The Personal Word
Psalm 119:25-32

Well as the children are dismissed for children's worship I ask that you would turn with me to Psalm 119: 25-32. And many of you are right now sighing a sigh of relief to know that I am not going to read all of Psalm 119, but only verses 25-32. So please turn there in your Bibles. This is a Psalm that is reflecting on the testimonies, the. The words, the commands, the rules. In short, the revelation of God to us of himself. The psalmist writes,

My soul clings to the dust. Give me life according to your word. When I told of my ways, you answered me. Teach me your statutes. make me understand the way of your precepts, and I will meditate on your wondrous works. My soul melts away for sorrow. Strengthen me according to your word. Put false ways far from me and graciously teach me your law. I have chosen the way of faithfulness. I set your rules before me. I cling to your testimonies, oh Lord. Let me not be put to shame. I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart.

This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

Well, where do you get your life? Where do you get your life from? Have you ever had an experience where something's happening? Maybe you're doing something you love. You're with someone you love and you go, this is where I get life. I'm not talking about where do you get happiness? Okay, we can get happiness from a variety of places. Or where do you get joy necessarily? But where do you feel life? What are the things that for you make you feel like you're seeing the world anew? Or maybe you're seeing it right again, right. The things that energize you, that pull you forward, the things that at the end of the day, you say, this is what I'm made for.

Well, there's all kinds of places that we can turn to try to find life. We look at achievement, things that we accomplish after working hard and finally getting to the thing that we achieved. We can find it in relationships. We can find it in pleasure. We can find it in comfort, recognition for something that you've done. You can find it in a good meal. People try to find life in all kinds of places. And by the way, none of those things are bad. All of those things are good things. I would even argue that they enrich your life. But Psalm 119 is saying, ultimately and practically we all only find our life in one place. We're going to come back to that in a minute. But according to Psalm 119, where do we find our life? We find our life in God's Word.

Psalm 119, as many know, is famous for being the longest of the Psalm - longest chapter in the Bible, one hundred and seventy six verses split out over twenty two stanzas, all ordered around the Hebrew alphabet. Okay. And some of you are thinking, well, wait a minute, aren't there twenty six letters in the alphabet? Yes, in the Roman alphabet. That's our alphabet. In the Hebrew, there's twenty three. But in this Psalm, they actually take one, two of the letters that are very similar, the sin and the shin. And they put them together and they give them one stanza. So you get twenty two stanzas. Aleph, Bet, Bet, Gimel, Dalet. We just read the Dalet stanza. Okay. A b, c d okay. It goes all the way through to the last letter.eAnd at the last, at that point, have you gotten to the end? What you have then before you is this long considered

celebration of the Word of God. As a matter of fact, it makes sense of why they've ordered it around the letters in the alphabet. If you want to celebrate the spoken word, if you want to celebrate God's Word of himself, to us, it makes sense to use the building blocks of words, right? Letters. As a matter of fact, there's a number of psalms in the Bible that have these alphabetic acrostics, and they're all kind of doing the same thing. They're all sort of celebrating wisdom, celebrating human knowledge, and celebrating the Word of God that gives us wisdom and gives us human knowledge.

Now, the stanza that we just read, the stanza, that's the D stanza. And if you could see it, you would realize that it does look like a Dalit, which is the Hebrew word for door. A lot of these letters come from pictograms. Olive is a bull and it's a bull's head. And if you actually think about your capital A, turn it upside down. Guess what? It looks kind of like a bull's head, doesn't it? Because that's what it is. All right. It's got little horns on the top and a pointed nose on the on the bottom. Okay. That's all coming from pictograms. And yet they became representative of sound. And the Dalit is a sign for a door. And the Dalit letter looks kind of like a door. It's got a hinge. It's got a post in a tendon. Right. That's kind of holding it up. Or a lintel, I guess. It's a post in a lintel, right. Sorry about that. Architects. I know I need to get that right though, or you'll stumble over that. Um, it's a post going up and then a lintel at the top and it looks like a door. Okay. It's the D stanza. And this D stanza is particularly celebrating God's Word. And as it relates to life, God's word, as it relates to life in. The psalmist is here to tell us this. We get our life ultimately and practically on a daily level every day from God's Word. Secondly, when we have life, our life should be conformed to the ways of God's Word so that we arrive at the goal. And the goal is God's Word. In other words, the motive of life, the means of life, and the mission of life is all God's Word.

