



# The Satisfying and Nourishing Word of God

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Scripture: Psalm 19

Hunger is an all-consuming passion. When a baby is hungry, you can give him toys, play with him, change his diaper, rock him, lay him down to sleep, and sing to him, but he will be restless and unhappy—and likely let you know it in the loudest of ways—until you satisfy his hunger. Babies grow up into men and women with more self-control, but when people are hungry, they are not happy and have trouble concentrating on anything except food. When people are desperately hungry and their bodies are starving, they will do almost anything to get food.

Therefore, it is hard to imagine the experience of our Lord Jesus Christ when He went for forty days and forty nights without food. He was not fasting in a comfortable place surrounded by friends, but alone in the wilderness of Judea, an area known for its hot, dry climate. If He had continued to fast much longer, it seems likely that He would have begun to die of starvation.<sup>1</sup> Yet Christ chose to do this. Why? It was not because Jesus was an ascetic

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<sup>1</sup> . Although the effects of fasting vary depending on health and hydration, severe starvation generally sets in after 35 to 40 days, during which the body cannibalizes the protein of its own muscles and organs to survive, leading to death after anywhere from 45 to 60 days of no nutrition, occasionally longer. Peter

who thought the pleasures of this life are inherently sinful. Christ chose to endure the hunger of the body for a time because He had a far greater hunger. As He Himself said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Christ hungered for the truth, life, and power of God’s Word.

God’s Word reveals that Christ must be the last or second Adam and defeat the devil’s temptations through the power of faith and the suffering of obedience. Christ must succeed where the first Adam failed in trusting and obeying the Word of God. And Christ did succeed, because He hungered and thirsted for God’s revelation of saving, sustaining truth more than for life itself. He told His disciples in John 4:34, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” In order that “the scripture might be fulfilled,” Christ endured wracking, unquenched thirst upon the cross as He suffered for hell-worthy sinners like us and completed the work of redemption (John 19:28–30).

Although Christ’s calling to obey and suffer for the salvation of His people was a unique calling, His hunger for the Word is a model for us all. In the wilderness of Judea, Christ quoted Moses’s words concerning how God had led Israel through the wilderness of Sinai. Moses said that the Lord had humbled them and trained them to live in absolute dependence and obedience to God’s Word: “that he might make thee know that man doth not live

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Janiszewski, “The Science of Starvation: How Long Can Humans Survive without Food or Water,” *Plos Blogs*, May 13, 2011, <http://blogs.plos.org/obesitypanacea/2011/05/13/the-science-of-starvation-how-long-can-humans-survive-without-food-or-water/>; Thomas C. Weiss, “The Phases of Starvation—What Happens When

We Starve,” *Disabled World*, February 1, 2016, rev. January 18, 2018, <https://www.disabledworld.com/fitness/starving.php>.

by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Deut. 8:3). This is a lesson that God the Father is teaching His children in all times through their many trials. The Word of God, as the great object of our dependence and obedience, must be our greatest hunger, our persistent appetite, and our most savory delight. It is our blessed duty (and privilege!) to feed upon the Word all our lives.

With God’s help, I wish to consider with you in this sermon, based on Psalm 19:7–14, the theme, “The Satisfying and Nourishing Word of God” in two thoughts: our delight in God’s nourishing Word and our duty toward God’s nourishing Word.

### **Our Delight in God’s Nourishing Word**

The Holy Scriptures abound with testimony that God’s Word is the satisfying and nourishing food of our souls. Psalm 119:103 says, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” In Proverbs 8–9, God’s Wisdom invites all people to come and enjoy the bread of understanding and the wine of knowledge (Prov. 8:1–11; 9:1–5). Jeremiah had a very difficult ministry, but he declares in Jeremiah 15:16, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.” God said to Ezekiel, “Open thy mouth, and eat [what] I give thee,” and the prophet ate God’s Word and said, “It was in my mouth as honey for sweetness” (Ezek. 2:8; 3:3).

