

Sweeter than Chocolate!

Sweet Words and Real Solutions from God's Book

An Inductive Study of

Psalm 119

by pam gillaspie

Sweeter than Chocolate!

pam gillaspie



Sweeter than Chocolate!

*An Inductive Study of
Psalm 119*



Thank you for sampling "Sweeter than Chocolate!"

*I pray God's Word will become the greatest delight of your life . . .
that you will taste the sweetness and continually desire more!*

Share the sweetness! Pass this tasty sample on!

Pam



*Sweeter
than* **Chocolate!**
Sweet Words and Real Solutions from God's Book

An Inductive Study of Psalm 119

by

pam gillaspie

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Sweeter than Chocolate

Copyright © 2009 by Pam Gillaspie
Published by Precept Ministries International
P.O. Box 182218
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37422
www.precept.org

ISBN 978-1-934884-19-5

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Printed in the United States of America

2009

Dedicated with love to . . .

Mom and Dad for always loving me unconditionally and raising me to know God's truth.

Precept Ministries and Kay for helping me to discover my spiritual gifts and equipping me to go forth and serve others.

Jan for generously pouring out wisdom and encouraging me to fully live out God's calling on my life.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to my dear husband Dave for the cover and layout design. Could God have given me a more perfect match? I don't think so.

Cress, Mary Ann, and Susan, thank you so much for your help in proofreading. You have freed me to study and write when I would have been obsessing over semi-colon usage.

John, thank you for believing in this project. Your enthusiasm spurs me on. Thank you Jan for continuing to "run things up the flagpole." Rick, thanks for your red pen—your edits and questions have brought clarity.

My dear Bible study ladies, thank you for coming along on this adventure. You are dearer to me than you can imagine.

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Sweet Words and Real Solutions from God's Book

An Inductive Study of Psalm 119

There is nothing quite like your favorite pair of jeans. You can dress them up, you can dress them down. You can work in them, play in them, shop in them . . . live in them. They always feel right. It is my hope that the structure of this Bible study will fit you like those jeans; that it will work with your life right now, right where you are whether you're new to this whole Bible thing or whether you've been studying the Book for years!

How could that even be possible? Smoke and mirrors, perhaps? The new mercilessly thrown in the deep end of exegesis or the experienced given pompons and the job of simply cheering others on? None of the above.

Sweeter than Chocolate! is designed with options that will allow you to go as deep each week as you desire. If you're just starting out and feeling a little overwhelmed, stick with the main text and don't think a second thought about the sidebar assignments. If you're looking for a challenge, then take the sidebar prompts and go ahead and dig all the way to China! As you move along through the study, think of the sidebars and "Digging Deeper" boxes as that 2% of lycra that you find in certain jeans . . . the wiggle-room that will help them fit just right.

Beginners may find that they want to start adding in some of the optional assignments as they go along. The experts may find that when three children are throwing up for three days straight, foregoing those assignments for the week would be the way to live wisely.

Life has a way of ebbing and flowing and this study is designed to ebb and flow right along with it!

Enjoy!

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Sweeter than Chocolate!

An Inductive Study of Psalm 119

How to use this study

Sweeter than Chocolate! studies meet you where you are and take you as far as you want to go.

1. WEEKLY STUDY: The main text guides you through the complete topic of study for the week.

2. FYI boxes: For Your Information boxes provide bite-sized material to shed additional light on the topic.

FYI:

Reading Tip: Begin with prayer

You may have heard this a million times over and if this is a million and one, so be it. Whenever you read or study God's Word, first pray and ask His Spirit to be your Guide.

3. ONE STEP FURTHER and other sidebar boxes: Sidebar boxes give you the option to push yourself a little further. If you have extra time or are looking for an extra challenge, you can try one, all, or any number in between! These boxes give you the ultimate in flexibility.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Word Study: *torah* / law

The first of eight Hebrew key words we encounter for God's Word is *torah* translated "law." If you're up for a challenge this week, do a word study to learn what you can about *torah*. Run a concordance search and examine where the word *torah* appears in the Old Testament and see what you can learn about from the contexts.

