



LIVINGHOPE

UNLOCKING THE BIBLE

IN 2025



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Day 1**UNSHEATHE YOUR SWORD**

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 ESV

It's a new year and day one of our season of prayer and fasting.

Among those who fasted in the Old Testament were Moses the Law-Giver, David the King, Elijah the Prophet, and Daniel the Seer. And in the New Testament, it was part of the life of Jesus, the Apostles as well as for the early churches. Similarly, throughout church history, so many of the great leaders and reformers such as Luther, Calvin and Knox, and those even from differing theological backgrounds like Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and Charles Finney also fasted. Sadly, like some other spiritual disciplines in many movements, it became law rather than life and a cold duty rather than a compelling delight.

Whatever way you've chosen to fast, resist anything self-righteous and let's joyfully dig deep together into the Word of God, worship and prayer.

It was as Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness that time and again, we see that over a lifetime He clearly had hidden God's Word in His heart. Every temptation from Satan, initially rooted in the twisting of a verse of Scripture, was successfully rebutted by Jesus as He spoke out the Word of God. We want to start this New Year by removing as many worldly distractions as possible and to connect intimately with the Lord. We do that as a community in prayer, unity, worship and in the Scriptures.

This year we believe the Lord has given us a renewed desire to be people of the Word with our theme **“Unlocking the Bible in 2025”**. Whilst we will devote ourselves to the public reading of Scripture and preaching as a church on Sundays and Wednesday nights, we’re also going to each personally take an increased responsibility to also hide God’s Word in our own hearts, daily.

The verse of the day from Hebrews 4:12, along with Ephesians 6:17, reminds us that the ‘sword of the Spirit’ is our only offensive weapon in our daily spiritual battles.

A young boy who was born without a left arm was sent to Judo lessons by his mother in a bid to help with his confidence. He began taking lessons with an old Japanese master. Every practise session, the master taught the boy one throw. Just one technique, over and over again. Every so often the one-armed boy would see the other students learning different techniques and ask the master why he wasn’t learning anything else. The master always replied, “Just focus on this one throw. Keep practising”.

Several months later, it was the state Judo Championship and the old master entered the young boy. The young boy was terrified. The first match began. The one-armed boy grabbed his opponent and to the shock of all the spectators, easily flipped him to the ground. Instant win!

The second round was a little harder but the one-armed boy again pulled off the technique - the only technique he knew - and won.

The third and fourth round amazingly went the same way and the young boy found himself in the tournament final facing a much bigger, stronger and tougher opponent, who had won the tournament for three straight years. The young boy was overmatched it seemed. The referee and the organisers of the tournament spoke to the master and asked him if he

wanted to withdraw his student. “No,” said the master. “We will fight”. As the final match began, the entire crowd were on the edge of their seat. The opponent stepped forward and grabbed the young one-armed boy reached with his right hand, stepped in and BOOM – he threw his opponent flat on his back to win the match!

The crowd went nuts – the one-armed boy was the state Judo Champion!

On the drive home, the young boy asked his teacher, “Was this a set-up? Did they just let me win because I only have one arm? I only know one technique – these guys know hundreds!”

The teacher replied “No – you won fair and square. But there are two reasons. You won because you mastered one of the most devastating techniques in Judo. And the only known way to defend against that throw is to grab the left arm!”

Keep practising getting into the Word of God; it’s how we take down our opponent! Jesus used the weapon of the Word to defeat our ravaging enemy. We are called to do likewise. At a time when so many are seeking microwave spirituality and the quick fix, I need to remind us that there are no shortcuts to spiritual maturity in the Kingdom. We need to daily unlock the Bible in our own homes and families.

But as we reflect on Hebrews 4:12 today, let’s do so from a different perspective. We not only have an external enemy, we also have one closer to home. “The flesh wars against the Spirit” (Galatians 5:17). It’s the Word, the sword of the Spirit, that will be key to winning the battle within.

4 Key Truths As You Read the Word – Hebrews 4:12

- 1. Living & Active** – this is like no other book. It’s far more than black ink on white paper. As God breathed life into the first man, He has breathed out these words and by them we will be renewed.

