

8 I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!



Beth

- 9** How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.
- 10** With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!
- 11** Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.

12 Blessed are You, O LORD!
Teach me Your statutes.

- 13** With my lips I have declared
All the judgments of Your mouth.
- 14** I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies,
As much as in all riches.
- 15** I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways.
- 16** I will delight myself in Your statutes;
I will not forget Your word.



Gimel

- 17** Deal bountifully with Your servant,
That I may live and keep Your word.

Ps. 119:9-16 passage notes

Though verses 9 and 11 are among the best-known verses of the psalm--and rightly so--it seems to me that verse 12 is the centerpiece of the *Beth* passage, distinguishing itself in a number of ways. It is distinctive first of all in its brevity; few verses of the psalm are marked by such simplicity of expression. It also is marked by its expression of appreciation for the person of God himself. Here and in the two preceding verses, the psalmist declares outright what he implies throughout the psalm: that his goal in learning and keeping God's statutes is not primarily a thirst for the statutes, but for God himself. (So the repetition of "heart" in those verses is especially apt.)

The word "blessed" occurs in the psalm only in verses 1, 2, and 12. The first two refer to those who follow God's ways, and the last referring to God; the blessedness we attain by walking God's paths is a reflection of his blessedness.

Seven times in the psalm the phrase "Teach me your statutes" is repeated, always in the second half of the verse. In the first six instances, the verb is in the imperative tense. The last time, in verse 171, the psalmist declares "My lips shall utter praise, for you teach me your statutes"--an indication that his oft-repeated request has been granted.

Material riches are mentioned only four times in the psalm, and never in a negative way (though the "covetousness" and "worthless things" of verses 37 and 38 could be applied to an inappropriate attitude toward material blessings). Verse 162 compares joy in God's word to the joy of finding treasure; but in verses 14, 72, and 127, it's clear that the value of wealth takes a distant second place to the value of the word.

The law of God as a source of joy is a theme that runs below the psalm like an underground river, frequently breaking through the surface like a refreshing spring (as in verses 14 and 16, with "rejoiced" and "delight"). I hope we can all come to share that delight in God's word. Memorizing 176 verses--let alone trying to live by them--is a grim task if done only through a sense of duty. Accompanied by joy, though, the work of memory is light, like the seven years Jacob worked for Rachel that seemed to him as a day.

I've marked again on the page layout for this section the occurrences of "Oh" and "O Lord," because they're so easy to forget.

Verses 13 and 14 each use the word "all"--another word that's easy to leave out if you're not careful. In this case, noting that it occurs in these two verses could help you think of them as a pair.

Verses 9-11 naturally lend themselves to be thought of as a unit, beginning and ending as they do with verses you probably memorized long ago.

I've marked the occurrences of the future tense, which, as in the *Aleph* section, appear only in the last two verses.

There is a uniformity of verb tense in the *Beth* section that you should note:

- 10 I have sought you
- 11 I have hidden
- 13 I have declared
- 14 I have rejoiced

You'll come to appreciate this consistency as you notice the lack of it in other places in the psalm. When you have fifty or sixty verses to review, you'll find yourself asking from time to time, "Was that 'I kept' or 'I have kept'?" (See verses 56 and 22.) Note that the simple past tense ("I sought" or "I declared") just does not occur in the *Beth* section.