

What Is Theology For?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 August 2026

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0:00] This evening I'd like us to turn back together to Psalm 71 and we're going to read verses 17 to 19. O God, from my youth you have taught me and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.

So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me. Until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come. Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God. Who is like you? There are many, many things that are wonderful about being a minister. It is an absolutely fantastic job for loads of reasons.

But one of the things that makes it so good is that I get to spend a lot of my time studying theology. And I get very, very excited about theology because I can still remember the life-changing experience I had when I went to study at what was the Free Church College and is now Edinburgh Theological Seminary back in 2000.

2011. I went there to attend to be a minister. And although I'd been a Christian for a long time, I'd never really had the opportunity to study theology before. And as I was being taught by the lectures, I just found that my eyes were being opened to more and more of the astounding reality of who God is and the wonder of everything that he has done.

[1:23] And I discovered that what the Bible teaches and what the Bible reveals is what I desperately needed. And again and again and again, everything I learned would quench my thirst.

And ever since then, I have been firmly of the view that theology is the coolest thing ever. And I hope that that's something that all of you are discovering for yourselves as well.

And I want us to think about that a little bit more tonight. And in doing so, I just want us to ask a very simple question. What is theology for? And as we look for an answer to that question, one of the best places to go is the book of Psalms.

And the Psalms are amazing for lots and lots of reasons. But one of the biggest reasons is because the Psalms are a place where all the riches of theology meet with all the realities of life.

And that's what I want us to see. The theology of the gospel is amazing, not just because it has the material to fill our minds with astonishing truth, but even more so because it has the power to transform every aspect of our lives.

[2:32] And I didn't fall in love with theology because it gave me knowledge. I fell in love with theology because it changed my life. Now, we could look at the whole book of Psalms to answer our question tonight.

But we're just going to focus on Psalm 71. In it, we have seven answers to our question. What's theology for? It's for searching out. It's for stretching your mind.

It's for sheltering within. It's for strengthening to continue. It's for sharing with others. It's for singing with all your heart. And it is for every stage of life. I don't usually do alliteration in my sermons.

So I thought, well, tonight I'm alliterating. I might as well have seven points. So we shall race through these together. First of all, then, theology is for searching out.

And what I mean by that is that theology takes you to the most profound, majestic, and vast areas of study that you could ever look into. And, you know, you only have to read four words of this psalm to discover that.

[3:34] It opens with the words, in you, O Lord. And these are words that are there to be searched. That title, O Lord, the Lord, that immediately stretches us.

Because it takes us to think about the absolute of reality. The ultimate source of everything else that there is. And there is so much to search into there when we think about God.

We're immediately in the realm where we're thinking about what are the answers to life's biggest questions. We're thinking about what we can learn about our origins. We're thinking about what we can discover about our destiny.

Those two words, O Lord, that's pointing us to ultimate reality. And as you search out the nature of God revealed in the Bible, you discover our creator and our sustainer.

You discover the one who is the fountain of all that is good. The one on whom everything else is totally dependent at every single moment.

[4:40] And you find the one in whom everything else makes sense. But you can search even more. Because as you look into those two words, O Lord, you discover and see that it's written in block capital letters.

And you will maybe know that that's to indicate that it's translating the Hebrew word Yahweh. Yahweh, in older versions it would have been the word Jehovah. And that is the covenant name of God revealed to his people.

And as Exodus chapter 3 reveals to us, the kind of root idea behind that name is the fact that God is who he is. Moses said to God, if I come to the people and they say, who sent me to you?

What's his name? God said to Moses, I am who I am. Say to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you. And it's from that that this name Yahweh translated the Lord in capital letters comes.

And it's all connected to the fact that this is the name used by God as he establishes his covenant relationship with his people.

[5:53] And all of that, as we search into that, it's telling you that God is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, and he is forever committed to his people.

He's the covenant making and keeping God. He's relentlessly faithful, immovably steadfast, unconditionally gracious, and eternally loving towards his people.

We are only four words into the psalm, and there's so much to search out. And alongside that, you also need to search out the you.

Because that's telling you something astonishing as well. Because there, in those words of the psalm, you have this psalmist, a tiny speck, in a tiny moment, in all the vastness of space and time and matter.

And he can turn towards God and say, you, oh Lord. In you, oh Lord, do I take refuge. And that is mind-blowing because there is a tiny me and an infinite you meeting in the opening words of this psalm.

[7:12] And what's true of the psalmist is true of you. Every time you pray, every time you read God's word, every time you sing. I am a tiny, tiny me. And God is an infinite, immense, unchangeable, immeasurable you.

And yet he and I can meet. And he and I can talk. And he and I can walk together. And so can you. You, oh Lord, these are amazing words to search. And the rest of the psalm is full of so many more. It speaks of God's righteousness there in verse 2.