2. **Sharpest Sword** – if we submit to God, just as when we allow ourselves to go under the surgeon’s knife, it will cut away our sick and infected “*stinkin’ thinkin’*”, enabling us to be transformed as our minds are renewed.
3. **Supernatural** – as a famous beverage, that I don’t recommend, once had as its advertising tagline “...refreshes parts others cannot reach”. I can’t explain it but when we let loose the Word, it pierces and divides and impacts our deepest parts for our good.
4. **Discerning** – the Scriptures will be an agent of God in our life, exposing and challenging our innermost thoughts. Don’t suppress this work and as we are challenged to bring things into the light, do so with a good Christian friend for accountability and encouragement.

“The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose and the lion will defend itself.”

C.H. Spurgeon

Day 2**GOD-BREATHED**

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – ESV

I was recently told that Bruce Springsteen will be touring through Europe in 2025 with various concert dates scheduled for venues in the UK. My first reaction was, “Is he still going?!” Bruce and I share a birthday (23rd September) although he came into this world a few years before me in 1949. With at least 12 concerts scheduled between May and July, that’s not bad for a 75-year-old. Love him or loathe him, he has released 21 studio albums; 121 live albums; 77 singles; 66 music videos and sold over 150 million records worldwide during a career spanning six decades. At present, Bruce has 1,838,639 followers on Instagram alone.

In his memoir titled, “Born to Run” published in 2016, Bruce explains that there is a life event in some shape or form behind every song he has written or produced. Reading this, I couldn’t help thinking about how many people were influenced in some way or another by lyrics from his songs. Bruce is successful by most metrics in a secular world but when all is said and done, he is just a man. Yet, many would regard his work as a cultural phenomenon with him being “the voice” of the “working man” in his generation.

Although this won’t be true for most, there will be some out there who dress like he does, have tattoos of him on their body and know the lyrics of all his songs off by heart. Of course this is not unique to Bruce

Springsteen; people today are greatly influenced by all sorts of people - politicians, artists, musicians, elite athletes and actors to name a few. If our world today was generally a place of serenity, unprecedented peace, prosperity and joy, perhaps being governed by the wisdom of Man would have been a winning strategy. But it is not! Bruce may be renowned and successful, however, modelling your life on his views, wisdom and insight would be a fool's errand. The same holds true for the wisdom of Man in general.

The Bible tells us, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17 - ESV)

There is so much in what Paul the Apostle says here to young Timothy but what immediately catches my attention is that the man of God (God's children) may be complete! Well, I don't know about you, but I need every bit of help I can get to navigate through the various seasons and challenges of life. Many of us tend to live “reactive” lives in an ever-changing world. I certainly want to be both prepared and equipped to not only get by, but to flourish along the way!

The Bible doesn't just give us interesting advice to consider along with all the other “voices” out there contending for our attention. No, says Paul. That which is contained within the Word is *“God-breathed”*. This means that scripture is completely trustworthy and entirely authoritative for our faith and life. There is no higher authority or greater mind to be found in this world that is worthy of governing and guiding our conduct.

At present, one of my primary privileges and challenges as a father lies in navigating the mysteries of parenting two young teenage girls.

Honestly, I often feel completely out of my depth and at a loss as to the complex nuances of their emotions, their perspective and their priorities that seem so far removed from my reality as a teenager in the early 90s. Perhaps Bruce Springsteen may have a song or two about raising kids, or some musings about the pressures of parenting in general. Thank you, Bruce, for a catchy tune but what I need is the inspired Word of God if I am to parent my girls faithfully and courageously. Why listen to Man, if I can draw on the wisdom of God?

I am sure you will agree with me. Why take good advice, when the “correct” advice is available? I don’t want good, I want great. I don’t want opinions and perspectives, I want truth. I need truth. Not just regarding parenting, but in every facet of my life.

Let’s look again at what Paul says, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”. Think about that word “righteousness”. You could read what Paul wrote to young Timothy as follows, *“The Bible is breathed out and inspired by God and perfectly able to teach us what is true. Really true! It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.”* The Bible is God-given to inspire and equip us for living “right”.

People are easily swayed by popular opinion if that opinion is offered authoritatively and with confidence and especially if that opinion or perspective serves the inherent desires of the flesh. Think of Adam, Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden. The advice offered was provoking a desire already present in Adam and Eve’s hearts. The Bible, God’s Word, won’t guide us in what we want but in what we need to live holy, wholesome, purpose-driven, eternity-focused lives.