If you decide to look for the word for "law" in the New Testament, you'll find that the primary Greek word is *nomos*.

Be sure to see what Paul says about the law in Galatians 3 and what Jesus says in Matthew 5.

4. DIGGING DEEPER boxes: If you're looking to go further, Digging Deeper sections will help you sharpen your skills as you continue to mine the truths of Scripture for yourself.

Digging Deeper

What else does God's Word say about counselors?

If you can, spend some time this week digging around for what God's Word says about counselors.

Start by considering what you already know about counsel from the Word of God and see if you can show where these truths are in the Bible. Make sure that the Word actually says what you think it says.

Week One

Taste and See!



Aleph

How sweet are Your words to my taste!

Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

—Psalm 119:103

Is the Bible really the best thing since sliced bread? Is it better than chocolate, more valuable than the fastest rising stock around, more effective than the planet's best GPS? In our language, those are the claims it makes about itself. *But is it what it says it is?*

The fact that the Bible is not only the best selling book of all time, but also the best selling book *every year* suggests that Americans support this view—at least with their wallets. As we begin our inductive study of Psalm 119, we need to take a step back and examine the landscape of our views about God's Word, our culture's view of it, and the claims that the Bible makes about itself. If God's Word really is what it claims to be; if it really does what it claims to do; and if you choose to align your life with its claims, it could change your life forever. It has changed mine!

While we will explore the text from many angles asking many questions of it as we go, the questions that must remain in the forefront, the questions that at the end of the day will make all the difference are these: *Is the Bible actually what it claims to be? Does the Bible actually do what it claims to do?*

If the answers are yes, we are fools if we don't align ourselves accordingly with its truths. If the answers are no, we are fools if we bother.

It is that simple.

So, grab a pencil and a piece of chocolate (I'm serious about this) and let's get started!

Week One: **Taste and See!**
Notes

FYI:

If you're in a class

Complete **Week One** together on your first day of class. This will be a great way to start getting to know one another and will help those who are newer to Bible study get their bearings.

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An Inductive Study of Psalm 119

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Study Tip: Running a concordance search

If you're not sure what claims the Bible makes about itself, you might consider running a concordance search. A Bible concordance is simply an alphabetical listing of all of the words that appear in the text of the Bible. In running a concordance search on this topic, some words and phrases that might yield helpful results are "Your word," "My word," and "scripture." The more you search, the more you will get the feel for how to do it, just like with Googling topics online. What are other possible search words or phrases that might help you discover what the Bible says about itself?

Study Tip: Online tools

Using a concordance is a fast and painless process with the Internet. Check out www.blueletterbible.org or www.crosswalk.com for free online Bible study tools.

CONSIDER the WAY you THINK

What do you know about the claims the Bible makes about itself?

What are your views about the Bible? What kind of role has it played in your life?

How do your personal views about and/or experiences with the Bible line up with the claims it makes about itself? Are they congruent or is there a degree of disconnection? Why do you think this is?

OBSERVE the TEXT of SCRIPTURE

READ through the entire text of Psalm 119 and jot down briefly some of the benefits that the psalmist says come from God's Word. We are taking a quick overview right now, so keep your zeal in check and don't write down more than one benefit per stanza. Note as you read that the psalmist uses a number of synonyms for God's Word.

What are some of the synonyms for God's Word?

REASON through the IMPLICATIONS

Considering what you have seen in Psalm 119, how do its claims line up with your life experience? For instance, *Have you found God's Word to be a delight? Have you found God's Word to be a counselor?* etc.

Week One: **Taste and See!**
Notes

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Thinking ahead

What might be important questions to ask regarding the background of the Psalm and its context within Scripture? You'll find some questions on the following pages, but before you turn there take a little time to think what they might be. Keep thinking ahead. Anticipate questions, think about other verses that might be relevant, consider other places in Scripture that might shed light on the passage that you are studying. Where else would you dig if all you had in front of you was the text of Scripture? As you contemplate some of the possible questions, consider where you can find the answers.

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ONE STEP FURTHER:

Blazing the trail

If you're up for a real challenge this week, consider questions that may need to be answered regarding the background and context of this chapter and list them in your "Notes" section. Then, research answers and also identify potential issues in the text. Remember, this is an optional assignment to keep those who are up for a serious challenge engaged.

