

Youth 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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Find links and videos related to this lesson.

Can I Be Whole-Hearted?

Psalm 119:9-16

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Tyler Johnson

This youth 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.

Gathering

As your group comes together, ask students how they are doing and what their week looks like. Reflect on the previous week's challenge.

Opening Activity

Invite students to play the "telephone game." Come up with a sentence with lots of descriptive words and phrases. Have students line up then whisper the phrase to the first student. The students whisper the message down the line. It may be comical to see what the end result is. The connection to the passage is that it follows a pattern, and a way for people to remember the psalm was to have words or phrases to help remember. It is good to note that paper was not a thing at a time, and aural and oral retelling of the psalms was dependent on others ability to remember before they were written down for wide distribution and use.

Listening to the Scripture

Read aloud Psalm 119: 9-16.

- What do you think of when you think of the word *purity*? What words or feelings come to mind when you hear that word? What do you think the author meant by purity?
- The psalmist was determined to show how they are following God; to point, they said "teach me your ways, teach me your statutes." What is something you have been so excited to learn?
- Based on this psalm, how do you think God wants us to live?

If you would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

- Look at Tony's great research on the alphabets.

If the group is up for a challenge, discuss what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*: How does the acrostic work?

- Have you ever made an acrostic? Invite students to identify a word that describes their faith, and make an acrostic psalm out of it that describes their relationship with God?

Application

Before closing, introduce this week's challenge.

Think about what makes you passionate in life, the way God makes the psalmist passionate. How has God informed your passion, and how does your relationship with God play into your daily life?

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 *bĕkōl-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 (*bĕlivî*, 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 'elôhênû ...*,” 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, *bĕderek* begins a phrase that literally means “in the way of your decrees I rejoice ...”

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

Finally, v. 16 closes the section with *bĕhuqōtĕkā* 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*.