

Adult Teaching Resources

September 6, 2020



A Prayer List for Today

Psalm 119:33-40—“Teach Me, Lord”

Psalm 103:1-13—“Forgive Me, Lord”

Psalm 78:1-7, 34-38—“Convict Me, Lord”

Psalm 25:1-9—“Deliver Me, Lord”

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“Teach Me, Lord”

Psalm 119:33-40

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

**Key Verse: Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
And observe it with my whole heart. (Psalm 119:34)**

Today's lesson comes from Psalm 119. It's a long psalm, 176 verses, but our lesson focuses on eight verses. These verses give us what we need to understand the message of the longer psalm.

Know that what we read today is only a part of something bigger, but the small part we read gives us more than enough to digest.

Opening

After everyone arrives, keep the group together in a large assembly. Share with your group the explanation our Lesson Writer gives about the form and structure of Psalm 119 in the opening paragraphs of today's lesson.

Focus on the last paragraph and the idea that all the verses in today's lesson begin with the same Hebrew letter and are verbs.

Have a volunteer read the first words of each verb. Record those words on the board.

Then, ask the group to share other verbs they think would be appropriate for someone writing a psalm to use. Record those verbs on the board. Ask them to give an example of how they would finish using the verbs they listed in a psalm. If necessary, ask for deeper explanation.

Spend some time talking about the verbs in the psalm and how often we pray those verbs; and talk about the verbs the group listed and how often we pray those verbs.

Then, move on to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

What does the Psalmist ask to be taught? (the way of the Lord's statutes)

What will he do with them? (observe them to the end)

What does he desire in understanding? (to keep the law and observe it with his whole heart)

How does he want to be led? (in the path of God's commandments)

Where should his heart be? (toward God's decrees and not to selfish gain)

Where should his eyes be? (no looking at vanities)

What does he want confirmed? (God's promise which is for those who fear God)

What should he turn away from? (the disgrace that he dreads for God's ordinances are good)

What has the psalmist longed for? (God's precepts)

What gives the psalmist life? (God's righteousness)

Making Connections

Looking at the list of verbs you listed, which verb is most significant to you right now in your faith journey? How would you use that verb in praying to God?

Where do you struggle with knowing what to do in faith (head) and following through with action (heart)? How could God help you align your head and heart?

How often do you rely on your own instincts to get through something? How often do you rely on God to help you? What does that prayer sound like for you?

What are the temptations in your life that keep you from totally focusing on God? How do you try to deal with those temptations? Are you successful?

Describe a life that is self-focused and led by temptation. Describe a life that is other-focused and led by servanthood. Which one do you see more in the world? Is that good or bad? Why do you say that?

If someone else was writing your biography, would they say that you pursue things that are truly worthwhile, or things that have little value in the ultimate scheme of things? What, if anything, would you try to change about yourself to get a different response?

What does it mean to you to "fear God?"

Our Lesson Writer says, "it is likely that the psalmist believed God would recognize his desire to follow God's teachings by granting security, prosperity, and long life, and he asked God to confirm the covenant promise." What do you believe God grants the faithful?

What promises do you believe God gives us?

So What?

Keep everyone in the large group. Share with them the final words of our Lesson Writer in today's lesson:

"The psalmist knows that God is the author of life, and he wants to know life to the fullest. That is the kind of life the prophet Micah described much more succinctly: one that finds its meaning in the rich joy of faithfully pursuing justice, displaying kindness, and walking humbly with God. That, Micah said, is what God wants from us (Mic. 6:8)."

- What does it mean to live life to the fullest?
- What does it mean to live a God-focused life?
- What role do you give God in living your life?
- Where do you need more God in your life?
- What kind of life do we want?

Take some time discussing these questions. Give time for conversation.

Ask the group to go back to the list of verbs from the beginning of the lesson. Thinking about living life to the fullest, and in a way that glorifies God, which verb would they choose and how would they use that verb in a prayer to God?

Ask each person to share their prayer sentence with the larger group.

The Challenge

This week, pray your sentence prayer everyday, seeking God's guidance in living your life more for God.

Prayer

Loving God, we want to live for you, but we let other things get in the way. We want to live for you, but we get scared. We want to live for you, but the world pulls us in a different direction. Help us to act on what we know we need. Give us the courage to name our weaknesses, the courage to step out on faith, and the wisdom to know where you desire us to go. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Alefbet—The English word “alphabet” is derived from the first two letters of the Greek alphabet: *alpha* and *beta*. The Hebrew collection of letters begins with *alef* and *bet*, so we call it the “*alefbet*.” Although Hebrew and Greek are very different languages, many of their composite letters descend from the same roots. Both Hebrew and Greek begin with corresponding letters that make the sounds for a, b, g, and d before the order diverges (*alef, bet, gimel, dalet* in Hebrew, *alpha, beta, gamma, delta* in Greek).