As we tackle 2025, let's choose to make the Word of God our preeminent source of teaching, training, guidance and correction above any other wisdom from Man, regardless of how popular it may be. Let's, together, choose to make this year one of dedicated training in righteousness and allow the Word to shape us increasingly into men and women, young and old, equipped for every good work! This is a year for "Unlocking the Bible" as individuals and as a church family. Let's pray even today that the Lord will open up the scriptures for us as Jesus did for the men on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:27) and expect by faith to grow in righteousness for His name's sake!

Amen.



Day 3**SET APART BY THE
WORD OF TRUTH**

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

John 17:17

In John 17, Jesus lifts His heart to the Father in prayer, interceding for His disciples as He prepares for His crucifixion. Among His requests is this powerful plea, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." This verse invites us to reflect on the transformative and purifying power of God's Word in our lives. Let's explore its meaning and application.

The Power of Sanctification

To sanctify means to be set apart, made holy, or consecrated for a divine purpose. Jesus' prayer for His disciples was not that they would escape the world, but that they would remain in it as ambassadors of truth, equipped and protected by the Word of God. Sanctification is not a one-time event; it is an ongoing process where believers are shaped into the likeness of Christ.

The Word of God is central to this process. As we engage with Scripture, our hearts are realigned with God's truth, our minds are renewed, and our lives are transformed. Romans 12:2 reinforces this, *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

The Bible is not merely a collection of inspirational writings; it is divine truth that has the power to sanctify us.

The Word is Truth

Jesus declares, *“Your word is truth.”* This statement is profound. In a world inundated with opinions, half-truths, and deception, the Word of God stands as the ultimate standard of truth. Psalm 119:160 echoes this, *“The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.”*

Scripture is not only true; it is truth itself. It is reliable, unchanging, and eternal. The Bible reveals who God is, His character, His purposes, and His promises. It exposes the human heart and guides us in the way of righteousness. As Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

Living in a World of Lies

Jesus’ prayer for His disciples to be sanctified by the Word is especially relevant in our modern world where truth is often considered subjective. Relativism claims that truth is personal and situational, but the Bible affirms that truth is objective and anchored in God’s Word.

Without the Word, believers are vulnerable to being conformed to the world’s values. Ephesians 6:17 calls Scripture, “the sword of the Spirit,” part of the armour of God that equips us to stand firm against spiritual attacks. When we immerse ourselves in the truth of God’s Word, we are fortified against the lies of the enemy and the fleeting philosophies of culture.

Practical Ways to Be Sanctified by the Word

1. **Daily Study:** Spending time in Scripture allows God's truth to shape our thoughts, attitudes, and decisions. Joshua 1:8 encourages us to, *"Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."*
2. **Memorisation:** Hiding God's Word in our hearts equips us to resist sin and stay aligned with His truth. Psalm 119:11 says, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*
3. **Prayerful Application:** Reading Scripture is not enough; we must apply its teachings to our lives. James 1:22 reminds us, *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*
4. **Community Engagement:** Discussing and studying the Word with fellow believers sharpens our understanding and accountability as Proverbs 27:17 highlights, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."*

Charles Spurgeon once said, *"A Bible that's falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't."* This quote emphasises the transformative power of engaging deeply with Scripture. A life rooted in God's Word is a life equipped to navigate challenges, resist sin, and reflect Christ.

Similarly, C.S. Lewis noted, *"We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved; we are rebels who must lay down our arms. ... Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realising that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again ... is what Christians call repentance."*

The Word of God plays a crucial role in this repentance and renewal.

It exposes our rebellion, guides us to Christ, and empowers us to live in obedience.

The Enduring Impact of the Word

When we allow the Word of God to sanctify us, we reflect His character to the world. Jesus' prayer in John 17:17 was not only for the disciples but also for all believers (John 17:20). As followers of Christ, we are called to be beacons of truth in a dark world.

Isaiah 55:11 offers this encouragement, *“So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”* The Word of God is powerful, effective, and eternal. Let us treasure it, live by it, and share it with others.