So let's start with the motive. How do we get life from the word? How is it that the motive for life comes from, and the source of life comes out of God's Word? When we look at the first verses twenty five to twenty seven, and it reminds us that when our souls are in the dust, God's Word does not merely advise us, it revives us when our souls are in the dust. God's word does not merely advise us, but it revives us. Look at what he says in verse twenty five. *My soul, my person is clinging to the dust. But give me life according to your word*. The psalmist begins in the dust. He says he's even clinging to it. And think about this picture of dust. Dust, of course, is the thing that we come from - out of dust. We are made to dust. We will return in death. But the psalmist is saying, sometimes in my life, in between my coming from the dust and my going to the dust, sometimes in life, I feel as if I am clinging to the dust. That's a vivid picture, too, of suffering, because it both highlights the fact that suffering brings us low, right? To be clinging to the dust. It means you're not standing up. You're not in the fresh air of standing up, but rather you're clinging to the ground. You've been brought low. But he doesn't just say, I'm clinging to the ground. He doesn't say I'm in the muck and the mire. What does he say? He says I'm in the dust. Right. You know, dust is a place of desolation. It's dryness. I'm not just brought low. I'm completely spent. I'm exhausted. I have no life. Give me life. Give me life according to your word. It's interesting, then, to note that his first request is not that he has a change in circumstances. So often that's how we pray, isn't it? We pray for a change of circumstances. Say, Lord, I'd like to have this job and be better than that job. I'd like to have this spouse. I'd like

to have this kind of family. I'd like to have this kind of friend group. I want to get into this college. I want to get to this group within the college once I'm in the college, we're often praying for the Lord to change our circumstances. And to be clear, that's not bad. The Lord invites us to bring all of our needs for circumstances to him. And yet we should remember with the psalmist, that's not ultimately our best good. I'll show you what I mean.

Think about a friend who you're with, who you care for, or a child maybe in your family, you know, your son or your daughter. You know, when they ask of a thing, when they say, I would love to have this, could I, could I get this? Or could I get that? If you love them, you want to give this to them. You want to give them the thing that they're asking for, and you're honored and glad that they felt free to ask you. Yet Jesus himself says, when a child asks for a loaf of bread from his father his father doesn't give him a stone. He gives him a loaf of bread. It's a good thing for us to go to the Lord and say, Lord, I'm fearful about my job. I'm fearful about my marriage. I'm fearful about my relationships, fearful about what you're doing in the world around us. That's good. He invites those prayers. And yet, like with the psalmist, we need to remember our greatest good is not just that our circumstances change. Our primary ask, our ultimate ask should be, Lord, give me life. Give me life according to your word. His first request is not for better circumstances; it's for true life. Give me life. When I told of my ways. When I shared with you who I was in verse twenty six, you answered me. And I think the assumption needs to be here. You answered me through your word. Teach me then your statutes. Verse twenty six, make me understand the ways of your precepts. You see, the psalmist knows if he wants life, he needs life from the word. How do I get out of the dust? The place of Lowness and death. Right. How do I get out of there? I need to get life. But if I'm going to get life, it must come from the Word of God.

Now, I want to be clear about this. It's not just that he's looking for information. He's not just looking for a roadmap to get out of the dust, to get out of the suffering. The knowledge that we find in Scripture is always a personal knowledge. It's a message from the lover of our souls, right? It's not just giving us a set of doctrines, it's revealing to us a person, a real person. And so we find life in it because we find the giver of life in it. But the life giving nature of the word is even more specific and more direct than just teaching us about God, who is the giver of life.

