

A Verse To Live By

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[0 : 00] When I was growing up, it was popular to, among Christians at least, to select a particular verse of Scripture and to kind of claim it as a life verse.

Perhaps you have one or you at least are familiar with the practice of that. I don't know that it's as common today. I don't really ever hear people talk about this anymore. But typically, if you're unfamiliar, it involved selecting a particular passage of Scripture that were especially comforting or encouraging or insightful, not really in specific moments of life, but through various circumstances of life is typically how it would work.

You'd pick one that you could just kind of memorize and recite to yourself across different seasons of life, and this would bring you encouragement. Some people would use these verses as a way of sharing their testimonies.

Perhaps you have been in a mission service, and a missionary has gone up. They've quoted, and they've said, I want to begin with my life verse, and they quote the verse, and then they use that verse to kind of tell their story of conversion or how the Lord has worked in their life to go to the mission field or whatever it may be.

Now, I will caution you and say that in describing that, I'm not necessarily advocating for that. In fact, I'm not advocating for it. We never want to read our own lives into the Scriptures.

[1 : 26] There's huge problems that come with that, isn't there? If we kind of take a passage that kind of sounds like what we want to say anyways, and then we use it to tell a testimony, even though everything we say is good, we end up saying something of the Scriptures that the Scriptures aren't saying of themselves, then we kind of get ourselves in a mess, and we don't want to do that.

So I'm not necessarily advocating for that. Still, it is wonderfully helpful and beneficial to have a practice of memorizing Scriptures, Scriptures like that, that the Lord will use to call to your mind and bring comfort to your heart, verses that you can pray again and again.

And I've never had a life verse, but I can say that Psalm 86:11 is as close as I've ever come to having a verse that is just uniquely present at various times of my life.

I return to it. I find myself praying these words over and over again throughout various circumstances, constantly coming back and repeating this to the Lord.

Teach me your way, O Lord. Teach me. I want to walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name. And you'll find that if you pray those words, there's no limit to the situations that you can pray it in.

[2 : 47] Every circumstance of life, ultimately, we want to come back to this particular spirit and thought, Lord, I want to know your way. I want to walk in your truth. I want to fear your name and glorify you and who you are.

So in that sense, it's truly a verse that we can live by. And it's one that I want to take a few minutes to examine and meditate upon this morning. Now, the uniqueness of it in Psalm 86 is that it's out of place.

At least it seems out of place. We read through this Psalm, we recognize this is a prayer of lament of David's. And David is spending most of this Psalm asking God to do a life-altering work for him.

Ruthless, godless, insolent men have risen up against him over and over. He's asking for God to intervene in that. In the circumstance that he's found himself in, he's saying, God, please deliver me.

He's asking for God to do this life-altering work. Please do this thing for me and help me, deliver me, save me. But when we get to verse 11, it doesn't fit with that dynamic.

[3 : 56] He's not asking for God to do a life-altering work for him. What he's asking God to do in verse 11 is to perform a life-transforming work in him. Do you see the difference?

Lord, do something about these men. Do something about this circumstance. Verse 11, though, is do something about me. Do something in me.

So it sticks out to us, doesn't it? It doesn't really make a lot of sense. Why is he saying this here? Why does he fit it in to this lament? And we see this just deep desire come to the surface in David's life where he just really wants to know God.

He wants to know God. He wants to please the Lord with his life. Even in the midst of his heartache, his desire at the heart of it is, Lord, I just want to know you.

I want to please you even in this. It seems out of place until you step back and you realize that it comes in the midst of David's prayer of praise.

[4 : 59] There's three stanzas to the psalm. The middle one, beginning at verse 8, is really a moment of private worship with David. It's a prayer of praise, and it's flanked on either side by this lament.

And what we find as we consider that is that it is his worshipful reflection on God's character and on the work of God's hand that prompts David's prayer for this instruction in righteousness.

It is as he looks at God that he begins to develop a more deep desire to know that God that he's considering, that he's meditating upon. Notice the place that it has in David's worship.

Look here just in verse 8. There is none like you among the gods. Again in verse 8, there are no works like your works. Verse 9, all the nations shall worship and glorify your name.

Verse 10, you are great. You do wondrous things. Again in verse 10, you alone are God. Verse 12, I give thanks to you with my whole heart. Again, I will glorify your name forever.

[6 : 07] Verse 13, great is your steadfast love toward me. You have delivered my soul. It's right in the middle of worship. There's no other request here.

His eyes and his thoughts and his heart is fixed on the person and the work of God who he knows him to be. And it is out of this that comes this unique request.

