

God's Way of Helping Us Live for Him: Psalm 119:33-40

Introduction: Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. No one knows who wrote it. It is arranged in 22 sections, the first word of each starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. That is why you will see the Hebrew letters at the head of each section in your Bible.

The overriding theme of the psalm is the absolute necessity of relying on God's word to live a godly, happy and valuable life. You can see this in the fact that almost every one of the 150 verses contains some reference to God's word, his law, his commandments, and so on.

The psalmist only had the first five books of the Old Testament to deal with; we have the added benefit of having *all* of God's word, both Old and New Testaments to guide us.

In the passage before us, Psalm 119:33-40, the first thing to note is that it is a prayer. The psalmist asks God to, teach him, to give him understanding, to direct his path, to turn his heart, turn his eyes, preserve his life, and so on. Like the Lord's Prayer, this passage can become for us a helpful model of how *we* can pray and what kind of things we should pray for.

Let's take each verse in turn.

Verse 33: Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end.

God's Way of Helping Us Live for Him: Psalm 119:33-40

Here you see a prayer and a promise. The prayer is for the Lord to *teach* him. How is God going to do this? By revealing his will in his word, in his *decrees*. God's will for our lives is not a secret. He has made it known, not only in the Ten Commandments but in the whole Bible, and supremely in the gospels and letters of the New Testament.

The first thing that is necessary is the *desire* to know what God's decrees are, and then, to respond. In this case the psalmist responds by promising to keep God's decrees, *to the end*. Following God's way is not a sprint, it is a marathon.

For us to be able to do this we need to pray constantly for him to teach us and we need the determination to persevere to the end.

Verse 34: Give me understanding and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

Again, there is a prayer; 'Give me understanding', and a promise; 'and I will keep it ...' The Scriptures are not always easy to understand. In matters of the spirit we need God's Spirit to help us understand. I Corinthians 2: 12; 'We have received the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.'

Notice the promise, 'I will ... obey it with all my heart'. This is the key; *all my heart*. We know that we cannot do this on our own, but there should always be the *desire* to do so. It has to come from within. If our lives are not motivated by a deep longing to do God's will, we will never move forward.

God's Way of Helping Us Live for Him: Psalm 119:33-40

Verses 35 and 36, *Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I will find delight. Turn my heart towards your statutes and not toward selfish gain.*

These ideas are similar to the previous verse. You will find *delight* in walking along God's path if your *heart* is tuned to his statutes. This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus; 'Where your treasure is [what gives you delight], there also will your heart be.'

James put this thought in terms of the opposite. James 1:14-15 '... each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.'

It all has to do with the heart and our psalmist looks to God's word for strength and guidance. So should we.

Verse 37: *Turn our eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.*

Again, there is repetition of the previous verses. Notice the reference to the eye. That is, what we allow our eyes to feast on to feed our desires. Genesis 3:6; 'when the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took it and did eat.'

You can turn your eye upon things that take you away from God, or you can turn your eye upon God's word which is seen supremely in Jesus.

God's Way of Helping Us Live for Him: Psalm 119:33-40

Verses 38 and 39; *Fulfil your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good.*

Think also of Proverbs 1:7, 'the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but folly despises wisdom and discipline.' There is always another way than following God's word. That is the way to be feared because it brings disgrace in God's eyes.

Even Paul talks about this struggle; Romans 7:21; 'I find that this law is at work: when I *want* to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.'

Only Jesus can deliver us from this struggle, and the main way he does it is by his word which we hide in our heart.

Verse 40: *How I long for your precepts! Preserve my life in your righteousness.*

The challenge and the promise of this psalm is not to follow a legalistic path of rules-keeping but to surrender ourselves, from the heart to Jesus and allow him, through his word and by his Spirit, to help us.

The Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent says it all:

God's Way of Helping Us Live for Him: Psalm 119:33-40

Blessed Lord, you have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that, encouraged and supported by your holy word, we may embrace and always hold fast the joyful hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our saviour Jesus Christ.