It's important that we remember this in the Old Testament, as in the law, the. The testimonies are actually revealed as being a source of getting spiritual life, because the Holy Spirit attends to the words that are given. Can you think about the prophecy of Ezekiel? You remember Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones. It's kind of a well-known story where he goes out to the dry bones and he preaches the word, and the dry bones are reconstituted. Okay. It's a vision. It's a wonderful picture for how the Lord is going to save Israel. But the bones kind of click clickety clack together. He even says that there's a clicking in the valley as they clickety clack back together, and the sinews grow all over them. And they have now bodies that have flesh and muscle and nervous systems on them. But then what happens? The Lord says, now that you've preached the word to them, preach the spirit to them. And when he preaches the spirit and calls on the spirit, the bones which have been given all the flesh that they need to live now stand up and exceedingly vast army, Ezekiel says. You see, even in the Old Testament, it was understood that when the word goes out, it is efficacious, but it's efficacious. It does stuff in

the world because the spirit attends to it. The same, of course, is true in the New Testament, and the Word of God is spoken. You are meant to hear it, but you can only understand and find life in it if the spirit empowers you to do so. Jesus describes the giving of his words as hearing the voice of God. When the sheep who are his hear the voice, they respond. John 10:27-29 - *my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*. The knowing of Jesus, the recognizing the voice of the Shepherd in the words of Scripture. That's the work of the spirit, to give us the ability to hear the spirit testifying in our spirits of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Later on in Acts 16:14, there's a story about Paul going to the town of Philippi. And this is told through Luke, who was a friend of Paul. And many, many point out, and it's probably not far from the truth that Luke and Acts are kind of Paul's account. That's his version of the gospel. Okay. you know, John was an apostle himself. Peter is probably speaking through Mark. Okay. Matthew himself was an eye witness. So he was there as well. So in Acts you're getting Paul's accounting of how the Gospel was worked out. And he describes it this way. When he goes to Philippi, he sits down with a group of women to teach with them and to debate and to discuss theology and some of the women listen and they hear and they believe. Among them is a woman whose name is Lydia. And this is what happens to Lydia. This is how it's described. It doesn't say she heard Paul teach, and she saw the reasonableness of his speaking and said, yeah, I'm convinced. It doesn't say that. Notice what it says in Acts 16:14. *The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul*. You see, Paul recognized that you can hear the Word of God, and it can do two things. It can harden you and it can soften you. And he knows that for the Word of God to give life, the spirit must attend to it so that it does not harden you, but it softens you to the things of truth. The Lord must open your heart and open your spiritual eyes to see and understand. That's the spiritual power of the word to give life. It's not just to inform us about life or about God, but rather it is a means by which God spiritually calls us to new life. We call that regeneration. In Christian doctrine you get regenerated re you get made alive again.

Now that actually brings us back to what I said earlier. The psalmist is quite exclusive when he talks about where we get life. He says it's only from God. And that's true ultimately, and it's true practically. Ultimately. We all know how it's true because we know that when God makes the world and he takes death and chaos and brings out of it life and thriving, how does he do it? Just go back to Genesis 1. One of the first things we see about God's creative work is that He doesn't do some, you know, rituals or something like this to make the world be created. What does he do? He just speaks it. The psalmist can say quite literally the word of the Lord is the source of all life. If you are alive, whether you recognize it or not, you got your life from the word of the Lord when he said, let there be light. And then he said, let the waters be separated. Let land emerge out of the water. He is speaking a life, and everything in the universe owes its existence to God. So ultimately, God's Word is the source of all life. But notice what the psalmist is saying here is it's not just in that first creation. It's also in new creation.

Let's put it this way. We receive life from the Word of God as creator. God as creator speaks life into existence. God as Redeemer speaks new life into existence. Both happen by the power of the spirit. Go back to Genesis one, right? You talk about *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formless and void*. Tohuwabohu. It's crazy and mad