WHERE WE ARE . . .

A LOOK at the STATS

excerpted from www.theologicalstudies.org

"Most Americans own a Bible. In fact, 92% of households in America own at least one copy. Of those households that own a Bible, the average number of Bibles is three. This includes not only the homes of practicing Christians but hundreds of thousands of atheists as well.

"Although most Americans own a Bible, use of the Bible varies significantly. In a poll taken by the Gallup Organization in October, 2000, 59% of Americans reported that they read the Bible at least occasionally. This is down from 73% in the 1980s. The percentage of Americans who read the Bible at least once a week is 37%. This is down slightly from 40% in 1990. According to the Barna Research Group [1997 data], those who read the Bible regularly spend about 52 minutes a week in the Scriptures."¹

REASONING through the NUMBERS

Fifty-two minutes a week in the Scriptures might not seem that bad, but let's stop and do some math here. If a person spends 52 minutes a week in the Bible, how much time is that each day? About seven and a half minutes, less time than a person spends watching commercials in an average 30-minute television show.

Even more disturbing is the fact that people tend to make themselves look better to pollsters than they really are, overreporting such things as how often they vote and how much they give to charity and underreporting such things as illegal drug use.

Given this tendency, the amount of time spent reading the Bible on an average day among people who call themselves "Bible readers" may very well be closer to five minutes.

Think for a bit about how much time you invest in your significant relationships. What would your relationships with your spouse, your children, your friends (or even your dog for that matter) be if you only gave them five minutes a day?

These statistics suggest that the vast majority of the visible church (to say nothing of those outside) is in the Word of God marginally at best.

Perhaps many today who have doubts that God's Word is what it says it is have just not given it a chance.

Christianity, if you boil it all the way down, centers on one question: *Is Jesus who He says He is?*

This study, as mentioned, focuses on a related question: *Is the Bible all that it says it is?*

Certainly there are those who already believe that the Bible is what it says it is and does what it says it does. In this study, you will learn more about its benefits

For skeptics the invitation is as clear as Jesus made it to those He walked with: "Come and see." He didn't ask for blind faith. He invited people to check things out for themselves.

The psalmist boldly asserts that God's Word is sweet to the taste, likening it to honey. He writes not only the longest psalm by far at 176 verses, but also the longest single chapter in the Bible as he speaks of the truths and benefits of God's Word from a myriad of angles. Before we dive into the text more closely, though, we need to consider a bit of the background and context of this monumental piece of Scripture.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Psalms 119 is an acrostic poem comprised of 22 stanzas based on the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet. Each stanza has eight lines, each beginning with the respective letter of the Hebrew alphabet. If we were to compose a comparable poem in English, ours would have 26 stanzas. In the first eight-line stanza, each line would begin with the letter A. In the second stanza, each of the eight lines would begin with the letter B and so on through the entire alphabet.

QUESTIONS of AUTHORSHIP and DATE

In addition to understanding the genre of the literature, other questions we commonly want answered when we begin to study a passage of Scripture concern authorship and dating.

Who wrote it? and When was it written? We can gather some information on these topics by observing the text. That said, however, this is one of the areas where we often find ourselves needing the input of the experts. Scholars can help us wade through issues not readily apparent to us by simply reading the text. The experts, though, will nearly always have varied opinions so there's a sense in which we need to become experts in learning how to utilize the experts! If you're feeling confused right about now, take a deep breath and relax.

So how do we become experts at evaluating the experts, or to put it in other words, at discerning which expert has the truth?

First, make sure that you are soaking yourself both in the text at hand and in the Word of God in general. A great temptation in studying God's Word is to put down the Bible and overuse commentaries and comments scholars have made about it instead of letting the Holy Spirit guide into all truth. There is, perhaps, no graver error we can make. Scholars are important, but they're not inspired. The power is in the Word, not academic tomes.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Why not?

Why not try and learn the Hebrew alphabet as we go along? In order to help us to that end, we'll refer to each stanza by its name from the Hebrew alphabet in addition to using the verse numbers we're accustomed to.

