

The year was 1535, and William Tyndale was on the run, fleeing for his life. His work on translating the Bible into English was seen as a direct challenge to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. The church of the day had held that the Scriptures needed to be preserved in Latin, and translating them would corrupt them. But Tyndale, following Luther, had wanted every person in the pew to be able to read the word of God.

While in Antwerp, he was betrayed by a false friend, Henry Phillips and was imprisoned a little north of Brussels, where he faced the cold winter months. A letter of Tyndale's was discovered, written to the governor of the prison. It reads:

"I entreat your lordship, and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here during the winter, you will request the Procureur to be kind enough to send me from my goods which he has in his possession, a warmer cap, for I suffer extremely from cold in the head....A warmer coat also, for that which I have is very thin: also a piece of cloth to patch my leggings....I wish also his permission to have a lamp in the evening, for it is wearisome to sit alone in the dark. But above all, I entreat and beseech your clemency to be urgent with the Procureur that he may kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible." (quoted in Dale Ralph Davis, *Slogging Along in the Paths of Righteousness* (Christian Focus), p. 115.)

A warmer cap, a warmer coat, a lamp. Above all...my Hebrew Bible. We have access to the Bible now unlike any other time. At the start of the new year, we want to be encouraged to be resolved to be in the Word afresh. And I want to consider 6 reasons why we need the Bible this year above all, 6 reasons why the Bible above all from Psalm 19.

Psalm 19 is a song of David praising God for revealing himself to his people and is a reminder that we need God above all. In vv. 7-10 we are given 6 reasons why we should literally covet the Bible more than gold so that we would find it sweeter than honey. So why the Bible above all?

## **1. Be Restored**

God is heard all throughout nature, but it isn't enough to be heard in nature. God's voice needs to be heard. And the Bible is God's voice to humanity speaking. The reason we need God's voice in the Bible is that his voice does more than what nature ever can. In each one of the phrases that follows about the Bible, it is given a different name and it is connected with the Lord himself.

The first reason we are given the Bible is that God's teaching restores the soul. Our problem is that life is tough. There is so much discouragement. Life is far from perfect. In fact, some days it is just hard to get out of bed. We put our feet on the floor and the day sometimes hits us before we are even out of bed. Our jobs are tough, relationships are broken, our struggle with sin is so painful.

And yet, David says that God's *torah* is flawless. Our Bibles typically translate *torah* as law, and we associate law with rules. But *torah* is so much more than law. It is God's teaching, instruction, and this instruction is described as being "flawless" – the same word that is used in Lev. 1:3 to describe the type of sacrifice that was to be brought to the Lord – without spot or blemish.

What happens to us is that life depletes us. It wears us down. We feel disillusioned. Disappointments happen. And here's what God's instruction is intended to do – he restores your soul. This is just like Psalm 23:3 – God leads his sheep beside quiet waters to restore their soul. When you feel like life has beat you down, God wants you to come to him and find that his way is life-giving, not soul-depleting.

So why should we come to God's word in 2024? We should find that the Bible is God's voice that speaks the word that we need when we don't know it.

## **2. Become Wise**

The second phrase describes the testimony of the Lord. This phrase was used to describe the 10 commandments (Exod. 31:18), and God had spoken to Israel from the mountain when they had come out of Egypt so that they would not live like slaves but as free people. When you've been enslaved for generations, what do you need? You need a sure word, a reliable word.

What happens in life is that when we get caught in sin, it makes us foolish. What we need is to be freed from folly and move from simplicity to wisdom – the ability to live skillfully. This is what Proverbs 1:4-6 and 22 says. Wisdom is the ability to live skillfully through life, and the way to grow in skill is to hear God's ways. We lack skillful living – we all do. We are all trying to navigate life and we need more than just rules to know what to do and not to do. The Bible is given so that we might learn how to live skillfully in those complex situations where we don't know what to do. So we should come to God's word in 2024 to find that God has skillful ways for us to live when we don't know what to do.

