

Psalm 119 (Introduction) - The Grand Canyon of Scripture's Greatness and Sufficiency
Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on September 14, 2008
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I am eager and excited about our next verse-by-verse study that has been brewing for a while and is building in my heart an earnest desire for all of us, including myself, to grow in our passion and love of God's Word. The study we begin today has the potential to be a soul-stirring life-changing heart-strengthening spiritually revitalizing and refreshing study that God might use to revive us as a church and as individuals. I hope and pray that God will do that for my own heart and for all of your hearts as well.

So I want to invite you to please take God's Word and turn with me to the very middle - the book of Psalms - the very center of Scripture, the heart of the Holy Bible, the 119th Psalm. In the actual text of scripture, many Bibles have this Psalm near the very middle, if not the middle page itself. My preaching Bible ends in Revelation at page 1268, and its exact middle page (634) lands in Psalm 119. Right before it, is Psalm 117, which if you count by chapters in our English Bible, would be technically the exact center chapter in the Bible (594 chapters before and after Psalm 117, contrary to one email going around that says Psalm 118 is the center chapter).¹ If you count by verses, the two center verses in the KJV would be Psalm 118:8-9, but we don't want to put too much significance on numbers since the chapters and verses were not part of the original scrolls, but were added in the centuries that scripture was being translated into English (12th-16th century).

Still, it is fitting that right here, near the very heart of God's Word we find Psalm 119, the psalm of a man's passionate *heart for God's Word*. Near the actual center of Scripture, we find a psalm that elevates and uplifts the centrality of Scripture in all of life.

We're told when 'the Protestant Reformation took place in the sixteenth century and the truths of the Bible, which had long been obscured by the traditions of the medieval church, again became known, there was an immediate **elevation** of the Scriptures in Protestant services. John Calvin in particular carried this out with thoroughness, ordering that the altars (long the **center** of the Latin mass) be removed from the churches and that a pulpit with a Bible upon it be placed **in the center** of the building. This was not to be on one side of the room, but **at the center**, where every line of the architecture would carry the gaze of the [people] to that Book.'²

This psalm calls for Scripture alone to have the central place and pre-eminent focus in all our hearts, in all we do, in all our lives.

This psalm epitomizes the Reformation motto "sola Scriptura" (Scripture alone is sufficient for salvation and all of life) and it was

- the *Scripture* alone, not a *style of service*, that drew true seekers of God to church in those days in church history
- It was always the *Word* being proclaimed, not a *worship* preference or innovation or the latest program or fad

- It was not *performances* that drew people, it was the *preaching* of the whole counsel of God, the way God wrote it, verse-by-verse, book-by-book, that truly changed lives
- It was not about *entertainment*, it was about the *exposition* of Scripture – nothing is more relevant in any age. This book is more up-to-date than tomorrow’s newspaper.
- We don’t need to *make* the Bible relevant, it *is* relevant (we may be out of touch with *it*). Any attempts to improve or upgrade God’s message will quickly make us *irrelevant!*
- The grass of culture withers, and the flower of our fads soon fade away, but the Word of our God abides forever.

Man’s nature has not changed since Bible times, and man’s need has not changed either. Man’s true need is always this book.

- This was true in the days of the prophet Hosea, who wrote “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge ... you have forgotten the law of your God” (Hosea 4:6)
- This was also a great need addressed in Amos 8:11 which prophesies of a time of “famine, not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but a *famine* of hearing the Word of God”
- This was the great need in the day of Nehemiah 8, at the great moment in Israel’s history, one of the great spiritual moments of a nation in world history when after returning to their land they also returned to the Law of the Lord, and they called Ezra to “Bring the Book” (and revival came)
- Look at Psalm 119:25 - This was also the great spiritual need of individuals in the day of the psalmist, even for godly men: v. 25b “Revive me according to your Word”
- This was the great need in the days of the New Testament, where Paul calls Timothy and us to “preach the Word”
- Man’s problem is always the same (sin) and the solution is always the same (to know and love God and His Word)

This is what I personally desperately need, which is one of the reasons I’m looking forward to this study for my own soul. This is what we all need - having a high view of God and His Word must remain at the center of everything in our church, families, and lives. I pray our great God will be honored as we seek to honor His great Word in this study of this great psalm for His great glory

- 1 How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
Who walk in the law of the LORD.
- 2 How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
Who seek Him with all *their* heart.
- 3 They also do no unrighteousness;
They walk in His ways.
- 4 You have ordained Your precepts,
That we should keep *them* diligently.
- 5 Oh that my ways may be established
To keep Your statutes!