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Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word, which is truth. Sanctify us through it, shaping us into the image of Your Son. Help us to love, study, and apply Your Word daily, so we may be set apart for Your purposes. May we be bearers of Your truth in a world that so desperately needs it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 4

GROWING IN HOLINESS

*I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.*

Psalm 119:11 - ESV

Psalm 119 is the psalmist's powerful testimony of his love for God's Word. Verse 11 gives us one of the most important reasons for growing in our knowledge, understanding and application of the Bible; that we might not sin against God.

My brother's family once appeared on the BBC's One Show. Their dog who was a handsome Red Setter needed to be trained, without cruelty, to leave sheep alone on his country walks. An expert dog handler was called in to help. The solution was surprising! They were given a tin can filled with stones. Every time the dog went towards the sheep, the can was to be thrown in front of the dog to stop him in his tracks. The idea being that by repeating this deterrent, eventually the dog's behaviour would be modified and there would be no need of the can.

This is a picture of how the Word of God can help us. We are in a battle. Galatians 5:17 (NIV) tells us, "*For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.*" Flesh is another word for sin. Our natural desires pull us away from what pleases God. Praise God that by His Spirit these desires are changed as we grow in intimacy with and knowledge of God. One of the most powerful weapons in this battle is devotion to the Word of God. It's our can of stones!

It's clear that God hates sin.

*“For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.*

*The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.”*

(Psalm 5:4-5 - ESV)

So, He equips us to overcome. Here are three ways storing up the Word in our hearts helps us in the war against sin:

1. Giving us Specific Prohibitions

The Bible teaches us that there are ‘no-go’ areas. An example of this in my life is the fight against the tongue. It can be so easy to allow our conversations to drift towards criticism, gossip or complaining; all things the Bible warns grieve the Spirit. Ephesians 4:29 says, *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”* I have committed this verse to memory, so that every time I find myself tempted to share in an unhelpful conversation, this scripture is like a can of stones stopping me in my tracks. Positively, it also points me to develop speech that encourages and builds others up. There are, of course, many examples in scripture we could apply here, including Jesus’ warning to not even look with lust and to avoid anger with our brothers and sisters. Having these verses in our hearts keeps us away from sin.

2. Acquainting us with the Character of God

1 John 2:6 tells us that, *“whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did”*. This hit me when I was debating whether or not an area in my life was sinful. Listening to a preach, this type of so-called ‘grey area’

was addressed, and a simple question was posed, “*Would Jesus do it?*” I suddenly realised that the Holy Spirit was the umpire inside me and the answer was clear – no, Jesus would not! The more we read, study and apply God’s Word, the easier it is for us to discern how God sees things and to become more like Him.

3. Helping us Resist Temptation

I’m always encouraged by the verse, “*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*” (1 Corinthians 10:13 - ESV) Knowing this scripture means we can resist when the enemy comes with his schemes. Being able to call on the Word is using God’s truths in the fight against sin. Jesus gave us a masterclass in using scripture when Satan tried to tempt Him in the wilderness. Each temptation was deflected using God’s words. A small example in my life has helped me avoid reacting when I’m tempted to get offended. I take the “love pause” that Jesus took before speaking to the prideful rich young ruler (Mark 10:21) and I pray for love using Romans 5:5 (NIV), “*And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*” My puny love won’t do but God’s love in my heart changes everything.

To conclude today, like the psalmist, here’s the best way to develop and deepen the store of God’s Word in our hearts:

1. Make a practise of reading and studying the Bible every day.
2. Make the effort to commit key verses to memory.
3. Confess scripture in prayer, quiet times and reading it aloud alone and when we’re together. Paul encouraged Timothy in the public reading of scripture (1 Timothy 4:13)

If you need help to make these things a part of walking out your faith, ask your Community Group leader or an Elder. It is not as difficult as it may seem. Often before I open my Bible, I pray using the words of Jesus, *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth...”* (John 16:13a - NIV) I simply ask that the Holy Spirit, as Jesus promised, be my guide and lead me into truth as I read. He is our helper.

Wonderfully, the Bible teaches us that if we do mess up, God’s kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) and He is faithful to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). That said, the truth is, as our love for the Word grows, we’re not sinless but we will sin less and we’ll need the can of stones less and less.



Day 5

HIS WORD NEVER FAILS

*so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
it will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

Isaiah 55.11

I remember when I was a young child, the arrival of this aggressive, ginger-haired boy called Daniel McNaughton. Daniel was that kid that you knew you would end up throwing toy building bricks at. He was an unsavoury character. During one particularly violent altercation with my 6-year-old nemesis, Daniel picked up a pencil and stabbed me in the eye.