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An Inductive Study of Psalm 119

FYI:

Early and late dating

A common trend you'll see in biblical scholarship has to do with early and late dating. Liberal scholars, for instance, who do not believe in prophecy will consistently date prophetic books later than will conservative scholars who believe that prophecy is, in fact, prophecy. The thinking behind liberal scholarship is that prophetic books like Daniel were written after the events in the book occurred. Be aware that this presupposition will affect the conclusions the scholar draws from the text.

Second, if you find that you need some help understanding part of a text, don't rely on the opinion of just one scholar or book. The best commentaries lay out various opinions on texts or topics and then tell you why the authors chose the position they hold. You can then find the scholars who hold the opposing views and compare both with the Word to see which arguments hold the most weight.

If you already set out to answer the question of authorship and dating on your own, you probably discovered that scholars disagree on both.

While many Psalms come with what journalists call a byline (a clear statement of who wrote the Psalm), sometimes even including bonus information on the event it was written for, Psalm 119 is often referred to as an orphan Psalm because there is no claim of authorship attached to it.

Not surprisingly, then, a variety of opinions regarding who penned this masterpiece of Hebrew literature and when have surfaced.

SO WHO WROTE PSALM 119?

The short answer is this: Scripture does not tell us. The name historically attached to the Psalm by the Jewish rabbis is King David, and much in the content and style of the text suggests that this is a good hypothesis. Other scholars have suggested that it was penned by Ezra the scribe as the people were reestablishing temple worship in Jerusalem after the period of exile. You can see how the issue of authorship and date are tied together. If David is the author, the date is much earlier than the date for Ezra. Because Scripture is silent on the author, we need to hold our opinions loosely. As you read, though, consider whether or not the Psalm has the same feel as other Davidic work. Consider whether the content is consistent with David's thinking or someone else's. In 119:23, for instance, the author makes reference to princes sitting around and talking about him. This is something David, and perhaps not a lot of other people, could have said. Watch for examples like this in the text that may hint at authorship.

OBSERVE the TEXT of SCRIPTURE

READ the Aleph stanza (Psalm 119:1-8) and mark every word and synonym that refers to God's Word.



Aleph

- 1 *How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.*
- 2 *How blessed are those who observe His testimonies, who seek Him with all their heart.*
- 3 *They also do no unrighteousness; they walk in His ways.*
- 4 *You have ordained Your precepts, that we should keep them diligently.*
- 5 *Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes!*
- 6 *Then I shall not be ashamed when I look upon all Your commandments.*
- 7 *I shall give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments.*
- 8 *I shall keep Your statutes; do not forsake me utterly!*

What words in the Aleph stanza are synonyms for God's Word?

Do you notice any general pattern in their placement?

Who is being talked about in the Aleph stanza? Is there a shift at any point? If so, identify where it occurs and describe it.

Week One: **Taste and See!**
Notes

FYI:

Marking the text

While you can mark the text any way that makes sense to you, here is a suggested way to mark the *Word of God* in this Psalm.

Try using a yellow colored pencil to mark synonyms for God's Word. As you identify specific Hebrew words, you can use a different colored pencil or pen to make a box around the outside of the words.

For example:

References to *law* can be yellow outlined in blue. References to God's *precepts* can be yellow outlined in green. By doing this, you will see how often synonyms for God's Word appear as well as their diversity.

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An Inductive Study of Psalm 119

FYI:

In the text of Psalm 119, eight key Hebrew words refer to God's Word. Two other words translated "way" are also important but occur a little less frequently.

Mercifully, the translators of the NASB have translated the words consistently so the only time we will question what Hebrew word we are dealing with will come up when we encounter the words "word" (either *dabar* or *imrah*) and "way" (either *derek* or *orach*). As we move through our study we'll look at each of the words.

Key words:

Law (*torah*)

Testimonies (*edah*)

Precepts (*piqqud*)

Statutes (*choq*)

Commandments (*mitsvah*)

Ordinances [also translated judgments] (*mishpat*)

Word (*dabar*)

Word (*imrah*)

Bonus words:

Way (*derek*)

Way (*orach*)

Digging Deeper

Basics of a word study: Blameless

Doing a word study on *blameless* will yield some very interesting results. If you have the time, let's work through this one together.