- 6 Then I shall not be ashamed
When I look upon all Your commandments.
- 7 I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments. \
- 8 I shall keep Your statutes;
Do not forsake me utterly!
- 9 How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping *it* according to Your word.
- 10 With all my heart I have sought You;
Do not let me wander from Your commandments.
- 11 Your word I have treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You.

My plan is to just introduce this psalm today, and then each week to seek to preach each stanza of 8 verses at a time (the stanzas you see broken up in your Bible with different headings, ex: v. 1-8 next week, and v. 9-16 the following week and so on) to keep up with the pace and structure of the original. Today I hope to whet your appetite for this feast of Scripture that I pray will fill our souls through the end of this year and the beginning of next year, as I can think of no better way to end a year or to start a new year.

The simple outline for our introduction to this Psalm will be:

1. Its Subject
2. Its Structure
3. Its Size
4. Its Significance
5. Its Setting

First, Its Subject

This is one of the few times were every single commentator agrees that the main subject, the theme, the focus of this psalm is the Word of God. Certainly there are other sub-themes that flow out of that, but the Scripture is indisputably the main subject, being mentioned in some way nearly 180x in all, in nearly every verse

- 1b ... the **law** of the LORD.
- 2 How blessed are those who observe His **testimonies** ...
- 3b ... They walk in His **ways**.
- 4 You have ordained Your **precepts** ...
- 5b ... Your **statutes!**
- 6b ... Your **commandments**.
- 7b ... Your righteous **judgments**.
- 8 I shall keep Your **statutes**;
- 9b ... Your **word**.
- 10b ... Your **commandments**.
- 11 Your **word** [*different Heb. Word than v. 9*] I have treasured in my heart,

There are 8 basic synonyms that the Psalmist uses 175x in 176 vss³

1. **“law”** (*torah*; v. 1), 25x; ‘Direction, instruction, law ... [in] its consistent usage in Psalm 119, “law” should be understood as also demonstrating a biblically documented wider connotation of “an immanent or underlying principle of life and action” rather than merely a narrowly and legalistically perceived code of mandates. Consequently, *torah* in such contexts refers to “Scripture as a whole”⁴

Torah is “Yahweh’s communication of moral truth and demonstration of his grace and guidance.”⁵

The “‘law’ which the poet describes in Ps. 119 is not a yoke which ‘neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear’ (Ac. 15:10). To the Psalmist the *torah* is a gift of God, which was both preceded and followed by divine grace.”⁶

It ‘depicts God’s special revelation as a gracious gift which points out or *shows the way* through life’s twisted highways and byways ... “Biblical law and the gospel of God’s grace are not archivals but twin mercies given by the same gracious Lord who did not wish his people in any age to be impoverished but to enjoy life to the fullest”⁷

2. **“testimonies”** (*’edut, ’edot*; v. 2), 23x. “the law of God is His testimony, because it is His own affirmation concerning His nature, attributes, and consequent demands.”⁸ ‘The Word of God as “testimonies” emphasizes both the authority of their source in the LORD and the accountability of their reception by men.’⁹

3. **“precepts”** (*piqqudim*, v. 4), 21x. This is the word that one type of inductive Bible study is named after – Precepts Bible Study – which seeks to draw God’s precepts out from His Word the way He wrote it, as one passage says “precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” Verse-by-verse study should be our main spiritual diet. The Heb word emphasized ‘oral or written declarations as to what he expects of man. The original meaning carries the idea of fix, appoint, designate ... it is obvious that Yahweh had the right and power to make such declarations and statements regarding man’s obligations toward him ... man must submit to ... the “precepts,” “orders,” or “charges” which flow from man’s Master.’¹⁰