So we might discern from the structure here that a genuine desire to know and love and obey and worship God flows out of a heart that is already actively engaged in authentic worship.

In other words, worship precedes the desire to more deeply know and glorify God. Therefore, a lack of sincere longing for God in your life will be directly linked to an absence of the true worship of God in your life.

And you say, I just have this struggle. Like I see these words that David pray. I don't think I've ever had a thought quite as emotionally attached and longing for God quite like this.

[7 : 21] Or at least it's been a while. And we would say, well, as we look at David's prayer here, it must be that at the heart of what you're doing in your Christian life is not authentic worship.

It may be religious forms. There may be other things happening in your life, but it's not authentic worship. Our worship is directly linked to our desire for God and for his ways.

And our problem at this point may be that we misunderstand what it means to truly worship. Worship is not merely recognizing a set of facts about God, as David has done in the psalm, but it's not about that.

It's not about recognizing this set of facts about God and then churning them out in kind of perfunctory prayers and songs and hymns that we just kind of select and we just kind of work our way through it.

You know, you've been there. I know you have. Worship is a heart level, faith driven, life consuming devotion to God.

[8 : 25] That's what worship is. It's not something that we can box up in a moment or in an hour and a half or in a song. It is a faith driven, life consuming, heart level devotion to God.

But unfortunately, this is not the natural disposition of our hearts. We do not inherently long for God. We don't long for his pleasure.

We long for self pleasure. That's how our minds think. That's how our hearts operate. And sometimes we're tempted to pursue David's request here.

This request for knowledge or this request for righteousness. But we pursue that without the worship that David has here, which ultimately just amounts to vain religion.

It's cold. It's burdensome. It's ultimately ineffective. Because our desire to know the word, perhaps, or even our desire to live according to the word is detached from authentic worship of God.

[9 : 28] We really become no different than the Israelites and some of the prophets when God was so angry with them. They're doing the forms. They're doing the things.

But their heart is far from him. And we can very easily fall into that. What we need is new hearts. We need new hearts.

If we're going to grasp David's prayers, our own for sure. Which means that we need the atoning work of Jesus. We need the regenerative and renewing work of the Holy Spirit before we can ever experience this genuine desire for God that David exhibits here.

There's three simple phrases to the verse. I want to group them in two categories. First, we'll see the ultimate aim of David's prayer. That's in the middle phrase. That I may walk in your truth.

Then we want to look at the means that David sees as achieving this desired end. That's in the first and third phrase. Teach me your way, O Lord. And then he says at the end, unite my heart that I may fear your name.

[10 : 37] So if we were to just kind of rework the structure of the verse a little bit, it may help us see exactly what David's getting at here. We could read it this way. Teach me your ways, O Lord. And unite my heart to fear your name so that I may walk in your truth.

Do you see that? The ultimate goal of the prayer is walk in truth. Teaching him his ways. Fearing God's name is the way that he knows. The path that he knows to be to get him there.

So let's think about the aim for just a moment. That I may walk in your truth, David says. His desire is to walk in God's truth.

This word walk is important here. It's significant in the Bible. It's used over and over in the Bible as an analogy referring to one's manner of life.

So it points to something that motivates our attitudes and our actions. That's really what the word means. Let me give you a few examples of this in the scripture. How about Psalm 1-1?

[11 : 39] Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, but his desire is in the law of the Lord. What's the psalmist getting at there?

That if you live your life being motivated by, your attitudes and actions being motivated by, the counsel of the world, you will not be the blessed man. But if you live your life in such a way that it is motivated by the law of God, you will be the blessed man.

Walking there is significant. It is simply what is the thing that's controlling our attitudes and actions. Mark chapter 7 and verse 5 is another one. The Pharisees use it here with Jesus.

Mark says, In other words, what they're asking is, why do your disciples not live according to our law?

Why is their manner of life not following and structured by what we've said in these traditions? Galatians 5.16 for a positive look at it.

[12 : 45] Paul tells the Galatians, But I say, Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Well, what does Paul mean by that?

To walk by the Spirit. To let your life, your attitudes, your actions be controlled by, structured by, the Holy Spirit's work in your life, which is automatically going to bring you back to the Word of God in your life as well.

And if you will walk, live according to the Spirit, you will then not gratify the desires of your flesh. There's many, many more we could go to.

You probably get the point. Our walk is the thing that directs our beliefs and behaviors. And what David wanted, guiding every facet of his life, as we look at this verse, is God's truth.

