

## 2CH Sunday at 7.30

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Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

### The main purpose of life

Presented by Steve Cooper

Good morning! Life these days is fairly hectic for most of us. I think of one typical day recently when I got out of bed with a determination to do one project this day – but guess what? After an unexpected phone call, the arrival of some emails that demanded time for reply, and people asking me to do things I hadn't planned for, it was almost lunch time before I got around to thinking about that project I'd planned! We're so busy being busy, that we don't take time to ponder what the purpose of life is all about.

There's one basic goal we should set ourselves above all else: to know God better. We may well want to grow and develop in many areas, but here is the most basic goal of all, which forms the foundation for everything else: to know God better.

This morning let's consider a psalm together, written by King David, Psalm 19 in the Old Testament of the Bible. In Psalm 19 we see David's longing to know God better, and it challenges us in our busy lives to put the most important thing first.

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One of the great Christian books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was written by J.I. Packer, entitled *Knowing God*. Packer challenges us to reflect on the main purpose of life: to know God better. He puts it this way: 'What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God. What in a person gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of himself.' (p.29-30)

The question then is, *how* can we grow in the knowledge of God? A helpful answer is given in Psalm 19. In this psalm David meditates on the two ways God reveals himself to human beings, and shows us how to respond to God's revelation in humble prayer.

The first way God reveals himself to us, writes David, is through God's creation. When we look at the sky, the stars and the sun, we learn about God's power, creativity, and glory: 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world.' (vv.1-4a)

I recall as a teenager lying on a golf course green with some mates. We gazed up at the stars, pondering the brilliance of the stars, and the inky black of the heavens. I thought: 'Surely there's a powerful God up there, who could create such haunting beauty and maintain the galaxies in such order'. It was a significant moment for me, the beginning of a personal conviction that there is a Creator God.

So here is one way we can grow in the knowledge of God. To get out into God's creation, to be observant, to revel in the beauty, variety, wildness and order of God's design. I love being out of doors. Each week I take my push bike for a long ride, and occasionally I paddle my canoe on a river. I enjoy walking around my

local suburb, looking at trees, plants, flowers, hearing birds, enjoying the breeze and sunshine. It encourages me to thank God, and delight in what I see of his strength and care for all he has made.

David finishes his meditation on creation by dwelling on the searching heat of the sun: ‘nothing is hidden from its heat’ (v.6). The sun in Israel was intense, like our climate in Australia, especially our desert regions. David observes that this intensely shining sun pierces into every nook and cranny, detecting all the hiding places of darkness. This leads David to meditate on the second way God reveals himself to us: through the written pages of the Scriptures (vv.7-10). We’ll reflect on that after this song.

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The main purpose of life is to know God better. Psalm 19 is a brilliant poem written by King David, giving us insight into how we can know God better.

David begins the psalm by saying that the first way God reveals himself to us is through creation. The second way, he says, is through the written Scriptures. To David there is a connection. Just as the sun searches out dark places, and purifies and cleanses, so God’s Word searches out dark places in our lives, and through his Word God purifies and cleanses us.

David describes ‘the law of the Lord’, which is first 5 books of the Bible. In these books the Lord instructs us in different ways: David refers to laws, statutes, precepts, commands, and ordinances. For the Christian, we have so much more to learn from the entire Bible: we can add the Hebrew prophets, the 4 Gospels about Jesus, the letters from the apostles. David describes what God’s word is like: ‘The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul... The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.’ (verses 7-8) He adds that God’s word is trustworthy, right, pure, and sure. God’s Word is so reliable, compared to the words and instruction of human beings. Then note what hearing God’s Word does to us: it makes wise the simple, gives joy to the heart, and teaches us reverence before God.

David sums up how important God’s Word is if we want to know God: ‘[God’s words] are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb’ (v.10). Notice the contrast with the first way God reveals himself to us (through the creation): David learns far more clearly about God through the Scriptures than he does from the creation.

Is this what the Christian Bible means to you? Do you delight in the Bible as David so obviously did? Do you regard the Scriptures as the most precious and sweet thing we have? What are you planning to do to know God better through the Bible? Do you have a plan to read the Bible on a daily basis? Many people find it helpful to use a devotional booklet, giving them a Bible passage to read each day, with insights to help understand and apply that passage. Will you commit to attending a worship service every Sunday, so you can hear the teaching of God’s Word? What about joining a Bible study group? Are you planning to read some good Christian books that will deepen your knowledge of God and God’s Word?

You might say: I don’t get enough time to learn about God through the Bible. If that’s the case, what’s taking up your time? Is it TV? Or DVDs? Newspapers? Sport? Shopping? Gym? All these may have a place, but if they steal time from getting to know God better through his Word, we need to re-consider our priorities.

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This morning we’re thinking about the main purpose of life: to know God better. In Psalm 19 David reminds us of two ways in which God reveals himself to us: through his creation and through the Scriptures. David’s

thought flows like this: Just as the sun searches out dark places, and purifies and cleanses, so God's Word searches out dark places in our lives, and through his Word God purifies and cleanses us.

That leads David to the final part of the psalm, where he personally responds in prayer to this God who reveals himself to us. Here the focus becomes more narrow: from God's revelation to all the world through creation (vv.1-6), to God's revelation to his people through the Scriptures (vv.7-10), to finally a much more narrow focus: one individual, David, responding humbly to God's Word in prayer (vv.11-14). David has contemplated God's revelation in the creation and in the Scriptures: that contemplation leads directly to self-examination and prayer.

David's prayer in this last part of Psalm 19 is a model for us of how we should respond to God's Word. He refers to himself as the Lord's servant (v.11). His prayer shows how earnest David is to deal with anything in his life that displeases the Lord: 'Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from wilful sins; may they not rule over me' (vv.12-13). When we get to know God better by reading the Scriptures, God shines his light on our lives, showing us our secret and small sins, and those sins that are blatant and that control us. Some sins do control us; they become habits and addictions that are hard to break.

David ends his prayer by humbly asking that all he says and thinks will be acceptable to the Lord: 'May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer' (v.14). David knows that the only way he will be sustained in a life of obedience is to appeal to God as his Rock (who is strong and reliable), and his Redeemer (showing grace and rescuing us).

Christians know it was through the Lord Jesus that God showed himself to be our Rock and Redeemer. When Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sin, and was raised to life as the mighty King, he became the strong deliverer. When we trust in Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we receive forgiveness for our sins, and the power of God's Holy Spirit. Then we can get to know God better. We focus on Jesus as we learn about him in the Scriptures. As we gaze at the Lord Jesus, we grow in the knowledge of God, and we receive God's grace to sustain us in saying 'no' to sin and 'yes' to a life pleasing to God.

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What are your goals for the future? Can I encourage you to have one main goal: to know God better. Psalm 19 is a meditation that guides you in deepening your knowledge of the Lord. Look carefully at God's creation, and see there a silent pointer to God's power and glory. Attend to the Bible, and listen for God's instruction to his people as he reveals more about himself. Then respond to God in prayer.

*'Heavenly Father, our desire is to grow in the knowledge of you. Help us to be clear on the main purpose of life: to know you better. Speak to us through your creation, and address us through your Word in the Bible. We invite you to shine your light into the dark places of our lives. Through your Son, the Lord Jesus, may the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.'*