4. **“statutes”** (*huqqim, huqqot*; v. 5, feminine in v. 16), 22x. ‘This word comes from a root which means to hew, cut in, engrave, inscribe; and so comes to mean what is ordained, decreed, prescribed, enacted ... to cut, because, it is said, statutes were engraved on tablets of stone or metal.’¹¹ ‘The common denominator is revelational and applicational indelibility; these “statutes” have been “written down and preserved for permanent observance.” Isaiah 30:8 provides a graphic context for this root’s bibliological significance of “the binding force and permanence of Scripture.”’¹²

5. **“commandments”** (*mitswah, mitswot*; v. 6, singular in v. 96), 22x. “This word emphasizes the straight authority of what is said .. the right to give orders” (Kidner, 418). It “expresses the insistent will of a personal God who is Israel’s Lord.”¹³

6. **“judgments”/“ordinances”** (*mishpat, mishpatim*; vv. 7, 13, singular in v. 160), 20x; ‘many, but not all of these, may be viewed as quasi-technical terms for God’s Word ... a judgment ... the Judge’s “revealed decisions or judgments.”’¹⁴

7. **“word”** (*davar, devarim*; v. 9, plural in vv. 57, 130, 139, 147, 161), 23x. “The most general term for God’s communication of His will to man ... the divine word which proceeds from the mouth (or lips) of God ... Consequently, this word or words may also signify divine commands ...; so the ‘ten words’ (Exod. 34:28) is the Decalogue ... *Dabar* may indicate not only a particular message of Yahweh ..., but also the sum total of his revealed will.”¹⁵

8. **“word”** (*'imrah*; v. 11), 19x;. ‘In Ps. 119 it often means the law of God in general, or his promises in particular.’¹⁶

There’s some discussion as to whether “ways” (vv. 3, 37) be is technically a synonym for “law” or “word”

The Massorettes [adding a couple other synonyms] observe, that in every verse but one, the 122nd, there is direct reference to the Law under some one of the ten names (supposed to allude to the Ten Commandments [Hebrew, Words]).¹⁷

In both psalms 119 and 19, the various synonyms express the many-sidedness of Scripture, its multifaceted beauty, like the various reflective facets of a gemstone. Rather than focusing on the nuances or precise lexical meanings of each phrase, the parallelism of the synonyms together all speak in different ways of the same thing – the Word of God. Psalm 19:7-9 is the best other example of this:

	<u>Synonym</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Result</u>
7	The law The testimony	of the LORD of the LORD	is perfect, is sure,	restoring the soul; making wise the simple.
8	The precepts The commandment	of the LORD of the LORD	are right, is pure,	rejoicing the heart; enlightening the eyes.
9	The fear The judgments	of the LORD of the LORD	is clean, are true;	enduring forever; they are righteous altogether.

So we’ve seen that the Subject is the Word of God, now Secondly, let’s look at the Structure of Psalm 119

This psalm is a magnificent masterpiece of Hebrew poetry, the product of human genius under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Each stanza is perfectly alliterated through the whole stanza, with one stanza for each letter in the Hebrew alphabet in what’s called an acrostic poem. This is the acrostic of all acrostics.

If you notice the word ALEPH in your Bible before verse 1 and BETH before verse 9, what that means is each Hebrew verse in the stanza begins with that letter in the original Hebrew:

- Ex: v. 1 begins with *aleph* (“A” in our alphabet)
v. 2 begins with the same letter as the 1st line
v. 3 and so on, through v. 8 all begin with A / *aleph*
v. 9 begins with *beth* (“B” in our alphabet)
v. 10, 11, 12-16, and so on (alliterated all 8x down)

There are 22 stanzas, one for each letter of their alphabet. Many believe this was to be a mnemonic aid, to help people memorize it. And that may be. Certainly the psalms were the hymnal of the Hebrews and were designed to be sung, and that would help them remember such a long song. Sometimes preachers will alliterate each point of their sermon, and I don't feel obligated to do that every time, but sometimes when it works with a particular passage it can help make the points more memorable, easier to remember. That's not a device invented by some homiletics professor, that's a device that Psalm 119 uses to drive home its truth vividly. Using the same letter of the alphabet is not the only way to do it, another method we learn from the psalms is to make statements that are parallel or that have some symmetry and balanced structure – parallelism is the key feature of Hebrew poetry and so it can be helpful to make points in the same way, consistent with the Psalms. Psalm 19 is the best example of perfect poetic parallelism.

