

A B C of Faith

Psalm 119: 1-16



Psalm 119 is an acrostic – a poem where the first letter of each line helps to spell out a word or phrase. Psalm 119 is different again, not only because it is so long, but because it is broken into sections, each one beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet – or aleph-bet. We are being taken through an alphabet of faith, and verses 1-16 cover those first two letters: aleph and beth.

I came across a teacher who used to set copying out portions of Psalm 119 as an alternative to setting lines. The naughty pupils used to grumble about how long it took – although I don't think they were ever made to copy out all 176 verses. What the teacher was trying to do was to encourage the pupils to reflect on the importance of following instructions, and how much better and happier they would be if they did as they were told.

Are we keen learners?

In verses 14-16, the Psalmist uses three verbs: “rejoice”, “meditate”, “delight”. His gaze is steadfast on God, following his instructions. This is not hard work – this is a joy, something which soaks into his very being as he “meditates” on God’s word, drawing him back again to further reflection so that he “will not neglect your word.” It is the language of someone utterly in love with God.

I confess that there are times when my energies are not always so intently focused. The cry, “Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!” (v. 5) might be nearer the mark. I want to follow the way of God, but sometimes my thoughts drift and my good intentions don't add up to much.

However, the wonderful thing about this Psalm is that it shows that although we might miss the mark, the path is there for us to follow.

Learning your ABC

Although we will probably not remember much about learning our alphabet in our first language, we had to learn it and have little rhymes and pictures shown to us to help us

remember the shapes of the letters and the sounds each one makes. Small children are immersed in learning these basics in different ways to make the learning fun.

This psalm is also a way of showing us that need to immerse ourselves in faith: reading the Bible, praying both for others and ourselves, coming into God's presence and learning to build up those habits so that they become second nature, much like learning our alphabet.

How about setting yourself a challenge of reading one or two sections of this Psalm over the course of a fortnight?

You might find praying this little refrain from verse 33 helpful:

"Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes."

Faithful God,
let your word be the treasure of our hearts,
that we may delight in your truth
and walk in the glorious liberty of your
Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Rev'd Vicky Barrett