

A Book to guide you

During the British Coronation ceremony a Bible is presented to the monarch with the words: *“We present you with this Book, the most valuable thing this world affords. Here is wisdom. This is the Royal Law. These are the lively oracles of God”*. The small Gideon Testament that contains the above quote goes on to say: *“This Book has the power not only to inform, but to reform and to transform lives. Through its influence countless people have been given a new strength, an unerring purpose and a sure hope in life. To the dying it has brought peace and assurance of eternal life. It has brought blessing to millions in every land and age. It is supernatural in origin, eternal in duration, divine in authorship, infallible in authority, inexhaustible in meaning, universal in readership, unique in revelation, personal in application and powerful in effect.”*

Wow! Sounds like we'd be crazy not to read it!

Icebreaker



Have each group member nominate an area of personal interest (eg chess, kickboxing, knitting, bee-keeping, etc), and then write down (in a few words) three different things about their chosen subject. Quickly share your answers. Now have each group member answer ‘Yes or No’ to the following question: Could you write down 176 things (both meaningful and different) about your chosen subject?

Read: Psalm 119:105-112

- ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet,
and a light for my path.
- ¹⁰⁶ I have taken an oath and confirmed it,
that I will follow your righteous laws.
- ¹⁰⁷ I have suffered much;
preserve my life, O Lord, according to your word.
- ¹⁰⁸ Accept, O Lord, the willing praise of my mouth,
and teach me your laws.
- ¹⁰⁹ Though I constantly take my life in my hands,
I will not forget your law.
- ¹¹⁰ The wicked have set a snare for me,
but I have not strayed from your precepts.
- ¹¹¹ Your statutes are my heritage forever;
they are the joy of my heart.
- ¹¹² My heart is set on keeping your decrees
to the very end.

Introduction

Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm in the Bible, being 176 verses in length. Its form is an acrostic, its nature is a prayer, and its subject is the Word of God. In verse after verse it expresses appreciation for God's laws, decrees and statutes, and does so with minimal repetition and maximum variation.

The Psalm is poetically arranged as an alphabetic acrostic, that is, it orders its lines according to successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The Hebrew alphabet consists of 22 letters, and Psalm 119 assigns 8 verses to each letter, thus making 176 verses in total. (There are a number of alphabetic acrostic Psalms in the Bible: Do you know any of them?)

The section that is the focus of our study is the 14th section, with eight statements each beginning with the letter *nun* – equivalent to our English letter 'n', and with the 'nu' pronounced as in the word 'nook'.

Dictionary

In referring to the Word of God, this Psalm uses a number of words...

<i>Statutes</i>	Those things that express the mind and character of God; eg 'principles'
<i>Precepts</i>	Those things that are 'statutes in detail'; eg 'rules'
<i>Law</i>	Those things that are 'statutes in spirit'
<i>Decrees</i>	Those things that endure; eg 'commands', 'promises'



Question 1

What is confessed and celebrated in the opening verse of this *nun-section*? (v105) Try expressing this verse in your own words?

Question 2

Some have wondered if our conscience might be considered as God's voice. Others have wondered the same thing about our instincts and intuition and 'common sense'? Do you think that this is what the Psalmist meant by those opening words, 'Your Word' (v105)? Explain your answer.

Question 3

In the words that are said at the presentation of the Bible to a King or Queen - "We present you with this Book, the most valuable thing this world affords. Here is wisdom. This is the Royal Law. These are the lively oracles of God" - what points do each of these four phrases make about the Bible?

Case Study 1

Robert heard his pastor say at church that the teaching of the Bible is applicable to all of life. He wonders if this might be an overstatement and one of his pastor's enthusiasms. For example, does the Bible have anything to say on the subject of money? Or friendship? Or war?

Question 4

(v106-110) The *nun-section* moves on to say that a declared commitment to God's Word often brings a person into conflict with those who draw their worldview from another source. Can you locate the verses that suggest this point?

Can you think of some Biblical characters who might prove the point that allegiance to the Word sometimes brings us into conflict with the world? Is there a time when you have personally experienced this clash of worldviews?

Question 5

In the final verses of this *nun-section* (v111,112), the Psalmist seems undeterred by the opposition and happy to stay the course right to the end. Select a phrase from these verses that you find (i) impressive, (ii) challenging, (iii) chiding, (iv) empowering.

John Newton's encouragement & challenge

John Newton wrote more than just his famous hymn 'Amazing Grace'. He was a godly pastor, significant preacher, and prolific correspondent. In one of his letters he gives the following counsel on the subject of reading the Bible:



"The chief and grand means of edification, without which all other helps will disappoint us, and prove like clouds without water, are the Bible and prayer, the word of grace and the throne of grace."

"I know not a better rule of reading the Scripture, than to read it through from beginning to end; and when we have finished it once, to begin it again. We shall meet with many passages which we can make little improvement of [sense of], but not so much in the second reading as in the first, and fewer in the third than in the second: provided we pray to him who has the keys to open our understandings."

"Experience only can prove the advantage of this method, if steadily persevered in. To make a few efforts and then give over, is like making a few steps and then standing still, which would do little towards completing a long journey. But though a person walked slowly and but a little way in a day, if he walked every day, and with his face always in the same direction, year after year, he might in time encompass the globe."

"Happy should I be, could I fully follow the advice I am now offering to you. I wish you may profit from my experience. Alas! how much time have I lost and wasted, which, had I been wise, I should have devoted to reading and studying the Bible! but my evil heart obstructs the dictates of my judgement."

Newton is a wise counsellor here at many levels, giving sage advice and frank admission. Have you ever tried to read the Bible through from beginning to end? If you have, what encouragements and discouragements have you found?

Case Study 2

Nancy has been inspired to read the Bible all the way through in one year, and has discovered that bold reading plan that was devised by Scottish Minister Robert Murray McCheyne, where four chapters of the Bible are read each day. Nancy has managed to keep to the plan through the month of January, but due to some unexpected sickness and the pressures of her university course, has fallen seriously behind, and is now feeling discouraged and defeated. What advice would you give to this sister? What advice would you give to yourself?

M'Cheyne Chart of Daily Bible Readings

DATE	FAMILY	FAMILY	PRIVATE	PRIVATE
Jan 1	Gen 1	Matt 1	Ezra 1	Acts 1
Jan 2	Gen 2	Matt 2	Ezra 2	Acts 2

Acrostic Challenge

Alphabetic acrostics in English poetry are not common, but they are fun to construct. Can you make one about the Bible, using the letters in sequence from L to P? (It might be a simple one, with just single phrases like: "Light for my path / Mighty in truth, etc", or it might be more ambitious like: "Luxurious in grace is my Saviour's Word to me / Magnificent in truth and mighty in wisdom, is Your Word, O God, etc".) Like the Psalmist, try and make your acrostic 'prayerful'.

L...

M...

N....

O....

P...

Memory Exercise

The Psalmist says in the 11th verse of Psalm 119: *"I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* Try memorising the 105th verse of the Psalm, and then say it together as a group.



*"Your word is a lamp to my feet,
and a light for my path."*

Prayer

Finish in prayer – remembering to pray for those who translate the Scriptures, and also those who teach the Scriptures, and for those who preach the Scriptures. Pray too for any family and friends who are trying hard to read the Bible.