

The Reason for Reading the Bible

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- [0 : 0 0] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles and to our reading this morning. And as you know, Edward has been leading us through studies in the longest psalm in the Psalter, Psalm 119.
- And we come this morning to verse 33, into this section, which if you just look at this section and you see the word he above it, you think, oh, is this just for the men?
- Nothing to do with he and she. It's he. It's the letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And you can see there's a little heading above every section of this psalm.
- It's a very clever psalm. Each section begins with the letter, the succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. And each line, indeed, of every section begins with that letter.
- So it's a very carefully crafted psalm, which tells us that it's not just to be sung. No doubt the psalms were sung, part of the praise of Israel, but they contain a very great deal of careful teaching.
- [1 : 0 3] And of course, that's why we're studying it. Actually, everything we sing as Christians ought to be full of careful teaching, teaching us about God and teaching us about how to respond to God, not just banal, empty phrases.
- And this psalm is certainly full of the very opposite of banal and empty phrases. It teaches us a great deal about God and I think a great deal about sung praise to God as well.
- But we're going to read from verse 33 to the end of this little section. Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will keep it to the end.
- Give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.
- Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways.
- [2 : 0 3] Confirm to your servant your promise that you may be feared. Turn away the reproach that I dread, for your rules are good.
- Behold, I long for your precepts. In your righteousness give me life. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.
- Amen. Good morning, friends. Very good to see you all here. And let's turn together, if we may, to Psalm 119, page 513 in our big Bibles.
- And our section is the one that Willie read to us a few minutes ago, verses 33 to 40. My title for this morning is The Reason for Reading the Bible.
- Now this psalm, Psalm 119, is one great heartfelt prayer. And apart from the first three verses, and verse 115, which you needn't look at, but apart from verses 1, 2, 3, and 115, every verse in this psalm is addressed directly to God.
- [3 : 2 0] It's a prayer. And almost every verse includes the word your or the word you. Mostly the word your. And you'll see that if you run your eye down over verses 33 to 40, you'll see that word your occurs in every verse, and actually twice in verse 38 and twice in verse 40.

So it's all addressed to God. The whole thing is a great prayer. But at the center of the prayer, there are two chief requests. Look at the first two words of verse 33.

Teach me. Teach me. And now look at the last three words of verse 40. Give me life. Those are the two chief requests which run right the way through the psalm.

Teach me. Give me life. Just look back to our section for last week, verses 25 to 30, and you'll see the same things are expressed. Verse 25. Give me life.

Verse 26. Teach me your statutes. Verse 27. Make me understand the way of your precepts. Well, that's teach me in slightly different words.

[4 : 30] Verse 29. Teach me your law. And then looking on into today's section, verse 33. Teach me. 34. Give me understanding. 37.

Give me life. 40. Give me life. And if you were to look on right the way through the psalm, you would find that those two requests are repeated over and over again.

They're expressed in a variety of different ways. But those two petitions, those two requests are the basis on which this whole psalm is constructed. But these two fundamental prayers are deeply linked together.

In fact, they're linked as closely as the wallpaper is to the wall. And the connection between the two requests is this. It's as we are taught the words of God that we increasingly experience the life of God's blessing.

It's the teaching that creates the life. It's the teaching that sustains our life with God. Now, we can be certain that our author was a careful reader of the book of Deuteronomy.

[5 : 38] Because the great theme and thrust of Deuteronomy is precisely this. That learning God's teaching and practicing it is the way to enjoy the life of God's blessing.

For example, Moses puts it like this in Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 1. The whole commandment that I command you today, you shall be careful to do so that you may live.

Be careful to do it so that you may live. So the teaching goes into the heart and mind. The obedience to the teaching follows. And the consequence is life. Not just earthly life or mere existence, but a whole new quality of life.

Life lived under God's blessing. Life in all its rich fullness as God intends it to be. Real life in this life and, of course, life in the world to come. Moses goes on like this famously in Deuteronomy chapter 8.

