



CWR/PTM

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

PSALMS 90-119

Week 4

The ABCs of Worship

DAY 22

Psalms 111

Which activities do you like more—those that challenge your brain, your heart or your body?

1. The psalmist used successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet to begin each line of praise to the Lord. Why do you think he did it this way?

2. What is the point of a songwriter using familiar musical scales, sequential numbers, the alphabet or catchy phonetic lyrics to convey the message? Can the message be in the medium?

3. Study the lyrics. What has God done that the psalmist should praise him (vs. 2-9)?

4. In the psalmist's call to worship, where do you see heart, mind, soul and strength involved?

1. What experiences do you have—what do you hear and see—that brings you closer to God?

2. What has God done for you that you should praise him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength?

*Psalms 111—118 are anonymous and are called **hallelujah psalms** (from the Hebrew words Hallelu Yahweh, meaning “praise the Lord”). The uplifting tone of these praise psalms is evident from the first line through the last. Psalms 111 and 112 are a pair of **acrostic** poems, each with ten lines and twenty-two phrases, with each successive phrase beginning with the next letter of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

A More Compassionate Conservative

Psalm 112

OPENING
up to the Word

In your experience, who personifies compassion?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What are the rewards for obeying God and caring for others in need (vs. 2-9)?
 2. Should those who obey God expect to be wealthy (v. 3), or never to experience bad news (v. 7)? Why or why not?
 3. In this psalm, who are the *righteous* and who are the *wicked*?
 4. How do the righteous show love to the poor, the needy, those in trouble?
 5. What two problems are solved by compassion and generosity?
-

LIVING
out the Word

1. Which rewards or blessings of faith-in-action do you enjoy?
 2. How and why and when will you show love to the poor, the needy, those in trouble?
-

WINDOW
on the Word

See the note at Psalm 111 about hallelujah psalms and acrostic poems. Concerning fear of the Lord, Psalm 112 picks up where Psalm 111 left off, but cites examples and incentives for practicing the right kind of fear and faith.

Delighting in

God's Word

Read whatever chapter of Scripture you will, and be ever so delighted with it—yet it will leave you as poor, as empty and unchanged as it found you, unless it has turned you wholly and solely to the Spirit of God, and brought you into full union with and dependence upon Him.

—William Law (1686-1761)



Photo by Barry Stahl—PTM

State of the Heart

Psalm 113

OPENING
up to the Word

Take some time to remember how Jesus loved the “little” people—the alienated, the outsiders and the disenfranchised.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. To what extent is the Lord to be praised (vs. 2-4)?

2. What is the point of the rhetorical question in verses 5-6?

3. Do you know someone who began life in poverty and humble beginnings, perhaps as a poor farmer, a street person or a social outcast? What application of verses 7-9 do you see for such people?

