

The Psalm is arranged in an acrostic pattern. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and this Psalm contains 22 units of 8 verses each. Each of the 22 sections is given to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line in that section begins with that letter. The closest parallel to this pattern in Scripture is found in Lamentations 3, which is also divided into 22 sections, and there are a few other passages in the Hebrew Scriptures which use an acrostic pattern.

Faithfulness in a Fallen World...

And today, in this mini-series on **Psalm 119**, we see the Psalm writer saying that is how the world around him made him feel because of his commitment to the God of the Bible. An alien. Only the Bible translation we use, the ESV, uses the word '*sojourner*' instead and that shows how the ESV is accurate but sometimes, if not often, archaic. After all, when did you last use the word **sojourner**?

A temporary stay; a brief period of residence.

But, in **Psalm 119.19**, the Psalm writer says '*I am a sojourner on the earth*'. In other words, '**I'm an alien because I don't belong to this world**'. He's saying to God '**I belong to you. And that means I no longer feel at home here, and often I no longer feel welcome here.**'

And if you've been a Christian any length of time, you'll know what he meant.

And today's verses of **Psalm 119** are to help us deal with that, and to see a model of what faithfulness in a fallen world looks like.

So would you open your Bible to **Psalm 119**. And we pick it up again at **Psalm 119.17**. And before we do, let me lead us in a prayer:

Father God,

Through this part of your written Word, please open our spiritual eyes

more; to see you and to see ourselves as your people, so that we can live faithfully in a fallen world.

In Jesus name; Amen.

So **Psalm 119** is the prayer of a believer who lived before Jesus, but his commitment to God and to God's Word pointed forward to what Christian lives would look like, and above all to what Christ's life would look like, when he was here as '*a sojourner on earth*', and so perfectly committed to his Father's will that it ultimately took him to the cross. I've got three headings for today's verses. **And here's number one:**

(OHP) 1. The reality of being 'sojourners on earth' (Psalm 119.17-19)

so look down to **Psalm 119.17**, and you'll see the mystifying word:

GIMEL, and that's the third word of the Hebrew alphabet, which most of the Old Testament was written in.

(And the writer of this Psalm decided to make it a highly polished prayer-poem, where each line of the first stanza all began with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line of the second stanza all began with the second letter, and so on, all the way through to the last.)

So, it's not like some of the Psalms that David wrote when he was on the run, the '**LORD, deal with my enemies otherwise I'm going to be mincemeat**' kind of Psalms (I paraphrase).

Psalm 119 is at the other end of the scale from that.

It's highly polished poetry, but still completely in touch with real life, with what it feels like to be committed to God in a world that doesn't want us to be.

So look at **Psalm 119.17**:

***Deal bountifully with your servant,
that I may live and keep your word.***

Now in a few verses, we'll meet the people who were making this Psalm writer's life difficult, and even endangering it.

(OHP) And I think that's why **Psalm 119.17** says:

***Deal bountifully with your servant,
that I may live [rather than be killed by my persecutors] and keep
your word.***

Now imagine your life was in danger – from some serious circumstance or illness and you prayed, '*Lord, deal bountifully with me, that I may live and...*'

What would your 'and' be?

Live and not leave my spouse behind?

Live and see my children grow up – or live and see my grandchildren?

Live and finish my academic career?

Live and make it to the top of my profession?

Live and just be happy?

(OHP) What your 'and' is shows where your heart is.

This writer's 'and' was: '*live and... keep your word*' because he knew in every season and circumstance of life, that's really the whole purpose of life, **it's to know God through his Word, and to live in trustful obedience to him.**

That's what we were made for.

Martyn at Wivey Evangelical. August 2020

Whereas the fallen world says, 'No way!

The purpose of life is the very opposite of that.

It's to be is to be free from all constraints, and all authorities like God telling how to live, and it's to be free to do what you want to do, and be who you think you are'.

(OHP) So in his book *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins writes this:

“There is something infantile in the presumption that somebody else (parents in the case of children, God in the case of adults) has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point. The truly adult view, by contrast, is that our life is as meaningful, as full and as wonderful as we choose to make it”.

*So he's saying if you're a **Christian**, you're being **infantile**, (childish) letting this God figure that you believe is there, tell you how to live, and you need to **grow up and choose** your own meaning and purpose and definition of right and wrong because you're missing out on the wonderful life of **being your own authority, being God**.*

Which sounds so plausible, doesn't it?

It's like when we're on holiday over in the west coast of Dorset, there's this wonderful, deep sea inlet called Durdle Door, that people jump in and go swimming in. People often say , *'It's lovely and warm! Come on in!'* Jump and it looks so inviting and exciting and they sound so *plausible*, but I know it's not true, because it's the **Atlantic**, not the Caribbean.

The fact that if you do jump of Durdle Door....then you may have a trip in a helicopter, have lots of important folk around you, and if you survive, spend your live in a wheelchair and so on...

And in a similar way what the fallen world is saying to us every day sounds so inviting and so plausible, but we need to see through it.

