THE CORNERSTONE
OF OUR FAITH

A Song Sung in Wonder of the Word
William Jones

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about the author

William Jones has served as the minister of the Boulevard church of Christ in Memphis, Tennessee for 20 years. Brother Jones was a frequent contributor to the Character Under Construction Bible study series as well as the head of his own publishing company, A Word from the Word. He has authored the previous The Cornerstone of Our Faith studies *The Ridiculous Runaway*, *Nehemiah*, and *Doctrines on Trial*. He has been a long-time board member of Agape Child and Family Services.

He received his education from Southwestern Christian College, Lipscomb University, and Masters Seminary and School of Theology. He and his wife of 30 years have three children.
how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called *The Foundation*. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God’s Word.

The second part of each lesson is called *The Cornerstone*. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section “preach.” God’s Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called *The Inscription*. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God’s Word. To know the Bible is one thing; to do it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking *Discussion Questions* that help you explore God’s Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.
introduction

The Psalms is one of the most familiar sections of Scripture. They are moving in their meaning, powerful in their profundity, and amazingly relevant in their application. Each individual song as penned by the psalmist offers us instructive insights into the human condition.

Psalms 119 is a special song in this Hebrew hymnal that is written to celebrate God’s Word. This song sings in wonder of God’s Word. In this song, we discover God’s Word is a word of direction and a word of protection. It is a word of truth and a word worth trusting. It is a word that offers light for the darkness all around us. God’s Word out looks, outlifts, out leads, out loves and out lives every other word ever spoken or written.

Psalms 119 is a brilliant, beautiful, poignant, and poetic Psalm. Simmons, a preacher from yesteryear, called it “a star in the firmament of the Psalms, of the first magnitude.” It truly is a breathtakingly beautiful Psalm.

This is the longest Psalm in Scripture. Its 176 verses make it the longest chapter in the Bible. This Psalm contemplates and celebrates the wonder of the Word of God. In practically every verse, there is a synonym for the Word of God.

Psalm 119 is an alphabet psalm. It consists of 22 stanzas, each of which is comprised of eight verses. Each verse in the 22 stanzas begins with a letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The first eight verses in the Hebrew text begin with the Hebrew letter Aleph, the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet. The second stanza starts with the Hebrew letter Beth, the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet. This poetic device continues throughout the entire Psalm.

In this study, we will sing along with the author and learn lessons for living in our own day.
lesson 1

The Formula for Finding Fulfillment

This study covers the first eight verses of this moving and meaningful song that celebrates the wonder of the Word. The setting of this Psalm conjures up images and thoughts of our 21st century Western culture. There was:

- Rampant religious skepticism
- Insolence and indifference
- Perversity and profanity
- Hatred and hostility
- Confusion and corruption

This psalmist struggled with a sin-soaked and saturated society. He struggled to maintain his integrity in an openly hostile and antagonistic world.

His response to his world that was in ruins was to tighten his grip on the Word of God. So many people make the mistake of letting go of the Word in the face of hardship, heartbreak, or hostility. Not so with this psalmist; the tougher the going, the tighter his grip on the Word of God.

In the first stanza, the psalmist contemplates the blessedness, which comes from keeping the Word of God. In so doing, he shares with us the formula for finding fulfillment. We seek contentment, happiness, and fulfillment any and
everywhere. What the text teaches is that only God can fill the awful emptiness of the human heart.

This passionate poet teaches us where we find the lasting fulfillment for which people are longing.

**Completely Protected From Defilement**

The writer of this Psalm is so enraptured and enthralled by the Word of God that he regards it as his highest ideal. He pronounces a blessing on that life that is the practical transcript of the Word and will of God. Blessed, indeed, is that life that translates the:

- *Law into life*
- *Word into walk*
- *Commands into conduct*
- *Doctrine into duty*
- *Faith into function*
- *Scriptural declaration into personal demonstrations*

It is when our lips and our lives are free from defilement that we can experience true fulfillment. The word *undefiled* is *tamiyn* in Hebrew. It means “faultless” or “blameless.” It denotes being “kept from evil.”

God is able to protect us from evil. He not only delivers from sin, He protects from sin. Genuine fulfillment comes from being protected and preserved from sin’s defilement.