I think the author of Psalm 119 had more in mind, though, than artistic balance and beautiful structure, although certainly the beauty of God's balanced Word deserves the best tribute language can give. The alphabetic acrostic poem probably was not only to help memorize it, but esp. in this context it is to present the subject in exhaustive fullness, using the whole alphabet, the whole gamut of language. This is the A-Z on the subject, a complete tribute to the complete Word, just as Jesus the incarnate Word referred to Himself in Revelation as the Alpha and the Omega (Greek alphabet), the beginning and the end, the first and the last – it speaks of perfection, completeness, fullness, finality, sufficiency.

The first word for Scripture in v. 1 “law” begins with the final letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*tau* for *torah*). The last synonym in order in verse 11 begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There is possibly even genius of deliberate design in details like the order of titles for the Word of a God who knows everything backwards and forwards.

Almost the exact same order of titles and synonyms appears in Psalm 19, which uses six words (one unique one, *fear*). There are six words in Psalm 119 that are perfectly balanced in the 22 stanzas, one for each of the 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet:

- Occurrences of “law” and “word” (*'imrah*) total 44 (2 x 22).
- Occurrences of “testimonies” and “precepts” = 44 (2 x 22).
- Both “statutes” and “commandments” occur 22x each.

There are 8 key words for Scripture and 8 verses in each stanza. Each of the verse has two balanced lines, and as I mentioned before, virtually every verse has a reference to Scripture. And still, even with this structure and alliteration constraints, the language is not artificial or awkward or monotonous, but there is a freshness as it presents the same truths in every different shade and angle.

Not only does this poem have a magnificent and beautiful structure for the beautiful magnificent Word of God, but there is a majesty in its sheer length, that marches on in honor of Scripture.

This brings us to the third point, the Size of the Psalm

It's been called "The Mount Everest" of the psalms, towering over the rest in its massive size, majesty, and matchless tributes to the matchless Word of our magnificent infinite awesome God, who reflects His glory and greatness in His Word and in His Son.

In the book *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (which you have a copy of if you attended our men's conference or women's conference last year), the first chapter reminds us that it's not about us. You may remember hearing or reading these words:

'We are all starved for the glory of God, not self. No one goes to the Grand Canyon to increase self-esteem. Why do we go? Because there is greater healing for the soul in beholding splendor than there is in beholding self. Indeed, what could be more ludicrous in a vast and glorious universe like this than a human being, on the speck called earth, standing in front of a mirror trying to find significance in his own self-image? It is a great sadness that this is the gospel of the modern world.

But it is not the Christian Gospel. Into the darkness of petty self-preoccupation has shone "the light of *the gospel of the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The Christian Gospel is about "the glory of Christ" [the Word who became flesh – the gospel is] not about me. And when it *is*—in some measure—about me, it is not about my being made much of by God, but about God mercifully enabling me to enjoy making much of him forever.'¹⁸

What's so great about wonders like the Grand Canyon or the Alps or Mount Everest is that the focus is on majesty, not me. Lasting refreshment and joy is found to the degree that the focus is not on man. We lose ourselves in the presence of massive deeps and majestic heights, and it is a wonderful thing. The greatest refreshment of mind and health for our soul and the greatest happiness for our hearts come from great splendor, not a great self. It comes from basking in true beauty, rejoicing in true glory, delighting in the manifold splendor of God and His revelation.

And nowhere is the splendor of God's Word more on display, nowhere is the majesty of Holy Scripture more clear, nowhere is the soul-satisfying, passion-producing Bible more celebrated.

Psalm 119 I have chosen to call "The Grand Canyon of Scripture's Greatness and Sufficiency." The psalmist is our tour guide inviting us to explore with him the depths and discoveries and seemingly endless beauty and wonder of this great book.