He says, The Lord let you, allowed you to hunger in the wilderness and fed you with manna so that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.

[6 : 47] Man lives by the words that come from the mouth of God. Now, obviously, our physical existence is sustained by our bread, our normal food. But our life with God, that is sustained and created by everything that God teaches us as he speaks to us.

And that glorious connection between the teaching of God and the life lived under God's blessing, that is what our psalmist understands so deeply. You could almost say that Psalm 119 is a practical and prayerful response to the book of Deuteronomy.

Teach me, Lord, so that I may live. Teach me your statutes and thus give me life. Now, for us in the 21st century, it's the same principle.

The life of the Lord's people today, the Christian life, the life of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people, that life is created and sustained by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, which is the words of the whole Bible.

And that's why you and I can cry out to God. We must cry out to God, like our psalmist, teach us your words so that we can enjoy living under your blessing.

[7 : 58] It's the teaching that brings the life into our otherwise dead hearts. Now, before we get into the details of the passage, let's notice something about our psalmist, which I think is very encouraging.

Although he is an experienced believer and indeed a teacher of the Bible, he's also very conscious of his own weakness. And therefore, we're in very good company with him.

Just follow me through our eight verses for today and you'll see the sense of weakness expressed in every verse. Verse 33, teach me, O Lord. Why?

Because I still have so much to learn. 34, give me understanding. Why? Because I'm so often an insensitive blockhead. 35, lead me in your path.

Why? Because I'm so often tempted to stray off into the wrong path. 36, incline my heart to your testimonies. Because my heart is a hard-boiled organ and it very often needs forcibly readjusting.

[9 : 05] 37, turn my eyes from looking at worthless things. Why? Because I lose sight so quickly of what is really valuable. 38, confirm your promise to me.

Because my grip on your promise is far from firm. 39, turn away the reproach that I dread. I fear the shame, the final shame of living an empty life.

Let that not happen to me. And verse 40, give me life. Give it to me. I'm beginning to enjoy real life now, but I haven't got very far yet. I need to understand it. I need to understand it and experience it more.

So he's very conscious of his own weakness. He has learned quite a bit, but he still has so much to learn. And in this way, he's a model for all of us.

He's modeling the life of the real believer. He's acknowledging both to himself and to the Lord that he has so much to learn. Many of you will know David Jackman, who comes here to preach for us occasionally.

[10 : 09] I remember hearing him say some years ago, there is really no such thing as a mature Christian. We're all maturing. Some are more mature than others.

Of course, that's true. But nobody is really mature. We all have so much to learn still. So if our psalmist, this Bible teacher, if he is crying out, teach me, Lord, it's no shame for you and me to be also acknowledging our ignorance and our need to be taught again and again.

Just think of it. If we were able to breeze around the place, puffing out our chests and giving the impression that we know everything about the Bible and everything about the Christian life, we would be a total pain, wouldn't we?

People would look at us and say, there goes that insufferable man, Mr. Know-it-all. I should give him a wide berth if I were you. But our psalmist is the opposite of Mr. Know-all.

He's Mr. Teach-me-more. But although he's conscious of his weakness and his relative ignorance of God's truth, he's not content to stay where he is.

[11 : 12] He's not content, as it were, to tread water. He wants to move forward. He wants to know the Lord better. He wants to make progress. And in that desire for progress, for learning more, he is also a model for us.

Well, let's look more closely now at the text and we'll try and draw out its main lessons, bearing in mind that the twin heart of the prayer is teach me and give me life.

Well, I've just got two main points this morning. Let's notice first that our psalmist is showing us the true purpose, the real purpose of reading the Bible.

And the true purpose of reading the Bible is that we should obey the Bible. This is what verses 33 and 34 are showing us.

33. Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes. Why? Because I want to keep it to the end. I want to keep the way of your statutes throughout my life.