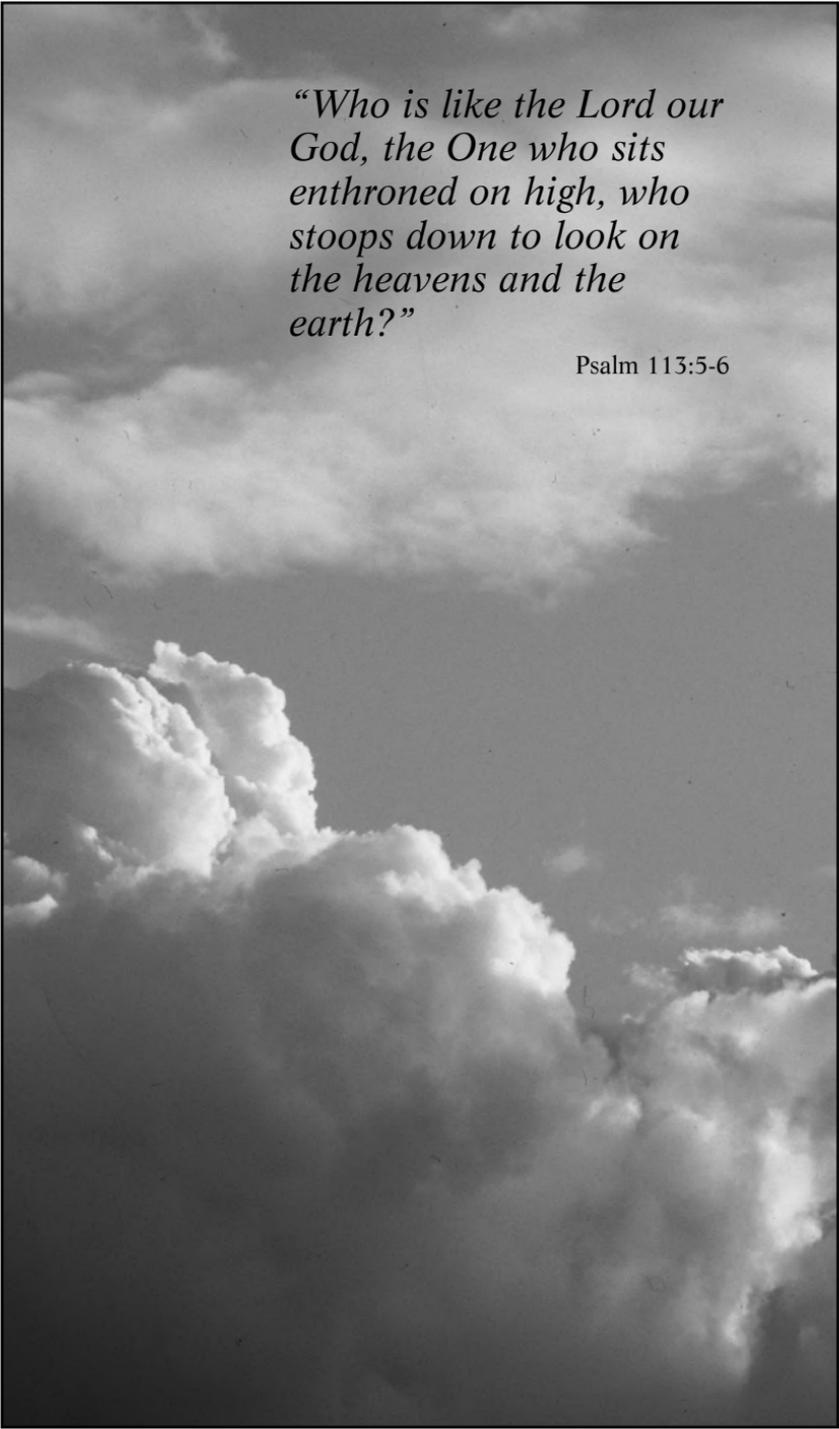
LIVING
out the Word

1. From what humble circumstances has the Lord lifted you up?

2. We “servants of the Lord” (v. 1) are to imitate the mind of Christ (Php 2:5-11), who in humility took on the form of a servant to make us one with God in his glory. How does this psalm suggest that you do that?