It describes God as a rock of refuge in verse 3. It speaks of hope and trust in verse 5. It speaks of glory in verse 8.

These are massive words and massive concepts. Theology is for searching out. And in terms of the gospel, the whole reason that people are missing out on all of this is not because there's nothing to find.

[8:22] It's because they're not looking. Theology is for searching. Theology is also for stretching your mind. And stretching out the truths in the Bible is, we can say, it's both satisfying and tantalizing at the same time.

It's satisfying because everything we discover in the Bible, the truth that God is revealing in his word, is everything that we need and everything that we long for. Yet at the same time, it's tantalizing because everything we learn reveals that there is so much more to discover.

And that's why theology stretches us and stretches our minds. And you see that so clearly in verse 19. Your righteousness, O God, reaches the heaven. You've done great things, O God. Who is like you?

And there is just this glorious, incomparable aspect of who God is and as he reveals himself in the Bible. I find I see this illustrated so powerfully every time I go to the mountains.

I love the mountains. Love hill walking. Love skiing. Love the mountains. Love the mountains.

[9:56] That you want to discover. And that's exactly what it's like in theology. You discover and learn something amazing. And that opens the door to so much more that we can see.

And it's stretching our minds. So when you look at the nature of God, you're looking at an incomparable category. No one and nothing else is God.

He's utterly unique. He alone is righteous, as this verse describes. When you look at the works of God, you're looking at an incomparable category. There's no other creator. There's no other sustainer.

No other savior. Nothing else does what God does. And when you look at the love of God. And when you look at the love of God, you are looking at an incomparable category.

Because there is none that loves you the way God does. Everything about God stretches us. His nature, his purpose, his holiness, his power, his mercy, his glory, his grace.

[10:57] You cannot have a small view of any of that. But do you know what stretches us most of all? What stretches us most of all is what God has done to save us.

Because the more accurate your theology, the further your stretching is going to go. Because our view of God cannot actually be high enough. Your view of God's goodness, his greatness, his holiness, his glory, as high as you can possibly go, is nowhere near the top.

And nowhere near high enough in terms of how exalted and glorious and majestic he is. At the very same time, our view of sin needs to be far lower and far more serious than it is.

Even our most severe understanding of that is probably a long way short. Of where it needs to be. And of course, what does that mean? It means that your view of God, as it becomes more accurate, stretches higher and higher and higher and higher. And your view of sin that has affected each one of us, the more accurate that becomes, the further down it goes.

[12:07] And the stretching extends all the time as you learn more. And what you discover is that the whole gospel is about Jesus bridging that gap.

about God the Son leaving the highest heaven to come to the lowest depths, to right where we are, to die in our place and save us.

It is only a stretched theology that's going to teach you the magnitude of who Jesus is and what he's done for you. Thirdly, theology is for sheltering within.

The Psalms are full of the language of shelter. And that's especially true in Psalm 71. You see it in verses 1 to 3. In you, O Lord, do I take refuge? It speaks in verse 3, a rock of refuge.

You're my rock and my fortress. And in the context of the Psalm, this language is clearly showing us that as the Psalmist wrote the Psalm, he feels vulnerable, he feels exposed, in danger, and under attack.

[13:21] And the same emphasis is repeated. Rescue me comes in verse 4. Verse 7, again, speaks of refuge. Portent is like the language of a warning, something that serves as a warning to others.

And that's kind of in a negative context. And so people are viewing him negatively in that regard. In that context, God is a refuge for him. Verse 13, again, crying out to God for help, seeking rescue and security.

All of it's reminding us that theology is not reserved only for the moments in life when things are going well. And this is actually very easy to misunderstand because when we think of that word theology, what do you think of straight away?

You might think of maybe like a university or a seminary, maybe even a library. And obviously there's a strong connection there because these are places where theology is learned.

But the problem with all of that is that universities can seem a little bit elite and inaccessible to many. Libraries are the place where you need to be in your best behavior.

[14:35] And associating theology just with kind of that realm of higher education or sophisticated learning all makes it look a bit squeaky clean and a bit out of reach. And I don't think any of that's accurate.

We don't know exactly who wrote this psalm and we don't know exactly the circumstances, but I want you to imagine two different days in the life of the psalm writer, in the life of the person who wrote Psalm 71.

On one day, he's in Jerusalem. It's a warm day. Imagine Middle Eastern sun. Everything's settled. Everything's secure. He walks to the temple.

And there he meets some people. He's able to have some really helpful conversations and learns some more things, reads some manuscripts, enjoys a time of fellowship and a learning there in the temple.

On another day, he's on a journey home. He's had a difficult few days. He's faced criticism. He knows that people are speaking about.

[15:36] He feels like he's running late to get home. It's going to get dark soon. It's getting colder. He's starting to get hungry. He's starting to feel exposed. His legs are tired, stumbles, doubts.