[12 : 12] Then verse 34. Give me understanding. Why? That I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart. So the purpose of growing understanding, according to verse 34, is that we should be able to observe God's law wholeheartedly.

Our psalmist is not interested in understanding God's law at a distance or at arm's length. He doesn't just want an intellectual grasp on God's law. He wants to learn it so as to do it, to live by it.

He's a bit like Ezra the priest. Do you remember that famous verse in Ezra chapter 7 about the way in which Ezra conducted himself in his life? Here it is. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach it in Israel.

He knew that he couldn't just study the law of the Lord and then teach it. He had to practice it. He had to know what it was like to live it out. It had to be the governing force in his life.

He couldn't preach what he wasn't practicing. Why then, to go back to our verse 34, why does our friend the psalmist need to understand the law in order to keep it and observe it?

[13 : 28] Well, let me try and illustrate this link between understanding in order that we should observe and keep. I want to take two of the Ten Commandments and try to unpack them a little bit.

And I think we'll see that it's the understanding that fuels the will to obey. So let's start with the third commandment. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Now, you'll know that commandment. I've known it for many years. In my earliest encounters with that commandment, I understood that it was a prohibition against using the name of God or the name of Jesus as a kind of expletive or swear word.

After all, we often hear the Lord's name used like that on the radio, on the television, or perhaps in our places of work. And if we're Christians, we deeply, we shrink back, don't we?

We hate hearing a name that is so precious to us being used in such a heartless and cavalier fashion. But while this commandment certainly addresses that kind of abuse, there is surely more to it than that.

[14 : 38] We take the Lord's name when we first come to the Lord and put our trust in him, when we become true Christian believers. We become attached to his name.

More importantly, his name becomes attached to us. And our very identity becomes defined by the name of Jesus. It's a little bit like the moment when a woman gets married.

She takes the name of her husband. Miss Smith becomes Mrs. Brown. She's been a Smith all her life. She's been used to being a Smith. But now she's a Brown.

And she has to begin thinking of herself as a Brown. So her new name modifies her very identity and self-consciousness. Now when we come to Christ, we become Christians.

Christians. The name of Jesus Christ becomes part of our new identity and self-understanding. This is what our baptism involves. Do you remember how Jesus said to his apostles just before his ascension at the Great Commission?

[15 : 40] He said, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them. Now in our Bibles it will say in the name, but actually the word means into.

Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Now think of what happens in baptism.

In baptism, your conversion to Christ is symbolized. It's a symbolic act in a way. You go down into the water. What does that symbolize? It symbolizes dying.

You're going under the waters of death. It symbolizes your death to the rule of king self. Then you come up out of the water, symbolizing you're being washed clean and born again into a new life and a new identity.

You're still Fred Smith. But the name of Christ has now been, as it were, wrapped around your heart and soul. You are now Fred Christian Smith.

[16 : 42] You've taken the name of Christ to yourself. And you could take that name in vain if you then lived life in an unchanged manner.

Jesus says, baptizing them into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. And what does that taking of the new name entail? Well, Jesus tells the apostles, you then teach these new Christians to observe all that I have commanded you.

In other words, they are now to live a new life with a new lifestyle. So if they go on living by the dictates of king self, they're taking my name in vain.

Now, my point is that this third commandment is about much more than just using God's name as a swear word. Once we've understood that the name of Christ has been, as it were, branded onto our very identity, making us his representatives in the world, we have a powerful incentive to live in a manner that is worthy of his name.

So if somebody should look at us behaving in an inappropriate way for Christians, behaving badly, that person would say to us, you're a Christian, and you do that, well, then we would be dishonoring the name of Christ and therefore taking his name in vain.

[18 : 02] Coming to understand the commandment helps us to live by it. Give me understanding, cries our psalmist, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

And here's a second example. I'll be a bit briefer on this one. And that's the commandment against adultery. You shall not commit adultery. When you're young, especially I think if you're a young man, when you first come across that commandment, it might seem a bit of a killjoy.