Until very recently, I had completely forgotten about this episode in my life. Fortunately, there was no permanent damage to my eyesight and, as is the way of children, Daniel and I went on to become good friends, despite the occurrence of “eye-gate”.

It struck me as odd that such a traumatic moment had almost slipped from memory into the annals of my rather colourful history, and yet, I can still remember, with perfect clarity, mildly offensive words spoken over me that even in later life would cause me to wrestle with my true identity as a loved and accepted child of God. It goes to show that the old playground nurse rhyme - *Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me* - could not be further from the truth.

Words are incredibly powerful and can have a long-lasting impact on our general sense of wellbeing. Proverbs 18:21 reminds us that,

“death and life are in the power of the tongue”. Words have the potential to crush a person’s spirit, but they can also prove to be a wellspring of life.

The Bible is littered with moments where we see God speaking to His people by His word to comfort them and build them up even as they endured the most difficult circumstances. Isaiah chapter 55 is one such portion of scripture. It addresses the grandchildren of those who were originally exiled in 586 BC when Jerusalem had fallen to the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar. God’s desire was to speak to those who had returned from exile to the ruins of Jerusalem. Despite the permission of King Cyrus and the Persian Empire for the exiles to return home, it was not to a prosperous economy or a thriving city, but one that had lain in ashes for over fifty years.

The chapter paints a picture of God’s people returning to Him and, in turn, to the land promised to them. Despite the hardship of their circumstances, the Lord assures them that the promises God made to David would not fail. God’s covenant with David was significant. He promised that the Messiah, Jesus, would be a descendant of David and the tribe of Judah, and that He would establish an unfailing Kingdom that would last forever. What makes the Davidic covenant so special is that God placed no conditions on it. It was not, and is not, dependent on the obedience of Man, of David or Israel for it to be established. The certainty of God’s promise rested solely on God’s faithfulness and the truth of His word.

In verses 10 and 11, Isaiah paints a picture of hope for God’s people that would have anchored their certainty in the fulfilment of His promises,

*“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,*

*making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
so shall my word be, that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”*

Rain and snow cannot return home after they have fallen; they drain into the land and inevitably produce immense benefits such as crop-growth, water to drink and plants that bear fruit. Life is sustained by the effects of the precipitation cycle. God, through Isaiah, reminds us that His Word, both written and spoken, fall on us like rain and snow. Once He has spoken, it is not possible for His Word to return to Him without producing fruit in the lives of those who hear and read. The question we must ask ourselves is, “*am I willing to receive His Word?*”

Recently, the world turned its attention towards the city of Valencia in Spain and witnessed historic flooding as a year’s worth of rain fell in only eight hours. The land was too dry to receive the deluge and as a result many lives were lost. The condition of the receiving land is so crucial for the effectiveness of the rain sent to nourish. The author of Hebrews highlighted the dangers of “dry land” when he said, “*Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion*”. (Hebrews 3:15) The result of Israel’s rebellion was that they never entered the land promised to them because of their hard hearts and their unbelief.

Today, we have the opportunity to open our hearts to the voice of God through His written and spoken Word. His Word is sent to us to accomplish its purpose in our lives. Every promise He has made, is trustworthy and infallible.

The author of Hebrews reminds us in chapter 5 [Hebrews 5:12-14]

that His Word is milk and meat that will nurture the infant and grow the mature, just as the water nurtures the land. The psalmist reminds us [Psalm 1:1-3] that His Word causes the man who meditates on it day and night to yield fruit like a tree in season. Jesus reminds us that His Word feeds us and gives us life and strength. [Matthew 4:4] Solomon reminds us that receiving the Word is life and health to the whole body. [Proverbs 4:20-22]

Today, when God speaks to you through His Word, will you receive it into your heart and will you ensure that you give the Father the time, space and opportunity for His Word to fall on you like rain and snow, bringing a fruitful harvest to life in you?



Day 6**THE PURIFYING
POWER OF THE WORD**

How can a young man keep his way pure?

By living according to your word.