What he knew to be true of God's character, what he knew to be clear in God's commands. I want the truth of God, who he is, what he wants, being the one thing that drives my life, that controls my thoughts, that controls the way that I live.

[13 : 56] He wasn't content with only being acquainted with God's truth. He was intent on being controlled by God's truth.

There's a distinct difference in that. William J. was a preacher, and probably Austin can tell you more about him, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

William J. said this, to walk in anything intends a fullness of it. And he gave an example. For a man to walk in pride is something more than to be proud.

It says that pride is his way, his element, that he is wholly under the influence of it. So likewise, to walk in God's truth is something more than knowing it to be truth.

It's more than acknowledging that this is God's word. It's more than acknowledging that the things that it says are true. It's more than simply acknowledging that the God that is described here is a true God and that the things that are said about him are true things.

[15 : 13] It's more than that. It is to make God's truth your way. It is to make God's truth your element, to be wholly under its influence in your life.

So walking in God's truth is not recognizing that morality is right. Walking in God's truth is to live morally because that's what God desires.

Walking in God's truth is not acknowledging that kindness, love, and compassion are good and helpful traits.

But it is to be kind and to be loving and to be compassionate because that's what you know to be true of who God is.

You see, it's entirely possible to accept what God's truth is but not walk in it. And along these lines, my concern, and I know some of you share this concern with me, is that there are many people, perhaps maybe someone even here today, you are claiming to follow Christ without actually being Christian.

[16 : 29] You have no problems with Jesus. You don't deny that He is who He is, that He did what He did, but there's nothing about that that is really controlling your life.

You acknowledge it, maybe mentally, but you are not surrendered to it. Or else, some people, their discipleship is really just a matter of convenience.

They accept what they like, they kind of disregard what they don't like. But to walk as a Christian, to truly follow Jesus, is to come holy under the influence of His truth.

And that we walk in His truth is God's supreme desire for all of us. God wants us to know Him. He wants us to love Him and obey Him more than He wants us to achieve whatever our notions of happiness are in this life and fulfillment.

To walk in God's truth is synonymous with His purpose in creation. That is, we are here to glorify Him. As we reflect Deuteronomy 10, and now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good.

[18 : 01] What is Moses saying? This is what God's desire for your life is, that you would walk in His truth. Not that you would merely acknowledge that it is true, but that you would come wholly under the influence of who He is and what He has said.

Which leads us to a question of application, which is very simple. Are you walking in God's truth? Not do you recognize what is true, but are you walking in God's truth?

Do you even care to? Is the longing of your heart ultimately at the end of the day to please the Lord? Even if you've done a miserable job at doing it, is it actually what you want to do?

Is it there? That's the difference between being a Christian and being just a Christian. Let's look at the means.

So David recognizes that a couple of other things have to happen in order to walk in God's truth. And really two things is what he gives here. In order to walk in God's truth, he knows that he must know God's ways and that he must fear God's name.

[19 : 08] It's really quite simple, isn't it? This isn't rocket science here. You cannot come wholly under the influence of God's truth without first knowing what it is and actually having a singular desire to do it.

That's essentially what he's getting at here. And there's two things, there's two ways that I want to address this. David essentially says that knowing God's ways involves the instruction of the mind.

So that's the first step. Fearing God's name involves the affections of the heart. Both are absolutely necessary.

Both are divinely given. So let's look at it a little closer. First, I want you to see the instruction of the mind. Verse 11, David prays, teach me your way, O Lord.

Teach me your way, O Lord. Now again, this isn't rocket science here. I don't mean to insult your intelligence, but let's just think about this word teach for a moment.

[20 : 07] The Hebrew word behind it, it simply means to point out or to mark the way. Like lighting a path. So poetically, David is using this word on purpose.

He's saying that to walk in God's path required that God would clearly mark the way. So he asked for God to teach him, to point out the way of truth, to point out the way of righteousness and make it clear.

Jesus did this. Jesus once said that there are two possible paths that you can walk in life. one is well-traveled. Everybody seems to go there.

You may be on that way simply because it feels comfortable. Everybody else seems to be walking on that way. There's safety in it, right? Sometimes we get in the midst of a crowd.

We don't really know where we're going. We just know that everybody else is going there so it must be the right place. Jesus is saying there's a path that most people find themselves on. They're not really paying attention to the signs on the road.

[21 : 11] They're just kind of going along with it. It's easy. There's a lot of people there but he says at the end of this path is destruction. We read it in Matthew chapter 7. Enter by the narrow gate Jesus says for the gate is wide the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many.

