

A Prayer To Live Well and Finish Well

Psalm 119:33-40

Introduction: 1) When it comes to living a life for Jesus, it is critically important that we remember an important truth. It is one thing to start well, it is another thing to run well for a season, but it is altogether something else to finish well.

Thankfully when it comes to our salvation we have our Lord's promise in Philippians 1:6, that he "who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." This promise, however, does not negate our responsibility to be faithful in our service to Christ until the very end. We must work out our salvation (Phil. 2:12). Our sanctification is a divine/human partnership.

2) Stanza "He" (vs. 33-40) contains 8 petitions that seeks the Lord's help in living well and finishing well for God's glory and our good. Spurgeon is exactly right, "A sense of dependency and a consciousness of extreme need pervade this section, which is all made up of prayer and plea" (*TOD*, vo. 3, 208). What then are the eight prayer requests this psalm invites us to place before the throne of grace in heaven?

I. Ask the Lord to teach you 119:33

1) The psalmist knows the divine teacher is the master teacher. Thus he begins with the simple and straight forward petition, “Teach me, O Lord [*Yahweh*], the way of your statutes.” There is a note of need and humility in His request.

Instruct me. Direct me. Reveal to me the way of your word. James Boice says this verse speaks of “matriculating in God’s school” (James Boice, *Living by the Book*, 44). God is the divine teacher and I am his humble, teachable student. This is a school the wise person will seek to enroll in.

2) “Teach me, O Lord,” and I will keep [your word] to the end.” The *CSB* says, “I will always keep them.” Ross notes the idea of reward may even be conveyed in this phrase (Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3, 497). I like to think of it like this. Learning God’s word and keeping God’s word is its own reward. It fills our lives with delight, joy and blessing. Further, keeping it completely or always or to the end simply multiplies the rewards! God teaches → I understand → I obey → I am blessed. What a great promise and motivation to press on and stay faithful to the very end. Learn and obey the word and live well! Learn and obey the word and finish well!

II. Ask the Lord to give you understanding 119:34

1) This verse continues the theme of instruction, learning and teaching. Having asked the Lord to be his teacher (v. 33), he now asks the Lord to “give me understanding.” Lord, help me to apply your word in everyday life. The end result is clear. Then I may 1) keep your law and 2) observe it with my whole heart. The idea is with all that I am I will keep and joyfully (from the heart) obey your word. I will hold nothing back. I want your word, your statutes, your law, to have its way with me.

2) One again we are confronted with the reality of how important it is to love God well with our minds (Rom.12:2; Phil 2:5). Win the battles of the mind and you will win the battles of the Christian life. Lose the battles of the mind and you will lose everywhere else as well. Quoting John Stott, Pastor James Boice is right on target, “Stott argues that anti-intellectualism is ‘part of the fashion of the world and therefore a form of worldliness.’ He asks pointedly, ‘Has God created us rational beings, and shall we deny our humanity which he has given us? Has God spoken to us, and shall we not listen to his words? Has God renewed our mind through Christ, and shall we not think with it?’” (*Living by the Book*, 48).

III. Ask the Lord to lead you 119:35

1) The Lord has taught us (v.33) and given us understanding (v.34). Now comes the petition, “Lead me in the path of your commandments.” Why? Because having been taught and given understanding of your word, “I delight in it.” I love the progression of this argument because it is so true to our experience. God teaches me his word and through reflection and meditation and study I grow in my understanding of it. I see how it works in real life as I keep it and observe with my whole heart. But, I need help daily, for the duration, to obey it. I need the Lord not only to teach me, I need him also to lead me. And to be specific, I need him to lead me in the path of his commandments, commandments I have come to love and delight in.

2) The commandments of God are not a burden, they are a blessing. The commandments of God are not depressing, they are a delight. Jeremiah 6:16 reminds us, “This is what the LORD says: Stand by the roadways and look. Ask about the ancient paths, ‘Which is the way to what is good?’ Then take it and find rest for yourselves.” Psalm 37:23 adds, “A person’s steps are established by the LORD, and he takes pleasure in his way.”