and wild. And what does it say? Who was there? It's the first mention we get of that. There's going to be some kind of trinity in this world. Okay? And the spirit was hovering over the surface of the deep. Look who's actively involved in the work of creation. Who's actively involved in the work of recreation. It's the Holy Spirit. God speaks through His word. The spirit attends to it, as we saw with Ezekiel and Ezekiel 37 but also, as we see throughout the Old and New Testament, when God's Spirit attends to his word, it brings about what does Paul say? Behold, new creation. If anyone is in Christ, behold like a Baptist pastor, right? New creation. The Baptist pastor is getting it from Paul. Okay. That's how we get our new life. That's how regeneration takes place. The spirit comes with the word. Paul says, how can they believe if they haven't heard? You've got to hear. Spend enough time around the church. You'll hear stories of how people heard and new life sprout anew. And by the way, it can be before you even remember. It can be back behind the fog of three and two years old. Somewhere along the way, the Lord regenerated your heart through the hearing of the word. I've had friends, by the way. It's not always to a perfect hearing of the word. It's never a perfect hearing of the word, but it's oftentimes through very kind of broken up here, you know, hearings of the word.

As a matter of fact, a friend of mine who's told me about the story of his father. His father was a criminal. He was out doing crime. Okay. He was kind of a thug. And he was sitting on the corner smoking a cigarette one day in a city, and across the street there was a tent revival going on, and as he was talking to his buddies about what they were going to do next, the flaps on the tent were kind of flapping open and closed, and every time they opened, he could hear a little bit of what the preacher was saying. And while he's talking to his friends with one ear, he's listening to the preacher with the other. And that's how the Lord regenerated him. That's how he got new life. It wasn't perfect, but he heard the word and the spirit attended to it. And he no longer lived. But now Christ lives within him. The new man, the spiritual man. Behold new creation.

You see, we can put our trust in this. It can give us confidence in our own faith. It was not because your own brilliant insight that you became a Christian. It is because Jesus alone sent His spirit to fill you with new life. That should give you a lot of confidence and hope, and it should take away any hint of pride. It should also, by the way, remove from us a certain kind of pressure when we're sharing the gospel with others, because you realize you may or may not do it the best. Have you ever been hoping and praying for opportunities to share the gospel with a friend? And suddenly they open up to it, and it's on the day where you've got a headache and you didn't get any sleep the night before, and you're in a rush because you're trying to get something done. You're like, Lord, why now? This should give us hope. There's been times when I have answered a person's questions. I have showed them love. I've given them a clear articulation of the gospel, and they walk away and they say, yeah, I'm glad that's a good truth for you, but not for me. I've also had times when years later, they come back to me now a Christian, and they tell me how someone said, like the most mundane thing in the world. And that's how the Lord opened up their heart to the gospel, right? And guess what I say, Praise God.

Paul says this to the Corinthians. He's writing to them about when they first met, when Paul went to the Corinthian church and he brought them the gospel. And notice what he says here.

He says in first Corinthians 2:1 and then later in verse 4, he says, *when I came to you, brothers did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God*. Notice he's using the language there of Psalm one hundred nineteen, testimonies, statutes, religion, rules, commandments, word. I didn't come to you proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. My speech and my message were not implausible words of wisdom, not in space, plausible words of wisdom, but in space. Demonstration of the spirit and of power. Here's the thing that that might be hard for us to get our heads around. But if we take Paul seriously and we don't say he's just being falsely, you know, humble. Well then, even though we know that Paul is a good writer because we get to read his letters, it's quite possible. Like many academics and pastors, it's quite possible that he's a good writer, but not a good speaker. I know a lot of guys who are great writers, and they're not great speakers, and I know a lot of guys who are great speakers. And then you put a pin in their hand it's terrible. Okay. It's quite possible that if you heard Paul preach, it would have been broken up. He might have been kind of distracted. He might have had a stutter. He might have not been able to finish a complete, like long thought like he does in his writing. He tells us right here, he says, when I came to you, it wasn't in eloquence. It wasn't in lofty speech. As a matter of fact, he says, it wasn't even in plausible words of wisdom. And yet the Lord used him to be the greatest evangelist in the history of the church, not only changing the course of the gospel, he changed the course of world history. And yet, Paul says it was not to demonstrate my ability because I wasn't very good. It was to demonstrate the power of the spirit. Paul knew well, as he says elsewhere, that God shows his wisdom and his strength through our weakness. And may that be true in our preaching of the gospel, too. Even when it's weak, even when we show up and give a sorry account for the hope that is within us, that the Lord attends to it, and that the Lord brings out new life through the power of the spirit. You see, it's surprising to us, perhaps, to learn that the Word of God is where we find life.