## **3. Be Joyful**

Here we are told that the precepts of the Lord are right. Precepts have this idea of being practical words to be kept (see Ps. 119:4). God doesn't give us his instructions as mere advice, he gives his ways so that we know what is right and wrong. His ways are not meant to steal joy, but to give us joy. John will say that his commands are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:2). The reason God's word gives us joy is that he will never lead us in the wrong way. He leads us in the right way.

This is what can give you joy: you can know that you're doing the right thing even when everything is really difficult. God isn't going to lead you down a path of misery. It might be hard and difficult, but that's because he is leading you to himself. So we should come to God's word

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in 2024 to find that God has given us his orders so that we would have joy. We should read the Bible with the expectation that God wants to meet us with joy.

#### **4. Be Enlightened**

This phrase in the second part of v. 8 is very interesting. The thing that the Bible is to do is enlighten you. If you've ever walked through a room with the lights off thinking you know your way around it and then run into something, you appreciate a light. You can navigate a room in the dark somewhat; you do so much better when you have the lights on.

This week I was leaving the church building and was walking through the auditorium, as I often do, but the lights were off. As I got close to the east doors, I walked full speed into the last row of chairs, scattering chairs, dropping my belongings, and banging up my shin really good. I thought, "Why did I do that?"

Psalm 119:105 says that God's word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. He shows us the way. And here's what I have found – it's by staring at the Bible that I notice things I've never noticed before. And here is one: the commandment of the Lord is pure. Light doesn't distort things. And this word, "pure", expresses how God's word is without corruption or pollution. God doesn't give us the Bible so that it confuses us. He gives it to us so that it is without fault. The Bible has been preserved for us and given to us without error. We can trust his Word to enlighten us as we look deeply into his word and discover that he hasn't given us tons of rules but he has given us one command that works itself out in hundreds of ways: to love him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And when we follow this command, it causes us to love others and orders our lives. So we should read the Bible so we can see our lives more clearly in 2024.

#### **5. Be Persevering**

In v. 9, there is a shift. Our attitude to God's Word is now described as "the fear of the Lord." I have said that this is the OT's way of speaking about repentance and faith. The Bible isn't a book first about rules, but about knowing and loving God and relating to him and his world rightly. But life has many many temptations. We all have reasons why we fall off the path. We do wrong and wrong is done to us, and we often respond wrongly. But the central message of the Bible is that we would live in repentance and faith. When we are shown that we are wrong, that we stop and change our ways and trust the Lord. So it is intended to make us "clean" – a word used to describe that which could come into God's presence. God's aim is to bring us into his presence, and he has given us his word so that we could come to him.

God's word endures, and though there are challenges to the Christian faith in every generation, God has always preserved a people for himself. When we read the Bible, what we should be seeing is how God is working repentance and faith in us. He has kept his word through hard times. We can see how God used men like William Tyndale to keep his word and preserve it and

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pass it on to people like you and me. We have been given this word so that we might learn repentance and faith. We never stop needing to repent and we never have to stop trusting God. Life is hard, and if we would read his word in 2024, he will help us persevere.

## **6. Be Righteous**

God's Word is described as rule that are right, and what the Lord intends is that we would learn his ways and know what is right and wrong. And this is what God is intending to do in us. This is why we need the Bible.

We need the Bible because by knowing God, he shows us what is right and wrong, how to live, how to change, how to live skillfully, and how to love him. God doesn't give us this book so that we would find it to be drudgery. He gives it for our joy in knowing him.

Life is hard. Life is difficult. Life is full of challenges. As I looked at these four verses, what I was struck by was how God has given us his Word so that we would know how to love and live and trust and delight in him. So is it any wonder that William Tyndale would ask for a warmer cap, coat, light, but above all his Hebrew Scriptures? He wanted to know and love the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength. He needed that as he faced certain death. He needed joy when he faced execution.

Life is challenging. What is going to refresh you? What is going to give you joy? What is going to give you wisdom? What is going to light your way?

Don't read the Bible because it is one more check list to do, because you feel like you have to do that to get to heaven. Read it because it is your food, your life, your light. Stare at it so that you might see wonderful things and discover something new about God and yourself. Read it and you will find that you will be like Tyndale. Above all, give me the word of God.