



Jan Pierce

Psalm 119 is devoted to the praise of the Word of God. The author is unknown, although some have suggested Ezra to be a likely candidate. The psalm is written as an alphabetical acrostic—a poetic work of art. There are 22 stanzas, each using one Hebrew letter at the beginning of each of eight lines. The theme throughout the psalm is love for God’s law in its entirety; the sum of God’s written instructions to his people.

Look at the picture above and I’ll tell you its story in an alphabetical acrostic:

Bangalore, India, in December 2010
Beautiful Kavita weds Joshua, our son
Bangles, beads, gold, and saris
Bountiful food and festivities
Blessed time for all.

Roger and I (on the left in the photo) live in Vancouver, Washington. Our daughter, Sara, and her husband, Jon Walker (on right), live in McCall, Idaho. We travel annually to India where we support indigenous Christian ministries.

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:1-6 (NASB)

On a tiny lot near the orphanage where I taught English in Andhra Pradesh, India, stands a small home. I watched the construction of that dwelling, day by day, until it was completed. It was built of brick and stucco placed on a narrow cement foundation. The materials were of good-enough quality by Indian standards, but the house was severely flawed. The land beneath wasn't firm enough, the foundation not strong enough, to build an "upright, righteous" home. That little house leaned mightily to one side and with each level of brick set in place became more and more crooked. Amazingly the work continued as if the problem didn't exist and the home, visibly listing to one side, was completed. There it stands today, a monument to poor planning and faulty construction.

Do you know people whose lives are built on faulty foundations? Though friends and family point out obvious problems, they stubbornly continue to lay the brick layer by layer in the construction of a life doomed to failure? Psalm 119:1-6 says those who build their home on God's testimonies will be blessed. Their household will grow in righteousness without need for shame.

At every point in the construction process of that house in Andhra Pradesh, I expected the builders of the crooked house to tear it down and start again. They never did. If we want an upright house it's never too late to bear the cost of laying a proper foundation with an eye to enjoying lifelong benefits of a structure that will endure.

SONG: How Firm a Foundation

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, I want to build on the strong foundation of your truth. Give me ears to hear godly counsel, and a hunger for your guidance. May my house prosper and be blessed.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:9-16 (NASB)

I was a bookworm as a child. I loved all kinds of books, but my favorites were ones using words like *secret*, *mysterious*, and *treasure*. The images these words conjured up in my mind kept the pages turning and my heart pounding.

The author of Psalm 119 loved words too. But not just any words—he loved God’s words. He finds an amazing number of ways to declare his love—176 verses worth! In verse 11 the psalmist writes, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against you.” In order to treasure God’s word he had to first hear it, meditate on it, roll it around in his thoughts and then mentally agree to it. He had to make a commitment to both believe it and obey it, much as Mary must have done when she submitted to God’s will and then pondered all those things in her heart.

Why treasure God’s words in our hearts and minds? Because to do so keeps us from sin. It’s a good reason. I’ve often wondered how much of God’s Word is stored in my brain. How much could I reproduce if I were stranded on the proverbial island? How about you? How much Scripture is treasured away in your mind and heart and readily accessible for daily living? Here’s a challenge: Jot down Scripture you can call to mind. Add to your list over several days and see how much treasure you’ve hidden away in your heart.

SONG: O Word of God Incarnate

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, your word is truth.
May I grow in love for the Scriptures and treasure them
in my heart.*

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:38-40 (NASB)

“Disgraceful,” one voice whispered. “Shameful behavior” hissed another. “Tramp!” muttered a third. These venomous comments and more like them were the words the young woman heard in her mind as she sat, brokenhearted, before the elders and wives of her church confessing her sin. She was unprepared for the words actually spoken to her and the prayers said over her. “Lord, restore her to yourself.” “There but for the grace of God...” “It could have been me.”

In verse 39 the psalmist cries out in pain, “Turn away my reproach which I dread.” Truly we are often our own worst accuser when we fall into sin because we know the darkness in our own hearts. But God’s word is restoration and his precepts protect us from disgrace. When we fail, we can be restored through confession and the forgiveness that revives us and leads us to wholeness.

The young woman above experienced restoration through a renewal of her commitment to follow the instructions given by her Lord. The very law that first condemned her was thus set as a foundation under her feet enabling her to make a fresh start. Painful? Yes, of course, but well worth the price. Praise God that his law was given to help us live in reverence of him and to stay far away from the pits of self-disgust and disgrace.

SONG: There Is a Balm in Gilead

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, thank you for forgiveness that breathes new life into my soul. Establish me in the safety of your laws that I may live in reverence of your holiness.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:65-69 (NASB)

If you're a quilter you know that just a fraction of an inch can make the difference between a beautiful block that behaves itself and one that pinches, puckers, and pulls. Similarly a tape measure incorrectly read has ruined many a do-it-yourself project. Without becoming overly perfectionist, we who love God's word strive to obey the Lord with all our hearts. Thankfully we live on the "glory" side of the cross and when we fail in spite of our best efforts there is mercy and grace for our souls.