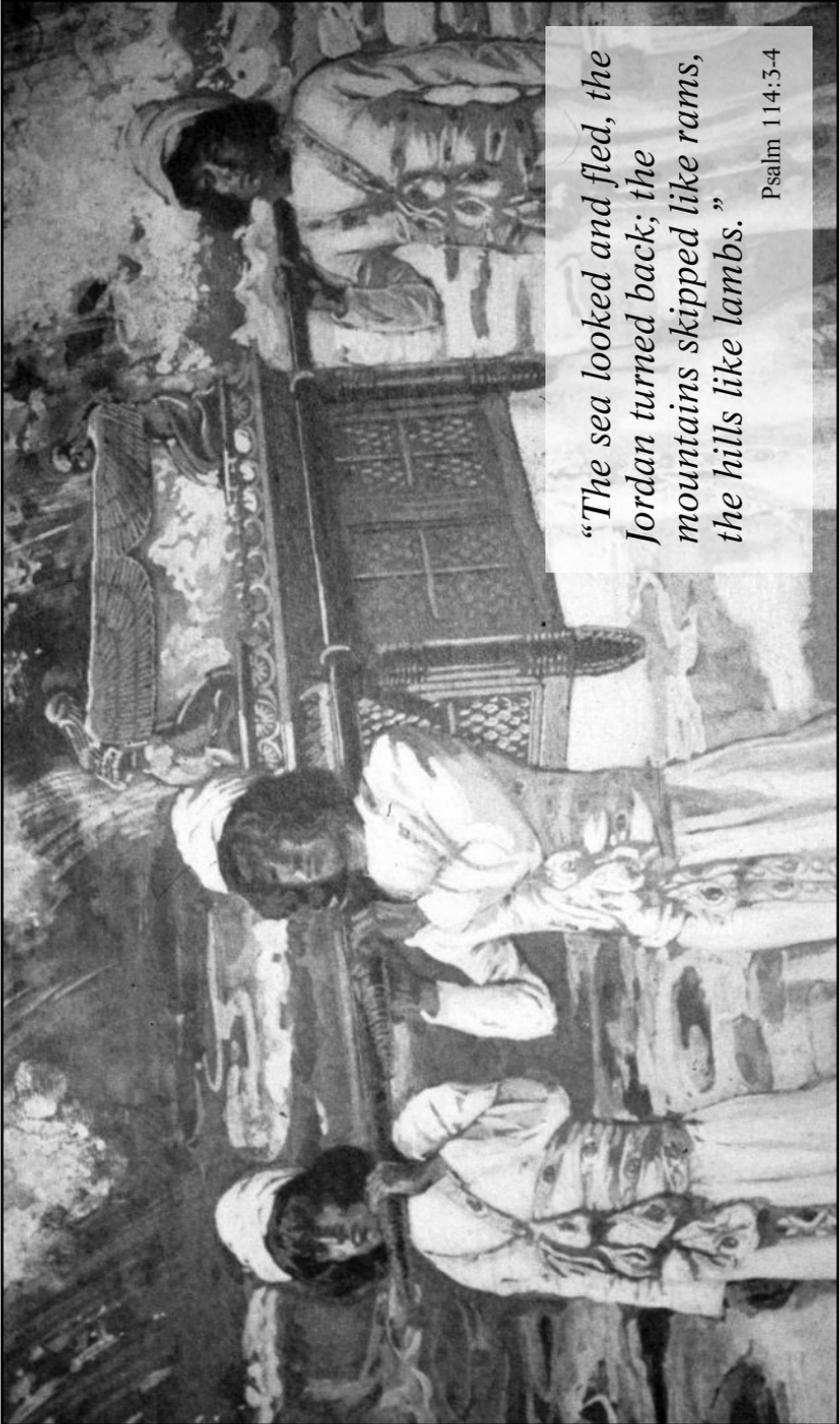
WINDOW
on the Word

Psalms 113–118 form a liturgy linked with the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles. Hannah (in 1Sa 2:8) and Mary (in Lk 1:52) apply the words of Psalm 113 to their respective situations where God delivers them from poverty and childlessness. Ultimately, this psalm speaks of the Lord’s incarnation and humility in condescending to be one of us, and in lifting us up to be one with him—seated in heavenly places, sharing in his kingly glory.



*“Who is like the Lord our
God, the One who sits
enthroned on high, who
stoops down to look on
the heavens and the
earth?”*

Psalm 113:5-6



*“The sea looked and fled, the
Jordan turned back; the
mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.”*

Psalms 114:3-4

Of Rams, Lambs and Dams

DAY 25

Psalms 114

Ever cross a rushing river that turned out to be too deep, or climb a mountain that proved too steep? What happened?

1. What does God's awesome power look like here? What does it feel like?

2. What truths of the Exodus story are conveyed by poetic figures of speech such as the "sea looked and fled" and the "mountains skipped" (vs. 3-6)?

3. What is significant about the parting of the Red Sea, the epiphany on Mount Sinai, the crossing of the River Jordan (vs. 3-6), and the water-from-a-rock incident (v. 8)? What do those events in Israel's history have to do with today's generation?

1. What main events would you retell in a personal psalm of your own journey with Jesus? In your case, (a) Which event in your life was "Egypt" (v. 1)? (b) How did you manage to escape? When did the waters part? (c) When did the earth "tremble" (v. 7) or cause you to tremble at the presence of God? (d) When did you receive life-giving water, as from a rock (v. 8)?

2. Will you then trust the God of Jacob to guide and provide during the next crisis in your spiritual journey?

*If Psalm 113 tells us what is distinctive about the God of Israel, Psalm 114 offers the crowning illustration—the unique event of the Exodus. Dramatic figures of speech—the **sea fled** and the **mountains skipped** (vs. 3-6)—portray the miraculous exodus from Egypt.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

The Real Thing

Psalm 115

OPENING
up to the Word

When did God first become more than an academic concept to you? When you think about God now, what image—tangible or intangible—comes to mind?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How did the people of Israel picture God (vs. 3, 9-11, 12-13, 16)? How did the other nations picture their gods (vs. 2-8)?
2. When we make God in our image, or enlist him on behalf of a sectarian or political cause, what features tend to get accentuated? What does this say about what we all are looking for in a god?
3. Even though Israel's God lived in the "highest heavens," he was active in the daily lives of his people (vs. 9-15). How do you explain that?
4. What is significant about the "silence" of the dead (v. 17; see note)? What does that make you want to do while you are yet able, "now and for evermore" (v. 18)?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What tangible things do you tend to put first—or idolize—in your life? Make a list after you've checked your day planner, your checkbook, your closet, your garage.
2. Do you need a visible object or tangible thing to communicate with the God of heaven?

