

The Word of God: The Gift That Keeps on Giving (Psalm 119:41-48)

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Introduction & Review

Form

Do you have a favorite or a memorable gift? Maybe there's a particular Christmas memory associated with it. Or perhaps there's a birthday present that was especially surprising, or a very practical gift that you received years ago but still use to this day. Have you ever given a gift that someone loves? What goes through your mind when you see the person using that gift? What about when you see them not using that gift?



As we come to the sixth section of Psalm 119, the section that begins with the Hebrew letter *waw*, the psalmist highlights gifts that come from loving and living in God's word. Recall that a defining feature of this Psalm is that it is an acrostic poem. The Hebrew alphabet consists of 22 letters, and this psalm contains 22 sections of eight verses each. Each one of the 22 sections is given a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line in that section begins with that letter. *Waw* is not often used at the beginning of Hebrew sentences; *waw* is more often used as a conjunction.

Language

During our study of this Psalm, you'll notice that we will frequently refer to the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) as the Greek words often add significant insights to the meaning of the verse. In a sense, the Septuagint functions somewhat like a "commentary" on the Hebrew text. In fact, many (if not most) of the Old Testament quotations made by the writers of the New Testament are taken not from the Hebrew text but from the Greek text, the Septuagint.

Most word studies and definitions will be taken from PreceptAustin.org, and BlueLetterBible.com which includes Strong's Concordance, as well as Hywel R. Jones's 2009 book Psalm 119 for Life: Living Today in the Light of God's Word, referenced above.

Gifts that Come into Our Lives through Loving and Living in God's Word

In this portion of Psalm 119, the writer will list gifts—or blessings—that can be enjoyed by someone who seeks to live an obedient life. These are not earned blessings, but rather they are simply up for grabs, these are the blessings enjoyed by those who keep his law continually.

I. Salvation (vv. 41-42)

41 Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord,
your salvation according to your promise;
42 then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.

It is by grace through faith alone that anyone can be saved (Ephesians 2:8-9). The details of that salvation are found in God's word, and that is the first gift that the psalmist lists, beginning with a statement of God's "steadfast love," as the ESV puts it. The NASB translates the same word as "mercy," and the word in the original Hebrew is a word that can be used of "goodness, kindness, and faithfulness," and has a "covenant" meaning to it too. It seems that both are appropriate translations, as these terms, broadly, can be used synonymously to describe salvation, to which he connects this term in the second half of the verse. Now, the psalmist acknowledges that God's steadfast love—or mercy, kindness, and faithfulness—as well as salvation, all come from God to man through the word of God. The word of God is not merely a self-help book to help point us in the direction of mercy and salvation. Rather God works in and through it to bring mercy and salvation to us. The word of God has a spiritual, supernatural power that brings transformation and has a spiritual effect in our lives.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

The synonym that the psalmist uses for God's word in verse 41 is "promise," a word that means "an utterance, speech, or word." It may denote anything that God has spoken, commanded or promised, intended to encourage and be the basis for expectation. The writer's opening prayer in this section of Psalm 119 is that the Lord would bring to him mercy and salvation through the God-spoken promises of his word. Notice that this is translated in the passive voice, "Let your steadfast love come to me." This is the Lord's work. I like how Charles Bridges described how mankind gets close to the Word of God: "It must come to me; or I shall never come to it."

Looking now at verse 42, we see that we can trust God's word, which provides an answer to those who taunt us. NASB uses reproach. This is a word that means disapproval with an element of disgrace in it. The disapproving voices we often hear can be drowned out by our abiding trust in the approval that we believers find in God. When we believe who God is and what he has done for us in Christ, the disapproval of this world is answered. The fact that the world may hold us in some sort of disapproval just doesn't sting the same way.

We trust the Bible about everything, because it is right about everything (v 128). It is true and can be trusted wholly. To argue with the Bible is to argue with God. So we test every other book by what God says in his word.

Psalm 119:128

Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right;
I hate every false way.

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

God's word, or as the psalmist calls it God's promises, not the least of which is God's promise of salvation, are a product of his steadfast love (goodness, kindness, mercy, and faithfulness), a gift to us that we can trust.

May we find assurance in God's promises (basis for expectation) as well as motivation when taunted for keeping it.

II. Obedience (vv. 43-44)

43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
for my hope is in your rules.
44 I will keep your law continually,
forever and ever,

This is a prayer for the word of truth to remain in the psalmist's mouth, rooted in the understanding that it is only by the goodness and grace of God that his word can dwell with us. Therefore the prayer asks that it may continue to remain in his mouth. He asks, in essence, that he may always be talking about the word of God.

Hypothetically, God might have created man and never communicated with him by his word. God's revelation, his written word isn't the only way God has communicated to humans.

