

# Adult Teaching Resources

March 17, 2024



## Season of Lent

March 3, 2024—"Can I Be Good?"—Psalm 19

March 10, 2024—"Can I Be Grateful?"—Psalm 107 (RCL:1-3, 17-22)

**March 17, 2024—"Can I Be Whole-Hearted?"—Psalm 119:9-16**

March 24, 2024—"Can I Be Safe?"—Psalm 31 (RCL 31:9-16)

## Season of Easter

March 31, 2024—"Good News for Everyone"—Acts 10:34-43

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# Can I Be Whole-Hearted?

*Psalm 119:9-16*

## FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

### Key Verse

*With my whole heart I seek you;  
do not let me stray from your commandments. (Ps. 119:10)*

### Opening

After everyone arrives, remain in the large group. Begin the lesson by sharing what our Lesson Writer says about the structure of today's psalm.

“Ancient Hebrew poets occasionally made their work easier to memorize by beginning each line, couplet, or stanza with sequential letters of the alphabet – or alefbet.

The longest and most complex of these is Psalm 119. Its 176 verses encompass 22 stanzas of eight couplets each, one for each of the 22 Hebrew letters.

Within each stanza, each couplet begins with the same letter. For example, each of the first eight verses begin with the letter alef, the next eight with bet, the next eight with gimel, and so on to the final eight verses, which begin with tav.”

Our Lesson Writer shares a couple of mnemonic devices from his past: “My Dear Aunt Sally” to remember “Multiply, Divide, Add, Subtract” (for the order of operations in solving math equations) and “Every Good Boy Does Fine” for EGBDF (for treble clef notes.

Ask your group to think of different mnemonic devices they have used, and still use.

What mnemonic devices have you used?

What did they/do they help you remember?

What mnemonic devices have you made up to help you remember?

How does following something simple like a mnemonic device help?

Why do you think the psalmist would use a mnemonic device

### Reading the Bible

How can young people keep their way pure? (By guarding it according to your word.)

With how much does the psalmist seek God? (With my whole heart)

Why did the psalmist treasure God's word in his heart? (So that he might not sin against God)

## Reading the Bible *continued*

What does the psalmist want? (To be taught God's statutes)

What does the psalmist declare? (all the ordinances of your mouth)

What does the psalmist delight in? (in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches)

What will the psalmist do? (meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.)

## Making Connections

How do you answer our psalmist's question, "How can young people keep their way pure?"

What does living in a way that honors God look like for you today? What did living in a way that honors God look like when you were growing up? What has changed? What has remained the same?

Do you think young men and young women should be held to the same standard when it comes to living in God's way? Why do you say that?

Our psalmist says that young people can keep their way pure "By guarding it according to your word." Our Lesson Writer points out, "Repeated references to God's "word" (*dābar*) are used in Psalm 119 to magnify God's good teaching. Readers should be careful not to confuse the expression with the Bible, often described as "God's word." The Bible is a witness to God's teaching and revelation, but only the most ardent literalist would claim that every word in scripture was spoken by God." What then, for you, is God's word?

When you make decisions, do you rely mostly on your head or your heart? Why is that? What do you think would happen if you put more emphasis on the other when you made decisions?

What is the most recent teaching of God have you learned that has made a difference in your life? Where did you learn it? How did you respond to it? How has it affected you?

Our Lesson Writer says, "The writer understood, as we should, that we can hardly influence others for good unless we set a positive example through our own living." How well are you doing by setting a positive example through your own living? Are you pleased with how you are living? What would you like to do more of? What would you like to change?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Following God's way was not a burden or an obligation for the poet, but a joy: "I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches." Is living in the way of God and following God's way a burden for you or a joy? Why do you say that?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Growing closer to God and learning from God takes both time and intention." What should modern-day Christians do with their time to grow closer to God? Is that possible with all the responsibilities we face? What should modern-day Christians do with their intentions to grow closer to God? Is that possible with all the responsibilities we face?