WINDOW
on the Word

*Psalms 115—118, a collection known as the **Egyptian Hallel**, were traditionally sung after Israel's celebration of Passover. In these psalms God is portrayed as a deliverer in times of trouble, based on his unchanging nature and matchless name, not because of human deeds or works. For more on **man-made idols** (vs. 4-8), see Isaiah 44:9-20. As for the **silence of the dead** (v. 17), this verse speaks of that day when earthly praise is no longer possible; it does not purport to teach anything about an afterlife devoid of God or his praises (compare Ps 16:9-11; 17:15; 49:15; 73:23-24).*

*“Our God is
in heaven; he
does
whatever
pleases him.
But their
idols are
silver and
gold, made
by the hands
of men.”*

Psalm 115:3-4

**Male deity from
Hazor, near Galilee.**



Psalms 116–117

OPENING
up to the Word

What love letter, received or sent, has made an impact on you?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. What can you learn about the psalmist from this very personal hymn of thanksgiving? What can you learn about God's nature from the way he responded to this person's need?

2. What kind of person is the "simplehearted" (116:6; 19:7; Pr 1:4)?

3. Why is "the death of his saints" (Ps 116:15) a good thing? Does that mean that the psalmist would have been delighted with the Lord whether he died or not?

4. What is the point of the rhetorical question in verse 12? Can anyone repay the Lord for the price he paid for man's redemption?

5. God wants to be worshiped by "all you nations" (117:1), yet shows great love toward Israel (v. 2). What then is Israel's role as the chosen people?

LIVING
out the Word

1. What would a tape recording of your bedtime or daytime prayers reveal about your relationship with God? What does your "walk before the Lord" (116:9) look like?

2. We come to know God most intimately as we pray and see answers to prayers. What have you learned about God from your prayer life?

3. As a token repayment, this psalmist composes a love note to the one he loves. What verse of heartfelt worship can you make up to give as a valentine to the Lord?

WINDOW
on the Word

"I love the Lord,... I believed,... I will fulfill my vows" (116:1, 10, 14). While the surrounding psalms in this collection accent God's love for his people and involve a corporate response, Psalm 116 is a singular love poem, sung by an individual to God, in thankful response for God saving him from certain death.

Worship Processional

DAY 28

Psalms 118

When the average non-Christian hears the word “Christian” what attributes and attitudes immediately come to mind? Why?

1. In Psalm 118, the repeated refrains or liturgical formulas (vs. 1-4, 6-7, 8-9, 10-12, 15-16) are corporate responses. What theme do you see developing in each refrain?
2. The Lord “has become my salvation” (vs. 14, 21) as opposed to trusting in man (vs. 8-9). What kinds of human alliances or man-made solutions are precluded here?
3. If you call on the Lord when you’re in trouble, will he always give deliverance and victory?
4. Verses 22 and 26 are oft-quoted with reference to Christ and his spiritual, universal body of followers (see Mt 21:9 and Lk 13:35, Ac 4:8-11 and 1Pe 2:7). (a) Who are “the builders”? (b) What “stone” do they reject? (c) What is a “capstone” (see Zec 4:7-9)? (d) Who comes in the name of the Lord?

1. The Psalmist describes someone who is content, trusting and beyond that, delighted in and with God. Why then are people who say they worship God seemingly angry, upset, vindictive and even hateful?

2. Is God as capable of doing “mighty things” (v. 15) for you and your family and your church now as he did for Israel long ago?

The worshippers proceed to the Temple (vs. 1-18), enter the gates (vs. 19-20), stand before the alter (vs. 21-25), are greeted by the high priest (vs. 26) and offer their sacrifices (vs. 27-29).