IV. Ask the Lord to guide your heart 119:36

1) Once again the issue of the heart is addressed in this psalm.

vs. 3: “Blessed are those who seek you with their whole heart.”

vs. 7: “I will praise you with an upright heart”

vs. 10: “With my whole heart I seek you.”

vs. 11: “I have treasured your word in my heart that I might not sin
against you.”

Vs. 32: “You set my heart free”

Vs. 34: “I observe your law with my whole heart.”

2) Here the psalmist asks the Lord to “incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain.” In essence he says, turn my heart and desires toward your word (testimonies) and your faithful acts in my life. Do not let me be deceived and seduced by selfish gain (lit. “unjust gain”). Lord, I want a heart like yours not a heart like the worldly who exploit and take advantage of others, especially the poor. I need your word as a medicine, a healing balm for my heart. Spurgeon says, “He who is covetous is of the race of Judas, and will in all probability turn out to be himself a son of perdition” (*TOD*, 210)

V. Ask the Lord to direct your eyes 119:37

1) I believe the psalmist knew there is an intimate connection between our heart and our eyes. He has asked the Lord to turn his heart towards the Word (v. 36). Now he asks the Lord to turn his eyes away “from looking at worthless

things.” He does not want to give his eyes and ultimately his heart to vile, vain, empty and useless things. Perhaps he was well aware of the truth, what the eyes do not see the heart most often will not desire.

2) Never forget sin first entered the world through the eyes when Adam and Eve “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes” (Gen. 3:6). Guard the eyes and protect the heart. There is much wisdom here.

VI. Ask the Lord to confirm His word 119:38

The Psalmist now asks the Lord to confirm his promise to his servant with the result being he will fear or reverence the Lord. He is asking God to act on his behalf so that “the divine promise would be realized” (Ross, 499).

Spurgeon puts it as only he can, “Make me sure of thy sure word: make it sure to me and make me sure of it” (*TOC*, 211). The result: my reverence and faith in you will continue to flourish and grow. I will fear you more, love you more and trust you more. Your word is my sure foundation. I will stand on it and not be moved.

VII. Ask the Lord to turn away disgrace 119:39

This verse may have verse 22 in mind. There he asks the Lord to “Take away from me scorn and contempt.” Here he asks the Lord to “Turn away the reproach that I dread.” Evil men reject and even mock those who love God and his Word. They ridicule them and heap insults on them. It can beat us down

over time. It can wear us out. It can even sow seeds of doubt concerning the ways and wisdom of God. The psalmist therefore makes a request, “Turn away the disgrace I dread” (*CSB*), “Deflect the harsh words of my critics” (*The Message*), and he makes a declaration, “your rules are good.” Others may laugh at and make light of your word, denying its truth, questioning its power, but I will believe it and trust it because I know a good God is behind His good word! Others may despise your word, but I will stake my life and my eternity on it. After all Isaiah 40:8 reminds us, “The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever.”

VIII. Ask the Lord to give you life 119:37, 40

This petition appears twice in the stanza. In verse 37 the psalmist prays, “give me life in your ways.” In verse 40 he prays, “in your righteousness give me life.” The two closely parallel one another. There is no life or real meaning in worthless, worldly things. Life is found in your ways and that is what I am asking for (v. 37). Indeed your ways are the ways of righteousness (v. 40). And, it is in your righteousness that real life is experienced and enjoyed to the fullest. So, keep me alive in your righteousness. Don’t let me lose hope and drop out of your school of instruction, my Lord. Let the eternal life I enjoy now reveal itself by desiring even more of the life you

provide. I know it is found in “your precepts,” your word. I long for them and in so doing love life to the end!

Conclusion: The Puritan Thomas Manton is right, “It is not enough to begin a good course, we must go on in it . . . else all our labour is lost; the end crowneth the work. God that made us begin [will] also make us to continue to the end.” (*Psalm 119*, 322). This is what our God did in the life of His Son so that from the cross He could cry, “It is finished” (John 19:30). This is what our God will also do in our lives as he directs our hearts to keep His word to the very end.