Maybe you've seen a lot of films which portray adultery as being fun, and marriage as being rather stale and boring. By the way, friends, that is one of the big lies of the devil that is so deeply untrue.

But that's the way it can come across to you. And you say to yourself, perhaps as a very young man, do I really want to enjoy sexual experience with only one person all through my long life?

Wouldn't that be rather colorless and drab? But you come to understand that commandment at the age of 40 in a way that you can't understand it at the age of 20. As you get older, you look around and you see some of your friends or colleagues at work committing adultery.

[19 : 14] And you realize then that far from bringing them happiness and joy, they're filling their lives with guilt and misery. They're damaging their children. They're causing grief to their own parents, to the grandparent generation, who look on with sorrow and pain to see how this family they treasure is falling apart.

And there's something else you come to understand as well. And that is a lesson about personal integrity. You realize that a person who is unwilling to keep their marriage promises is likely to be unwilling to keep other promises.

Fidelity is something that goes through a person's life. To be faithful in marriage helps you to be faithful and loyal to other people in other contexts. Faithful to your colleagues at work, for example.

Faithful to your parents. And most importantly, faithful and loyal to God himself. Fidelity or infidelity is something that runs right the way through a person's life.

Now, friends, let me say this. This is important. There is, thank God, forgiveness available to the repentant adulterer. There's forgiveness available to the repentant anything.

[20 : 25] Whatever we do, if we're repentant, there is forgiveness available. We mustn't doubt that. But God gives us this searching seventh commandment against adultery, not so as to be a killjoy, but to promote and protect the joy of human marriage and human families.

But my point is that coming to understand that commandment more deeply is a great incentive to obeying it and observing it. Verse 34, give me understanding that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.

What goes on, then, in the human heart, which causes us to be able and increasingly willing to obey God's commandments?

Well, it's the action of God himself in the human heart that works this change. When you become a Christian, you're born again by God's kind and merciful will.

And God gives you the Holy Spirit, the comforter, which means the strengthener. And the Holy Spirit comes to inhabit our very hearts and minds.

[21 : 34] And he uses the very words that he has himself inspired, the words of the Bible. And he brings them to life for us so that we begin to feel their forcefulness and their power.

He awakens our consciences. And possibly, to our amazement, he makes us want to obey the Bible's teaching. Now, I don't mean that there isn't sometimes a struggle to be obedient.

But as we read the Bible and think about the Bible, we are learning the will of God. We're learning what God wants. The Bible speaks with power to a Christian.

But to the unbeliever, it's rather different. The unbeliever will typically think of the Bible as no more than a piece of historical literature, a bit like reading Julius Caesar. Let me give you an example of the Bible's teaching coming to life in the hearts of Christians.

Some years ago, a Christian married couple went to see a friend of mine who was their minister. And they went to see this friend of mine because their marriage was falling to pieces. And they had decided to get a divorce.

[22 : 39] So they sat with the minister and they poured out to him their pain and distress. And as they did so, his mind was traveling around different Bible passages because he was asking himself, what can I bring from the Bible to help them in their difficulty?

And he remembered a verse from the prophet Malachi. So he said to them gently, there is a verse in the prophet Malachi which might be helpful. What is it?

They asked him. And he said to them gently, he said, I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel. Well, the couple went home and they looked at each other and they said, what are we thinking of doing?

If God hates divorce, we must not get divorced. We must rebuild our marriage. And that's just what they did. The teaching of the Bible came home to them with power and rescued them from making a decision which would have caused great pain and damage.

So to come back to this question, how do we become increasingly able and willing to observe and obey God's teaching? The lovely answer is that he himself enables us to do it.

[23 : 50] He is at work within. We couldn't do it by ourselves. But he, the Holy Spirit, who is dwelling in our hearts, takes the words which he has himself inspired, the Bible, and he enables us to recognize their truth and power.

