

Prayer That Moves Hearts

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[0 : 00] Cool, so Psalm 119, 33 through 40. All right, verse 33.

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. 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 and your righteousness give me life. So we're in the middle of studying Psalm 119.

It's a very, very long chapter. And as you probably heard beforehand, that Psalm 119 is an alphabetic acrostic. So it's got eight verses each, and each of those verses starts with the one letter of the Hebrew alphabet successively.

[1 : 09] Right? So the first eight verses starts with the first letter, the next eight verses starts with the next letter, etc., etc. The psalm is also a wisdom composition. So it's teaching its hearers about the right way to live and right faith.

Right? It makes clear that wise living centers around the instruction of God, the word of God. And a number of words with slight nuances are used throughout Psalm 119.

So, for example, we see in this passage the words statutes, law, commandments, precepts, promise. So they all refer to God's word, and it's slightly nuanced.

And it's not super profitable to go into, like, the theological differences between each of the nuances, but it's good to know that they mean slightly different things. Throughout this chapter, we encounter the psalmist's yearning that God calls him to live in his instruction.

And in this passage specifically, we read of the psalmist petitioning God and relying on God to change his mind and his heart and his life.

[2 : 15] And so this is what we can take away from this passage, that we need to rely on God to change our minds and our hearts through his word, which leads to changed lives that are full of hope.

So looking first at a changed mind. So we first need him to change our knowledge, our thoughts, our intellect, our understanding.

Right? That's what our minds refers to. And it's relatively easy to memorize knowledge of the Bible, just like we might study it in school and memorize, like, facts in a history book.

We can memorize, like, the order of events, people, books, and chapters. But our aim is not the superficial degree of knowledge. Right? Rather, we're seeking to understand what God is revealing in his word so that we might obey it.

Verses 33 and 34 say, 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.

[3 : 18] So the goal here is to obey. I think we've been going through a loop on Sundays, right? So we're reminded of the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day who knew the scriptures better than anyone else.

And yet they were the ones who were in conflict with the Lord. And we even see in John 3, Nicodemus the Pharisee, when he encounters Jesus, Jesus tells Nicodemus that everyone needs to be born again, from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive.

But Nicodemus doesn't understand. He incredulously asks, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? And Jesus responds, Are you the teacher of Israel?

And yet you do not understand these things. So to have right knowledge is not a matter only of studying and putting in time and the effort. It involves that. But it requires prayerful reliance on God to give us that genuine understanding of what God's teaching us.

The second thing is the heart change. Verse 36 through 37 says, 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.

[4 : 33] Our hearts involve our desires, our loves, ultimately who we are at the core of our identity. And I'm in my 30s, which is still relatively quite young.

So I'm still growing in my appreciation of the impossibility of changing a person's heart. I think throughout, well, pre-30s, like youth and teens and 20s, it's just a lot of growth, right?

A lot of potential. I think of just like a small seed putting down roots and shooting up a trunk and branches and green and young and supple. And it's just full of possibility and hopeful expectation. But then what happens when the shoot starts going sideways? You know, have you guys seen those experiments where they put like a seed in a box and there's only one hole of light and the seed like goes towards the light?

Like what happens if you go all crooked and the branches are twisted? And what's being produced are rotten leaves, rotten fruit that are ugly and no good.

[5 : 41] So I think with our hearts, our intentions may be good and kind. But at least for me, as I've grown older, I've seen more and more the ugliness of my heart, the sickness of my heart.

And I may want to be gentle in speech, but, you know, in a conflict, the first words and thoughts might be anger or impatience.

And I might want to be full of faith, but when I face trials in life, it's anxiety and fear that grip my heart as opposed to faith. And I might want to be self-controlled, but I over and over again in a vicious cycle indulge my temptations.

And it's like Peter, we see plenty of examples of this. Peter, before the Lord went to the cross, said, Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death. But he ended up denying him three times.

And it says that Peter went out and wept bitterly. And Paul talks about the struggle, too, in Romans 7. He says, For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

[6 : 45] For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So as we study through Psalm 119, 33 through 40, we see that it's Christ who gives us hope for our hearts to be changed, to reach down deep and to change what we love, change what we want, change what's valuable to us, which is not something that we can ultimately control.

And God gives us hope. He turns our eyes away from things that are worthless. And, I mean, they might be worthless in different ways.

They might be outright sinful. So he changes, he averts our eyes to things that are more valuable, right? But they might be worthless in the sense of not being the best, right?

Maybe it's a good thing, but it's taking up too much of your time or too much of your heart, right? So, I mean, I don't know if this is like a good thing, but an example that came to mind is like after work, coming home and playing like six hours of Fortnite or something like that, right, where it's fun and it might be a decompressing thing, but you could probably spend that better with sleep or Bible study or exercise or talking with your wife or all kinds of things, right?

[8 : 17] So in Christ, we have confidence in God to untwist those branches, to straighten out that trunk that's gone crooked and to make us produce good fruit. And this ultimately leads to the last thing, which is changed lives that are full of hope.

These changes in our minds and our hearts, yeah, it brings real change. So verse 38, it says, Confirm or fulfill, is another translation, to your servant your promise that you may be feared.

And we know that God is not like a man, right? He doesn't lie. He tells the truth. In Numbers 23, it says, God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.

Has he said and will he not do it? Or has he spoken and will he not fulfill it? So we know that God is faithful and he's trustworthy. And there are sweet promises, nuggets in God's word that we hold on to and we cling to.

So a question is, what are some of those promises for you guys that you hold on to, that are sweet to you, that are treasures to you in dark times? A few is from Philippians chapter 2 when he says that God works in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

[9 : 42] So we know that God is working in our lives, in our hearts, and in our actions to bring change. We know that God is also changing our character to make us more and more Christ-like, to make us more loving, humble, holy.

And as we hold on to God's promises, we build up this track record with God, seeing that he fulfills these promises over time, and this builds up hope for us.

So that's some of the things that we see in this passage, and I encourage you guys to trust his word for hope, because he brings life change that we can't bring ourselves.

With that...