

## Psalm 119:33-40

**Introduction** – Psalm 119, set in 22 stanzas parallel to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, focuses every verse upon some aspect of the Word of God. In this fifth cluster, the Psalm-singer calls upon God Himself to be his teacher and guide, and even to be the source of change in his desires and motivations.

Ultimately, joyful obedience is a matter of the heart and there is only One Shepherd of the heart. Jesus Christ, by means of His Word and Spirit, conquers, converts, and subdues our heart that we might be changed from the inside out. This prayer encourages us to “cut with the grain” in the work of God’s sanctifying presence and power. Learn this prayer and learn to pray in the manner of this prayer.

**Requesting the Best Teacher** (vv33-34) – More important than the subject you are learning is the teacher who is instructing you for he will shape your mind and heart far more than the subject of learning itself. If David, who penned much of God’s Word, is petitioning God to be his teacher, how much more should we pray the same?

There is a need to be taught (v33) and to receive understanding (v34) and so both are requested. And this is often the order: obedience brings understanding which brings greater and more heart-felt obedience (Deut 4:6). The prophets promised that we would be taught by God, and Christ declared that when we are it always leads us to Him (John 6:45) and Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, grants us the understanding (1 John 5:20). This is just the opposite of wisdom that “*does not descend from above*” (James 3:13-18).

The Psalmist is not entering into a contract with God, as though he was saying, “you promise to teach me, and I’ll promise in return to keep your law...” Rather, he is declaring the natural outcome of being taught by God and granted understanding of God and His ways, “*I shall keep it to the end...with my whole heart.*”

“*Alas, for those who will never be taught. They dote upon their own wisdom, but their folly is apparent...*” – Spurgeon.

**Responding to the Best Trainer** (vv35-37) – Apparently it is a good thing to pray that God would simply “*make*” you walk in His path. This is not a prayer to be a puppet, for the leading is not that of a power source, but communion with the Persons of the Trinity. We begin to live like them because we find that we are living in and with them. This is the promise of the New Covenant through Ezekiel 36:26-27. And this is what Paul means when he writes, “*being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ,*” and “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure*” (Phil 1:6, 2:12-13).

It is appropriate as well to ask God to incline your heart one way and not another (v36). And why not? Wouldn’t you rather obey without chafing? Jesus has made clear that we cannot serve God and mammon (Matt 6:24), that is, we cannot make an idol out of any created gifts, good as they might be. And so, what do you covet, what have you been tempted to make an idol of? Ask God to make your heart long for Him and His ways and hate all else and all others in comparison (Luke 14:26). When we give in to covetousness, we are easily deceived, enticed and confused (2 Pet 2:3, 14).

And so the Psalmist prays that even his eyes would be turned away from worthless or vain things, for we are easily tempted through our senses (v37), and Jesus warned us in this regard as well (Matt 5:28-30). This teaches us that it should be expected that we will be tempted in countless ways of vanity; this is normal in the not-yet-fully-sanctified state. It also teaches us that we must come to God for change from the inside out and protection from the outside in. “*Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” The end of this verse calls out that God would quicken him from within.

**Sincerity and Honesty** (vv38-40) – In our prayers, we can declare our sincere devotion (v38), agreement (v39), and longing (v40) for God and His ways. We can do that sincerely and honestly, confessing our need for Him to establish/confirm/keep us there (v38), turn us from our own or other’s reproach (v39), and bring us to life while declaring we are alive (v40). “*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief,*” the man of a child brought to Jesus for healing cried. And so do we as we sing and pray this prayer.

**What Do You Long For?** – The more you see Christ, the more you will long for His ways, His precepts. The more you see His ways are good, the more you will long for them to be kept in you and the more you will realize that this must be done with a living communion with God by faith. Is Christ in you? If not, then believe. If so, then seek Him to revive your faith in just those areas of doubt or compromise.