And we find that we want to respond by practicing and doing his law. Now, of course, there's effort involved. We have to put our backs into it. We need to make every effort to cooperate and be obedient.

But it's God who is at work in us to realign and reset the direction of our hearts according to his ways and teaching. Now, this will affect the way that we read our Bibles at home.

I imagine that many of you, I would encourage many of you to sit down regularly with your Bible open at home. How should we pray as we begin to read? Well, let me suggest a way of praying.

And I'm basing this on the words of verse 34 in our psalm. Let's pray something like this. Lord, give me understanding of your words now, because I want to keep your law and not flout it.

[24 : 57] Be at work in my heart, because I want to observe your law with my whole heart. The reason for reading the Bible is that we should understand God's law and God's will, and then keep it and obey it.

The Apostle James makes very much this point in the first chapter of his letter in the New Testament. He says this, Be doers, doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. He looks at himself, then goes away, and at once forgets what he looks like.

But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, that is the one who will be blessed in his doing.

When we understand the teaching of God's words and begin to obey it, that's when we experience God's blessing. And that means that we experience the new life and joy that he wants to give us.

[26 : 08] It also means, of course, that if we keep our Bibles closed, largely, we are the losers. We're depriving ourselves of both understanding and blessing.

We're cutting ourselves off from God, whose teaching brings us life. So there's the first thing. The reason for reading the Bible is to learn to obey the Bible and be blessed by God.

Now, second, our psalmist shows us the contrast between the Bible, or the Bible's teaching, and empty idols.

Look here at verses 36 and 37. In these two verses, our psalmist fixes on two of the most important parts of the human body, our hearts in verse 36 and our eyes in verse 37.

Now, he's not thinking about the heart in the way that a modern cardiologist would think of the human heart. In Bible language, the heart is the seat of our thought, our emotions, and our will.

[27 : 11] It's the governor of our life. It's where we make our decisions and form our scale of values. It is, if you like, the central engine room of the human being. And our eyes, in Bible language, are the gateway into the heart.

The things that we admit through the gateway will inevitably have a formative effect on the way that we live. Now, our psalmist is very much alert to the dangers posed by both our hearts and our eyes.

You may not think of your heart as a dangerous organ. You could possibly, especially if you're over a certain age, you might think of your heart as a bit of a danger point in medical terms.

Your doctor, I'm sure, would tell you that if you want to keep your heart healthy and in good shape, you must stop smoking, take regular exercise, and eat plenty of porridge. But our psalmist is, of course, not thinking of that kind of heart danger.

In verse 36, he's thinking of the danger of inclining our hearts in the wrong direction. And in verse 36, he's thinking, he's showing us that there are two alternative directions in which our heart may be inclining.

[28 : 21] The first is God's testimonies. And the second, selfish gain. So he cries out, incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain.

And why does he say that? Because he knows the natural inclination of his heart. His heart is a bit like a compass needle, which naturally keeps swinging back to magnetic north.

And magnetic north, for the natural heart, is selfish gain. So what does selfish gain mean? Well, friends, I'm now going to go into a daydreaming mode for a moment.

I'm going to close my eye. You might be daydreaming already, but I'm going to go into a daydreaming mode. And in my daydream, I'm imagining some of the things which I would like to gather around myself for selfish gain purposes.

Things for my own comfort, perhaps in order to enhance my standing in society. What would I like to gain? Well, first of all, more money would always be useful.

[29 : 24] It would be very nice to have a car. A car that, I've got a car, but a car that doesn't break down. That would be a lovely thing to have. I'd love to have an improved garden. Fewer weeds, fewer slugs, more raspberries, tastier lettuces.

I'd love to have more grandchildren. That would improve my sense of status, wouldn't it? You know, I can imagine myself and my wife in extreme old age, sitting in that family photograph.

