

# St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Penrith

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## ENCOURAGEMENT LETTER 30/4/2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

How are you today? I am thankful for Refresh last week and the opportunity to meet with other ministers and workers in the Presbyterian Church in NSW and be encouraged by their stories.

Today we begin looking at Psalm 119 for our encouragement beginning with the first stanza, "Aleph" thinking about "Live to Know God". Also, in this week's encouragement I have included some thoughts for voting in the election this Saturday before moving on to church matters.

### ENCOURAGEMENT: Psalm 119 Aleph – Live To Know God

Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible at a whopping 176 verses long. For a lot of us it is not an easy read, and if we are looking for a Psalm to read it is not likely our go to Psalm. We tend to get lost in the words and it can feel repetitive. But the Psalm has a lot to say. In each stanza the verses begin with a particular letter in the Hebrew alphabet beginning with Aleph and ending with Taw, for a total 22 stanzas. It is a Psalm that teaches us about God's law and his word and our relationship to it as means by which we can know God and grow in our relationship with him. Over the next 22 weeks or so we will journey through Psalm 119.

How is it that we might know God? We often speak about our relationship with God, but from our side of the relationship it can be bumpy – our sin short circuits the way we connect with God, we do not always experience the deep joy of knowing him. The first stanza of Psalm 119, 'Aleph', speaks into this space and helps us grow to know God more.

The stanza begins:

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,  
who walk according to the law of the LORD.  
Blessed are those who keep his statutes  
and seek him with all their heart.

Psalm 119:1-2

The Hebrew word for “Blessed” here is “asher”. It conveys a sense of joy and happiness in being the recipient of the divine benevolence. It is a joy accessed through obedience and the Psalm stresses this in a series of four parallel phrases concerning blameless ways, walking according to the law of the Lord, keeping his statutes culminating with seeking him with all their heart. The last phrase shows that to obey God is to know God. Joy stems from knowing God. It shows us that obedience is not the means of our relationship with God but the goal, it is what we strive for because the obedient life is the life lived in communion with God.

This is underscored in the next two verses:

They do nothing wrong  
they walk in his ways.  
You have laid down precepts  
that are to be fully obeyed.

Psalm 119:3-4

Those who live according to God’s law do nothing wrong, their attention is given to living in a way that pleases the Lord completely. The law the Lord has given is not a list of helpful guidelines. He expects and requires full obedience, wherein we might know him fully. This creates a desperate quandary for us, for who obeys the word of the Lord, who meets the demands of his law? For we are sinners and we find ourselves impaled upon a sobering truth – we are not obedient, and we are naturally inclined to disobedience. The Psalmist himself feels the weight of this in the next two verses:

Oh, that my ways were steadfast  
in obeying your decrees!  
Then I would not be put to shame  
when I consider all your commands.

Psalm 119:5-6

The Psalm longs for the perfect obedience in which we can know and experience the joy and happiness in a relationship with God. Instead of joy he experiences shame. He considers the commandments and is pressed down with guilt and sorrow because he does not walk in God’s way but has a heart that turns to the left and the right. He falls far short of what God requires and confesses his sin and unrighteousness.

The last two lines of the stanza are in the future tense and mark a resolve to strive towards obedience.

I will praise you with an upright heart  
as I learn your righteous laws.  
I will obey your decrees;  
do not utterly forsake me.

Psalm 119:7-8

He sees that he is a work in progress and resolves to move towards the life that God desires and expects. He resolves to praise God with an upright heart and to that end he will learn the Lord's righteous laws, he will grow to obey God. The last verse has a desperate ring, he pleads with the Lord to not utterly forsake him, to not give up on him, to not turn away from him, to be patient with him as he strives to obey the Lord's decrees.

The first stanza, Aleph, presents us with a conundrum that is left unresolved. Knowing the Lord is experienced in obeying the Lord. But we are disobedient sinners, our hearts crippled but selfish inclinations. We experience the shame of disobedience not the joy of a blameless walk. 'Aleph' opens up our desperate need as we lament our failures. It is a need we see met in Jesus, the one "who did nothing wrong" yet died on the cross for my sin and disobedience. The Lord hears our cry and answers with forgiveness that cost the death of his Son, and then he pours his Spirit upon us so we might begin to "seek him with all our heart". It is then as we trust in Jesus that we grow in obedience as we trust that the law of the Lord is good and the best way to live. Jesus' death and resurrection gains our forgiveness and makes obedience possible. As the old hymn says, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Do you know your sin and failure? Do you trust in Jesus for your forgiveness? Do you trust in him for the Spirit to grow you towards obedience and ever-increasing intimacy with God?

## FINAL COMMENTS

A song for your  
encouragement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNWp5JNHO7w>

As always, love and prayers,  
Steve