Which explains the prayer that comes next:

Look at **Psalm 119.18**:

*Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.*

*I am a sojourner on the earth;
hide not your commandments from me!*

So that's just one prayer requests, it's bracketed together, because praying, **'open my eyes to your Word' is just the same as praying 'hide not your Word from me'**, and so he's saying, **'Lord, in order for me to see through what the world is saying, I need you to give me clear spiritual vision as I read your Word.'**

And in particular, he asks to see 'wondrous things out of your law [in God's Word].' And if you use BibleGateway, or a 'search engine' and you do a search for 'wondrous' and 'wonders', you find those words crop up a lot in the Psalms.

And again, and again, they mean the wonderful, saving work that the Lord did to get his people out of slavery in Egypt, and into relationship with him, in the promised land.

So when the Psalm writer prays, **Psalm 119.18** *'Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law...'* He's praying, **'Help me to see more clearly how you have saved us and therefore how we belong to you, and not to this world around us.'**

A Christian would now pray, **'Help me to see more clearly how you've saved me through Jesus' dying for my forgiveness, and then rising again, and how that means I now belong to him as my Lord, and not to this world that I'm living in.'**

So, there's a great prayer to pray whenever we come to the Bible: **'Lord, help me to see more clearly what you've done for me in Jesus and who I am in Jesus.'**

And this Psalm writer prays that, because, **Psalm 119.19**; *'I am a sojourner on the earth'*.

In other words, 'Because I'm an alien, because I don't belong to this fallen world – I belong to you Lord. And yet he realises he is so easily deceived by the world, so easily pressured or seduced to side with it, that he needs God to keep his spiritual sight clear'.

So that's the reality of being 'sojourners on earth'.

Then secondly:

(OHP) 2. The outward conflict of being 'sojourners on earth' (Psalm 119.20-24)

Look on to **Psalm 119.20-24**, where the Psalm writer says to God:

My soul is consumed with longing

for your rules at all times.

You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones,

who wander from your commandments.

*Take away from me scorn and contempt,
for I have kept your testimonies.
Even though princes sit plotting against me,
your servant will meditate on your statutes.
Your testimonies are my delight;
they are my counsellors.*

I said we would meet the people who were making this Psalm writer's life difficult, and even endangering it, and here they are in **Psalm 119.21**:

*You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones,
who wander from your commandments.*

[Which means 'who deliberately walk away from God and his ways'].

So, the Psalm writer says these people who do not like his commitment to God are 'insolent' towards him. Which my Dictionary defines as: 'having an arrogant lack of respect, expressing scorn and contempt'.

And sadly some of the things Richard Dawkins has said, along with others of the so-called **New Atheists, certainly fits that definition.**

And scorn and contempt is certainly what you are inviting if you speak as a Christian on any of today's moral issues. You're bigoted, homophobic, intolerant, judgemental, and worse.

And then in **Psalm 119.23** we find that some of these insolent people are in very high places. '*Even though princes sit plotting against me...*'

That is the first hint that the Psalm's writer himself might have moved in high circles, might even have been one of the godly kings, later leaders of Israel.

But whoever he was, the people who did not like his commitment to God had the power to do him damage.

And the Psalm gives various hints as it goes on, that his life was in danger.

And that's the changed world that we're now beginning to live in as Christians.

A generation ago, I guess, being a Christian just meant disagreeing with the world on certain things.

Now it means being **in danger from it, from** the new moral orthodoxies that it's trying to impose on us – increasingly, with the backing of law.

So, you have the danger of being disciplined for saying the wrong thing or not saying the right thing, the danger of being removed from positions and public life in politics, the danger of losing your job and your livelihood.

So look at this Psalm writer's model attitude to that in **Psalm 119.23-24**.

He says to the Lord:

Even though princes sit plotting against me,

[even when commitment to you gets not just difficult but dangerous]

your servant will meditate on your statutes.

*Your testimonies are my delight;
they are my counsellors.*

In other words, even then I will side with God and his Word.

Because although siding with the world would relieve the pressure of being a sojourner on earth, that's about all that can be said for it.

Because does the world clearly offer the delight, the joy, that commitment to God does?

And does the world clearly offer counsel that's better, that's wiser than what we have in God and his Word , that clearly delivers the kind of life that makes you look at the unbeliever and say, 'Wow, you are so lucky. I wish I was you'?

And remember, Jesus faced this conflict; of being treated with scorn and contempt, of being plotted against by princes (who of course ultimately crucified him).

And Satan offered him a way out of the conflict, didn't he? (in the temptations in the wilderness).

Satan basically said, '*You can still have a kingdom over here, but without suffering if you side with me.*'

But that easy kingdom would have been no kingdom at all, **just like the easy life he offers us is no life at all.**

So, the reality of being sojourners on earth, the external conflict of that, and lastly:

(OHP) 3. The inward cost of being ‘sojourners on earth’ Psalm 119.25-32

If the last stanza is about a believer’s outward conflict with the world, I think this this next one is more about the inward cost, the toll that it takes.