There's a story that goes back to 2010. You may remember it when the 33 miners in Chile were trapped because of a cave in in the mine that they were in, and it took days for rescuers to find them. And the only way that they found them was by drilling holes down through the earth. And finally, when the drill bit popped through into the little safety refuge that the miners had taken refuge in, it was only then that the world got the message back from the miners. It said, we're all alive, all thirty three. Okay. All thirty three are alive in shelter. But then now, for the next few weeks, while they got ready to get the miners out, which was quite difficult, that little drill hole that had been made through the earth became their only lifeline to the outside world. They got information about their loved ones. They got notes from their children and from their spouses. They got antibiotics. They got food. They got water all through that little tube. Sometimes think of us like the miners living here in the dark. And yet we've got this little tube that the Lord has sent down to us, and we get everything we need from it. The Word of God is like that conduit. It gives us news. Absolutely. It gives us information about reality as we're in the midst of the darkness, but it also gives us food and it gives us water, and it gives us protection to sustain us to the end. So the word is the motive for life, right? It's the source out of which life comes. But it's not just that. It's also the means. We're not just talking about life coming from the word. We're not talking about life in the word. God's word strengthens us by removing falsehood and forming us in faithfulness. Verses 28-30 now turn their attention to what do we do now that we

have life? How do we now live in life, this new life that we've been given. Notice what he says in verse twenty eight. My soul melts away for sorrow. Strengthen me according to your word. So the psalmist is moved. He was clinging to the dust, but now he's moved from the dust to tears. Okay, he's not in the dust, presumably any longer. But now he's in tears. He's weeping. He even says in this vivid picture, my soul melts away. He's using that Hebrew word nephesh, which means, really my person. It melts away. And it's a vivid artistic picture because have you ever felt that way when you're crying and it's just kind of coming down and you're weeping and grieving. Elsewhere, David will say, I soaked my pillows with my tears, and it can feel like that. It can feel like you're emptying yourself. Like the insides are melting and coming out of your eyes. He's done. He's spent. His soul melts away. He's lost the firmness and the strength of life. He feels weakened, as if he is dissolving under the weight of sorrow. But notice where his answer is found. He says, strengthen me, O Lord, according to your word. The word gives life, but it's also a means by which that life grows. It's not just the source. God doesn't just leave us there with life and then walk away. He then, through His word, continues to form us and grow us. This is what we call sanctification in the Christian life.

Okay, Sanctification - that's the Lord working in us now that we've been saved. It's not about getting freed from your sin anymore. You've been freed. You've got the new life. There's no more corruption and there's no more guilt. That's what the gospel is. Do you know that, Christian? You are saved from the corruption and the guilt of sin. That's the good news. So how do I live now? says, live according to the word where you got your life. Now live according to it. Be formed by it. It's the means of spiritual growth and spiritual formation. What does that look like? Look what he says in verse 29 -- Put false ways far from me. Okay, when I was dead, clinging to the dust, I was clinging on to false ways. Now I know the truth. Let me put away the false ways. Okay. Do you realize that sin is not just something that's forbidden? It's actually false? Do you know that? It promises a lot, but it's all lies. What it promises. Again, the psalmist doesn't see becoming a believer as having a lesser life. He sees it as having a greater life. I'm getting away from the false stuff, right? I'm getting away from the thing that gives me no nourishment, and I'm moving towards the thing that gives me real life. Put false ways away from me. Graciously teach me your law. Verse 29-30 - I have set the chosen. I've chosen the way of faithfulness. Notice he's saying I'm a believer. I've chosen the way of faithfulness. I've set your rules before me. Now mold me according to your word. Growth involves both removal and replacement. The false must be replaced by the true. We do not mature by simply trying harder. We mature as God graciously teaches us to recognize the false, destructive, hurtful ways in us and to lead us in his everlasting way that is found in the word. Just before we move from this, I want to point out, isn't that interesting? In verse twenty nine, he says, graciously teach me your law. We don't usually attach grace and the law together, but notice what he's saying. Teach me your word. Okay. Again, he's using law, rule statutes, testimonies. These are all synonyms for word. He uses them over and over again interchangeably. Teach me your word in grace. You see, if you are in Christ, if you are regenerate, if you are now a friend of God and not an enemy of God, the law is not a source of condemnation for you. And so when you go to the law, it's just grace upon grace. Okay. If you have a loving father or a loving mother, or a caring discipleship leader or mentor, and you go to them and you say, I know you love me. I know you care for me. Can you guide me in this way? I need some advice and counsel. When