## So What?

Remain in the large group. Share these words from our Lesson Writer, “Most of us know how easy it is to turn our focus away from God’s way, if not to forget it altogether. Other things and other people demand our attention. As we seek both pleasure and profit in life, however, we may come to realize that they mean little without a deeper sense of connection to the life God wants us to live.”

Ask your group to share what the ways they think God wants us to live. Write down their answers in one column.

Then, ask your group to share all the things that demand our attention. Write down those answers in a second column.

Then, spend time in conversation and discussion figuring out how to live faithfully in a busy and demanding world.

## The Challenge

This week, live intentionally for God, putting God and God’s way in front of all the demands and challenges of the world.

## Prayer

Loving God, you call us to follow you and to care for others. With everything we have going on, it is easy to put those things far down on our “to do” list. Help us to flip our list so that you are first, others are second and everything else is further down. Give us the courage to do what you ask. Amen.

## Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

**Alefbet**—The English word “alphabet” is derived from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet: *alpha* and *beta*. The Hebrew collection of letters begins with *alef* and *bet*, so we call it the “*alefbet*.” Although Hebrew and Greek are very different languages, many of their letters descend from the same roots. Both Hebrew and Greek begin with corresponding letters that make the sounds for a, b, g, and d before the order diverges (*alef, bet, gimel, dalet* in Hebrew, *alpha, beta, gamma, delta* in Greek). This is helpful to know when we consider the acrostic form of Psalm 119.

This also explains the strange headers many Bibles have above each section: “*alef, bet, gimel,*” etc. The headers are the names of the Hebrew letters that begin each verse in that section.

**Synonym city**—One might quibble over nuances of meaning regarding the various words the psalmist used in praise of God’s law or teaching, but they are all basically synonyms. Notice how many we find in this short text: “word” (vv. 9, 11, 16), “commandments” (v. 10), “statutes” (vv. 12, 16), “ordinances” (v. 13), “decrees” (v. 14), “precepts” (v. 15), and “ways” (v. 15).

# The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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## How does the acrostic work?

For those who might be interested, here's how the acrostic works in vv. 9-16, all of which begin with the letter *bet*. In all but one instance, the poet has made his life easy by using the preposition *b-*, which typically means “in,” “on,” or “with.”

Verse 9 begins with *bameh*, combining the preposition *b-* with the interrogative pronoun *mâ*, meaning “what?” The combination “in what” or “with what” is typically translated as “how?”

Verse 10 also begins with the preposition *b-*, with *běkōl-livî* meaning “With my whole heart.”

Though NRSV translates v. 11 as if it begins with a verb, the poet resorts to the preposition again, combining *b-* with the word for heart (*bělivî*, literally, “In my heart I hide your words.”

In v. 12 we finally come to a verse that begins with something other than the preposition. “Blessed are you” is from *barûk attâ*, the *qal* passive form of the verb *bāarak*, meaning “to bless,” and the second person pronoun. Many common Jewish prayers still begin with the words “*barûk attâ 'adonai 'elōhênû ...*,” meaning “Blessed are you, O Lord our God ...”

Verse 13 reverts to the preposition: *bispātî* translates to “with my lips.”

As in v. 11, the NRSV might lead one to believe that vv. 14-16 begin with verbs, but the preposition reappears for all of them. For v. 14, *běderek* begins a phrase that literally means “in the way of your decrees I rejoice ...”

Verse 15 begins with *běpiqudēkâ* before the verb for “meditate,” thus “On your precepts I will meditate.”

Finally, v. 16 closes the section with *běhuqōtēkâ* before the verb for “delight,” so we can read “In your statutes I delight.”

The psalmist wasn't changing the word order to suit his purpose: it's standard practice in Hebrew for prepositional phrases to precede the verb. With the handy preposition *b-*, however, he had an easy time designing his acrostic for the letter *bet*.