

Our ABC's
Psalms 119
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This summer we have been exploring the Psalms. Today we are going to look at Psalm 119, which is the longest Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. Don't worry, I'm not reading the entire thing.

Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem. Each eight verse section is devoted to a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which each line of that section beginning with that letter. This literary affect cannot be translated into English.

Basically, Psalm 119 is a primer into the way of life God desires for God's people. It is the Hebrew ABC's of God's law, used to teach children. The great Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that this psalm "affirms that the biblical tradition is an adequate, reliable guide to the pilgrimage of human life." Elsewhere he wrote "The commandments [of God] liberate and give people space in which to be human. . . . [they are] a starting point, a launching pad from which to mount an ongoing conversation with God through daily experience."

[Psalms 119:1-3, 105, 169-176]

The ABC's of the good life? Sounds like a good idea for a baptismal Sunday. So, for Sebastian and all our children and really for every one of us, since we are all children of God still learning, here are your ABC's.

Adventure awaits the one who enters upon the way of God. For the Christian life is a life of **a**ction.

We are **b**orn by a mothering God and **b**orn again into new life when we enter upon the way of Jesus. This journey is a process of **b**ecoming, not of **b**eing—for who we are is not established already in some essence. We are responsible for creating ourselves by the choices we make, the lives we lead, the actions we perform.

We are all **b**eautiful, sharing in the goodness and the glory and the love of God. And **b**eauty is what we aspire to—a more **b**eautiful world where everyone and everything lives in harmony and abundance. A world of **b**lessing.

God **c**alls us out of our **c**omplacency and self-centeredness into a life of **c**ommunion—**c**ommunion with **c**reation, with other people, and with God. **C**ommunion requires **c**ommittment and **c**ourage.

Speaking of **c**reation, behold the wonders of nature—the stars and the planets, the intricacies of living molecules, the complexities of the atom. **C**reation declares the glory of God. And, we are **c**reated with minds able to grasp and understand the **c**osmos. We share with God

the power of co-creators using our own imaginations and abilities to fashion a new and better world.

Remember that **change** and **novelty** are the way of the universe, for God has declared, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Which should inspire your **delight** and your **desire**. Make it your **discipline** each and every **day** to **delight** in the world and the people around you, in the food you eat, the songs you hear, the beauty you behold.

God invites us to **desire**, **wish**, and **dream** as well. What will make you fully alive? What will the glory of God radiating in you and through you look like?

What God desires for all creation is an **ecstatic** fellowship, participating in the **ecstatic** fellowship that is God. As our Reformed tradition teaches, the chief **end** of humanity is to glorify God, and to **enjoy** God forever. **Enjoyment** is creation’s **end**; its purpose and goal. **Enjoyment** is the meaning of your life.

Which should **free** you. **Free** you from all the burdens and sins that would constrain you. **Free** you to **form** genuine relationships, to create the **family** of your own choosing, the **family** who supports and encourages you. The **family** who will remain **faithful** to you as you remain **faithful** to them. And don’t forget that **friendship** is the greatest good.

To be a good **friend**, to maintain the **fellowship** and **fidelity** of **family**, will require **faith** and **forgiveness**. The world makes it easy to become a cynic, a skeptic, a pessimist. **Faith** trusts that everything will turn out well, that your relationships can be healed when broken, that the world can and will become a better place. **Faith** in action includes **forgiveness**. **Forgiveness** is essential to the good life—**forgiving** yourself and letting go of shame and guilt, accepting **forgiveness** when offered to you, and being the **first** to offer **forgiveness** to other people.

“The **glory** of **God** is a humanity fully alive,” as St. Irenaeus taught. Your life is a **gift** that God has already declared to be very **good**. In order to retain that **goodness** and **gain** the **glory**, then learn to be **grateful**, **generous**, and **gracious**.

And be **humble**, for you aren’t the center of the universe and you don’t know everything.

Human life is impossible without **hope**. Remember that every moment in life has an infinite number of possible futures. You are never permanently trapped by the way things currently are. Learn the lesson that Christians are the eternal beginners.

Use your imagination to gain **insight** and **inspiration** as to what the future might become.

And remember that God’s love is always an **inclusive** love. If you hear anyone teaching that God excludes people for this or that reason, you’ll know immediately that that person does not speak for God.

Our God is a **just** God. Your work, therefore, is the work of **justice**—helping the oppressed, the poor, the disenfranchised. For where you find those people is where you will find God at work in our world.

The work of **justice** can be difficult to sustain, for the work takes time and effort and there are many setbacks and defeats. Therefore, you’ll need some **joy** in your life. One of my personal favourite names for God is contained within the hymn “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee.” That name is “Wellspring of the Joy of Being.” God is **Joy**, so if you follow your **joy**, there you will discover God as well.

Kindness is almost always the answer to every difficult situation. Kindness is the smallest and gentlest form of love, and love is the greatest power in the universe for God is love.

Stand in awe of the **m**ysteries. Theologian Mary Grey, in her book *Introducing Feminist Images of God*, writes, “the very inexhaustibility of [the divine] **m**ystery admits the possibility of new imagery, new naming, fresh and startling experiences of the divine.” For, according to Grey, God is always the “God of Surprises.”

Which resonates with one of the core teachings of our faith tradition in the United Church of Christ, a teaching passed along by John Robinson, pastor to our Pilgrim ancestors, “there is yet **m**ore light and truth to break forth out of [God’s] holy word.”

Love your **n**eighbor as yourself, especially when that **n**eighbor is very different from yourself.

Be **o**pen. “Open doors to conversation. Invite people in. Invite light in. **O**pen doors within yourself. Think about the big picture. Be **o**pen to **p**ossibilities. Welcome new ideas. **P**ush the envelope. Grow. And keep growing.” For we are a **p**ilgrim and **p**ioneer **p**eople.

Praise God.

Pray.

And keep your **p**riorities straight, **p**articularly **P**eace.

Don’t get lost on some **q**uixotic **q**uest for wealth or success or personal ambition.

As you can see, the Christian life isn’t about rules. This adventurous life is about being a radical follower of Jesus.

Repeat if you wander off of the way of God. Turn around and head again in the **r**ight direction.

Sing songs and tell stories. For songs will lift your **s**pirits and stories will tell you who you are and what to do.

Don’t be **s**elfishness. Instead, live a life of **s**ervice, in solidarity with those who need your help.

Learn to **t**rust and be **t**rustworthy.

Give **t**hanks.

And spend as much **t**ime as you can watching **t**rees.

God loves you **u**nconditionally, which means you’ll always be welcomed back home, no matter what you do or how often you stray from these teachings.

Be **b**old with your **v**isions and consistent with the **v**irtues.

Acquiring **w**isdom takes a lifetime of effort and failure but **w**isdom begins quite simply in our childlike **w**onder at the **w**orld around us.

So, if you’ve listened to what I’ve said, I’ve described the way of **e**xcellence. We will do our best to train **y**ou in this way, but it is ultimately **y**our choice. Remember, we love **y**ou, God loves **y**ou.

With **z**est I invite you: the adventure begins.