

He
Psalm 119:33-40
ABC 6/3/18

As Christians we all want to finish well. Paul (2 Tim 4:6-8) &, of course, Jesus (Jn 17:4) ended well, but not everyone does. A good beginning ought to lead to a good ending, but that isn't always the case. Lot, Samson, King Saul, & Demas all made good beginnings, but their lives ended in tragedy. The psalmist wanted to end well (33), but ending well is the result of living well. What are the essentials for a consistent life that ends well? He tells us in this section of Ps 119. As you know, Christianity & learning have always gone hand-in-hand. Wherever the gospel has gone, schools, literacy classes, & colleges have followed. The gospel opens the mind not only to matters of the soul but also to the mind itself. In the 5th stanza of Ps 119 we have the author wanting to learn God's Word so he might walk in it, or obey it. In order to make progress in this he asks God to be his teacher, as he did in vss 12, 26, & 27. This stanza is filled with 9 prayer requests. There's a poetic reason for this. This is the 5th, or *he*, stanza with *he* being the 5th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, & in Hebrew *he* is used at the beginning of verbs to make them causative.¹ In English we'd translate these verbs as *cause me to learn*, *cause me to have understanding*, *cause me to walk*, etc, which sounds awkward. The verbs are better rendered as petitions, which is what they are. As a result, we have: **Teach me** (33), **Give me** (34), **Make me** (35), **incline my heart** (36), & so on. In other words, the psalmist calls on God to act & each time he uses a verb form that says God has to cause something to happen. God has to do these things because we can't (Jn15:5). **33-40 PRAY**

1. Learning 33-34

1st he says, **Teach me**. The Hebrew word means to throw, shoot, or hit the mark. One of the biblical words for *sin* means to miss the mark. As believers, we aim at the goal of being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). But we all are sinners & continue to fall short of the glory of God. How will we ever hit the mark? Only by God's grace (Rom 3:23-24; 12:1-3). His plan is that He gives in grace & we receive by faith. Only faith gives credit & honor to the Lord

¹ Leslie Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p 142

Jesus Christ. Any time we try to fulfill the plan of God ourselves, we miss the mark because our own power is absolutely inadequate for the task (Eph 2:8-10). The psalmist says **teach me** because he had no doubt that God has given His Word, his fear was he wouldn't understand it. Yet he was utterly confident that God had spoken & that it could be understood rightly by the prayerful heart & mind. But being taught wasn't enough for, he wants more. He wants God to make him understand (34). The Hebrew word for **understanding** means discernment or the ability to evaluate the circumstances of life in light of God's Word. The reason he's asking for this is so he might be able to keep God's **statutes ... to the end** & be able to obey God's Law with all his heart. **To the end** means without time limit & **with all my heart** means without reservation. What the writer says he's lacking is understanding & the ability to do even what he does understand. The wisdom he wants is practical. It's walking according to God's law as well as knowing it. It's necessary to know it. In fact, we must have an intellectual understanding of God's ways before we can apply it because we can't use what we don't know. That's why Paul began the application section of Romans with words about the renewal of the mind (Rom 12:1-2). Likewise, the psalmist begins with the mind, asking God to help him understand the Bible. That's why we need discernment. But we can't produce it ourselves' it's a gift of God. We must pray for spiritual enlightenment so we may learn God's Word & God's way. It isn't enough to read the Bible, outline the books, & be able to discuss theology. We must come to understand the character of God & His ways (27:11; 86:11; 103:7). Just as children come to understand the character of their parents & what pleases them, so we must get to know God better & discern His desires. We have the complete revelation of the Lord & His will in the Scriptures, but we need His illumination to discover what it means to our own lives.

Does your mind matter? Years ago John Stott wrote a little book insisting it does. The book, *Your Mind Matters*, deals with 6 areas of Christian living, arguing that each is impossible without a proper & energetic use of our minds. To summarize, he says...

A. Our minds matter in worship, because worship is honoring God for who He is. In order to do that we must understand something about who He is. We must praise Him for being sovereign,

holy, merciful, wise, omniscient, & so on. Without an understanding of God's attributes, worship becomes an emotional thing in which we indulge our feelings.

B. Our minds matter for faith, because faith is believing & acting on the promises of God. In order to believe God's promises we must understand what they are. Apart from a right use of the mind, faith becomes only a feeling or, worse yet, wishful thinking.

C. Our minds matter for growth in holiness, which is what Ps 119 addresses. Growing in holiness isn't a matter of emotions or following a formula. It's knowing what God has done in us when He joined us to Jesus & then acting on it because there's really no other way for us to act. We can't go back to being what we were & therefore there's no direction for us to go but forward.