Why is God’s Word such savory and nutritious food for our souls? David explains in Psalm 19 that it is because of the Bible’s attributes and operations as the inspired Word of God:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul:  
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the  
simple.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart:  
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening  
the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever:  
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous  
altogether. (Ps. 19:7–9)

Mark these attributes of God’s Word: it is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and righteous. Although the very heavens above us declare the glory of God, as David said earlier in this psalm, only God’s Word brings the knowledge of God and His will into such sharp focus and fullness of detail so that we can know Him personally as our Rock and Redeemer. Mark as well the effects and operations of God’s Word: it is the Holy Spirit’s effectual means of salvation and sanctification. John Calvin said, “Since God in vain calls all peoples to himself by the contemplation of heaven and earth, this [God’s Word] is the very school of God’s children.”<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is divinely designed for effective application (2 Tim. 3:16). It is not a textbook for mere intellectual theology, but doctrine for life, “truth in order to goodness,” as the Old Princeton divines saw it. This is one reason for the great variety of ways or forms in which its books are written. William Ames said that the Holy Scripture reveals God and His will “by stories, examples, precepts, exhortations, admonitions, and promises. This style best fits the common usage of all sorts of men and

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<sup>2</sup> . John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.6.4.

also greatly affects the will by stirring up pious motives, which is the chief end of theology.”<sup>3</sup>

At every point, Psalm 19 tells us that God’s Word is the answer to our fallen condition in Adam, for the Word reveals Jesus Christ, “the bread of life” (John 6:35).<sup>4</sup>

- First, the Word nourishes us by “converting the soul” (Ps. 19:7), which may be translated “restoring the soul” (KJV mg.). The phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible for reviving or restoring someone’s life by giving food to the hungry (Lam. 1:11, 19). Adam and Eve fell into disobedience to God’s Word by lusting after forbidden food (Gen. 3:1–6), but God’s Word is the spiritual food that gives life to sinners.
- Second, the Word nourishes us by “making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7). Satan enticed Adam and Eve with the lie that disobedience would make them “as gods, knowing good and evil,” so that they would be “wise” (Gen. 3:5–6). But, “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22). God’s Word is “able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).
- Third, the Word nourishes us by “rejoicing the heart” (Ps. 19:8). Eve coveted the forbidden fruit because Satan deceived her into thinking it was “good,” “pleasant,” and “to be desired” (Gen. 3:6). Instead of joy, our first parents tasted death. God’s Word brings us back into fellowship with the triune

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<sup>3</sup> . Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.34.19 (187–88).

<sup>4</sup> . For what follows, see D. J. A. Clines, “The Tree of Knowledge and the Law of Yahweh (Psalm XIX),” *Vetus Testamentum* 24, no. 1 (1974): 9–13; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 19, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 182–83.

- God and with each other, so that our joy may be full (1 John 1:3–4).
- Fourth, the Word nourishes us by “enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:8). When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, “the eyes of them both were opened,” but only to a new experience of shame and fear as God’s enemies (Gen. 3:7–8). Man’s heart became darkened by sin and idolatry (Rom. 1:21–23). God’s Word illuminates us so that we walk in knowledge, hope, life, and power as God’s forgiven and adopted children (Eph. 1:17–19).
  - Fifth, the Word nourishes us by “enduring for ever” (Ps. 19:9). Because Adam dishonored God by not listening to His Word, God gave mankind over to death (Gen. 2:17; 3:19). We have become shadows on the earth (Job 8:9), and our lives are but a vapor that quickly passes away (James 4:14). But the Word of the Lord “abideth for ever,” and by it God’s Spirit causes us to be “born again” into eternal life (1 Pet. 1:22–23). This living and abiding Word is the incorruptible seed of eternal life in Christ (1 Pet. 1:23–25).
  - Sixth, the Word nourishes us by being “true and righteous altogether” (Ps. 19:9). Adam’s fall corrupted our entire being with sin so that every purpose of our hearts became evil (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). God’s Word is the seed of the righteous God, which when planted in us, sends down roots into our innermost being, and produces the good fruit of new obedience to His commands (Mark 4:8).
  - Seventh, the Word nourishes us in all these ways because it is the Word of “the LORD.” Psalm 19:7–9 repeats the name of “the LORD” six times. This is God’s covenant name, Jehovah, by which He revealed

Himself to Israel as the ever-living God, the faithful Redeemer and the sovereign King. He has promised salvation to His people, and all who trust in Jesus Christ will inherit it. This is the secret of God's Word: it is not merely a collection of human words, but the Word of the covenant Lord, and in it we meet the living God who speaks to us both of judgment and salvation. God's Word is the means by which God establishes a covenant relationship between Himself and us through Jesus Christ.

