

Independence Day reminds us how dangerous the world is, and how costly our freedom and security can be. For 227 years our peace and safety has cost us the blood of many patriots and soldiers. ***Constant vigilance is needed to keep our freedom and safety secure nationally.***

One of our great responsibilities as individuals is to protect those we love. One of my great duties as a husband is to protect my wife and children. This duty and responsibility shows up as we lock the doors at night, listen to weather advisories, remind them to buckle up, watch for suspicious characters when we drop them off places, warn them to be careful – all because we love them and want to protect them. ***Constant vigilance is needed to keep our freedom and safety secure physically.***

This was brought home to me vividly this week as Bonnie and I sat on the edge of the great Huron National Forest that stretches across Northern Michigan. This beautiful area has nearly one million acres of trees, with 9 pristine rivers running for 550 miles, crisscrossed by 330 miles of trails. Late Monday night, under those towering oaks and ancient jack pines we watched the stars as our children slept in three tents under one giant oak tree.

Just as we were ready to stop talking and head to bed I switched on my flashlight and made a wide arc across the rolling hillside in front of us, hoping to see a deer grazing on the lush green grass. Instead we both gasped; there in the distance loping across the hillside was a pair of glowing yellow eyes that reflected back at about the size of a half dollar. Bonnie was sure it was some fierce carnivore. So dad was dispatched with a stick and the flashlight to go out and meet the creature and to defend our sleeping and unprotected children.

As parents we saw a danger. As those entrusted with the care and protection of those small lives, we had to act. Lurking in the million acres of dark shadows of the night were creatures that could harm the lives we love so much. After quite a chase I ran the forest monster up a tree, only to turn back to find two more sets of glowing yellow eyes headed out another thicket of trees. After rolling stones, banging sticks and waving my flashlight – those next two were warded off. The good news was that these monsters turned out to be harmless coons on their way to the camp trashcan. But the memory of creatures of the night stalking our children was unforgettable.

As I lay quietly listening to the sounds of the forest that evening my mind turned to something far more dangerous than a Huron national Forest wild animal. Those animals

could only scratch and scare my children. No, I began to think of the spiritual forces of darkness, of creatures far more lethal than any that roamed the forest. What can I do to protect and guard my life and the lives of those I love from dangers that lurk in the spiritual darkness seeking to injure the souls of those loved ones? What does God say we need to do to stay safe and secure here on earth? ***Constant vigilance is needed to keep our freedom and safety secure spiritually.***

A safe, secure, and liberated life is described in God's Word as 'word filled'. As Paul said, a Spirit filled believer has the Word richly dwelling or filling them. But how is that possible? To find out we need to turn our hearts to Psalm 119. There EZRA explains the secret of maintaining a Word Filled Life – the only sure protection in the dark spiritual forests of life into which we -- and our loved ones, must walk each day.

Our focus is that Old Testament Giant of the Faith – EZRA. His testimony is the 119th Psalm. He gives us in these 176 verses the content of his personal HABITS or RESPONSES to the Lord, and his personal resolves or HOPES in the Lord.

Remember, there are 22 stanzas of 8 verses each.

Stanzas begin with "A" and continue with successive Hebrew alphabet lettering.

This is called an acrostic. In the Psalms there are 8 other acrostic Psalms. These are Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145

To best comprehend the acrostic concept let me read the literal Hebrew translation. In The Psalms Chronologically Arranged the compilers show how the Psalm would look if the English alphabet were used in this way; and here is an example of Theodore Kubler's treatment, in respect of Daleth (ד) in verses 25-32.

v. 25 **Depressed** to the dust is my soul: Quicken Thou me according to Thy word.

v. 26 **Declared** have I (to Thee) my ways, and Thou heardest me: Teach me Thy statutes.

v. 27 **Declare** Thou to me the way of Thy precepts: So shall I talk of Thy

wondrous works.

v. 28 **Dropping** is my soul for heaviness: Strengthen Thou me according to Thy word.

v. 29 **Deceitful** ways remove from me: And grant me Thy law graciously.

v. 30 **Determined** have I upon the way of truth: Thy judgments have I laid before me.

v. 31 **Deliberately** have I stuck unto Thy testimonies: Lord, put me not to shame.

v. 32 **Day by day** I will run the way of Thy commandments, When Thou shalt enlarge my heart.

Ezra's testimony is in two areas: his habits (the "I have's") and hopes (the "I will's"), or to put it differently – his spiritual responses and his Scriptural resolves!

One of the first things we notice as we look into this Psalm is the intensely personal nature of these verses seen in the overwhelming use of the 1st person pronoun "I".

These 176 verses have in all 176 mentioned God.

In 173 God's word is mentioned.

He refers to himself 325 times as "I", "me", and "my".

A Word-Filled Life is a Life with Habits of Scriptural Responses

First, Ezra shares in Psalm 119 a list of his Habits or SPIRITUAL RESPONSES he had cultivated toward the Lord. There are at least 10 of them.

1. **He wanted the Lord.** [Psalm 119:10](#) With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.
2. **He wanted the Word.** [Psalm 119:11](#) Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. (Have you ever had a treasure so precious, or a possession so fragile, or a favorite cereal, drink, cookie, etc. that you wanted so badly -- that you hid it away so that no one else could take it from you?)