D. Our minds matter in seeking guidance as to how we should live & what decisions we must make. God doesn't guide us by mystical revelations & we can't count on God's providential ordering of events alone, though He does order all things. The way God guides us is by the Bible. To be guided by God we need to study to understand God's Word & then apply its principles. That can't be done without thinking.

E. Our minds matter in evangelism, because if a person must have faith to be saved & if faith is responding to the Word of God & acting on it, then we must present the truths of the Bible & the claims of Jesus so others can understand & respond to them. They must know what they're believing.

F. Finally, our minds matter in ministry, 1st, in seeking out a sphere of service (*What am I good at? Where do my spiritual gifts lie? What is God leading me to do for Him?*) & 2nd, to serve in that sphere well (*How should I go about the work I have been given?*). Stott argues that anti-intellectualism is *part of the fashion of the world & therefore a form of worldliness. To denigrate the mind is to undermine foundational Christian doctrines.* He asks pointedly,

*Has God created us rational beings, & shall we deny our humanity which He has given us? Has God spoken to us, & shall we not listen to His words? Has God renewed our mind through Christ, & shall we not think with it? Is God going to judge us by His Word, & shall we not be wise & build our house upon this rock?*²

Teach me & give me understanding is a great prayer for all of us to make.

² Stott, *Your Mind Matters*, p 26

2. Obeying 35

The author of this psalm uses the same development here as in the section we looked at last week (25-32). 1st teaching, then understanding, & finally application. If God has to do the teaching, & God has to give us understanding, then who makes the application in our lives? Only God can through His Holy Spirit. We have to depend just as much on God in applying the Word as we have to depend on Him in everything else. The psalmist is saying, *Cause me to apply the Word today in my life. You do whatever it takes for me to fulfill Your plan & purpose in my life. I want Your will, but I don't have the ability to accomplish it. So I ask You to make me **walk in the path of Your commandments***. The Hebrew word translated **path** is from a root verb meaning *to tread* & means *the trodden way*, not a new direction. In other words, it's a path because of the many who have gone before us. Herbert Lockyer speaks of *an accustomed trail, plain with the track of all the pious pilgrim's feet of past times*.³ It reminds me of Jer 6:16, **Stand by the ways & see & ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, & walk in it**. God's way isn't a new or novel way but rather the old established way in which the people of God have walked from the very beginning of His dealings with mankind.

What we learn with our mind & understand with our heart must motivate the will to do what God commands. But our obedience can't be that of a slave obeying a master in order to avoid discipline. It must be the obedience of a grateful child who delights to please his parents. **Doing the will of God from the heart** (Eph 6:6). This was the way Jesus obeyed His Father: **I delight to do Your will, O my God, & Your law is within my heart** (Ps 40:8; Jn 4:34).

3. Delighting 36

We'll come back at the end to look at delighting in God's Word, but for now think of it like this: The only way you can defeat a sin that's gotten hold of you is to find a greater delight. This has been one of the themes of John Piper's whole ministry, to fight temptation with superior delight, to fight sin with superior joy, to replace the fake joys that are offered by the sins of this world with real joy, with deep joy, with lasting joy, with joy that nothing can take away from you, a joy

³ *Psalms: A Devotional Commentary*, p 549

that's better. The psalmist is saying, *I delight in your commandments*. That, in & of itself, is the work of God's grace in him that he can delight in God's commandments. It's one of several phrases in this passage that only a Christian can say. No unbeliever can say, *I delight in God's commandments*. Delight in God & His Word is the essence of the Christian life. We're to be learning, obeying, delighting, & now ...

4. Moving 36

Incline means to bend or deflect & has to do with motivation. He's saying to the Lord, *Keep on moving me in the direction of Your Word!* Why? Because he sees a danger here. This is the 1st time in this stanza that the writer mentions a negative alternative to what he's asking God to help him do. He's asking God to turn his heart toward the Bible rather than allowing him to pursue selfish gain. He's confessing to a potentially divided mind. He wants to pursue God's Law, but he knows his heart & is aware he could quickly slide into covetousness. Jesus said, **You cannot serve God & wealth** (Mt 6:24). The psalmist knew this. He also knew the appeal riches have & his own inclination to pursue them. So he asks God to move his heart away from riches toward God & His Law instead. Jeremiah had condemned the people of Judah for their pursuit of everything but God: **For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain** (Jer 6:13; 8:10). The temptation for all of us to covet is great. Great enough so the author knows his only hope of staying on the path is if God keeps on moving him toward the Word.