Psalm 119:9

I grew up within a few hundred metres of a lagoon filled with thousands of oysters. Did you know that these little creatures have the ability to filter, on average, 200 litres of water a day as one of the highly efficient filter feeders of God's marvellous creation? A world-renowned culinary delicacy whose favourite meal is simply dirty seawater. The filthier the water, the happier they are. They feed on algae and excess nitrogen in the water, filtering the water as it eats its dinner resulting in huge, positive effects on eco-systems. This little creature's efforts purify the water by allowing more light through the surface and enabling life to grow in the waters below.

The Word of God works similarly in us, purifying our hearts to allow more of Christ's light to impact our lives and enabling us to grow to become more like Him. When I first encountered Jesus, my life was polluted beyond measure. Riddled with sin, caught up in ways totally contrary to the ways of God and it is simply a wonder how my life has changed and continues to change because of the Word of God. Take a look through the New Testament and you will see men and women whose lives were in disarray when they first met Jesus. They were ungodly and broken yet encountering the Word of God transformed them for good by

its power to purify. Look in the church today and you will find countless men and women transformed by the purifying power of the Word of God.

Jesus taught, *“God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God”* in Matthew 5:8 and this is certainly a blessing I long to have in my life! I love seeing the works, power, hope, freedom and many other factors of God’s character flood my life and have witnessed how the condition of my heart has directly impacted their visibility in my life. The Word of God reveals the ways of God. The Holy Spirit reveals the will of God and together they have the remarkable power of purifying our hearts.

For me, the Word of God has been totally transformational and I have made countless choices since following Him which are totally contrary to my flesh-directed nature. These have led to countless victories, walking life free from many painful sin-filled slip ups and I am firm believer that a follower of Jesus who regularly reads, hears, applies and allows the Word to purify their heart will live a totally different life to one who doesn’t allow the Word to change them. We must allow the Word to purify our hearts for everything we do in our life flows directly from it. Like that little oyster, as each day passes by, the question we should ask is whether or not the Word of God is having a purifying impact on our heart, life and surroundings each day?

Psalm 119:9 says, *“How can a young person stay pure? By living according to your word.”* This has certainly been true for me and I have countless moments where the stored up, studied and read Word of God has reminded me that I need to live a different life because I am a follower of Jesus Christ. Want to stay pure? Live according to God’s Word!

James 1:21-22 says, *“get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the*

power to save your souls. But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves." It clearly shows us that the Word has purifying power to get rid of all the filth which longs to get the better of us each day. This should fill us with much hope for the days ahead that we can be changed by the Word for the better.

For many of us, the humility comes when we start following, living out and acting as the Word encourages us. We are offered a guide, a way of life, which will purify our hearts if we are willing to live out what the Word of God teaches us! Am I willing to humble myself today and live by the Word of God?

Ephesians 5:25-26 talking about the church says, *"He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word."* This reveals to us the profound power of the Word's part in sanctification - the process of making us more like Jesus - cleansing and purifying our sin-filled lives. Time and time again, I have seen shame, guilt, ungodly living, anger, division and deep hurts encounter the Word of God, bringing significant transformation. Each encounter is a beautiful step of purification as the cleansing power of the Word sets hearts free to see God more clearly.

The Word of God changes men and women so profoundly; the purifying power, transforming families, marriages, children as its truths sink deep into hearts. 1 Peter 1:22 says, *"You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart."* As we follow the Word, it cleanses us from our sins and draws in us a deeper desire to love God and love one another. The purifying power of the Word helps us to catch His true heart so we can now live a life of worship

to Him and love the people all around us made in His image. So many broken relationships in our world could look different if we just followed and allowed the Word of God to purify our hearts. How we live totally changes when we live pure lives changed by the Word of God impacting our broken world around us.

The Word of God is a wonderful gift to us as believers and as Proverbs 3:1 says, *“My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart.”* In a world full of sin, compromise and suffering let’s set out to live lives with a pure heart so we will see God in all we do. Allow the purifying power of God’s Word to transform your life today for a greater tomorrow with our almighty saviour, Jesus Christ. I pray today that you will experience a fresh outpouring of His presence and see God more clearly as His Word purifies your heart.