You know the sort of one with the old couple, white haired in the middle, creased faces, cherry colored cheeks, beaming, and surrounded by their children and several rows of grandchildren.

All the grandchildren looking the perfect model of charm and good behavior. Wouldn't that be lovely? Now, our psalmist in verse 36 is begging God not to let his heart be drawn off in that kind of way.

Incline my heart, he says, to your testimonies. Let them be the magnetic north of my heart. Oh, that I might hunger more than anything for your words of truth.

[30 : 30] Do you want to pray that kind of prayer? Or are you happy just to let your heart drift along with so many other hearts devoted to gathering things around you for your own comfort?

Verse 36 is not really an either or. Sorry, it's not a both and. It is an either or. Either our hearts will be inclined to God and his words, or our hearts will devote themselves to self-centered living.

But that compass needle can't swing in both directions at the same time. It's going to be one or the other. Incline my hearts to your testimonies. Now, let's think of the eyes in verse 37.

Listen, turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways. Now, again, you'll see there's a strong contrast.

Worthless things on the one hand, life on the other. Now, it seems obvious, doesn't it? Obvious that worthless things are not worth bothering about.

[31 : 30] But the problem is, it's not so obvious. That is our problem. Just to illustrate, imagine yourself going into one of those great big department stores which sells everything.

Everything from the most valuable items to the most cheap and ordinary things. You can buy a box of matches for a few pence, or you can buy luxury items for thousands of pounds in this big shop.

Now, just imagine that somebody has come along and has switched all the price tags around so that the valuable things are priced at a few pence and the cheap things are priced at thousands of pounds.

Now, isn't that what we human beings are inclined to do in our own thinking about the value of things? We switch the prices around. Our eyes naturally look at the things of no value or low value, and we regard them as highly desirable.

For example, we look at the rich crook who has shouldered his way to a position of power and prestige. We can think of a few of those, can't we? And we envy a man like that. Maybe we see a film of Las Vegas with beautifully dressed, smart, elegant, lovely people who are making piles of money at the casino.

[32 : 45] And we think how lovely that is. A tuxedo, a large Havana cigar. That would suit me very nicely, wouldn't it? But we then undervalue things which are really valuable, like loyalty, truthfulness, and self-control.

Can you imagine reading in a glossy magazine a fine article extolling the value of self-control? The truth is you would never find such an article in a glossy magazine.

The magazine wants to glorify lack of self-control. Our eyes are naturally drawn towards worthless things. Now, in the Old Testament, worthless things often means worthless idols.

And maybe you'd turn back a page with me to Psalm 115 to see an example of this. Psalm 115. And in this psalm, or at least in part of this psalm, the author is contrasting the true God, the only true God, with the idols of the Gentile nations who lived close to Israel.

And his point is, it's a very pointed point for the Israelites, he's saying to them, the idols of the Gentile nations are pathetic, impotent, and useless. So look at verse 4, Psalm 115, verse 4.

[34 : 03] Their idols are silver and gold. But have they been made by God? No, they're merely the work of human hands. So the psalmist here is saying, imagine worshipping something which you've made yourself in your garden shed.

A little human figure that you fashioned out of silver or gold. Well then the psalmist goes on to examine them. Verse 5. They have mouths, but do not speak.

They can't even mumble. They can't even say incomprehensibly. They've got nothing to say. They have eyes, but they don't see. They can't see. They have ears, but the finest hearing aid cannot help them.

And they have noses. Don't you like that in verse 6? Noses. Look at the beautifully chiseled little nostrils that they have. But that little nose can't smell. Then verse 7.

They have hands, but don't feel. Feet, but do not walk. And they do not make a sound. Not a whisper of anything in their throat. In other words, they can't do a thing.

[35 : 07] They're pointless, they're powerless, and they're useless. But the punchline comes in the next verse. Verse 8. Those who make them become like them.