So above **Psalm 119.25** is the word *DALETH*.

That’s the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet – their ‘D’ if you like.

And in the original, all the lines of this stanza begin with that.

So **Psalm 119.25-28**:

*My soul clings to the dust;
give me life according to your word!
When I told of my ways, you answered me;
teach me your statutes!
Make me understand the way of your precepts,
and I will meditate on your wondrous works.
My soul melts away for sorrow;
strengthen me according to your word!*

And those four verses hang together as one thought, because verse 25 and 28 are very similar and bracket that thought.

So, verse **Psalm 119.25**: *‘My soul clings to the dust...’*

In other words, ***‘I have got so low, I am so worn out by the pressures and seductions of this world, that I feel I can’t keep going, that any minute now I could give in’.***

Maybe you relate to that.

For example, **people often say to me** recently that his workplace was 'corrosive' for a Christian, that when he got home, he felt he needed to detox.

Another said to me recently that she despaired at how many things on the BBC on TV, on radio, online, now have a gay agenda.

That's how the sojourner on earth feels.

And so next line he prays: ***give me life according to your word!***

And then verse 28: ***'My soul melts away for sorrow...'*** We would talk about 'dissolving into tears'.

And later in the Psalm he does say, ***'My eyes shed streams of tears because people do not keep your law.'*** (Psalm 119.136).

In other words, he saying, ***'I'm overwhelmed by just how far the world is from you and your ways Lord.'***

And maybe you relate to that sense of being overwhelmed by how fast it's moving away.

And so next line he prays ***'strengthen me according to your word!'***

That shows when the writer of Psalm 119 mentions God's word he's not always just thinking of God's commands.

Here, he's clearly talking about God's word of promise. And he's praying, **(OHP) *'I can't keep going in my own strength under the pressures and seductions of this world and I'm overwhelmed by just how far it is from your ways. So, you are going to have to keep me going, as you have promised to.'***

And we need to pray that for ourselves, brothers and sisters.

We need to name the pressures and seductions of the day ahead and praying, 'strengthen me.'

And reading on to **Psalm 119.29**, he's obviously still very conscious how easily he could give in and side with the world's 'false ways'. And so, he prays '*Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law!*'

And then he ends this stanza by telling the Lord he is still committed to him. **Psalm 119.30-32:**

*I have chosen the way of faithfulness;
I set your rules before me.
I cling to your testimonies, O LORD;
let me not be put to shame!
I will run in the way of your commandments
when you enlarge my heart!*

And that last verse, verse 32 is a lovely picture of commitment to God, which gives the lie to the world's idea that it means losing your freedom, because it's a picture of going for a run (which in and of itself might not be attractive to you but just run with the picture).

And where it says '*when you enlarge my heart*', the Bible uses that word '*enlarge*' elsewhere, to describe large places, wide open spaces is the idea.

So don't imagine a run along a narrow footpath, where you feel constantly constrained by barbed wire and hedges and stinging nettles. Imagine instead, a run on a huge beach when the tide is way out (this is

one of my holiday treats over in St David's in Wales), where you feel utterly free in all that space.

And Psalm 119.32 says commitment to God *does mean running within the way of his commandments, it does mean being constrained in that sense by his definition of what is right and wrong, what is good and what is not good for us.*

But, in your heart, that does not feel like running along the narrow footpath. It feels like running on the beach.

Because for a human being, made to live in trustful obedience to God, the most freeing thing is to be what you were made to be.

But the world doesn't get that does it?

And it looks at Christians and it says, **'Poor you. If only you were free like we are.'**

But the truth is, it is only those who belong to Jesus, and who are therefore aliens, within this fallen world, who can know real freedom from being shaped by their sinful desires, and real freedom from being shaped by the pressures and seductions of the world.

And when they are in their right minds, Christians know that being aliens like that is not a blight on their lives, it's a blessing.

1. Separate from the World

Some of us take our boats out of the water all together. Our intentions are good. We want to protect ourselves and our families from the sin of the world. Granted, it's easier to live by God's standards if we remove ourselves from the influence of the world. But there's one big problem with that. In doing so, we also remove the influence of Christ from the world. Jesus calls us to go out into the world and take the Gospel (John 17:14-18), not hunker down in a holy bunker.

2. Compromise in One or More Areas

Others of us launch our boats out in the culture, but because we fail to adequately protect ourselves from its influence and guard ourselves against sin, we end up taking on water. Some believers simply throw up their hands in surrender without even trying to live by God's standards. Following Christ may feel "too hard," "too boring," or just "too weird." But the majority of us compromise little by little. Often, we don't even realize it's happening. We straddle the fence over here. We give slightly in another area over there. Sometimes, we even compromise with God's holy standards in a misguided attempt to be "relevant."

3. Live by God's Standards Out in the World

Admittedly, being out in the world but not like it can be brutally difficult - much like paddling a boat upstream. In fact, some days it may be more like trying to go *up* Niagara Falls in a barrel.

Fix our eyes on Jesus...the author and finisher of our faith...

TV repeats