But then he says the only other possible path for your life is this other path. It's a bit obscure. Not very many people find it he says. It's clearly marked but it's hard.

It's the path not of least resistance it's the path of most resistance and it's going to be very difficult for you but at the end of the path is life. He goes on to say for the gate is narrow the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.

It is God's path that leads to life. It is his way that leads to eternal life. But you'll never find it by accident.

Contrary to popular notions that we're all all these religions world religions are ultimately kind of doing the same thing. They're working their way to the same place and it doesn't really make a difference which route you take you're probably going to get there as long as you're not so bad as you know the infamous people of history like Hitler or so forth you're probably going to be alright.

[22 : 32] It doesn't really matter which route you take. That's not what God says. He says no this is actually not a well-traveled path. His way is the only way that actually leads to life.

And his way is marked by his spirit through his word. That's the key. If you're looking for the signs on the side of the road to tell you where you're going the only way to life is to look to the word.

Is to look to the word. The Bible. Our instruction is the Bible. Our instructor is God himself. That's why in Psalm 119 the psalmist says your word is a lamp to my feet.

It's a light to my path. It shows the way. As long as I stay in the light of God's word I'll stay on the way to life. 1 Corinthians chapter 2 Paul dabbles with this dynamic of the Holy Spirit being the one who teaches us.

He says now we have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given us by God. That's the scriptures.

[23 : 45] What are the things given? The scriptures. Who is it that helps us understand the things freely given? Paul says it's the spirit of God who does that. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom.

It's not our idea but it's actually taught by the spirit interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. In other words you cannot know the way of God without God's word.

And you cannot know God's word apart from God's spirit. To walk in God's truth requires that we be instructed by the scriptures.

And we must pray that the spirit will illuminate his word in our hearts and in our minds. Otherwise we become like those who simply acknowledge that this is truth without actually walking in that truth.

Teach me your way oh Lord. Not let me take my Bible and figure it out. No. You teach me Lord. I have my Bible. I'm going to read it. I need you to help me.

[24 : 53] I need you to work in me and to illuminate my heart and mind and to enlighten my eyes. So there is the instruction of the mind here. The second means has to do with the affections of the heart.

The affections of the heart. Look again at verse 11 the third phrase here. Unite my heart to fear your name. So we must know God's ways. We must fear God's name.

But what does that mean? It's one of the most confusing statements in the Bible to me. What does it actually mean to fear God? Well it doesn't mean to be afraid of Him at least in the traditional sense.

And I want to show you a passage that helps us to understand that. In Exodus chapter 20 I'm not sure if this one's on the screen. Is this on the screen? So you can just lift your eyes here. Exodus chapter 20 this is at the conclusion of God giving Israel the Ten Commandments.

And I want you to see what happens. Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking wouldn't that be terrifying? That would be absolutely terrifying.

[26 : 00] And guess what they were? They were afraid. They were terrified. They trembled. So much so that they stood far off and they said to Moses you talk to us and we'll listen.

Don't let God talk to us. If He talks to us again we're going to die. He's going to kill us. We'll hear from you. But watch what Moses says. He says to the people do not fear.

That is don't be afraid of God. Instead he says for God has come to test you that the fear of Him may be before you that you may not sin.

In other words what Moses is getting at here is that being afraid of God is actually the opposite of fearing God. Those who are not in Christ those who are still in their sin lost in their sin they have no choice but to be afraid of God.

All that they have now is judgment and damnation that awaits them. But for those of us in Christ that's not the experience is it? We have no need to be afraid of God. We do have a need to fear Him.

[27 : 00] Those two things are on the opposite ends of the spectrum. So at least the first thing that we know is that it doesn't mean to be afraid of God. We see this again in Isaiah. Isaiah prophesies that Jesus would have the spirit of fear.

But Jesus wasn't afraid of God the Father. Here's what He says. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on Him. The spirit of wisdom and understanding. The spirit of counsel and might.

The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. He'll be characterized by this. And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

But Jesus wasn't afraid of God. So what is this? What does it actually mean? Let me give you a few thoughts here. To fear God is to stand in awesome wonder of Him.

It's to stand in awesome wonder of Him. Which requires that you know and believe what the Bible says about Him. Psalm 33.

[28 : 04] Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. To fear the Lord is to be full of adoration for God.

Full of praise and worship for God. Psalm 22. You who fear the Lord praise Him. The psalmist says. Fearing God means loving what He loves and hating what He hates.