Synonyms for “law” or “teaching”—The psalmist populated Psalm 119 with eight thematic terms describing God’s teaching, repeating them again and again: most of them appear in each of the 22 sections. These eight terms are generally translated as “law” (*torah*, used 25 times), “decrees/covenant terms” (*edût*, 23 times), “statutes/laws” (*choq*, 22 times), “commandments/commands” (*mizwah* 21 times), “ordinances” (*mishpat*, 22 times), “word” (*dabar*, 24 times), “precepts/charges” (*piqûd*, 20 times), and “promise/saying” (*imrah*, 20 times). Occasionally he uses terms such as God’s “paths” or “ways” to get across the same ideas.

James Luther Mays described the effect of the acrostic structure and repetitive lexicon of stock words in this way: “So he used the alphabet to signal completeness and the whole vocabulary to represent comprehensiveness. . . . Within the control of the formal structure, the same thing is said in 167 different ways, in a progression that moves through the alphabet without ever moving from its single subject” (*Psalms*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, [Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], 381-382).

Give me life—The closing line of v. 40, translated “in your righteousness give me life” in the NRSV, is subject to varying translations. In Hebrew it consists of two words that require multiple words to express in English: “in your righteousness” (*betzîdgateka*) and “give me life” (*chayēnî*). The basic stem of the verb used means “to live” or “to have life.” Here it appears in the emphatic *pi’el* form, so that it means “let live,” “give life,” “revive,” or “refresh.”

Thus, NIV 11 has “preserve my life,” while NASB 95 and NET have “revive me.” Though the nuances may differ, the central thought is the same: the psalmist wants to experience the best life possible, which he believes is found in following God’s way.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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How does the alliteration work in vv. 33-40?

For those who might be interested in more insight to the poet's craft, here are the verbs that introduce vv. 33-39. We note that they are all in what is called the *hifil* form, which gives them a causative sense. This allowed the poet a great deal of freedom: he could use almost any verb he wanted, because the causative form would add a *hē* prefix.

Verse 33 begins with *hōrēnî*, from the verb *yārāh*. The suffix *-nî* is the first person pronoun, "me." The meaning of the verbal root is "to cast" or "to shoot." In the causative form it was used to mean "to teach" or "to show." Indeed, it is the same verb that gave rise to the noun form *torah*, which is often translated as "law" but really refers to the wide range of divine teachings. Here *hōrēnî* means "teach me" or "instruct me."

Verse 34 begins with *hebînî*, the causative form of *bîn*, "to understand" with the first-person suffix: "cause me to understand" or "give me understanding."

Verse 35 begins with *hedrîkēnî*, from *darak*, which means "to walk." The causative form with the first-person suffix means "cause me to walk," or more elegantly, "lead me."

Verse 36 begins with *hat-lebî*. The verb is *hat* (sometimes transliterated as *hath* to distinguish the letter *tet* from *tav*, which has a sharper sound). It comes from the root *nātāh*, which means "to incline" or "to bend." In the *hifil* form the initial *nun* and the final *hē* both disappear, leaving the imperative *hat*, which can mean "stretch out," "turn," or "incline" when used with an object. In this case, the object is *lebî*, "my heart." The psalmist wants God to incline or turn his heart toward God's teachings.

Verse 37 begins with *h'avēr*, the *hifil* form of *āvar*, which means "to pass over" or "pass by." In the causative form it can mean "cause to pass over" or "cause to pass by." In this case, the psalmist wants God to cause his eyes to pass over or turn away "from looking at vanities."

Verse 38 begins with *haqēm*, from the verb *qûm*, which means "to arise" or "to stand." The *hifil* form means, as we might expect, "to cause to stand," or "to raise." The idea of "causing to stand" can carry the idea of "establish" or "confirm," and that is the sense here, where the psalmists prays for God to confirm or establish God's words/sayings, translated by the NRSV as "promise."

Verse 39 begins with the same verb as v. 37: *h'avēr*. Here, instead of praying for God to turn the psalmist's eyes away from vanities, it has the sense of asking God to "cause to pass by" or "turn away" any disgrace or reproach from the psalmist.

Verse 40 concludes the section, though with a different beginning. Here the first word is *hinēh*, an interjection that means something like "behold" or "see."