Search on the Hebrew word from the text of Psalm 119:1 and note contexts in which this word is typically used.

If you're using blueletterbible.org you can take the following steps:

1. **Type in Psalm 119:1.** Change the version to NASB. **Click the "Search" button.**
2. When you arrive at the next screen, you will see six lettered boxes to the left of Psalm 119:1. **Click the "C" button** to take you to the concordance link.
3. **Click on the Strong's number**, in this case 8549, which is the link to the original word in Hebrew. Clicking this number will bring up another screen that will give you a brief definition of the word as well as list every occurrence of that particular Hebrew word in the Old Testament.

Before running to the dictionary definition, scan places where this word is used in Scripture. Examine the general contexts where it is used.

Interestingly, by far the greatest use of this word has to do with an undefiled sacrifice, a sacrifice acceptable to God. The highest volume of occurrences is in books that spell out how to keep the Law.

Are any people described as blameless? What can you find out about them? Did they live before or after the Law? Does this make a difference? Why or why not?

If you have access to other study tools, you may want to check resources like the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* for other scholarly inputs. Record your findings.

Search for *blameless* in the New Testament and see what you discover.

Focusing on verses 1-4, describe the person the psalmist calls blessed. What does this person do? Why and how does he do it? As you respond, quote directly from the text.

In verse 5, what does the psalmist ask of God for himself?

Notes

Week One: **Taste and See!**

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Word Study: *torah* / law

The first of eight Hebrew key words we encounter for God's Word is *torah* translated "law." If you're up for a challenge this week, do a word study to learn what you can about *torah*. Run a concordance search and examine where the word *torah* appears in the Old Testament and see what you can learn about from the contexts.

If you decide to look for the word for "law" in the New Testament, you'll find that the primary Greek word is *nomos*.

Be sure to see what Paul says about the law in Galatians 3 and what Jesus says in Matthew 5.

TRUE STORIES:

Noah and Job

The two most notable stories we have of people who are referred to as blameless are Noah and Job. Noah's story appears in Genesis 6-9, while Job's appears in the book bearing his name. If you are looking for some additional reading, either story will give you a look into the life of a man who was walking in a manner pleasing to God. Both of them lived before the giving of the Law. Although they are called blameless, we know from the full context of Scripture that there is none who is without sin and that it is through the perfect sacrifice of Christ that we will one day be presented before God as "holy and blameless and beyond reproach" as Paul tells us in Colossians 1:22.

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FYI:

Asking questions of the text

The key to exegesis (that's the fancy word meaning to draw meaning out of Scripture) is asking questions of the text. The basic investigative questions Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? will be your framework. Not every question can be addressed to every verse, and some verses require several variations on the same question. As we study Psalm 119 together, realize that not every question that can be asked will be asked, but don't let that stop you from asking other questions and exploring further on your own. We will never run out of questions to ask and answers to glean from God's Word!

In the remaining part of the Aleph stanza, what benefits does the psalmist look forward to as a result of keeping God's statutes?

What does the Aleph stanza teach us about God?

Does anything in the text bother you? If so, you have a clue that you need to either ask more questions, start applying, or both. Sometimes we are bothered because we have not studied and understood the text fully. Other times we are bothered because we have fully understood and simply don't want to accept or obey. Either way, when a text bothers us, it requires more attention.

Record below anything that is still bothering you within the text, as well as some questions you can ask and strategies you can take to answer the questions. In a little bit, we will look at a potentially bothersome spot together and see what we can discover simply by studying thoroughly.

Digging Deeper

Examining a perplexing phrase

What is up with the prayer “Do not forsake me utterly!”? Doesn’t it say somewhere else in the Bible that God will never leave us or forsake us? At face value, this phrase may seem to contradict that. So what do we do with it? It’s in the text so we can’t just ignore it.

Certainly the easiest approach is to run to a commentary. However, you’ll find that there aren’t a lot of commentaries that deal line by line with Psalm 119. Even if they did, you’d still have to discern whether or not you agreed with the commentator. Remember, commentaries are helpful. Scholars often ask questions lay people would never think to raise. Still, you’ll want to seek that input after you have first wrestled with the text yourself.