He's not sure if someone's following him. He's desperate to get home. There's still miles to go. He's sore and scared and struggling. Which of these two days do you think is more likely to have prompted the writing of this psalm?

Exactly. The second one. Absolutely. The second one. And it's reminding us that though there are many wonderful theological libraries in the world, and I love theological libraries, there's many wonderful theological libraries, it's reminding us theology doesn't meet you in the library.

It meets you in the ditch. It meets you in the storm. It meets you in the darkness. And the key point is this, that if theology is not a refuge for you, if the theology of the gospel isn't a refuge for you, then you don't understand that theology very well.

As God reveals himself in his word, the whole reason he's doing that is so that we can run into his arms and be safe. As we go through our journey in life, we are repeatedly faced with conflict, cruelty, injustice, and evil.

[17:03] And sometimes we're even the cause of that ourselves, and all the time we are the target for it, that the forces of darkness want to see our destruction.

And yet this psalm captures so beautifully that everything God is, rock, refuge, rescuer, all of these things, fortress, all of these things that God is, he is then for you.

And the key lesson is that theology is for sheltering within. And that's why it's reminding us that theology does not give you knowledge to display as though you're all smart.

That's not what it's about at all. Theology does not give you knowledge to display. It gives you security where you can hide. Everything that God is, his strength, his mercy, his wisdom, his power, his glory, and his love.

If you are trusting in Jesus or if you put your trust in Jesus, then all of that is protecting you forever. But sheltering in our theology doesn't mean that the Christian life is one where we do nothing but hiding, where we're escaping, and where we're avoiding difficulty.

[18:23] No, theology is also for strengthening to continue. And that's why, that's what you see in this psalm. It speaks a lot of sheltering, but it doesn't just speak of sheltering. It also speaks of being strengthened.

So often the psalmist expresses his weakness, verse 9, verse 16, verse 20 and 21. But in the context of that, there's the promise that God will increase our greatness, our comfort, our strength, and our help.

And it's reminding us that the gospel does two things. It comforts and commissions. And so it speaks beautiful words of comfort to us when we feel weak, when we're worried, when we're bruised, when we're frustrated, when we're full of regret.

But at the same time, the gospel commissions us to go and to serve Jesus, to work, to strive, to press on, and never to give up.

And the key point that our theology teaches us is that the whole reason we can do that is because it's God's strength that we're given. It's not that we're strong enough and it's not that we need to stir ourselves up in order to do that.

[19:31] No, the promise of the gospel is that we are strengthened. In all these verses, God is the one who's primarily active and part of his activity is to strengthen his people.

And that's why the theology of the gospel is not just water to quench your thirst, it's not just water to heal our wounds, it is also rocket fuel to fire you up and to spur you on.

Jesus has given us an astonishingly brilliant mission to go and to make disciples of all nations, to tell people everything that we have learned about who he is and what he's done and he has promised to empower us with his presence to give us every bit of strength that we need to make that happen.

As verse 19 says, God's done great things and studying theology teaches us what these things are and all of it's showing us that God is still going to do even more great things through his church.

And all of it's reminding us that what we learn at church at the start of every week and what we discover through reading and praying day by day in our lives, what we discover is that the gospel heals. And that's a really important thing to recognize that the gospel heals.

[20:46] And there's two aspects to that because healing doesn't just mean tending to our bruises and injuries. It does mean that but it doesn't just mean that. Healing also means recovering so that

we can go again because a healed athlete doesn't stay on crutches at the side.

A healed athlete gets right back onto the track and runs again. Theology is for strengthening us as we continue following Jesus together.

Theology, fifthly, is also for sharing with others. One of the beautiful things about the Psalms is that they are so personal. There's an honesty and openness and a rawness in the Psalms that is so striking and rare and it's incredibly helpful.

But although the Psalms are deeply personal, the Psalms are not self-centered or individualistic. And you can see that so clearly in this Psalm there is a wonderful emphasis on telling others about these truths.

You see that in verses 15 to 18. My mouth will tell of your righteous acts. You see that in verse 24. My tongue will talk. All these great emphases on sharing the truths that God has revealed.

[21:59] That's a key part of what we're trying to do at church. We want to publicly proclaim and teach the amazing good news that God has revealed in the Bible. But as we think about that, as we think about our great mission to tell people about Jesus and to communicate the gospel, why are we doing that?

And it's so easy to misunderstand this. Why are we doing that? Why does the church work so hard to do this? Is it because we want to maintain our traditions? No. Is it because we want to secure and advance this institution that is the church?

No. Is it because we want to promote a particular ideology? No. We're not doing it for any of those reasons. The reason we are doing this is because Jesus is amazing.

And knowing Jesus is amazing. And we want other people to know about him because this is the best thing that we can give to anyone.