Psalms 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Creation declares the work of God. We also know that God has communicated to man through conscience. Yet God has not only communicated through creation and conscience, we have this gift of God that he has communicated to us through writing. So he prays that the words that God has communicated through writing remain in his mouth— a wise thing for us to pray as well. In light of this he declares that he wants to keep God's law forever. If you are going to speak it, you had better keep it. This is true for all of God's people, not just the ones who are officially teaching. We all have the responsibility to talk about God's word, and we should all live in a way that would never disqualify us from the work of proclaiming God's word.



At the end of verse 43, the psalmist proclaims that his hope is in God's rules, or judgment (as the KJV translates it). Perhaps "rulings" might be a better way of appreciating the nuance of this synonym for God's word. This is a word that means "a verdict (favorable or unfavorable) pronounced judicially, especially a sentence or formal decree," and comes from the Hebrew word "to judge." The psalmist can testify of God's past judgements. His past hope is the basis for his present and future expectation. He hoped in God's rules, and he has not been disappointed. Too often,

people can easily look back to events, especially tragedies, and question God's faithfulness, goodness, mercy, his "steadfast love," causing them to lose hope, but the psalmist declares that the past judgements of God are what give him hope, what gives him a high expectation. This is the motivation to "keep" God's law. The word "keep" means, "to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; generally, to protect, attend to." In other words, the psalmist wants to protect God's

word. What does God's word need protecting from? Us! The best way to protect God's word is by carefully obeying God's word continually at all times from now on ("forever and ever").

May we live a life that is qualified to proclaim the truth. May God's word fill us with hope that motivates us to keep his word and live what we speak.

III. Freedom (v. 45)

45 and I shall walk in a wide place,
for I have sought your precepts.

In verse 44, the psalmist had just spoken of the obedience that comes from having the word of God within, and now he testifies that this obedience brings freedom. The ESV uses the much more literal phrase "in a wide place" to describe where the psalmist finds himself walking, whereas the NASB and KJV both translate this as "liberty." The original Hebrew word means wide, broad, large or roomy in every direction.



The image here is that of wide-open spaces that offers freedom to roam. The psalmist identifies what offers him this freedom: seeking God's precepts. In other words, real freedom comes through obedience and submission to God. What a paradox: a submission that gives freedom!

John Piper commented on this verse that "an essential element of joy is freedom. None of us would be happy if we were not free from what we hate and free for what we love... The word frees us from smallness of mind [see 1 Kings 4:29 below]... [and] from threatening confinements [as Psalm 18:19 sows]."

1 Kings 4:29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore.

Psalm 18:19

He brought me out into a broad place;
he rescued me, because he delighted in me.

Jesus offers us freedom from the power of sin and freedom to holiness.

John 8:32-34 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." 33 They [Jews who had believed Jesus's teaching (cf. v. 31)] answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

Peter describes the freeing power of God's promises, using the image of escaping from confinement in 2 Peter 1:4.

2 Peter 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

One of the most dangerous misconceptions (and deception) ever is that the word of God is limiting because the gospel actually offers true freedom. Whereas before accepting the good news, we were slaves to sin, we are now saved from its power and are free to obey and live holy lives. The word of God sets us free.

Psalm 119:133

Keep steady my steps according to your promise,
and let no iniquity get dominion over me.

John 8:32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free

Romans 6:2, 6-7 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?... 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.

James 1:25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

Again, the psalmist is using a familiar metaphor, one of walking on a path, but here, this is not the image of walking a well-trodden like we have seen often in this psalm already. This time the image is that of freely walking wide open spaces. Walking in obedience and submission to God lead to freedom. It is a wide open space to walk in, whereas disobedience, rejection of God's word, and reliance on self are a path to bondage.

2 Peter 2:19 They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

When we trust God's promises, we break the chains of sinful desire—which makes its own false promises—by the power of a superior promise. How vital it is to have the word of God, which breaks the power of false counterfeit pleasures. The best way to train to spot counterfeit bills is to



know what the real ones look like in great detail.

The synonym for God's word that is used here is "precepts," which is drawn from a root that means "to attend to, visit, or frequent often" as in the sphere of an office or an overseer like a man who is responsible to look closely into the situation and to take action. By implication the word points to the particular instructions of the Lord as one who cares about detail, and this is what the psalmist has sought.

Psalm 119:105

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.

Psalm 119:11

I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.

May we be vigilant to know the great details of the word of God by studying it prayerfully so that it lights our path and fills our hearts.

IV. Confidence (v. 46)

46 I will also speak of your testimonies before kings
and shall not be put to shame,



What characterizes a confident person? If we were to describe someone as confident, what words would we list? What happens when a confident person fails at something?

Confidence is one result of the liberty that comes from loving and living the word of God. As Charles Bridges put it, "Liberty in walking in the Lord's ways will naturally produce boldness in 'speaking' of them." Having boldness and the ability to speak freely of God, having boldness and the ability to testify of the great things God has done in history and in us, having the boldness and ability to proclaim God's word before anyone, including kings or the great men of this earth shows true liberty.