Day 7

WALKING BY THE LIGHT

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Psalm 119:105

I remember a Monty Python sketch where four Yorkshiremen were reminiscing about how tough their childhoods were. Their childhood memories got more and more exaggerated until the final statement was, “Right... I used to get up in the morning at half-past ten at night, half an hour before I went to bed; eat a lump of freezing coal; work 28 hours a day at mill and pay da mill owner to let us work there...Yah, you try an’ tell the young people of today that, and they won't believe you!”

It is true that our grandparents and great grandparents had life much tougher than us. I heard about the Snaefell miners who lived in Sulby. They would leave together at 5am while it was still dark and walk the narrow pathways up the mountain to the mine entrance with only a lantern on a stick to help guide their way into the hills. That would have been quite a sight as 100 men navigated their way to work in wind and pouring rain, a line of 100 lanterns in the pitch dark guiding the men to work.

“Yah, you try an’ tell the young people of today that, and they won't believe you!”

I was reading Psalm 119:105. It says, “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*”

Using that picture of the Sulby miners, I want us to look at how God’s word can be a lamp to our steps and a light to our future.

Containing 176 verses, Psalm 119 is the longest single chapter in the Bible. The author is unknown, but his path was tough, and he must have suffered serious difficulties in his life. Throughout the Psalm, he talks about plots, slanders, and taunts against him, with persecutions and afflictions.

But although his path was tough, he shares a profound truth that the Word of God is all-sufficient. It is his lamp to the path and the light to show him the way.

In my third year of university, I became very distracted from my studies and found the course tough and the temptations of student life very appealing. As a result, I failed some exams which threatened my future on the course. The re-sits were my wake-up call. I remember sitting in my car outside the exam building. Desperate and seeking God, I opened my bible and read, *“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”* (Proverbs 16:9)

I was feeling lost, not sure of the path ahead and ready to chuck it in, but I saw from God’s Word that He establishes my steps. I felt a great peace that God was illuminating my path ahead and showing me the next step. His Word became a light to my path.

The first revelation that Psalm 119:105 shows us is that, *“Your word is a lamp to my feet”*

All around us are pitfalls and traps hidden by the darkness. There are schemes of the enemy, and there are our own sinful desires and stupid decisions. All of these can make us stumble. We need God’s Word as a lamp to our feet to ensure our next step is in step with His commands and precepts.

As we fast and pray this week, ask God to illuminate your steps so you

know that you are walking in His footsteps. Ask Him to reveal when we have taken a wrong step so we can avoid the pitfalls and keep to the path.

The second revelation that we see in this verse is that, *“Your word is... a light to my path”*

This tells us that God’s Word is not just a guide for our steps but also sets the direction for our journey and our future. I often see people looking for psychic readings on Facebook, desperate to find out about their future. There is so much uncertainty and fear of the future that people will look anywhere to find direction. For the Christian, we have the hope of knowing God and He knows what is ahead of us. His Word, the Bible, is a light to keep us on that path.

One of the areas where we often make mistakes is that we run ahead of God by rushing into decisions that will affect our future without seeking God’s Word for direction.

I remember my first car was a mark 2 Ford Fiesta 950cc and I was a boy racer! On the country roads in Ireland at night I noticed that there was an issue when driving fast and that was that my lights were not powerful enough to light up the road ahead when I went over 55 mph! This meant that I could not anticipate the bends in the road or any other obstacles. I discovered that if you are driving too fast, your headlights will not illuminate any potential obstacles until it is too late for your brain to send the signal to your body to step on the brakes. This makes avoiding an accident nearly impossible. This way of driving is called ‘over-driving your headlights’. I needed to slow down and drive so I could clearly see the way ahead.

In the Bible, there are many examples of people ‘over-driving’. One well-known one is when Abraham heard God’s word about having a son,

but when it wasn't happening in his timeline, he went into 'over-drive' and decided he and Sarah could make it happen sooner using Sarah's servant girl (Genesis 16) and so Ishmael was born. But that wasn't on God's path for them and caused so much trouble because they thought they knew better than God.

In our life, we can have the tendency to go into 'over-drive' and go ahead of God on the path but slow down. Seek God's word and let it be the lamp unto your path. Not every job promotion or offer is from God, not every lovely girl is God's best, and not every investment of your time and money is where God wants you to put it.

This week, as you pray and fast, unlock the Bible and bring God's Word into your decision-making as a guiding light for your daily steps and your future plans.



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