And so we want to share it. And we can be confident doing that because what we have is actually what everybody is longing for. We have the living waters that quench every thirst in Jesus.

[23:15] We have the sun of righteousness that brings warmth and joy and light to our lives and we want so much to share that. And that's why it's so important. There's two aspects that are so important.

The church as it meets on a Sunday has got to be so clear in communicating that message and that's what we seek to do. But then how we live our lives during the week and especially our ethical conduct as Christians, our attitude among people that we are with, the way that we behave day by day is also massively important because when we fail to live like Jesus it becomes so much harder to point people to Jesus.

But if in our home and our school and our work and our day-to-day lives we are following the instructions and the example that Jesus has given us then we are already pointing people to him and when the opportunities come to speak about him our lives have already given credibility for everything that we want to say.

The theology of the gospel is the greatest information that you can ever learn. And that means that you and I have got something utterly brilliant to share. So theology is for sharing with others. It's also for singing with all your heart. Now at one level that's very obvious because the whole sermon tonight is based on a song, a psalm but even the psalm itself speaks about singing verse 8, verse 14, verse 22 to 23 all speaking about singing and praising God.

[24:40] And so that's obvious at one level but at the same time it's so easy to neglect this or to misunderstand why this is so important. Theology is to be sung and I think that's for two reasons.

One is because God wants us to. God delights to hear us sing. And the wonderful thing about God is that he has absolutely no preference or expectations in terms of the quality of your singing.

He just loves to hear it. So never be afraid if you're a good singer or a terrible singer or someone in the middle never worry about that. God delights to hear us sing and singing can be such a helpful thing for building us up.

The New Testament speaks about teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Singing is something that God wants and it helps us.

But the second reason why theology is to be sung is easy to miss but it's important. The reason theology is for singing is because when we start to discover just what God has done for us in Jesus we cannot help but sing.

[25:53] And that's because songs are where our most intense emotions are expressed. And that's even through people who are not very confident singers. We still resonate with songs even if

we're not very good at singing.

Songs are the outlet for our deepest emotions and our highest joys. When you fall in love you go to a song. When you get your heart broken you go to a song.

When you win the World Cup you start singing. Theology is for singing because it is about the things that matter most and all of it's meeting our deepest needs and coming to know Jesus is where you will find your highest joy.

And we might be terrible singers that doesn't matter the gospel gives us the best song. And that's why our singing on Sunday is actually a powerful witness to the community around us.

That's why we don't just sing out of duty or obligation we're actually just singing because we are so happy. we're singing because we are genuine and we're singing because we are heartfelt and even though life is so hard Jesus has made us so happy.

[27 : 08] So theology is for searching out it's for stretching your mind it's for sheltering within it's for strengthening to continue it's for sharing with others it's for singing with all your heart and lastly theology is for every stage of life.

And in many ways this is the big emphasis that this psalm is highlighting. It speaks of the whole of life's journey from infancy all the way through to being old and grey haired.

The psalmist goes right back to his birth to his mother's womb now he speaks of being in his old age from his youth he was taught now as he's old and grey he looks to the Lord.

And the key point is that this psalm is teaching us that the gospel is so good and so precious and so relevant for every stage of life.

And so in infancy the foundations of your life are being laid and with the gospel parents and family can pour assurance and security and stability into their child.

[28 : 17] Childhood is full of discovery, of adventure, of laughter, of tears, of likes and dislikes. With the gospel the child can discover how valued and precious and loved by God they are.

You step into the teenage years you discover that the world is much more broken than you thought it was and you discover that sin is much more tempting than you realize. The theology of the gospel gives us direction, it gives us clarity, it gives us boundaries, it gives us self-assurance and it gives us identity.

You step into adulthood, there's opportunities, there's privileges, there's responsibilities, there's blessings, there's burdens, there's pressure to succeed, pressure to conform, pressure to impress. The theology of the gospel replaces all of that pressure with peace and purpose. You go into the middle aged years of life and life has brought more bruises than you thought it would and dreams did not come as true as you hoped and worries have increased rather than decreased and in it all the theology of the gospel is a rock.

A rock that gives you unshakable stability. And in old age your strength, your potential, your talents are fading before your eyes.

[29 : 37] You've got so much to be thankful for but so much of life has raced by in the blink of an eye. and in it all the theology of the gospel tells you that you haven't even started.

And there is an eternity of joy and peace and togetherness and wonder and love for all who trust in Jesus. The theology of the gospel is stunning.

It's for searching out, for stretching your mind, for sheltering within, for strengthening to continue, for sharing with others, for singing with all your heart, for every stage in life. And that is why it is such a tragedy and why it is utterly crazy for someone at any stage of life to say, the gospel is not for me. it's everything we need, everything we long for. Following Jesus and learning about him really is the coolest thing ever. Amen.