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

Psalm 119:9-11

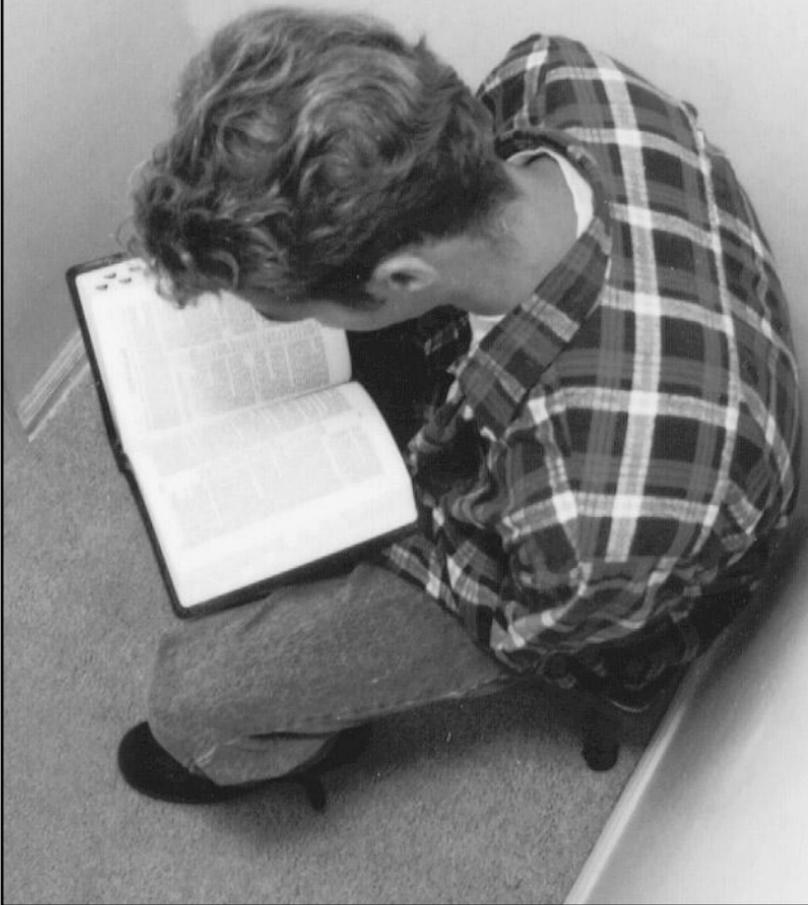


Photo by Hal Finch—PTM

I Love God's Law (Part I)

DAY 29

Psalm 119

Love of God in the Old Testament centers on law—how does that emphasis change when God came to us in the person of Jesus? See John 1:17.

1. What blessings or benefits result from devoting oneself to God's will (vs. 1-8)?
2. How can youthful and lustful indiscretions be avoided (vs. 9-16)?
3. When God figuratively opens your eyes, what gifts will you get from his word (vs. 17-24)?
4. How does one keep going spiritually, even when depressed (vs. 25-32)?
5. The writer asks for God's guidance in eight ways (vs. 33-40). What are they?
6. What steps does one take to ensure a closer walk with God (vs. 57-64)?
7. What good things does God do for his children (vs. 65-72)?
8. Why is the writer suffering? And what is the antidote (vs. 73-80)?
9. What age-old questions is the writer struggling with (vs. 81-88)?

This elaborate acrostic poem is constructed of 22 eight-line stanzas. In each stanza, all eight lines begin with the same Hebrew letter. The 22 stanzas correspond to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in alphabetical order. This is evidence of literary skill, and a way to make the poem easier to memorize. Another special feature is the eight aspects of God's will: (1) law or teaching; (2) word or verbal communication; (3) testimonies by and about God; (4) statutes or unchangeable rules; (5) judgments, ordinances, decrees or decisions God has made; (6) precepts imposed with God's authority; (7) commandments that expect obedience; (8) all resulting in ways of God, or habits of life and thought.

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

*“Your word is a lamp to
my feet and a light for my
path.”*

Psalm 119:105



I Love God's Law (Part II)

Psalm 119

1. How does knowing the law protect one's life (vs. 89-96)?
2. How does one become wiser than one's enemies, teachers and parents (vs. 97-104)?
3. What would one's life be like without God's law (vs. 105-112)? For a Christ-follower, what would life be like without Jesus?
4. Can you find seven things to thank God for (vs. 161-168)?
5. Does the psalmist straying "like a lost sheep" remind you of Jesus, the Shepherd of our souls? (See 1 Peter 2:25).

-
1. How does a Christ-follower understand the old covenant law as contrasted with God's grace?
 2. If the same psalm were written after the cross of Christ, would the object of adoration be a what (law) or a Who (Jesus)?

DAY 30

DIGGING
into the Word

LIVING
out the Word