Psalm 117, just two chapters before our psalm, is the smallest chapter in the Bible, just two verses. Psalm 119 is well-known for being easily the largest or longest chapter in the Bible, but I hope you know this psalm for more than that bit of trivia. I hope that if it's not already, this chapter will become one of your favorite places to turn to again and again, drinking often and deeply from it.

It's been pointed out that 'Psalm 117 contained two verses and five lines. Psalm 119 contains 176 verses and 315 lines. [Ps. 117] tells us to praise God. [Ps. 119] praises God for His Word, the Bible, because God has given us the Bible and it is only through the Bible that we can come to know who God is and how to praise Him ...

Others have also loved this psalm. In his *Treasury of David* Charles Haddon Spurgeon has 349 commentary pages on Psalm 119, which is [nearly] a book in itself. Charles Bridges, a great Church of England evangelical of the [18th] century, wrote 481 pages (Banner of Truth Trust edition). His book contains a sermon for each of the psalm's twenty-two stanzas and was issued in 1827 when Bridges was only thirty-three years old [*the same age I am as I begin to preach this book*]. Most impressive of all is the three volume work by Thomas Manton, one of the most prolific of the Puritans. Each volume is from 500 to 600 pages in length for a total of 1,677 pages (Banner of Truth edition). The work has 190 long chapters, more than one [sermon] for each verse.¹⁹

I'm certainly not going to duplicate that feat from the 17th century, although I do have his set on my shelf. I also have Calvin's sermons on Psalm 119 from the 16th century, where he did 22 sermons, one for each stanza, which is the pace I plan to try to keep. Others in the 17th century ventured into this Grand Canyon of the psalms, and you will undoubtedly hear echoes from the past that have helped me though this deep journey, as I am over my head in this psalm and in need of these wiser friends on my shelf.

In the 1800s, Charles Bridges also gave 22 expositions of this psalm, which you can read in biographies and diaries of many godly men and missionaries how much his study impacted them. Spurgeon's 19th century work in the psalms took him 20 years and is indeed a great treasury unsurpassed in devotional delight. In the 20th century, a more recent hero of mine, the late James Boice, preached through Psalm 119, and in the 21st century my living hero Steve Lawson preached 24 sermons on this great psalm, and you will no doubt hear their voices and others helping us along the way. This is a daunting task with such a great cloud of witnesses that has made me very acutely aware of my own inadequacy and insufficiency at such a massive and monumental passage before us.

Augustine, who lived some 17 centuries ago, the most influential theologian before the Reformation, gave himself to a lifelong study of the Psalms, and even he hesitated to try and plumb the depths of the 119th chapter. It's said that 'among his voluminous works [of] Comment on the Book of Psalms, that he delayed to comment on this one till he had finished the whole Psalter; and then yielded only to the long and vehement urgency of his friends, "because", he says, "as often as I essayed to think thereon, it always exceeded the powers of my intent thought and the utmost grasp of my faculties".'²⁰ But as he got over his intimidation and studied Psalm 119, his later vision later likened it a Tree of Life in Paradise.

Charles Spurgeon himself, who certainly was not intimidated by mere man in his preaching, was intimidated by the size of this Psalm. He wrote, 'I have been bewildered in the expanse of the 119th Psalm ... Its dimensions and its depth alike overcame me. It spread itself out before me like a vast, rolling prairie, to which I could see no bound, and this alone created a feeling of dismay ... it threatened a monotonous task, although the fear has not been realized [it actually was his joy after he jumped in]. This marvelous poem seemed to me a great sea of holy teaching, moving, in its many verses, wave upon wave; altogether without an island ... I confess I hesitated to launch upon it. Other Psalms have been mere lakes, but this is the main ocean. It is a continent of sacred thought, every inch of which is fertile as the garden of the Lord: It is an amazing level of abundance, a mighty stretch of harvest-fields.'²¹

Ps. 119 is the Grand Canyon of Scripture's greatness and sufficiency but those who have been blessed by its study would encourage us to not let its great size discourage us from exploring. I may be just a boy among a forest of Sequoia trees, but that's not going to stop me from appreciating their beauty. Feeling small and inadequate before greatness is really a good thing. I'm just a little kid in kindergarten at the edge of the Grand Canyon, and I'm not going to try to explain it all, I just want to enjoy as much as I can as we explore together, although we'll never exhaust its fullness.