Have you opened your mouth and eaten the Word of God? That is to say, have you received the Holy Scriptures as the bread and wine of your soul? Do you believe that this Book is the Word of God, not just man's word about God but God's Word to man? Have you experienced its life-giving, life-changing, life-sustaining effects?

If the Bible is just dead letters on a page to you, that is because you lack the Holy Spirit of God. As Calvin said, it is by "the secret energy of the Spirit" that "we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits."<sup>5</sup> The Holy Spirit is "the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears."<sup>6</sup> If you are blind to the beauty and glory of God's Word, then you do not have the power to heal yourself. But you may be like blind Bartimaeus when he heard that Jesus was passing by. Cry out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me," and do not stop your crying until Christ opens your eyes by faith in His Word (cf. Mark 10:46–52).

If you know, believe, and have experienced that the Bible is the Word of life, then give all glory to God through

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<sup>5</sup> . Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

<sup>6</sup> . Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.4.

Jesus Christ, who by His Holy Spirit has made the Word to be life and salvation unto you. Cherish the Word. Feed upon the Word. Beware of anything that would draw you away from the Word—which is exactly what Satan and this world labor to do. And be faithful to carry out your duty toward the Word.

### **Our Duty toward God's Nourishing Word**

God's Word does not work automatically apart from our minds and wills, but calls for a response from us—indeed, demands a response. Just as we must ingest, chew, swallow, and digest our food for it to strengthen our bodies, so we must receive God's Word, hearing it with faith in our hearts, and hiding it in our hearts, for it to save and sanctify our souls. The Lord says in Isaiah 55:1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." What is this feast God offers for free? Verse 3 says it is the hearing of God's Word: "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." Paul tells us, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Such faith is likewise nourished and sustained by the Word. Peter says to all believers, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2).

Again, we find a model of a proper response to God's Word in Psalm 19, especially verses 10–14:

More to be desired are they than gold, yea,  
than much fine gold:  
sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.  
Moreover by them is thy servant warned:  
and in keeping of them there is great reward.  
Who can understand his errors?  
cleanse thou me from secret faults.

Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;  
 let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be  
 upright, and I shall be innocent from the great  
 transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the  
 meditation of my heart,  
 be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and  
 my redeemer.

These words both describe the response of a true believer to God's Word, and prescribe to us our duty that we must obediently follow in order to walk with God more and more:

- First, we must love God's Word, treasuring it more "than gold, yea, than much fine gold," and delighting in it as "sweeter also than honey" (Ps. 19:10). Such love springs from faith in the gospel for salvation. Psalm 119:174 says, "I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight." If we long for Christ, then we must long also to become like Christ in obedience to God's laws. Paul wrote in Romans 7:12, 22, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.... For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." An inward pleasure or relish in the holiness of keeping God's commandments shows that we are truly converted. John wrote in 1 John 2:3, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." When obedience is born of love, then it is a delight: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Charles Bridges wrote, "Duties become privileges when Christ is their source and life."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> . Charles Bridges, *An Exposition of Psalm 119* (1827, repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 471.

- Second, we must listen to God’s Word as God’s servants so that by it we may be warned of what displeases our Lord and instructed in how to obtain God’s “great reward” (Ps. 19:11). Have the attitude expressed by young Samuel: “Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:9). Every time the Bible is opened, we must remember and, if we are in Christ, look forward to that day when God will open the books of judgment and call us to account for all that we have said and done. Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 sums up the matter: “Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” Therefore, listen with a profound sense that you need God to teach you His ways. Psalm 25:4–5 says, “Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.” When you open the Bible, do you do so with an attitude that says, “Lord, show me Thy ways”? Approach the Bible saying, “O LORD, truly I am thy servant” (Ps. 116:16).
- Third, we must look to God’s saving grace promised in His Word. David confesses the deceitful depth of his sins (“Who can understand his errors?”), and seeks grace for justification or acquittal from his guilt: “cleanse thou me from secret faults” (Ps. 19:12).<sup>8</sup> He seeks grace for sanctification: “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (v. 13). If we do not cultivate this