they give you advice and counsel, you don't say, stop. What do you say? You graciously receive it. Have you ever gotten good counsel? It's grace. It's life giving. is beautiful. You see, the law is not a condemnation to you because God does not condemn you when God loves you. You can love the law. You're free to enjoy it and love it. You don't get any salvation from it. You know that. You've already been saved. Now you're growing in life.

Augustine, the great bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa, talks about his conversion story in his book confessions. It's a wonderful read. He was an adult convert. He wasn't a young man, a young man who was a Christian. He was quite rebellious, a criminal. Uh, he had a child out of wedlock. He still remembers. And it's instructive for us as well. Even after becoming a believer, he remembers his worst crime. And if you hear it, you'd think, that's not that bad. He stole some fruit off a tree in a man's yard. But he says this is why it was the worst crime I committed, because he said objectively, I did worse things. Okay. But for me, I know this was the worst evil I committed because we stole even though we weren't hungry, he says. I don't even have that excuse that I was hungry. I just did evil for the sake of evil. And yet he had a loving mother who followed him around in his early life. Her name was Monica. She prayed for him and cared for him. She was a believer and she relentlessly brought him before the gospel and later in life, he's in the city of Milan. This is the time, we could say, of his conversion. He's in one of those gardens -- if you've ever been in Mediterranean. I used to teach a class in Malta in every house in Malta had this. You'd go in the backyard, and the backyard is this high wall. And there's a garden in the wall. And you have privacy there because there's a high wall, okay. But you also don't have privacy, right? Because there's no roof. So you can hear everything that's going on in the other gardens. And Augustine is in the backyard and he is weeping. He has tried everything. He's tried out every philosophy. He's tried out stoicism, Manichaeism, you know, hedonism. He's tried it all. None of it works. He is weeping. He is lost. He's broken. And as he's weeping there with his hands holding his face, he hears somewhere in another garden, a child playing or something. He doesn't even know the context. He's like, she might have been playing. She might have been praying, she might have been reading something. But all he hears is a child's voice. And she says two words Tolle lege, take up and read. And he hears those words and he says, okay. And he looks around and there's a Bible, and he opens up the scripture to Romans 13:13-14 that tells him that he is to put away sinful desire. And here's the key phrase and put on Christ, put away sinful desire, but put on Christ. And he says, it was at that moment that he realized that he had been going in all these different false ways. He had been clinging to dust. He'd been going in all these false and destructive ways, and he was finally shown the way of life. That exposed the false way in Scripture. It summoned him to faithfulness, and it became the means through which God redirected his life. The word strengthens us because it gives us shape to a life of sorrow, temptation, and falsehood that are constantly trying to pull against us. So the Word of God is the source of life. It's the motive of life. It is the means of life. But then lastly, what is our life pointed towards? It's pointed towards the word. The word is the mission of life. We get life from the word. We get life in the word and we get life unto or for the word. It is the mission just as much as it is the motive and the means. Life, created and strengthened by the word, becomes a life that is eagerly directed towards obedience to the word. Look what he says in verse thirty one. I cling to your testimonies. What was he clinging to before? He's clinging to the dust before. Now he's clinging to your testimonies. Oh Lord, let me