Here is an approach for working through this prayer:

–Consider what you have already learned about the context in which the phrase occurs. What are the repeated words or concepts?

–What did you learn from studying the words *torah* and *blameless*? What do they tell you about the context of this phrase?

The psalmist has the Law of God in the front of his mind as he is penning this psalm. Understanding this context is crucial for helping us understand some of the concepts in the text.

As you may have discovered in your research this week, the Law and the covenant into which Israel entered with God held out both a blessing and a curse. The people would be blessed if they kept the covenant, but they would be cursed if they broke it. This is a foreign idea to many people who have read only the New Testament, but it is entirely biblical. If you have time, it is a great idea for you to take a few minutes and read through Deuteronomy 11 and 27–31. In Deuteronomy 11 we have a clear statement about the blessing and curse.

Deuteronomy 11:26-28

26 *"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse:*

27 *the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today;*

28 *and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known."*

In Deuteronomy 27–31 Moses addresses the children of Israel standing at the border of the promised land and passes the baton of leadership to Joshua. Again we see as part of the covenant, if the people forsake God, He will forsake them.

Deuteronomy 31:14-18

14 *Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting.*

15 *The LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.*

16 *The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.*

17 *"Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?'*

18 *"But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods."*

The psalmist knew the Law. He knew the covenant required obedience and that God was looking for His people to follow Him in obedience. When the psalmist says, "Do not forsake me utterly," he is asking God to keep His end of the covenant. The psalmist plans to keep God's statutes and when he does, God will not forsake him.

REASON THROUGH THE TEXT

How does this view of covenant fit in with what you know of the Bible at this point?

Does this imply that we are made right through works? Why or why not?

If you have not read Matthew 5 and Galatians 3, take some time and do that now, noting what Jesus and Paul say about the Law. Does this impact the response you gave above?

Remember, we are looking at an Old Testament text and God revealed His truth to man progressively. As Paul tells us in Galatians, the purpose of the Law was not to make us righteous, but to show us our imperfection to lead us to Christ who is the fulfillment of the Law. We have power to obey because He dwells within us!

ANYTHING ELSE . . .

Use this space to jot down anything else from this stanza that you might want to go back and investigate more thoroughly in the future.

@ THE END OF THE DAY . . .

What have you learned from the text this week that you can apply to your life?

What would a life without shame mean to people today who often live steeped in it?

How does your love for God's Word compare with that of the psalmist?

As you close out your study this week, take some quiet time (perhaps 30 minutes to an hour) to simply take a walk and quietly reflect on what you have learned. When you finish, write down any new thoughts God brought to your mind from His Word.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Want to be a psalmist?

Here is an optional assignment that will help secure your understanding of the basic form of the Psalm and probably increase greatly your respect for its author. Following the pattern, write one sentence that relates to the truth or benefits of God's Word. As you do this, bear in mind that the Psalmist wrote eight sentences per stanza. Additionally, he was working in specific words and was doing a lot with syllable counts and parallelisms that we are not *even* going to get into!

Try it for yourself. Here, I'll get you started.

All of Your words are true.

Better than food to my body are Your precepts for life.

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Sweet Words and Real Solutions!

In six brief lessons you will journey through the Bible's greatest Psalm devoted to the theme of the Word of God. Discover insights, practical wisdom, and deep truths that will strengthen your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ in *Sweeter than Chocolate!*



Pam Gillaspie is the author of *No More Excuses: An almost too-practical guide to reading through your Bible* and *Ablaze: Igniting Spiritual Passion for Life through Reading God's Word*. She and her husband, Dave, are the founders of Deep & Wide Ministries.

Pam holds a BA in Biblical Studies from Wheaton

College in Wheaton, Illinois where she graduated with highest honors. She is also a Seminar Leader with Precept Ministries International. The Gillaspies, their son Brad, daughter Katie, and Great Dane Abby reside in suburban Chicago.

If you'd like to invite Pam to speak to your group, you may contact her via e-mail at pamgillaspie@aol.com.

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