A word of caution however; the accuser of our souls rejoices when we begin to make a habit of cutting corners. Too many "close enoughs" and our quilt is ruined and the wood-working project becomes firewood. When "close enough" becomes a habit we're on the slippery slope of compromise. If we recognize a "close enough" attitude prevailing it's time to return to basics. We need to learn the truth anew and commit to obedience.

The psalmist learned his lesson in the school of affliction (v. 67). He admits that he went astray and then suffered for his choices. But now he's more discerning and fastidious and now he lives in the wisdom of obedience. He's not looking for the easy road anymore; he's committed to following the Lord's good way with all his heart.

SONG: All the Way My Savior Leads Me

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh, Lord you know my heart. You know when I begin to move away from your precepts and go my own way. Keep me, Lord, in the safety of your paths and strengthen me to obey your commands with all of my being.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:129-132 (NASB)

When I was a child the school classroom was a very low-tech entity. We had books and pictures and charts, many of them created by the teacher's own hand. It was pre-Learning Palace and pre-copy machine if you can believe that. The most wondrous piece of equipment inside the classroom by far was the movie projector. It magically clicked and rolled and, if the teacher managed it properly, one reel of film rolled onto another with no pile-up of cellulose on the floor. We loved seeing movies. They were usually about science and my all-time favorites showed plants wiggling and straining toward light and then, wonder of wonders, flower buds unfolded petal by petal into fully mature blossoms. I could have watched all day!

In verse 129 of Psalm 119 our psalmist is still finding new ways to praise God's word. "Your testimonies," he says, "are wonderful." As they unfold, they provide understanding. That understanding shows us how to live—it's beautiful and exciting. It's breathtaking. His delight knows no bounds. Close your eyes and visualize the unfolding of a flower through time-lapse photography. Now imagine that the unfolding of the flower petals provides just what you need in the way of guidance for your day. What a process. You read and meditate, you ask the Holy Spirit to teach you, you ask the God of the heavens to strengthen you and then you determine to live by those laws. God is at work right inside of you? Really? Now that's high tech!

SONG: Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, your ways are wonderful. I stand amazed at the wonders of your world. I praise you, great Creator of all.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:140-144 (NASB)

My mother used to buy bars of Ivory soap when I was a child. It was pretty and white and it floated in the tub. I liked its smell and everyone knew it was 99 and 44/100% pure! I was too young to know about truth in advertising, or the lack thereof. I didn't care about the other 56/100 % of impurities. I just liked to play with the bar of soap while taking my bath.

Another example of advertising dishonesty is found in the billboard pictures of your favorite fast food hamburger. In the pictures the bun is puffy and brown, the tomatoes, lettuce, onion, and cheese are placed just so and look mouthwateringly good. The beef patty is big and juicy. But, oh please! Have you really looked at a fast food burger? The pallid bun is squashed and doughy, the skinny beef patty is barely there and the whole thing looks like it's been through a war.

Aren't you glad that God's word is entirely pure? It is 100% pure—as nothing else on earth. When con artists lie to us, when our leaders cheat, when even our best and most trusted friends fail us, as they will, our God has spoken words and issued promises that are 100% true. His ways are without flaw, his words so pure that we can stake our very life on them. What a gift! We, who are but a dot on the earth, can count on the things we learn from God's unfailing Word. It gives us hope and contentment deep in our souls. Thank you, Lord.

SONG: I Am Standing on the Word of God

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: I praise you Lord for your perfection. Thank you for being the One we can rely on 100% of the time.

—Jan Pierce

BIBLE READING: Psalm 119:169-176 (NASB)

My husband tells a story from his childhood that always gets a laugh. When his father asked him how he was doing in school he had a pat answer that satisfied Dad and kept him from asking more probing questions. He'd say enthusiastically, "I'm doing better than Scotty Tipton!" Well, that sounded pretty good and Dad had done his bit to keep Roger on the straight and narrow educationally speaking. So his father was caught totally off-guard when little Roger came home at report card time with a dismal set of grades. "I thought you were doing better than Scotty Tipton," he roared. Roger tearfully explained that he was indeed doing better than Scotty, but Scotty was the poorest student in the class. He was comparing himself to the bottom of the barrel and he was failing.

In verses 174 through 176 the psalmist longs to be a winner. Alas, he has to admit that he's strayed like a lost sheep. He's failed. He pleads for the Lord to rescue him because he hasn't forgotten the commandments, but he can't succeed on his own. My husband was eventually able to succeed in school as God provided various people to redirect him toward God. He was restored over time. In fact he became a teacher and pastor and a successful businessman. There *is* hope after failure. Like the psalmist we earnestly desire restoration. We test our behavior and heart condition against the perfect law knowing we'll be found wanting, yet humbly accept God's helping hand as we go (v. 173). Then, we too will live and praise his name.

SONG: Precious Lord, Take My Hand

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Have mercy on me when I fail,
O Lord. Restore me. I will praise you forever.*

—Jan Pierce