Being aware of my own inability and inexperience in life and feeling ill-equipped for such a task is healthy if it brings me to my knees in desperation and dependence. I need to pray like this psalm

*18. Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from your law
26-27. I have told of your ways and you have answered me
Teach me your statutes.
Make me understand the way of your precepts,
So I will meditate on your wonders*

I hope the size of this psalm does not intimidate us so that we do not turn to it, because God has rich blessings for us here.

It's true this one chapter is longer than many of the books of the Bible. In fact, it has more verses than 30 entire books in the Bible, nearly half of the books in the Bible are shorter than this one chapter of the Psalms. To put that in perspective, the book of Titus had 46 verses, and Psalm 119 is almost 4x longer than Titus.

The psalm is not only long in its words, it is long in its history. 'George Wishard, Bishop of Edinburgh, would have been martyred had it not been for a most singular expedient. When upon the scaffold, he availed himself of the time, which permitted the condemned to choose a Psalm to be sung. Wishart selected the 119th Psalm, and before two-thirds of it had been sung, a pardon arrived, and his life was preserved. Doubtless the length of this Psalm was sagaciously employed as a means of gaining time, and, happily, the expedient succeeded.'²²

'William Grimshaw [18th century minister] also occasionally employed this psalm during his long and fruitful ministry in Haworth, England. He was a powerful preacher, nevertheless not everyone in town showed up every Sunday to hear him.

"It was his frequent custom," wrote John Newton, "to leave the church at Haworth while the psalm before the sermon was singing, to see if any were absent from worship and idling their time in the churchyard, the street, or the ale-houses; and many of these whom he so found he would drive into the church before him."

Newton continues, "A friend of mine, passing a public-house in Haworth on a Lord's day morning, saw several persons making their escape out of it, some jumping out of the lower windows, and some over a low wall. He was at first alarmed, fearing the house was on fire; but upon inquiring what was the cause of the commotion, he was only told that they saw the [pastor] coming. They were more afraid of the [pastor] than of a justice of the peace. His reproof was so authoritative, and yet so mild and friendly, that the stoutest sinner could not stand before it."

What does all this have to do with Psalm 119?

On particularly sparse Sundays, according to a village tradition, Grimshaw would announce the 119th Psalm would be sung by the congregation. All 176 verses would be sung, giving the [pastor] plenty of time to round up the strays and assemble a sizable congregation to hear the preached Word.²³

The length of this psalm, though should not be the only thing it's known for. It should be equally known for its breadth of thought, depth of meaning, and its heights of passion for God and His Word. It's been compared to the four-square heavenly city described in Scripture, which is not only long but equally broad and deep and high. It may not impress or attract the unspiritual, just like the blind do not enjoy the Grand Canyon's depths and width, but the regenerated heart wants to speak like verse 161:

... But my heart stands in awe of Your words.

May this study in the weeks ahead above all produce in my heart and produce in your hearts an awe for God's truly awesome Word

We've looked at this Psalm's Subject, Structure, and Size, now lastly let's introduce ourselves to ITS SETTING

There is no heading of this psalm telling us it is a psalm of David, although many commentators have assumed that in the past. There are similarities with Psalm 1 and Psalm 19 which David wrote, so certainly he was familiar with his psalms, and obviously very familiar with God's Word, but not all the details in Psalm 119 fit perfectly with David's life. Jewish tradition, on the other hand, attributes it to Ezra or one of his disciples. A few have suggested the prophet Jeremiah. A number find Daniel to be compelling based on the actual internal evidence. Some of the language also leads many to argue for a time of writing after the exile.

Ultimately we can't be dogmatic because even the best of men don't know for sure. God did not feel it was necessary for us to know or He could have preserved it in the text, and the original author chose to remain anonymous, perhaps among other reasons so that the focus would be on the ultimate Author of Scripture, God and God alone.

This is a profoundly God-centered psalm, addressing God approximately 275 times in my translation ("You" or "Your" or "Lord). I like the title one commentator gave to Psalm 119: "The ABCs of the God-Centered Life." And one thing clear to me in my study is that only a God-Centered Scripture-filled and Scripture-loving life would sustain the writer through what we do know from his life, based on what he wrote in this psalm.

