

Session 2

January 31, 2021

KNOWING GOD

Psalm 119:17-24

While the author of the longest psalm is not named, it is most often attributed to King David. Some even suggest the layout, using the Hebrew alphabet as an acronym, may have been a teaching tool for educating Hebrew children. What we do know for sure is that the psalm is all about God's word. And since God has chosen to reveal Himself through His word, the best way to know God, is to know His word. The focal passage reveals four approaches to God through His word.

Contemplation (vv. 17-18). The 17th century Welsh commentator Matthew Henry said it well, "If God deals in strict justice with us, we all perish." I tell my students rather bluntly, "If our salvation was based on God's justice, we would all end up in hell. No, God deals with us on the basis of His *mercy*" (see Titus 3:5). The psalmist begins this section acknowledging God's grace and mercy. By God's generosity, we are able live our lives (see John 10:10); and thus, keep His word (v. 17). The simple word *keep* has a variety of meanings. It certainly means *to obey*, but it can also refer to *guarding*, *preserving*, or *treasuring*. Clearly, the writer believes that real living is tied directly to contemplating God's word. Verse 18 teaches two important truths. First, God's word contains wonderful truths about Him, and second, God is the One who opens our eyes to receive them. For reflection: *In light of John 1:1, what is the connection between God, His word, and His Son?*

Adoration (vv. 19-20). The word *stranger* (v. 19) refers to a traveler; one who is passing through. Hence, the psalmist sees his life not only as precious, but as fleeting (see James 4:13ff). For this reason, the follower of God is moved by a strong desire to get as much of God's word as he can, for as long as he can. That's adoration. The plea is that God would keep His word open and before him. The word *judgments* here (v. 20) does not refer to God's *condemnation*, but rather His *righteous opinions*, or *decrees*. For reflection: *Do you see yourself as a stranger here on earth, a sojourner just passing through? What effect does our "growing comfortable" here have on our relationship with God?*

Submission (vv. 21-22). James reminds us that "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Here, the psalmist said much the same thing. Those who rebel against His word are *under His curse* (v. 21). They are warned about the consequences of rebellion in the Scriptures; they are faced with those consequences *in* their rebellion. Verse 22 is awkward until we consider verse 23, which explains it. The psalmist asks God to remove the reproach and insults he knows are being directed toward him, not from God, but from his rivals (see v. 23). These are unfair and unwarranted, he argues, "for I have kept Your decrees" (v. 22). For reflection: *Can you think of examples in the Bible or in life, when following God closely and submitting to His word brought insult and injury from the godless on the outside? What is your reaction?*

Consolation (vv. 23-24). The language of verse 23 indicates conspiring groups of influential leaders continually attacking the psalmist. While this could refer to public discourse, it likely applies to private conversations laced with insults and accusations behind his back. This was a

frequent complaint of David, but easily applies to any godly leader who seeks to lead by his convictions. Yet, the faithful servant of God refuses to be distracted by the detractors. Rather, he continues to dwell on God's word. Why? Because therein lies the psalmist's delight as well as his comfort (v. 24). For reflection: *Why do you think it is so easy to listen to the voices of our critics while disregarding the counsel of God's word? How would you encourage someone who is trying to live a godly life, but finds himself under attack?*