5. Turning 37

Here the author doesn't even speak of what the eyes should be turned toward, only what he wants them to be turned from. He wants to be delivered from worthless things. He expects God to help him in this. The way not to be affected by sin is to look at something else. If you have fixed your eyes on Christ the crucified, the risen, the exalted, the soon to return, if your eyes are taken up with Him, you'll find yourself not drawn to sin. This vs follows naturally from vs 36. Once the writer has begun to consider what might keep him from God's Word, he realizes he's tempted by more than mere riches. There are many worthless things & they're all appealing. If we're to progress in the Christian life, we must fix our eyes on the things of God, which are

lasting, rather than the things of this world, which are passing away. The eyes are so powerful the psalmist prayed for power outside himself to turn his eyes from worthless things. Does the psalmist have no eyelids? No muscles in his neck to turn the head? Yet we all sympathize with this prayer, because the eyes lead the heart, the mind, & the whole person. The prayer isn't so much that our eyes may be shut as turned away because we need to have them open but directed at the right object.

Vs 37 occurs in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* when Christian & Faithful come to Vanity Fair on their way to the Celestial City. Here all the merchandise of the world is for sale, but those on their way to the Celestial City don't fit with these people. When they're asked to stop & buy, they put their hands to their ears & run away, crying, *Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity & look toward heaven to show where the business of their lives is.*⁴

This is the Christian's only wise response to the enticements of this world. **Turn way my eyes.** Who can turn our eyes? Who can take away our preoccupation with useless things? Only God can. Our human viewpoint says if we have a distraction in our lives, we need to work at changing it. But the harder we fight it in our strength & energy, the worse it becomes. The only way to win is to remember that the battle is the Lord's (1 Sam 17:47). So the psalmist prays, **revive me in Your ways**, meaning, *Wake me up! Cause me to live real life, abundant life.* Only God can do this for us. We want a life that has purpose & meaning. How can we have that life? Only by faith in the fact that God wants us to have it & that His blessings are never hindered by our circumstances. The psalmist wanted to walk in God's way, & to do it with a revived heart. He prayed for deadness in one direction, towards worthless things, & for life in another direction, towards God's way. These vss warn us that our hearts & minds & eyes must be focused on the truth of God & His way, not on material things & the vanities of this world (51, 157). Abraham looked for the heavenly city & ended well; Lot looked at Sodom & ended badly (Gen 13; Heb 11:8–16). What the heart loves & desires, the eyes will see (101:2–6; Num 15:37–41; Jer 22:17). To have one eye on the world & the other on the Word is to be double-minded, & God doesn't bless double-minded people (Js 1:5–8). **39**

⁴ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p 95

39 The problem the psalmist says might cause him to drop out is **reproach**. **Reproach** can be thought of in either of 2 ways. On one hand, it could be the disgrace brought on by God because of the writer's sin. That is, he could disgrace himself by his disobedience. On the other hand, it could be disgrace heaped on him by sinners because of his faithful following of God's Law. This can't be resolved with certainty. But in either case, the danger is the same. It's the danger of falling off God's path either because of personal failure or because of other people's scorn. Are you tempted to drop out because of your own failures or because of other people's mocking? Don't do it. Keep on! Remember Jesus' words, **All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved** (Mt 10:22). We all make bad decisions. We all sin. We all face shame & reproach. But God can always restore us. **Turn to Me & I will forgive you; I will purify you; I will wash you & you will be whiter than snow** (Ps 51:7). Our human viewpoint says, *It can't be that easy; surely there's something I have to do to win back God's love & favor.* That's a lie. The author sees the danger of falling into self-reproach & shame & he turns to the only One who can deliver him from himself. He claimed the promises of God & trusted God for strength & grace because we live on promises, not explanations. Our faith is tested by the promises of God & our faithfulness is tested by the precepts of God, & both are important. Learning, obeying, delighting, moving, turning, & now ...

6. Fearing 38

Faced by temptations & the dangers of life, the psalmist is aware he needs help. Where is help to be found? The only help is from God & the only reason he can hope for God's help is that God has promised to help him, as he indicates by saying, **establish Your Word** or promises **to Your servant**. What *promise* or **word** does this refer to? There's no reason to think he's singling out any one promise. Instead, he's thinking of the entire Word of God as he's been doing all along. The psalmist knows if he's to please God with his life, he'll have to live by God's Word at all times & in all its parts, not picking & choosing. This vs is a perfect OT expression of what Jesus said to Satan when He was tempted by him to turn stones into bread. He told him, **Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God** (Mt 4:4; Dt 8:3). **Establish**

means to strengthen or to cause to become a foundation. *Plant my feet on Your Word*, he says. The Word of God received by faith will make us reverent. As we look deeper & deeper into the Word, we'll see in increasingly richer detail the face of the greatest Man who ever lived, the Lord Jesus Christ. The more we see of Him, the more real He becomes to us & the more impressed we'll be with Him every day of our lives. In a sense, all God's Word is promise, a promise of life to those who repent of sin & put their faith in Jesus & a promise of death & judgment for those who reject the gospel. The psalmist is clinging to the promise of life because he fears, or stands in awe of, God. If we're to profit from his example, we must do the same. Do you fear God? Do you live by every word from His mouth?