Verse 161, which we just read, gives us one of many insights as to the circumstances or setting of the psalm. It says "*Princes persecute me without cause*"

It is clear from many verses that there was heavy personal persecution in the life of this man who loved God's law.

v. 157: Many are my persecutors and my adversaries

This is true not just at the end of the psalm, but throughout:
 Psalm 119:23b ... *princes sit and talk against me ...*
 Psalm 119:51 *The arrogant utterly deride me ...*
 Psalm 119:86b ... *They have persecuted me with a lie; help me!*

If you think you had a rough week, listen to what was going on in these next verses:
 Psalm 119:61 *The cords of the wicked have encircled me ...*
 Psalm 119:110 *The wicked have laid a snare for me ...*

If you ever feel trapped or surrounded by wickedness or sinful people, take comfort from this psalm, and the true comfort God intends is not just identifying in the emotion, but by reading the other half of each verse to see how the psalmist dealt with it.

God's Word is sufficient not only in the everyday difficulties of life, but in the most extreme difficulties that have been faced by saints in the past. This wasn't just spiritual or physical persecution, this is physical and deadly harm intended by these enemies:

Psalm 119:95 *The wicked wait for me to destroy me ...*
 Psalm 119:87 *They almost destroyed me on earth ...*

As we study through this psalm, I think it will become clear to us how a high view of God and His Word, and a high love for His law is what will guide us through the valleys and shadows and caverns as we journey through this canyon of life's rugged terrain.

Whatever the source of your afflictions or suffering or difficulties, this psalm gives help and hope. The encouragement is not just that this godly man experienced trouble and anguish like you do, as part of the verse says words similar to your own heart's. We will find lasting encouragement when we can say the whole verse truly

Psalm 119:143 *Trouble and anguish have come upon me, Yet Your commandments are my delight.*
 Psalm 119:153 *Look upon my affliction and rescue me, For I do not forget Your law.*
 Psalm 119:157 *Many are my persecutors and my adversaries yet I do not turn aside from Your testimonies*

161 *Princes persecute me without cause, But my heart stands in awe of Your words.*
 162 *I rejoice at Your word ...*
 165 *Those who love Your law have great peace, And nothing causes them to stumble.*
 166 *I hope for Your salvation, O Lord, And do Your commandments.*
 167 *My soul keeps Your testimonies, And I love them exceedingly.*

I want to be able to pray like this man! I want to be able to be more like this psalmist! I want to truly believe and preach and live like I believe these truths! And I pray that is your desire as well and that our Lord will bless this pursuit as we join our hearts to the psalmist on this journey. As we survey the wonders of Scripture's greatness and sufficiency, I pray God will would cause us to fall more deeply in love with His wonderful Word.

¹ http://prayerfoundation.org/not_center_verse_of_bible_118_8.htm

² James Montgomery Boice, preface to *Calvin's Sermons on Psalm 119*, published by Old Paths Publications.

³ The statistics of these synonyms are indebted to my former professor at <http://www.drbarrick.org/Website%20Files/Ps%20119.pdf>

⁴ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, p. 418

⁵ Ronald Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Psalms 101-150, p. 141-42.

⁶ A. A. Anderson, *Psalms*, 2:808.

⁷ George Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, p. 42-43.

⁸ Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 209.

⁹ Zemek, 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹ Scroggie, *Psalms*, 172.

¹² Allen, p. 134; Kidner, 418; Zemek, 46.

¹³ Allen, 134.

¹⁴ Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 3:249.

¹⁵ Zemek, 48-49.

¹⁶ Anderson, 2:812.

¹⁷ Leupold, 347.

¹⁸ John Piper, *Seeing and savoring Jesus Christ* (2004). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, p. 15.

¹⁹ Boice, 3:970

²⁰ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, 3:132

²¹ *Ibid.*, preface.

²² Herbert Lockyer, *Psalms*, 536.

²³ Morgan, R. J. (1998). *From this verse : 365 scriptures that changed the world*. March 30 entry. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.