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<sup>8</sup> . The verb translated “cleanse” (*naqah*) means to be acquitted, free from guilt or punishment. See Gen. 24:8, 41; Ex. 20:7; 21:19; 34:7; Num. 5:19, 31; 14:18; Deut. 5:11.

kind of dependence upon God's justifying and sanctifying grace, we will either neglect or turn away from God's Word or we will become Pharisees who distort it to maintain our external self-righteousness.

- Fourth, we must long to please God by meditating on His Word, obeying His Word, and speaking His Word to others. David teaches us to pray, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight" (Ps. 19:14). Meditation is the chewing, swallowing, and inward digesting of our spiritual food by continuing to think about what God says and how it applies to our lives. William Greenhill explained, "Digest the truths thou hearest, by serious meditation, and by faith that they may become thy nutriment, and thou mayst feel the power and efficacy of them in thy heart, and act accordingly."<sup>9</sup> We must meditate on God's Word not only as servants, but also as sons and daughters who love their heavenly Father and desire more than anything to please Him. This is the heartbeat of the fear of the Lord. Anthony Burgess said, "There is nothing done in secret, but thy Father seeth it. There is no heartpride, no heart-earthliness, but thy Father seeth it. There is never a time thou prayest, hearest the word, but thy Father seeth with what form of spirit it is. Oh therefore if thou art a son of God, thou wilt discover it in thy whole carriage [show it in your whole course of life]: a son feareth the frowns of his father; I dare not do this; my father will be offended."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> . William Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, ed. James Sherman (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 96.

<sup>10</sup> . Anthony Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or, a Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: by A. Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1652), 239.

- Fifth, we must lean, more and more, on the Savior revealed in God's Word. David concludes his psalm by praying, "O LORD, my strength [literally, as the marginal note reads: "my rock"], and my redeemer" (Ps. 19:14). These are words of trust (Ps. 18:2), a personal confession of faith, indicating that our greatest duty toward God's Word is faith in Christ. Here we find the seventh use of God's name ("LORD") in this psalm, showing that God's Word calls us to rest our hearts upon the faithful Savior and only Mediator of the covenant of grace. Christ is the center of the Bible's message from beginning to end. Let us never fall into the grave error of searching the Scriptures to find the way of eternal life while turning a blind eye to the fact that they all, with one accord, testify of Christ, and Christ alone as the way, the truth, and the life (John 5:39; 14:6).

It is important to note that the third, fourth, and fifth duties I have mentioned all appear in Psalm 19 in the form of prayers. Prayer is faith taking hold of the Word of God, and seeking all that God promises to us in His Word. Douglas Kelly writes that all true knowledge of God "lives and breathes in an atmosphere of prayer."<sup>11</sup> John Owen said he who studies the Scriptures must "abide in fervent supplications, in and by Jesus Christ, for supplies of the Spirit of grace, to lead him into all truth." Owen warned that any man who undertakes to interpret any portion of Scripture without praying to God for the Holy Spirit to instruct him greatly provokes God

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<sup>11</sup> . Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in the Light of the Church, Volume 1, The God Who Is: The Holy Trinity* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 48.

for that man acts in pride and ignorance.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, pray every time you open the Bible in your devotions or family worship. Pray in preparation for public worship for the preachers of God's Word. Pray for missionaries and Bible teachers around the world. Ask God for illumination to understand the Bible and sanctifying grace to believe and obey it. And thank God for every drop of blessing received through the Word.