When there are unconfessed sins in our lives, we will never find fulfillment. We are made for something bigger and better than what the world can offer. So, the psalmist says fulfillment comes from being protected from defilement.

Sin is an inside job. Defilement starts in the heart. Sin exists as an:

- *Attitude before it is an action*
- *Disposition before it is a deed*
- *Conception before it is a conduct*
The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart (Matthew 15:19-20). The phrase “whole heart” means “an undivided heart.” It implies that we must give God our undivided attention. You cannot be casual about your relationship with God and expect to find fulfillment.

Whatever is in your heart will eventually show up in your habits. Our admiration will determine our actions. The psalmist is speaking about our habits. He mentions “who walk in the law of the Lord” (v.1), “who walk in His ways” (v.8), “that keep His testimonies” (v.2). Each of these statements indicates action and implies a habit of life.

The surest way to be protected from doing what is wrong is to make a habit of doing what is right. If God’s Word is at the controls of our lives, it will protect us from being defiled in our hearts and habits.

Fulfillment is found in “walking in the law of the Lord” (v.1). The Hebrew word translated “law” is torah. It means “that which is given out, that which is taught.” It appears 25 times in Psalm 119. In our text it means we are to practice in our lifestyle what God has taught in the Scripture. We find God’s will in His Word. As we follow God’s will through obedience, we find fulfillment.

**Carefully Praying With Direction**

The psalmist has stopped preaching and started praying. He is no longer talking to us; he is now talking to God. He is praying with direction. The essence of real praying is to pray under the direction of the Word of God.

He does not pray casually or flippantly, but with great urgency. He knows that God’s demands call for diligence. He is cognizant of the fact that in our own strength we will fail, falter, fumble, and fall. So, he prays for help from heaven.

Your prayer has no direction when you pray without a sense of shame for your sin. Sin brings shame. The mirror of the Word of God gives us the reflection of our lives. If
we live lives filled with rebellion and inconsistency or negligence and disobedience, we must repent and confess. The Word of God brings conviction, correction, and causes contrition. It is unfortunate that so many people have absolutely no shame for their sin.

Praying with direction leads us and compels us to surrender our lives to God. We must come humbly before the Lord with a surrendered will. “Not my will, but thy will be done” must be our prayer.

If we want the strength to overcome the shame of sin, we must surrender our lives to God. We are given strength as we obey, the more we obey the more strength we are given. Oh, what peace is found, what contentment, what fulfillment is there in knowing we have a Father into whose hands we can put our problems (1 Peter 5:7).

**Consistently Praising Without Deceit**

From prayer to praise should never be a long journey. It is important to remember that we cannot allow our practice to invalidate our praise or our conduct to contradict our claims.

You cannot genuinely praise God with a sinful lifestyle. It is not how loud you shout or how high you jump. It is how straight you walk when your feet hit the floor.

The psalmist is no longer ashamed; he is now lost in admiration of God. The essence of praise is appreciation and adoration of God. We are reminded that there must be confession before there can be celebration.

Psalms 51:17 teaches, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (KJV).

Fulfillment comes from being able to praise God without deceit. Our worship and our walk are connected. Our worship must impact how we walk. Our walk, when it is inconsistent and unfaithful, will negatively impact our worship.
The word *upright* (v.7), is *yosher*, and means “straight as opposed to crooked.” We honor God our Father when our lives are pure and straight. Our praise must be backed up with a life that is pure. “I will praise” must be connected to “I will keep.” It glorifies God when our lives resemble His character. First Peter 1:16 reads, “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (KJV).

When so many others look for fulfillment in places that are destined to disappoint, this poet reminds us that genuine fulfillment is found in discovering and doing the Word of God.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are some ways that the psalmist’s time mirrors our time?
2. How has the Word protected you from spiritual defilement?
3. Why is it easier for some people to cover their sins than it is to confess them?
4. Why is praying with a sense of shame so important to finding fulfillment?
5. What happens if we are too casual when we approach God in prayer?
6. How can our worship impact how we walk?
7. How does our walk impact our worship?
8. What are things people do that invalidate their praise?