 24:35;
2 Timothy 3:14-17

ROOTED IN REASON

BY MARK SCOTT

Faith takes us beyond reason, but an informed faith is a faith that reasons. Psalm 119 calls us to love God “with” our minds (i.e., using reason). This psalm is among the most incredible pieces of literature in the Bible. The complicated masterpiece is a tight acrostic; each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (22 of them in all) begins the sections (strophes) of the psalm. And, if that is not enough, each line in that particular section (of eight verses each) begins with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Psalm 119 celebrates the Word (not just Scripture but the “message”) of God. Many terms are employed to underline the vastness of God’s message to his people (e.g., *words, commands, decrees, laws, statutes, and precepts*). This lesson will expound on the 2nd, 12th, and 17th letters/sections.

The Word Within Us*Psalm 119:9-16*

God’s Word was never intended to be left on stone tablets (Exodus 34:1). His Word was intended to be written on the heart (Deuteronomy 10:12-16; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2 Corinthians 3:3). The psalmist acknowledged a direct connection between how much of God’s Word penetrates us and what our moral fabric looks like to outsiders.

For instance, how can a person *stay on the path of purity* (clear or cleansed)? Answer: *by living according to God’s word*. And how can a person not sin against God? Answer: *by hiding God’s Word in their heart*. Insofar as God’s people seek God with all of their heart and do not stray from his commands, they will be able to live a life of praise.

Three things are involved in internalizing God’s Word. (1) Memorization—implanting the Word in the heart from memory keeps one from sinning. Jewish boys were not allowed to ask a question in Hebrew school if they had not memorized that day’s lesson, so how much more should we memorize the text? (2) Recitation—recounting the law with our lips reinforces memory. Just as handwriting aids memorization more than typing, so hearing the text being read aloud and recounting the words with our *lips* is better than great riches. (3) Meditation—studying, talking, and pondering are ways to delight in the Word. Let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16).

The Word Above Us*Psalm 119:89-96*

We can rejoice that God’s Word came near to us (Deuteronomy 30:14; John 1:14). But his Word also is transcendent above us. The opening line of this section says as much. God’s Word *is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens*. God’s Word is not just within his covenant people. It stands over the whole universe. God’s Word (and nature) *continues through all generations*, is established over all the earth, and endures day by day.

But this Word that is over us also is particular to us. The psalmist recognized that he had an enemy (a theme scattered throughout this psalm) who would attempt to afflict him and destroy him. But by making the Word his *delight* (as in something pleasant) he would *preserve* (save) his life. By seeking out God’s *precepts* and God’s *statutes*, the psalmist was giving himself the best chance to succeed in life. The psalmist was limited as to the *perfection* (completion) he could achieve in this life, but he acknowledged that the *commands* of God are boundless (greatly broad). This Word that is within us is also over us in transcendent power.

The Word About Us*Psalm 119:129-136*

The Bible does a perfect job of tying the vertical with the horizontal. The Word within and the Word over must find practical expression by moving out to others. When the Word moves out from us, people witness obedience in our lives. Light (knowledge) and understanding are then possible for people who are *simple* (foolish or naïve).

Staying hungry for the things of God (described in the text as panting, longing, and loving) helps keep sin from reigning in our bodies. People can witness holy behavior in us when our *footsteps* are directed by his Word. When God redeems us, makes his face shine upon us, and teaches us, then his decrees are on center stage for all to see. When the law is not obeyed, then the horizontal dimension of the Word is compromised. The result is that *tears flow from the psalmist’s eyes*. We do not love our minds, but we love God with our minds. The Gospel prophet, Isaiah, said it well: “Come, now, let us *reason together*” (Isaiah 1:18, *English Standard Version*, emphasis added). ■

APPLICATION

HIDDEN IN YOUR HEART

BY DAVID FAUST

A man in Ethiopia showed me his well-worn Bible. Years ago, when his country was under communist rule, he had to keep his Bible in a secret location so it wouldn't be confiscated and destroyed.

I understand why that Christian brother hid his Bible. But why does the psalmist say, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11)? Why hide God's Word at all? Shouldn't we go public and share it every chance we get?

The Hebrew word translated "hidden" in Psalm 119:11 (*tsaphan*) not only meant to conceal or keep secret, but also to store away as a treasure. It described the way Moses' mother protected him for three months when he was a baby (Exodus 2:2-3) and Rahab hid the spies to keep them safe (Joshua 2:4). David used this word to express confidence that God has "stored up" good things for those who fear him (Psalm 31:19).

Why Hide It?

It's common to put valuables like a coin collection or expensive jewelry in a safe place. Do you keep spare cash hidden in a desk drawer, hide a house key outside your door, or store important papers and keepsakes in a safe deposit box so they won't be misplaced or stolen? We hide God's Word in our hearts, not because we're ashamed of it, but because we value it.

Sometimes we hide things until the right time to display them. Do you ever buy a birthday gift for someone and hide it until the special day arrives? Do you ever play Santa and purchase something in November but keep it hidden until Christmas Day? We hide God's Word in our hearts for the same reason cooks store spices in the pantry and mechanics keep tools in the garage—so we'll have the right resources on hand when we need them.

Memorizing Scripture today seems to be a lost art, but it's a skill we need to reclaim. If you hide Scripture in your heart, it will be available when you have surgery, reminding you that God is your refuge and strength. When a loved one dies, it will reinforce your hope and assure you that Christ is risen. When you feel lonely or discouraged, Scripture will remind you that God will never leave you or forsake you. Biblical truth will help you get along better with others, handle money wisely, and grow older with purpose and peace.

The psalmist stored up truth in his heart so that he would not sin against God. Memorized Scripture is preventative medicine. It helps us make better choices and steer away from sin.

Where to Hide It

Over the centuries, Scripture has been written on stones, on leather and papyrus scrolls, and in printed Bibles that sit on our shelves; but it's not enough merely to read or hear the words. God's truth must be internalized, digested, and hidden in our hearts.

When we read Scripture or listen to teachers explain it, we should pray as the psalmist did, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18).

We should pursue wisdom "and search for it as for hidden treasure" (Proverbs 2:4), treasuring God's truth in our hearts until the day comes when everything hidden will be revealed.

Personal Challenge: Select a passage of Scripture (one verse or multiple verses) and commit it to memory. To improve your likelihood of success, get a friend to join you in this effort so you can hold each other accountable. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICAH ODOR

1. When you were a kid, where did your parents hide your birthday or Christmas gifts? Where do you hide gifts now?
2. Last week, we wrote an "I will" statement about confession and repentance. How did you follow through on that?

Ask one person to read all of **Psalm 119:9-16, 89-96, 129-136** straight through out loud. Then ask other group members to each read one section at a time.

3. How would you summarize these passages?
4. In verse 11, the author says he has "hidden your word in my heart." Have you memorized any Scripture, and if so, how have you found that helpful?
5. Verse 92 tells of the protective power of following God's commands. What's one instance that your life was better because you did things God's way?
6. The author shows a desire to follow God's commands. Yet nowhere does he claim he followed them perfectly. How does verse 133 give us a realistic goal in our pursuit of God?
7. Notice how passionate the writer is about the message of God. How can you grow in your passion for God and the Scriptures?
8. What do you learn about God in this passage?
9. What do you learn about yourself?
10. Based on this passage, what's one thing you're doing well?
 - What's one thing you need to improve?
11. How will you obey what you've read today?
12. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Psalm 92**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■