One reason why we must pray is that we need supernatural strength if we will think clearly and act boldly against this wicked world. To delight in God's Word, it is necessary that we do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way "of sinners" nor sit in the "seat of the scornful" (Ps. 1:1–2). It's not easy being different. Greenhill said the "example of others is like a mighty torrent that carries down all before it."<sup>13</sup> Flood waters have immense force to move boulders, uproot trees, and destroy buildings and bridges. A mere six inches of fast-moving flood water can knock a man over.<sup>14</sup> When we try to stand against popular tastes, prejudices, preferences, or practices, we are like men trying to wade upstream through a flood. But Christ is sufficient. Greenhill imagined how Christ might answer our fears about proclaiming the truth in the face of opposition. We might say, "Lord, if I do this I will lose my friends," but Christ answers, "I am your friend, your best friend." We might say, "I will alienate my family from me," but Christ

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<sup>12</sup> . John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), 4:204–205.

<sup>13</sup> . Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 93.

<sup>14</sup> . National Weather Service, "Turn Around Don't Drown," <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/os/water/tadd/tadd-intro.shtml> (accessed October 6, 2014).

replies, “I am your brother, for I took your very nature to suffer for you and make you a child of God.” We might say, “Great and powerful men will become my enemies,” but Christ says, “I am greater than they, and my throne is above all thrones.” Therefore, Greenhill said, “Do not make the manners of the world the rule of your life, nor the worship of the world the rule of your worship, but look higher.”<sup>15</sup>

The Westminster divines summed up our duties toward God’s nourishing Word by saying, “The holy scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, if you are a preacher of God’s Word, then stand in awe of your calling and let nothing distract you from the ministry of the Word. As William Perkins wrote in the flyleaf of his books, “Thou art a minister of the Word; mind thy business.”<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

What an unspeakable blessing we receive when we do our duty and feed upon God’s Word in a regular, humble,

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<sup>15</sup> . Greenhill, *An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel*, 93.

<sup>16</sup> . Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 157), in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693*, comp. James T. Dennison Jr., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014), 4:340–41.

<sup>17</sup> . As cited in Ian Breward, “The Life and Theology of William Perkins, 1558–1602” (PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 1963), 35.

diligent, faithful manner! For in the Word, we find Christ, the Bread of life, who alone can satisfy us forever. And in Christ, the Mediator, we find God, who is the fountain of life and the fullness of joy.

Perhaps you do not have a regular time to read the Bible and pray. If that's the case, then start now. Resolve that by God's grace you will not let another day of your life pass without reading and meditating on God's Word. Get a Bible reading plan, choose a particular time when you can concentrate, and begin immediately. If you are a child, talk to your parents about how they can help you to do this all-important duty.

It is crucial that you approach the reading and hearing of God's Word with a right attitude in your heart. Do not do it resentfully, as a chore or a duty that you must fulfill but inwardly dislike. Do not do it like a Pharisee, abusing God's Word as if it were a way for you to feel that you are better than other people. Instead, do it with hunger, as someone who knows that this is his necessary and nutritious food. If you do not have a good appetite for God's Word, then be warned that you are not spiritually healthy, and you may be as yet dead in your sins. Pray to the Lord to give you a heart that hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

Have the mindset present in this poem, titled, "Of the Incomparable Treasure of the Holy Scriptures," that appears in the front matter of a 1599 edition of the Bible.

Here is the spring where waters flow,  
to quench our heart of sin.  
Here is the tree where truth doth grow,  
to lead our lives therein.  
Here is the judge that stints the strife,  
when men's devices fail.  
Here is the bread that feeds the life,  
that death cannot assail.

The tidings of salvation dear,  
comes to our ears from hence. The  
fortress of our faith is here, and  
shield of our defense.

Then be not like the hog that hath  
a pearl at his desire,  
And takes more pleasure in the  
trough and wallowing in the mire.  
Read not this book in any case, but  
with a single eye.  
Read not but first desire God's grace, to  
understand thereby.

Pray still in faith with this respect,  
to fructify therein,  
That knowledge may bring this effect,  
to mortify thy sin.  
Then happy thou in all thy life,  
what so to thee befalls, Yea,  
double happy shalt thou be,  
when God by death thee calls.<sup>18</sup>

May God grant you the happiness, yes, the double happiness, of feasting on His Word throughout your life, and one day entering heaven to behold the glory of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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<sup>18</sup> . *The Bible* (London: Christopher Barker, 1599), no pagination.