Luke 1:74

that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,

This confidence that comes from living and loving the word of God is evident in the apostles, especially Peter, in how boldly they proclaim Christ in Acts versus the apostles in the Gospels. We can hardly believe that the men who boldly and confidently proclaimed Christ before crowds and powerful people in Acts are the same men who in Matthew 26 left Christ and fled, and the

man who denied even knowing Christ to a servant girl. Look at Paul before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa (see Acts 23-26) as he could later in life advise Timothy to “fan into flame the gift of God.”

2 Timothy 1:6-8

6 For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, 7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,

Paul’s command to Timothy echoes the psalmist’s declaration. There is a great comfort and confidence in knowing that God will accomplish his will through his word. There is no shame in our testimony. We need only be faithful in speaking.

May we be so immersed in and in love with God’s word that we will confidently speak it and live it.

V. Delight (vv. 47-48)

47 for I find my delight in your commandments,
which I love.

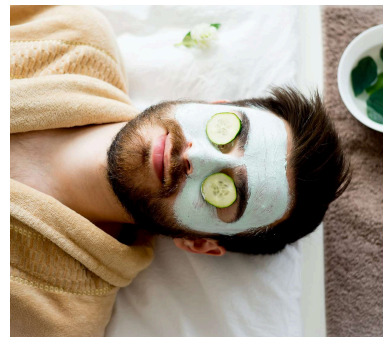
48 I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes.

The psalmist says that he *finds* his delight in God’s commandments, showing us that this is a choice. He doesn’t wait for a feeling of delight to overcome him, but rather he chose it. The word translated “delight” here is a Hebrew verb we have encountered before in this Psalm back in verse 16, and is used of stoking, smearing all over, or to be blinded by something.

Psalm 119:16

16 I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

The original Hebrew word describes that which gives pleasure or satisfaction, that which is so pleasing that it’s like an indulgence. A silly image that comes to my mind is that of Uncle Scrooge swimming in his gold coins. Perhaps a more grown-up image would be indulging in a spa day. The psalmist is declaring in verse 47 that he finds great pleasure indulge in God’s commandments. I think of delighting as a habit word; it’s the kind of thing one makes a habit out of.



The psalmist’s deep affection for the Lord’s commandments is so deep that in both references to commandments in verses 47 and 48, he adds the descriptive phrase “which I love” to commandments. Both times, the affection is connected to “your commandments,” or the

Hebrew word *mišvâ*, which means “a command, whether human or divine that emphasizes the straight authority of what is said.” So the psalmist is choosing to delight in (or indulgently smear) and love the “straight commandments,” happily submitting to the Lord’s will. This love is manifested not just in the feeling of delight, but also in an act of honor in verse 48, as he lifts up his hands to God’s commandments. This act of lifting up his hands indicates an expression of praise and adoration from a heart of love. That the eternal God, Creator of the universe and sustainer of all, would choose to share even a glimpse of his mind, his will, his plan to us through his inspired written word is an incalculable honor, and we should approach his word with not just the affection, but the honor it deserves. That is, with the intent to obey it.

Based on verses 47-48 (and almost every line of this entire psalm in fact), the strength and the depth of the psalmist’s love for God’s word are undeniable and downright impressive. That love is manifested not only in the feeling of delight (in verse 47 “I find my delight in your commandments”), but also in an act of honor (“I will lift up my hands toward your commandments” in verse 48a), but also in the time and energy spent with God’s word (“I will meditate” in verse 48b).

Meditation can be described as digestion for the soul; it is to the soul what digestion is to the body. To meditate means to “turn over” God’s Word in the mind and heart, to examine it, to compare scripture with scripture, to “feed on” its wonderful truths. In this day of noise and confusion, such meditation is rare but so needful. Meditation is impossible without constant exposure, thought, and even memorization. Reading the Bible without meditating on it is like eating without chewing.

We might say that all true love has the three components described above. Feeling (delight), giving honor, and dedicating time and energy in knowing the one who is loved. It’s true in a romantic relationship. It’s true in a parent/child relationship. It’s true of a best-friend situation. This serves as a good measuring stick of our love for God’s word. If we love God’s word, there will be a feeling, there will be a giving of honor, and there will be a deliberate time, energy, and effort spent in God’s word.

If the psalmist found such great reason and motivation to delight in God’s word, and give it honor, and meditate on God’s word, if he saw the benefit of dedicating time and effort to reading and meditating on God’s word, given what we have—the complete canon of the scriptures— we have so much more reason to read, delight, honor, and give our energy to God’s word. Whatever reason the psalmist had for his love of God’s word, we have so much greater reason.

May God increase our love for God’s word, and may that love express itself in feeling, honor of God’s word, and in giving our time and energy through meditation on God’s word.