

How to Hike (and Survive!) the Psalmist Trail

Be well equipped.

For a hiker to be prepared for the Appalachian Trail (the A.T.), he or she needs to be equipped with an adequate tent, sleeping bag, backpack, clothing, footwear, water filtration system, and food. Likewise, those who serve the Lord need to remember, meditate upon, and delight in God's word (119:11-16). This is the answer to the famous "how" question in verses nine.

Stay on the trail.

As white blazes mark the route of the A.T., God's word marks the way that we should go. This is stressed in the fourth stanza (119:25-32) through the use of "way" as the first-in-verse term in five verses. Best of all, the final verse in the stanza (119:32) shows that the capacity of heart to run in the way of God's commands increases with experience.

Be flexible.

When time is limited, it is fine to be a "section hiker" by limiting your reading, thinking, and discussion to one eight-verse stanza. If it is your day off, however, and there is more time, why not enjoy a couple hours on "the trail" in two or three stanzas? A carefully planned marathon sharing session through the entire Psalm with a group of friends should be possible sometime as well. (Don't be lazy!) Thus, there is more than one proper way to hike the Psalmist Trail.

Be observant.

There is much to see and photograph along the Appalachian Trail, both in panoramic landscape mode and with a macro-lens to focus on many small details. Likewise, the Psalmist Trail diagram graphic on the cover is wide and panoramic, while the word-by-word renderings of the 22 stanzas are like detailed closeup or macro photos.

Confront evil.

Unfortunately, it is not just good people who are on the A.T. Likewise, it is not surprising on the P.T. that the psalmist called upon evildoers to turn from him (119:115). Verse 115 is unusual, in that it is addressed to men rather than God. The stanza in which it appears (#15) along with the next one (#16) form valley #4 which is about intimidation and separation.

Hike it again.

Some hikers who have completed the Appalachian Trail once went on to hike it a second and third time. Likewise, Psalm 119 was not intended to be read or preached through once and then forgotten. It is an A to Z survival guide for the Lord's servants and can and should be meditated upon and applied repeatedly, stanza by stanza throughout one's life.

Many enjoy reading the one-a-day chapters in Proverbs, even though the divisions in Proverbs are somewhat artificial. The alphabetical divisions in Psalm 119 are God given.

Don't carry useless junk.

Most new hikers have far too much stuff. So their packs are heavy, and they end up discarding much of their equipment as they learn what is truly essential and what is not. Profit-hungry outfitters are, of course, happy to sell hikers more stuff, but the Lord as the believer's Outfitter provides what is actually needed (119:11-16, 98-100).

Don't be a critic.

Sadly, experienced hikers sometimes wrongly criticize the equipment other hikers use, especially if it is anything out of the ordinary. With that in mind, please remember that the word-by-word rendering of Psalm 119 in this booklet is aimed at revealing the first-in-verse terms. So this booklet is special but necessary equipment in Psalm 119, which is **not** intended to replace, or lead to a critique of, your everyday Bible.

Don't overreact.

Lack of adequate spring water during hot, dry summers can lead to hiker dehydration along the Appalachian Trail. So "trail angels" sometimes meet hikers in the valleys and provide free, cool, refreshing drinks. Likewise, the psalmist was hot with anger for a while against the wicked in verse 53. Yet, in the surrounding verses he said that he was also comforted and encouraged through the Scriptures (119:52-54). We too need God's word to control our emotions.

Don't panic.

As long-distance hikers are often reminded, the most important thing in times of crisis is to not panic. For the psalmist, the low point came at the midpoint, in stanza #11 and verses 81 through 88. His enemies had almost made an end of him (119:87). Yet he did not forsake the Lord's precepts (119:87). God's word kept him from panic.

Don't be a willful loner.

Like solo hiking, personal Bible study can be wonderful, and the psalmist was often alone. Yet he longed for biblical fellowship with others who feared the Lord. Stanzas eight through ten, especially verses 63 and 79, form a broad "peak" focused on godly fellowship. Therefore as much as possible, it is good to study Psalm 119 with others. So seek out others who fear the Lord to join you on the Psalmist Trail.

Don't be boastful.

The completion of the Appalachian Trail is a great accomplishment. So too is a life well lived for God. Even so, the psalmist — who may very well have been Jeremiah — admitted from the beginning in verse five that he was not as stable as he would like to be. Moreover, though his walk was improved somewhat through the affliction that he suffered (119:67, 71), at the very end of the psalm he confessed to having gone astray in some ways (119:176). Since even he, the prophet Jeremiah (?), was not boastful, neither should we boast.

