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**SERMON TITLE: When You are in Over Your Head**  
**SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119, selected**  
**DATE: August 25, 2019**  
*Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

*Read also 2 Timothy 5:16-17.*

**W**e have talked about prayer and today is the last lesson in this series. So let's talk about "when you are in over your head." When you learn new things this is a good topic to consider—like learning to swim. Shouldn't that include, "when you are in over your head?" For teachers, shouldn't a college course have taught you what to do when you are in over your head? Or, business school? Or home improvement.

There are times when we, as Christians are "in over our heads" and we need help. Psalm 119 is the lifeline or lifesaver (I don't mean candy!).

The Psalms were written as sacred songs. This helped the people remember the Word of God. What's the best way to teach a child their ABC's? A song, right? People with memory loss may not be able to remember much, but most remember hymns with no problem at all. Perhaps that is the healing power of the Word.

Psalm 119 uses the entire Hebrew alphabet. Each letter—there are 22 of them—has eight stanzas. Each stanza embodies a spiritual truth. It is an ode. You sing it with expressive emotion. It helps you take it to heart. It helps you connect with God.

Now sometimes expressive emotion might be described as a call for action. That would be like a two-way radio. Connection is immediate. It is like saying "Earth to heaven, mayday, mayday, over." You have said who you are, who you want to talk to, what the problem is, and you are done. You anticipate a response.

Mayday means "lives in danger; need immediate attention." Remember the old term "newsflash?" You've heard this when your show is interrupted to announce a grave threat to the nation. Even open a browser and often you get a NEWSFLASH!

Or have you gotten an Amber Alert on your phone and it scares you to death! Or you see one on an electronic billboard—they want people to act now by looking for the care or missing person.

But sometimes we don't take advantage of this means of communication. Sometimes we need a great deal of help down

here, and it would behoove us to knock on heaven's door a little more loudly; more expeditiously.

Psalm 119 does just that. It is a call for grounding ourselves in God's Word at all times. It talks about the truth of God in all kinds of circumstances. It talks about immediate help.

Today I present to you verses or stanzas from ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet that will help you immediately when you are in over your head. Not only will it help you, but it will help us with major dangers and distresses currently being dealt with in our culture. You have a list of these with your bulletin.

We begin with the stanza for the Hebrew letter "gimel." Some traditions teach that the letters themselves have meaning. Gimel includes the struggle between opposites such as reward and punishment and creating motion toward the better. Here's the verse: (119:9-11)

"How can a young person keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I see you; do not let me stray from your commands. I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you."

As you start out as a young adult, do you desire to keep your way **pure**? You are full of passion but do not have experience or knowledge to guide you. So there's a struggle. You need help to stay pure. You have a desire for goodness but a tendency toward sin. The Psalmist says God's word will help you avoid **sin**. God's Word provides the wisdom you do not yet have. This is a very present and immediate help. A good beginning would be Proverbs.

Let's look at another one (119:25, 28-29). It is from the Hebrew letter "He" which represents divine revelation, the breath of the Creator:

"I lie in the dust; revive me by your word. . . . My soul melts away for sorrow; encourage me by your word. Keep me from lying to myself; give me the privilege of knowing your instructions."

He's depressed; a person in mourning. His own thoughts lie to him. Perhaps he is saying negative, life-draining words: "I'm can't get over this. I'm not worth it." But the Word revives him with stories of hope and redemption and life. Like this passage from Isaiah. The Psalmist says read it and takes it to heart:

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:18-19).

Are you discouraged? God says, "Set aside the past and look to me, who gives you streams of hope."

But perhaps this is not your problem. Never fear, there is one for everyone. Turn to v. 36-37:

"Give me eagerness for your laws rather than a love for money! Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word."

We know about that pull! Do you recognize this song? (see link below)

*Some people got to have it, Some people really need it,  
listen to me why'all, do things, do bad things with it . . .  
For the love of money people will steal from their mother,  
rob their own brother, For the love of money people can't  
even walk the street because they never know who in the  
world they're gonna beat for that lean, mean, green  
almighty dollar!*

*For the love of money people will lie, Lord, they will cheat,  
people don't care who they hurt or beat for the love of  
money . . . I know money is the root of all evil, do funny  
things to some people, give me a nickel, brother can you  
spare a dime, money can drive some people out of their  
minds. . . . Don't let, don't let, don't let money fool you! . . .  
. People! Don't let money change you. It will keep on  
changing, changing up your mind.<sup>1</sup>*

The Psalmist has a similar response: "Reassure me of your promise. . . . Help me abandon my shameful ways; for your regulations are good. I long to obey your commandments! Renew my life with your goodness" (v. 38-40).

Do you think the O'Jays read Psalm 119 when writing this song? When you need direction in life, read vs. 57-59.

When you are in over your head, the Scriptures are the place to turn. I cannot cover all 178 verses, but here's one for those who suffer:

"My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees. Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver." v. 71-72 {Yodh} and "If your instructions hadn't been my joy, I would have died in my misery." v. 92 {Mem}

Michael Durant piloted an Army Special Operations Blackhawk over Somalia in 1993, was shot down, sustained extensive injuries in the crash, and was taken captive by General Mohamed Aidid, warlord during Somali's civil war. Durant had a broken back, broken femur, and was then

severely beaten and left in a room with no furniture, a small window, a guard, and lots of flies. He could not sit up.

He described himself as a Christian of convenience. But suffering sometimes changes that. Scripture began coming to him, 'yea, *tho' I walk through the valley of the shadow of death . . .*' A Red Cross worker was allowed to visit. He writes, "On my seventh day as a prisoner of war, I found religion."<sup>2</sup> The Red Cross worker sent him a box. He searched for a weapon. At the bottom was a pen and a U.S. Army Bible. Little did he know the weapon would be the Bible. He began reading.

As he read he began to feel better, hopeful. He sensed people were for him. He read, sometimes all day. Negotiations for his release began—up and down his optimism would go. On day eleven as he read Exodus he felt like the U.S. release negotiator, was "playing Moses to Aidid's Pharaoh. Maybe he hadn't exactly turned Aidid's walking stick into a snake, but when he said, "Let my pilot go," and threatened them with a plague of air strikes and armor, I'm pretty sure they felt the earth shake."<sup>3</sup> The deal was done that night and he was released the next day. Had that not happened, he would probably not have survived his injuries. The Word of God had become more valuable than millions. It was his salvation.

So how do we take this Word in personally? Each stanza tells us of the incredible resource we have. How can we not only take it in, but help our nation which is struggling because we are in over our heads. We strive for human solutions to the violence in our own nation. We lean on our own understanding. We lean on divergent political views. We are almost at civil war ourselves. What might we do?

What if we turned to God's Word? What if we stopped keeping it hidden because we don't want to offend anyone? What if we simply said to one another, suggest to our friends, colleagues, and students . . .

We are in over our heads. There's a maxim—some call it a rule of law. It is the truth. It might help us. It says this:

*You shall not murder.* Or the cowboy version: *No killin'.*

Let's cast a vision for the **value of life**. Let everyone see it once again. Perhaps Christians of convenience might become disciples who heed the Word.

There are times when we, as Christians need to throw a lifesaver. How you might do it? We can pray about it. Psalm 119 is the lifeline.

AMEN

<sup>1</sup> The O'Jays, "For the Love of Money," (above abridged). For song see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXE\\_n2q08Yw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXE_n2q08Yw), accessed August 21, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Durant with Steven Hartov, *In the Company of Heroes*, (New York: New American Library, 2003), 266.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.