

IOUS: For Reading the Bible

I – Incline! The first thing my soul needs is an inclination toward God and his Word. Without that, nothing else will happen of any value in my life. I must want to know God and read his Word and draw near to him. Where does that “want to” come from? It comes from God. So Psalm 119: 36 teaches us to pray, “Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!” Very simply we ask God to take our hearts, which are more inclined to breakfast and the newspaper, and change that inclination. We are asking that God create desires that are not there.

O – Open! Next I need to have the eyes of my heart opened so that when my inclination leads me to the Word, I see what is really there, and not just my own ideas. Who opens the eyes of the heart? God does. So Psalm 119: 18 teaches us to pray, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” So many times we read the Bible and see nothing wonderful. Its reading does not produce joy. So what can we do? We can cry to God: “Open the eyes of my heart, O Lord, to see what it says about you as wonderful.”

U – Unite! Then I am concerned that my heart is badly fragmented. Parts of it are inclined, and parts of it are not. Parts see wonder, and parts say, “That’s not so wonderful.” What I long for is a united heart where all the parts say a joyful Yes! to what God reveals in his Word. Where does that wholeness and unity come from? It comes from God. So Psalm 86: 11 teaches us to pray, “Unite my heart to fear your name.” Don’t stumble over the word fear when you thought we were seeking joy. The fear of the Lord is a joyful experience when you renounce all sin. A thunderstorm can be a trembling joy when you know you can’t be destroyed by lightning. “O Lord, let your ear be attentive to . . . the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name” (Nehemiah 1: 11). “His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11: 3). Therefore pray that God would unite your heart to joyfully fear the Lord.

S – Satisfy! What I really want from all this engagement with the Word of God and the work of his Spirit in answer to my prayers is for my heart to be satisfied with God and not with the world. Where does that satisfaction come from? It comes from God. So Psalm 90: 14 teaches us to pray, “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”