

## 5-Day Devotional Series

### Praying Scripture: Learning to Pray Prayers Designed to Give us Hearts More Like Jesus -From Psalm 119

#### Day 5:

#### *Keeping An Eye Towards Jesus and the Gospel*

#### How We Got Here:

On (Day 1) we saw that part of sharing the gospel with unbelievers includes relaying the “hope” of our hearts that is in us, not just doctrinal truth (1 Pet 3:15). This is important to remember especially in this present day. On (Day 2) We examined David, Psalm 119, and God in relation to our hearts. We saw that God transforms our hearts through prayer (first at conversion by giving us a new heart, but then also progressively). Our hearts are very needy for God at all times. On (Day 3) we looked at David’s heartfelt prayers and saw how much he delighted in God’s word, proclaimed absolute commitment to God, sought God in suffering, etc. David’s prayers really challenge us to examine our own hearts and prayers, and this was only a small sampling of Ps. 119! Yesterday (Day 4) we went through a suggested 8 Steps for How to Pray Hard Prayers. These steps emphasized (1) confessing our neediness to God, (2) asking him to change our hearts, and (3) building our hope for change upon Jesus and the Gospel. *The gospel* enables us to pray hard prayers that challenge our hearts, with hope, and not despairingly or hypocritically. The gospel gives hope (1 Pet 3:15)!

#### Today:

Yesterday, in Steps 6-8 *praying* with an eye towards rejoicing and taking hope in Jesus and the gospel, was emphasized. Today, I want to focus on this idea again more fully by thinking about *reading Scripture* with an eye towards Jesus and the gospel.

#### Reading Scripture *Without* an Eye Towards Jesus –is Dead

What is the difference between the terms “gospel” and “the word of God”?... The “word of God” as a term denotes the *whole* of God’s Scriptural revelation, i.e. the *whole* of the Bible. The “gospel”, however, is a little narrower in meaning. While all of Scripture is God’s word, the “gospel” is the *central message* of Scripture, the message about the glorious person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The gospel is so important that if we have an understanding of Scripture that misses Jesus, we are lost and without eternal life. Jesus told this to the Pharisees: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; *and it is they that bear witness about me*, yet you refuse to come to me *that you may have life*” (Jn 5:39-40). Jesus is saying that all of Scripture is meant *to point to him*. He is saying that *Scripture reading* that misses him, is dead. The same thing could be said about prayer: *prayer* that is not built upon Jesus and the gospel, is dead. Yesterday, the suggested prayer steps sought to emphasize the gospel. Now, I want us to think about reading Scripture with an eye towards Jesus, particularly in Psalm 119. My goal in this devotional is to encourage us as brothers and sisters in Christ to *pray* Scripture and *read* Scripture *with an eye towards Jesus and the gospel* because *the gospel* is the source of not only salvation (Rom 1:16) but *heart transformation*. And so, if we are to pray Scripture, even the psalms of David, we must do so with an eye towards our hope in Jesus.

### Reading Psalm 119 With an Eye Towards Jesus.

Does Psalm 119 “bear witness” about Jesus? Yes, it does. I want to demonstrate that, albeit carefully.

**David:** First, this is true of the author of Ps. 119: David himself as a person in Scripture - just like Jonah (Matt 12:40), Moses (Heb 3:5), Joshua (Heb 4:8), Adam (Rom 5:18) and many others - is meant to prefigure Christ. More specifically, David, the one who had a heart “after God’s own heart,” is meant to point us to the One of whom this is most fully true: his future descendant, the Son of David, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus is not “after” God’s own heart, but is himself the very “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) - the very heart of God is on display in Jesus Christ. Jesus *is* God (Jn 20:28).

Second, I want to give several examples of how we can read Ps. 119 “with an eye towards Jesus.” We want to be careful in how we do this, but I think this is true: we should always be reminded of the gospel when we read Scripture because Jesus is the central message of Scripture.