7. Longing 40

All through his meditations in this section, the psalmist has said over & over, *God, make me dependent on You!* God's power is perfected not through our strength, but through our weakness. Our strength only gets in God's way. If we want to stay on the path & fulfill God's plan for our lives, we have to be broken & humbled until we recognize that God doesn't want our ability, he wants our availability (Phil 4:13). To have a deep longing for God's truth is the mark of a maturing believer. The psalmist's soul was **consumed with longing** & he even **fainted with longing** (20–21, NIV), so much so that he even **panted** for God's commands (131). He longed for the day when God's salvation would be revealed (174; Rom 8:18–23). Meanwhile, his longing was satisfied by the living Word of God, which is the believer's honey (103), bread (Mt 4:4), milk, & solid food (1 Cor 3:1–3; Heb 5:12–14; 1 Pt 2:1–3).

Coming back to **delight**, this Psalm is one long & exuberant song of delight in God's Word. Many descriptions of God's Word are accompanied with repeated exultations of joy in His Word (119:14, 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 111, 143, 162, 174). I want to leave you with a few ways in which we can experience joy & delight in God's Word:⁵

⁵ Adapted from David Murray, <http://headhearhand.org/blog/2015/10/05/our-happy-book-finding-joy-in-gods-word/>

A. We find joy in its existence Spurgeon said, *This great joy is sometimes aroused by the fact that there is a Word of God.*⁶ This is a book in which God reveals Himself. Unless God had revealed Himself we could never have known Him. But He has & we have unlimited access to His self-revealing Word. Take joy in that God has revealed Himself to us!

B. We find joy in its origin Compare your response to a letter calling you to jury duty with the great joy of receiving a letter from an absent loved one. The origin of the letter determines how much pleasure it gives us. Therefore, when reading the Bible, the more we consciously realize that this is God's Word to us, that the ultimate Author & Speaker of these words is God Himself, then the more joy there will be in reading it.

C. We find joy in its reliability When we receive a new gadget we just had to have & realize it comes with instructions written in poor English which make no sense, it's not very inspiring is it? The unreliability of the words make us question the reliability of the gadget. But when we read the Bible, it's an immense joy to know that this book is unlike any other publication in the world. It is 100% truth. It is reliable because God is reliable. There's great joy in knowing that truth.

D. We find joy in its authority In a world so full of conflicting opinions, ideas, & ethics; in a world where everyone is right & no one is wrong; in a world where everyone does what is right in their own eyes; in a world where the most solid words are *I think...* or *I believe...* in such a world, it's a joy to have God's Word come to us with absolute authority in its *Thus saith the Lord*. Take joy in the Bible's authority.

E. We find joy in its clarity Ever picked up a book & been totally frustrated at being unable to understand any or much of it? For some reason, when I was in high school, I felt I needed to read James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Any of you read it? I don't remember a thing about it other than he didn't like punctuation. No wonder it's on most every list of hardest books to read. I wish I would have known that back then. Getting through it was pure misery! I didn't get it. Had no idea what he was saying. I was utterly confused. Not so with the Bible. Although,

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, & observed for salvation are so clearly propounded,

⁶ www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons28.v.html

*& opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.*⁷

In other words, we can understand the Bible & take joy in that.

F. We find joy in its sufficiency Although we might sometimes wish the Bible was bigger, or more detailed & specific in some areas, God has given us enough of His Word to know Him & know what to believe about Him & do in response to who He is. Our faith & duty is either clearly given or implied by it. It lacks nothing essential to our faith & life. If it sufficient & that brings us joy.

G. We find joy in its teaching The Christian's brain loves to learn & the Word of God is an endless source of learning. We'll never come to the point where we can say, *I know it all*. Not the most brilliant professor nor the most mature Christian in the world will ever exhaust its riches or plumb its depths. & yet it's so easy to understand the basics, that even a small child can do so.

H. We find joy in its grace There could be no joy if this was a book of mere law of do's, don'ts, guilt, condemnation, & judgment. But finding its pages packed full of grace for the guilty, mercy for the miserable, & forgiveness for the sinner, we find great joy. Many of you can point to a text or passage that God used to open your eyes & give you new life. Take joy in God's grace.