And so do all who trust in them. In other words, you become like what you worship. If you worship the true God, who has expressed his very being and character in the person of Jesus Christ, you become more like him.

But if you worship a dumb, powerless idol, you become dumb and powerless yourself. To worship the Lord Jesus is to have your life expanded and enhanced and blessed.

But to worship an idol is to become diminished to the point of disintegration. An idol is anything that you wrap your soul around and allow to become the most important thing in your life.

It could be an obviously intrinsically bad thing like gambling or pornography. But it could be something which is intrinsically good. Something like food or physical exercise or the operas of Mozart.

[36 : 14] But anything which becomes the chief center of attention and interest can become an idol. And that idol drains us of energy. We pour our time and effort into it.

We worship it. And so the energy and love of our hearts, which belong to the true God, get diverted to a false God. Where then does verse 37 back in our psalm, verse 37, teach us to invest our energy?

Psalms 119, 37. That verse teaches us to invest our energy in life. Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things and give me life in your ways.

And God's ways are the way of life detailed and described in the Bible. And then what follows in the next few verses unpacks verse 37. So verse 38, confirm to your servant your promise.

In other words, make me firm in persevering in a life of reverent fear. Verse 39, your rules are good. But I know that if I don't persevere in them, if I do give my life to empty idols, I will end up in shame and reproach.

[37 : 26] Food, physical exercise, the operas of Mozart, a hundred other things, they're good. They're gifts of God to us to be enjoyed and to be received with thankfulness, but not to be worshipped.

The test question is, could I live without this thing? Would I shrivel up and collapse in tears if this thing were taken away from me? And if the answer is yes, my world would fall apart without this thing, I need to look very carefully at where my heart lies.

Then in verse 40, our teacher gives us a prayer for any Christian to use regularly. Behold, he says, I long for your precepts. In your righteousness, give me life.

So yes, I need my food. I need a bit of exercise. I enjoy Mozart's operas. But what I long for most of all, the psalmist is saying, is your precepts, your teaching, O God, and not only your teaching, but the life which your teaching opens up before me.

Man cannot live by bread alone, I know it, but by believing and listening to and obeying every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So friends, let's learn from our psalmist to long for the Bible.

[38 : 44] Let's pray for a hunger for the Bible because that's a hunger for the Lord. In a sense, you can't put a cigarette paper between the Bible and the Lord who speaks the Bible. Let's hunger for him and for the words that he says.

Let's hunger for his precepts, his teaching. What does the Bible do? Well, it's our real nourishment. It's our real food. It delights us.

It comforts us. It probes us. It stimulates our thinking. It sharpens our conscience. It causes us to repent. It shows us our sin.

It shows us who God is and what God is like. All revealed to perfection in the person of our Lord Jesus. The Bible shows us just how much we're loved, how the Lord has not abandoned us.

On the contrary, when we were lost, when we felt abandoned, he sent Jesus to salvage us from the wreckage, to bear the death penalty in our place and to bring us through his resurrection the promise of eternal life.

[39 : 49] The Bible is full of a good news to which those who reject the Lord are strangers. Teach me. Give me life. That's the way to pray.

Let our prayers be fashioned like the prayer of the psalmist. Teach me. Give me life. And God, in his mercy, will teach us and indeed he will give us life.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray to him. Amen. God, our Father, we thank you that you are the giver of life. We thank you that the Lord Jesus, that it said of him in John's gospel, in him was life and that life was the light of men.

We thank you that you, dear Father, have life in yourself and have given it to our Lord Jesus that he too has life in himself. And we long, dear Father, to understand, to appreciate and to experience that life more and more.

Life in this life, life under your blessing as we walk through this difficult world and then the glory and grace and joy of everlasting life. So we pray, dear Father, that you will teach us and continue to teach us from the scriptures lifelong.

[41 : 03] Develop in us, we pray, a hunger for your words that we may delight in them and grow to love them and to observe them more and more deeply. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.