not be put to shame. You notice there's an ark. There's a narrative story being told in this stanza. He begins clinging to the dust. Now he's clinging to the testimonies. The same life that was attached to dust has become attached to the word. The question is not whether we will cling to something right. Like Bob Dylan said, you gotta serve somebody. You got to cling to something. You're going to cling to the dust. Are you going to cling to the word? He says in verse thirty two? I will run in the pathways the way of your commandments. When you enlarge my heart, he begins in the dust, but he ends running. He begins constricted by sorrow, but he ends with an enlarged heart. God does not revive us merely so that we can remain where we are. He's not absent in our life, but rather he is drawing us along through His word so that we might arrive at His Word. Notice I like this phrase enlarge my heart means make great my heart expand or magnify my heart. What is he saying here? He's saying, I am striving for your word and I want to desire it and understand it more, but my heart is already full of it. So if I want to grow in my knowledge of it, you need to make my heart bigger. If we were to rewind back to the previous stanza.

Okay, the third stanza of the poem, you'll notice the first thing he says in that stanza is this Lord, let me live a few more days so I can enjoy your word. Just a few days more, right? So you notice the goal is the word. He doesn't say, let me live a few more days so I can, you know, have a little bit more fun or I can be with my family even. What does he say? I want more life, which means I'm going to strive towards your revelation of yourself. Give me just a bigger heart, expand the inner desires and will of my life so I can more fully understand who you are and the life that you give. Expand out my imagination. And I don't mean imagination like the ability to make stuff up. I mean, the way in which you conceive the world as you get more experience in life, your understanding, your conception of the world grows and you get a bigger imagination. Have you noticed that when you were small, you had small experience of the world and your idea of greatness was small? As you get older, you get a bigger view of the world, and your anticipation of what greatness might look like gets bigger. He's saying the same thing here spiritually. My heart grows so that I more fully understand the glory. I more fully understand the wonders of your thoughts and your ideas. I more fully understand who you are. See, the enlarged heart describes a heart that is spacious, willing, eager, and free. There's a reality that I think we run into in cultures that are formed by the Bible, Christian cultures, formerly Christian cultures. I think we see this in the Bible Belt. I've noticed one very big difference between Washington, D.C. and Birmingham is everywhere you go, everyone's a Christian. Kinda right. I remember I was talking to a woman who was cutting my hair, and she was telling me these florid stories with florid language about things that she'd been up to. And then she turned inevitably and said, so what do you do? And I said, all right, there goes the end of that conversation. This happens on planes, too. You know, if I want to shut it down, just tell them what I do know and say I'm a pastor. And she goes, oh yeah, I go to church too. And I was like, oh, I bet you do. I'm sure you do. You know, but there's something that can happen in these kind of biblically formed societies where the Bible is known, and it becomes kind of a checklist of the things you need to do to have like the normal holistic life, but it becomes an Obligation, right? The Bible is the obligation that you're required to pay. It's the tax that you pay to being a good citizen of society. Right? Notice how the psalmist does not talk about the Word of God that way. It is a source of life and joy. And if you want to have a better life, if you want to have

fuller joy of this life, grow in your knowledge of the word. That would be my hope and my prayer for you. As you're studying God's Word is you're studying the Psalms that your heart would grow. Let me add something practically to that as you read Psalm one nineteen. We've been using the series, uh, to talk a little bit about how the Psalms form our prayers.