**(1) Vs. 112:** Yesterday, in going through the steps of how to pray hard prayers, you may have noticed that I applied the hard verse we were seeking to pray to Jesus himself. The verse is (vs. 112): “I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.” Now, I want to be very careful. We are not saying that this verse is *originally* about Jesus inclining his heart to perform God’s statutes. Rather, it is truly about David. However, because God is the Author of all of Scripture, and Sovereign over all of time, God intended that the Old Testament Scriptures not only have a function in that time, but also prefigure the Gospel. In other words, the principle of devout obedience expressed by David prefigures an *ultimate* expression of devout obedience in Christ. Jesus is the one who literally was perfect. But then, how humbling and beautiful is it that this very One “suffered” for us... “the *Righteous* for the unrighteous” (1 Pet 3:18). He “loved me and *gave himself* for me” (Gal 2:20). But more than that, it is the giving up of this One who was “*obedient to the point of death*, even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8) that *enables* us to become “*obedient from the heart*” (Rom 6:17). We can begin to have the kind of heart that David expresses in this verse *only* because Jesus, the truly Righteous One, was given over to death for our sins... Praise be to God! So, instead of despairing that we may be far from the kind of heart that David expresses here, we praise God that *in Jesus* he has purchased this kind of heart for us by his blood...

**(2) Vs. 17** “Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” For us, are not our eyes first truly opened to behold wondrous things out of God’s law when God saves us and opens are eyes to know Christ? And then, is not knowing the wondrous things out of God’s word ultimately fulfilled when we know the riches of Christ and the gospel in a deeper and fuller way?

**(3) Vs. 50** “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.” For us, what is our greatest comfort in affliction? It is Christ. In Christ God has given us “eternal comfort” (2 Thess 2:16). Jesus is the promised Christ-to-come who gives us life.

**(4). Vs. 71** “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.” While this verse is referring to David, and many of us would say the same of our own personal experience, God’s action of working through affliction to teach his statutes is *ultimately true* in Christ and the gospel. *Christ* was “afflicted” (Isa 53:5) that through His affliction, God might truly teach us his statutes. And with respect to our study as a whole these past five days, this parallel should give us great cause to be hopeful and expectant that God will transform our hearts

to be more like Jesus. Christ did not die for nothing! He died to “purify for himself a people *who are zealous for good works*” (Tit 2:14). God will be faithful to teach us to be more like Jesus as he did with the Thessalonian church: “you yourselves *have been taught by God* to love one another” (1 Thess 4:9).

### **Conclusion:**

Praying and reading our Bibles “with an eye towards Jesus” helps us to become more hopeful and rejoicing people. The Gospel transforms people who were “without God and without hope” (Eph 2:12) into a rejoicing-in-Jesus, hopeful kind of people. And this hope –as we began on Day 1 – is the hope that we are to share with others (1 Pet 3:15)! This hope that we share with others is Jesus himself. This is the same hope that Peter had in mind when he began his letter two chapters earlier: “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again *to a living hope* through the *resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. (1 Pet 1:3)...

### **Devotional Application:**

1. Read through the verses above, especially vs. 112 and praise God and thank God that he gave up his perfect Son to die for our sins. Rejoice in the gospel again.
2. Seek to be reminded of the gospel when you read your Bible and Psalm 119, and build your prayers for change off the hope of the gospel.
3. Think about your individual relationships with people. If God’s plan from eternity is for us to be made more like Christ, is pointing your fellow believers and unbelievers towards Christ, growing to be more like him, and rejoicing in him together the goal of your relationships?
4. Pray in a needy-for-grace, rejoicing-in-the-gospel, hopeful, kind of way for God to make you more like Christ. Pray for Christlikeness. It was for this that Christ was afflicted. Continue to pray that God will “teach you” his statutes.
5. Continue to pray Scripture, especially the Psalms, starting with Psalm 119.

### **Daily Picture of Juliet:**