3. **He loved God's ways.** [Psalm 119:14](#) I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.
4. **He obeyed the Word.** [Psalm 119:22](#) Remove from me reproach and contempt; for I have kept thy testimonies.
5. **He talked about God.** [Psalm 119:26](#) I have declared my ways, and thou heardest me: teach me thy statutes.
6. **He followed the pathway of God.** [Psalm 119:30](#) I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me. *(Did you know your pathway either gets clearer and better, or darker and harder -- ever day we follow that pathway? [Proverbs 4:18-19](#) But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.)*
7. **He was stuck to the Word.** [Psalm 119:31](#) I have stuck unto thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame.
8. **He was excited about God!** [Psalm 119:35](#) Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight. (Do you know what one of my constant prayers is? That everyone who goes out on Saturday night and get fried by all the garbage in the movies would feel so miserable on the Lord's Day that they would start figuring out that to watch things that so diametrically oppose God's Way flattens your spiritual brain waves, deadens your spiritual appetite, and dampens your spiritual fervor. In other words – IT IS NOT WORTH IT!)
9. **He feared disappointing God.** [Psalm 119:39](#) Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments are good. A teen once demonstrated this heart attitude as his friends suggested that they go to a certain restaurant for a good time. "I'd rather go home, my parents don't approve of that place." "Afraid your father will hurt you?" one of the girls asked sarcastically. "No," he replied, "I'm not afraid my father will hurt me, but I am afraid I might hurt him." He understood the principle that a true child of God, who has experienced the love of God, has no desire to sin against that love.
10. **He longed after the Lord.** [Psalm 119:40](#) Behold, I have longed after thy precepts: quicken me in thy righteousness.

A Word-Filled Life is a Life with Habits of Scriptural Resolves

So, First Ezra shares in Psalm 119 a list of his Habits or RESPONSES he had cultivated toward the Lord. Secondly, he records his hopes or RESOLVES

1. [Psalm 119:7](#) I will praise thee with uprightness of heart, when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments.
2. [Psalm 119:8](#) I will keep thy statutes: O forsake me not utterly.
3. [Psalm 119:15](#) I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.
4. [Psalm 119:16](#) I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.
5. [Psalm 119:32](#) I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.
6. [Psalm 119:45](#) And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts.
7. [Psalm 119:46](#) I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.
8. [Psalm 119:47](#) And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved.

9. **Psalm 119:48** My hands also **will I lift up unto thy** commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes. (Literally 'in my hands I will carry...' God's Word was close at hand).

So how did Ezra do this on a consistent basis? By meditation. Remember Meditation is a soul that thirsts and drinks of God in His Word; that longs for the waters of life and drinks them of God in His Word; that drinks from an ever present oasis in the arid, sun baked, lifeless deserts of life through finding and communing with God in His Word.

Seven times Ezra confesses his secret, it is called meditation (after finding God's Word and eating it – then we digest or meditate upon it). Here is his pathway:

- PURIFYING MEDITATION, look at v.9. **Psalm 119:15** I will meditate on **Your precepts**, And contemplate **Your ways**.
 - ILLUMINATING MEDITATION, look at v. 18. **Psalm 119:23** Princes also sit and speak against me, But Your servant meditates on **Your statutes**.
3. REFRESHING MEDITATION, look at v. 25. **Psalm 119:27** Make me understand the way of **Your precepts**; So shall I meditate on **Your wonderful works**.
 4. TESTIFYING MEDITATION, look at v. 46. **Psalm 119:48** My hands also I will lift up to **Your commandments**, Which I love, And I will meditate on **Your statutes**.
 5. REFINING MEDITATION, look at v.75. **Psalm 119:78** Let the proud be ashamed, For they treated me wrongfully with falsehood; But I will meditate on **Your precepts**.
 6. FOCUSING MEDITATION, look at v. 101. **Psalm 119:99** I have more understanding than all my teachers, For **Your testimonies** are my meditation.
 7. INTERCEDING MEDITATION, look at v.147. **Psalm 119:148** My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on **Your word**.

A Word-Filled Life is a Life with Habits of Scriptural Prayers

Finally, mediation freed Ezra to just ask the Lord for each area he needs to live fruitfully for the Lord. Remember Ezra faced a worldly congregation, soaked in all the worldly ways of Babylon and Persia. What was his plan to bring about lasting change in those he served? He started with his own life. He learned to point his heart frequently toward doing God's Will.

Thirty-three times with eleven phrases, Ezra cries to the Lord.

The secret of his fruitful life was his choice to invite the Lord into every part of his life, and invite Him into every part of his day.

1. Teach me: 12; 26; 33; 66; 68; 108; 124;135.
2. Remove from me: 22.
3. Make me: 27; 35.
4. Give me: 34; 73; 125; 144; 169.
5. Revive me: 37; 40; 88; 107; 149; 154; 156; 159.
6. Help me: 86.

7. Save me: 94; 146.
8. Uphold me: 116; 117.
9. Redeem me: 134; 154.
10. Hear me: 145.
11. Deliver me: 153; 170.

So how do we adopt Ezra's strategy? Here are so elements to practice getting alone with God.

- **START WITH HIM:** Try to spend at least 12 minutes each day in reading God's Word and seeking to find one truth to hold on to all day long.
- **SPEAK WITH HIM:** From that time alone with God, think through your entire day. Ask HIM what would be the best use of your life for this day.
- **STOP WITH HIM:** Try to also get in the habit of a weekly time of evaluation. Just a half hour reflecting on where you are, and where you are headed in life and ministry.
- **STAY WITH HIM:** Finally, try one time of strategic planning each month, to truly reflect on life for a couple of hours. Take a spiritual retreat. Sit with a pad of paper, your calendar, and an open Bible. List your priorities for the next month. Pray over them, change them, decide upon them and then do them!