Let me just give you a little practical use of the Psalms here. Psalm one nineteen can be used in this way. Um, you could set aside twenty four days, okay, twenty four days of Psalm one nineteen and I would encourage you to read it this way. On the first day, read the whole Psalm And don't slow down. Don't try to go back and read the verse again. Just read the whole thing, all one hundred and seventy six verses and just let it wash over you, and then pray in response to it, and then go back. And for the next twenty two days, read one stanza after the other. Now as you go through. You go through all of them and you read them and you take your time or you go back, you ask questions, you try to understand each line and do this as well. Ask yourself how are the things that it's saying true? I think you should do this with Psalms and Proverbs and a lot of the wisdom teachings. As you read it, think to yourself, how is this true both generally and how is it true specifically in my life? And then at the end of each one of those stanzas, pray the stanza back to the Lord. It's your prayer. You can do this. You can steal recklessly from the Psalms. Okay, God giving them to you. Just go ahead and pray it as if it's your prayer. And note this where are the places where it's easy for me to pray these things? And where are the places where? When I pray, it feels like I'm saying something that I may not really believe. And by the way, you'll be surprised. He says a lot of stuff in Psalm one nineteen. You'll be surprised at some of the things he says, and you'll go, oh, I'm not sure. I'm not sure how to say that. And on those things say, Lord, conform my heart to yours. Give me a desire and a will that matches your desire and the will. Show me how to grow in this way so that I can pray this honestly. Another way to say it is this enlarge my heart, O Lord, so that I can understand and rightly articulate your word. And then as you get to the end, on your twenty fourth day of twenty four days of Psalm one hundred nineteen, read the whole Psalm again and pray in response and make note of how the Lord has expanded your understanding not only of Psalm one nineteen, but of him, and of how to speak to him in a way that honors and glorifies him. Has it changed the way you think about His Word and His revelation to you? Now, if you read that, if you read it closely, we only got to read one stanza here. You'll note something about Psalm 119. Jewish scholars have noted this as well. Psalm 119 is interesting because the way that he talks about the word, the testimonies, the statutes, it doesn't feel like he's talking about a book. Say things like this when I awake at night, you're there o word. When I'm walking along the way. And I'm fearful of the marauders and the thieves who might be lying in. Wait a word. You protect me when insolent ones speak out against me, O word, you testify on my behalf. Even Jewish scholars have pointed out. It's almost as if he believes the word is a person. And I would argue he does. Even by Old Testament lights, he is saying something that's deeply mosaic, which is that the Word of God, like the name of God, registers the presence of God. It's not a metaphor for God. It's not an image for God. It is registering for us the presence of God. What do I mean by that? Have you ever seen a newborn baby in the arms of her mother? And the baby may be crying, and then she hears the mother say, it's okay. And the baby, who has no rationality going on at all, will stop crying and turn and look and be stilled. Is it because the baby's saying, oh, that voice represents my mother? Or that's a metaphor?

That's a good metaphor for my mother. No, the speech of the mother registers the presence of the mother. No one's meant to worship the sound waves that that bring the voice of the mother, right? You're not supposed to. She. The baby doesn't love the sound waves. The baby loves the mother.

We don't worship the Bible. We're not bibliolatry. Have you ever heard that phrase before? We're not biblical. We don't worship the Bible, but the Bible registers the present, the presence of our father. The gospel writers take this a bit further. Under the instruction of Jesus. John chapter one retells us the story of God's creative work. He starts with the same words that would be in the Greek version of the book of Genesis. Hebrew in the beginning is Greek. It's in John 14:6. What does he say? He says, I show the way. The truth is that what he says? I teach the way, the truth, and the life. Now what does he say? I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am where life comes from. I am what your life is formed by. I am the goal of your life. You see, Jesus is the culmination of the word that the psalmist is celebrating in 119 and he's reminding us of this. Just like with the psalmist, my goal in salvation is not that my circumstances change. I am not longing and working towards the things that God gives. Ultimately, I am looking and working and striving for God Himself. You see, Jesus is the perfect word. So you ask, do we worship the word? Yes and no. Do I worship a book? Absolutely not. Do I worship the word incarnate? Absolutely, because it registers to me the presence of God.

So this stanza, the Dalit stanza of Psalm 119:25-32 traces a remarkable transformation that we have in the word. He goes from dust to life. He goes from sorrow melting out in his tears to strength. He goes from falsehood to faithfulness. He goes from clinging to the dust to clinging to God's testimonies from lying around helplessly to running freely for the Lord. You see, we don't read the Bible, and we don't turn our eyes to Christ merely so that we can gather information or satisfy a religious obligation. We come to the word because that's where God meets us. It's where he reveals himself. It's how we know he's present. We come to it because he answers us. He hears us tell of our ways. He gives us life. He conforms us to himself, and ultimately he draws our eyes to him because he is our portion. He's the reward that we're striving for. The psalmist says, give me life according to your word. And that's not merely a prayer with which the Christian life begins. It's the prayer by which the whole Christian life is formed.