Proverbs chapter 8. The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. It's hatred of evil. Well why do you hate evil if you fear the Lord?

Because the Lord hates evil. We hate what He hates. Deuteronomy chapter 10. You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve Him and hold fast to Him and by His name you shall swear.

You love what He loves. You do what He says. Solomon says without the fear of the Lord you cannot possess the wisdom and understanding that it takes to walk in His ways.

[29 : 08] Proverbs 9. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The knowledge of the Holy One is insight. Psalm 25. Who is the man who fears the Lord?

Him will He instruct in the way that He should choose. It's just a surface level approach of what it actually means to fear the Lord is to have a life that's in awe of God.

You love what He loves. You hate what He hates. To please Him. Walk in His ways. Now David recognizes that there is something that stands in the way of fearing God. Look at it in the verse.

Unite my heart He says. Unite my heart to fear His name. What is it that's standing in the way of fearing God? It's a divided heart.

We might say it's competing affections. so that David says unite my heart God help me to want your glory more than I want anything else.

[30 : 07] Help me to want your glory more than I want the sin. Help me to want your glory more than I want the satisfaction of sex and lust. Help me want your glory more than I want the satisfaction of getting won up on this person that I really hate.

Help me want your glory more than anything else in my life. Unite my heart. give it a singular focus spurgeon paraphrased it this way having taught me one way give me one heart to walk therein for too often i feel a heart and a heart two natures contending two principles struggling for sovereignty that's really the key isn't it what is the real struggle that we have as believers it is this inner struggle with who will we allow to have sovereignty in our lives will we allow the word of god to guide us and the spirit of god to inform us or will we give in to the lust and the temptations of the flesh that wage war against it every believer can relate to david's and spurgeon's experiences of fighting through competing affections of the heart we know what this is like we desire to live a morally upright life but there's a competing desire on the other end to fulfill the lust of the flesh and it's a struggle and it's a fight and our prayer must be unite my heart lord so that you win so that i may fear your name we want to be faithful to the worship gathering on the lord's day that wages war against this other desire for rest and family time instead what must be our prayer unite my heart lord don't even let me make my family an idol that comes before you we want to stand firm on the bible and share the gospel with others we also have this other competing affection that desires to be accepted by the culture that hates god's law and anyone who's willing to follow it they're competing affections they wage war in our hearts and to walk in god's truth requires that we fear god's name and to fear god's name means that our affection for his glory must reign over every other affection of the heart and here's the good news about that is that by god's grace a singular heart for god is what's promised in the gospel of jesus it's promised in the new covenant jeremiah 32 i will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever for their own good and the good of their children after them i will make with them an everlasting covenant that i will not turn away from doing good to them i will put the fear of me in their hearts that they may not turn from me paul talked about this struggle at the end of romans 7 recognizing this war raging within him and he says at the end of it oh wretched man that i am who will deliver me from this body of death he says and then he provides the answer thanks be to god through jesus christ our lord that's how we fear god's name it comes through christ it comes through his gospel and his gospel alone and if there is anyone here who maybe you're new to christianity or you're a little confused about some of the things that i've been saying the clearest demonstration of what david was getting at in this prayer is found perfectly in the person of jesus another old preacher christopher wordsworth said this verse verse 11 of psalm 86 is the via veritas vita of the gospel in john 14 in other words christ is our way teach me your way oh lord christ is our way

that i may walk in your truth christ is our truth unite my heart to fear your name christ is our life to see the way you look to jesus to know the truth you listen to jesus to have eternal life you follow jesus he will teach you he will transform the affections of your heart so that you might walk in god's truth not because you're capable but because he is capable not because you have to do it to earn god's favor but because he has done it and he has granted god's favor on your behalf the verse is filled with all kinds of things that we're responsible for there's no really other way to look at it we must know god's ways which means that we must study god's word we must walk in his truth god's not going to walk it for us we must do that we must fear his name and yet david still makes this an issue of prayer it's as if david knows that in order to do this he needs divine aid he says teach me he says unite my heart because only god if you do those things in me will i be able to truly walk in your ways the truth is none of us can actually do any of this on our own sin is so permeated our hearts that we desperately need god's intervention to actually fulfill the purpose for which he has created us we need the word and the spirit to teach us we need the grace of god to transform those affections we need the enabling power of god to walk in his truth that's why this prayer is worth repeating over and over and over day by day circumstance by circumstance teach me your way oh lord unite my heart to fear your name so that i may walk in your truth it's truly a prayer to live by isn't it perhaps a suitable life verse if you're so inclined