I. We find joy in its cleansing It's so good to come home to a refreshing shower if we've been working hard on a dusty job in the hot sun. What an exhilarating feeling to step out of the shower & feel clean again. Similarly, as we read God's Word it cleanses us from the filth of this world & of our own hearts (Eph 5:22). Do you experience joy in the forgiveness promised in Scripture?

J. We find joy in its strength Sometimes we've faced difficulties in life & thought about giving up. Then God's Word has spoken into our lives & given us renewed energy, motivation, drive, & enthusiasm. We're given mental strength, spiritual stamina, & emotional stability. We're strengthened to face difficulties, to serve, & to suffer if need be (Ps 119:50). Take joy in that God never asks something of us that He doesn't also provide the strength to do it.

K. We find joy in its guidance So many times we've wondered what we should do, where we should turn, & the Word of God has made the decision clear. What joy when the fog lifts & the way ahead is obvious! Find joy that God's Word lights your path.

⁷ Westminster Confession 1.7

L. We find joy in its warnings We're all thankful for warning signs on the road of life, to slow us down lest we fly off on a dangerous curve. Similarly, God's warnings about hell should be a joy to us as they serve to keep us from danger & motivate us to show others the warnings too. We don't resent them but gratefully receive them from the God who knows far better than we do what is good for us.

M. We find joy in its promises Spurgeon said, *It is a good thing to mark your Bibles when you have received a promise. Mark the margin with T & P, & let it stand for 'tried & proved.'*⁸ Do you keep track of God's promises? Do you find joy that He never breaks one?

N. We find joy in its suitability It's a constant wonder that God's Word is so suitable to so many different people in so many different places at so many different times in so many different circumstances. I'm constantly amazed by how the Bible speaks to every situation in life, in every culture of the world. It's so real & so relevant. How can we not feel joy because of it?

O. We find joy in its communion Unlike any other book, as we read God's Word, we actually enter into communion with its Author. We enter into a relationship with God through Christ by the Holy Spirit. As we read its pages the triune God comes out of the book & into our hearts & lives.

P. We find joy in its unity One of the greatest pleasures in reading God's Word is to see how each Testament fits the other, how earlier books shed light on later books & vice versa, & how it all fits together as part of one great & grand plan of redemption. From beginning to end, it's about God's redemption of sinful man through His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. If that doesn't bring you delight, I don't know what will.

Q. We find joy in its hope The Bible is full of anticipation of a brighter & better future, holding out before us the prospect of the new heavens & the new earth in which dwells righteousness, of which we'll be a part. It's like reading a travel brochure to the world's greatest destinations, & knowing that you're going to all of them at once. No, it's even better than that. Unimaginably better!

⁸ *The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon, Volume 28: Sermons 1637-1697, electronic edition*

R. We find joy in its songs God's songs in the book of Psalms have been a delight to Christians' throughout the centuries. They thrill our hearts & soar our souls heavenwards.

S. We find joy in its balance Although the Bible warns us against worldliness, it also encourages us to have a love for this world. The worldliness that it warns us against is accepting & following the norms, values, philosophies, & sins of this world. But it also encourages us to value, cherish, care for, & enjoy this world, meaning this physical world that God created & still sustains.

T. We find joy in its worldview The Bible gives us a lens to view the world, a framework with which to understand this world, its history, its present, & its future. We should delight in the fact that God is sovereign over everything.

U. We find joy in its freshness How many times have we come to read a portion of God's Word & it comes alive so that it feels like we've never read it before? The old becomes new, the old story comes with new power. No wonder David exclaimed: **I rejoice at your word, as one that finds great spoil** (Ps 119:162). I'll let you find 5 more ways we find joy in the Scriptures to complete V W X Y & Z in this alphabetic list. PRAY

Men come for communion

Beginning to end, the Bible is about Jesus & God's plan of redemption through Him. Gen 3:15 gives us the promise, **I will put enmity Between you & the woman, & between your seed & her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, & you shall bruise him on the heel.** In Exodus we read of the Passover Lamb, picturing Jesus, the Lamb of God. In the law we read that blood must be shed for the forgiveness of sins. King David is a picture of the coming King who will reign forever. We can come to God today because of Jesus' perfect & sinless life, atoning death, & victorious resurrection. That's what we remember with thanksgiving & joy as we come to the communion table once again today. PRAY PASS (Heb 10:19-23).

We eat of the bread representing His body, His flesh & we remember just like the temple curtain, Jesus was torn to open the way into a relationship with God.

We drink of the cup remembering that it is by His shed blood, His death that we now have confidence to enter the holy place, into God's very presence.