

THE DELIGHT OF THE WORD OF GOD
PSALM 119: 97-104

Several years ago, after reading through Psalm 119, I was fascinated by all the different ways that the psalmist said he responded to the Word of God. So I re-read through the psalm and made a chart of as many different responses as I could find in the psalm (the list is [here](#)). Included are these responses:

- Account as worthy
- Afraid of Your judgments
- Awe of
- Behold/look upon/see
- Believe in
- Better than ____ to me
- Choose/chosen
- Cling to
- Comforted by
- Consider
- Counsel with
- Esteem
- Hate false ways/falsehood
- Inclined my heart
- Learn/know
- Loathe the treacherous
- Long for
- Meditate on
- Not ashamed of
- Do not forget
- Do not forsake
- Not gone astray from
- Do not turn from
- Praise/worship
- Regard
- Reject wanderers from
- Rejoice/my joy
- Remember
- Run after/with
- Seek
- Sing
- Speak, tell/told
- Sweet to the taste
- Give thanks
- They are mine
- Treasure
- Trust
- Turn to
- Wait for/long for
- Weep (for not keeping)
- Zealous for

This morning, we come to two of the more common of the themes in the psalm — a love for/delight in the Word of God and obedience that springs from that delight.

It is fitting as we begin a new year with new resolutions to take in Scripture, to hear an impassioned joy in the Word of God. Perhaps you finished 2018 on a “down” note; perhaps you are skeptical about 2019. Or perhaps you finished 2018 with joy and you are optimistic about 2019. Regardless, we both need to hear the one thing above all others that will give us joy and delight this year. Here is what the psalmist says:

IF YOU WANT TO BE WISE, LOVE GOD'S WORD.

As one writer says, “...there is no higher education than what the Word of God imparts.” [Barrick]

This stanza provides us with four encouragements about our affection for God's Word —

- 1. LOVE God's Word (v. 97)**
- 2. Love God's Word, Because it is WISE (vv. 98-100)**
- 3. Love God's Word Enough to OBEY It (vv. 101-102)**
- 4. Love God's Word by HATING EVIL (vv. 103-104)**

Here are four encouragements about our affection for God's Word

1. LOVE God's Word (v. 97)

- In a stanza filled with declarations of the ability of God's Word, the psalmist begins by affirming his commitment to the Word of God. And he begins by saying, ***O how I love Your law!***
 - ✓ His love for Scripture dominates this entire psalm (vv. 47, 48, 113, 119, 127, 140, 159, 163, 165, 167); and he will use a similar term "delight" at least nine more times.
 - ✓ Love for the Word of God is one of the most dominant themes in this psalm.
 - ✓ When the OT writers use this word "love," the emotional aspect of it is secondary; they are taking about a commitment to someone or something. The psalmist is affirming his fidelity to God's Word.
 - ✓ It is fitting that the psalmist says that he loves the Word of God because in the previous stanza he just testified to the faithfulness and sufficiency of Scripture (e.g., vv. 89-90, 96). How can one not love what is best for him? Since God is faithful how can the psalmist also not be faithful to God?
- What the psalmist loves is God's ***Law***. Here he is not speaking of the *Torah* proper — the first five books of the OT. It also refers to all of the OT (Bible). Anything God says and anything God commands the psalmist is committed to doing and heeding.
- It is also well to notice that because the psalmist loves the law it is his ***meditation all the day***.
 - ✓ When he says he will meditate, he means he muses on and contemplates Scripture. He is internalizing the Bible, making it his own. He is mentally preoccupied with what he knows about God's Word.
 - ✓ He is also daily and hourly captivated by Scripture — he thinks on it ***all the day***. That doesn't mean that he thinks about it to the exclusion of everything else (so "he is no earthly good"). It means that everything that he does and says all day is filtered through the grid of His knowledge of God and Scripture — he is constantly evaluating, "Is this consistent with what I know about God?"
 - ✓ So there is a cycle that is happening here: he loves Scripture so he is constantly thinking about its implications on his life and the more he thinks about those implications, the more he loves Scripture and the more he in turn meditates on it — so that his entire life is captivated by God's Word. The Bible is not a small segment of his life; the Bible is the center of his life.
 - ✓ Spurgeon was right: "The Word of God is always most precious to the man who most lives upon it."
- So, we can evaluate whether or not we love Scripture by simply asking, "how committed am I to do what it says?" Our love for Scripture is not determined by our emotional response to it but by our volitional obedience to it.

2. Love God's Word, Because it is WISE (vv. 98-100)

- When we talk about wisdom, we're talking about the right application of knowledge to living — wisdom has been described as the art of living well. And biblical wisdom might be described as doing the right thing for the right reason at the right time. It is right thinking, right believing, and right living.
- Where will you go to find such wisdom? The psalmist is adamant only Scripture will make us wise.

• God's Word makes us wiser than the world (v. 98)

- ✓ There is more wisdom in all the various **commands** of Scripture than all the accumulated "wisdom" of the psalmist's **enemies**.
- ✓ Who are his **enemies**? He has spoken repeatedly of his enemies; they are those who are opposed to both the psalmist and God and His Word (cf. vv. 107, 121-122, 134). These are people who are pridefully "obnoxious [with their] superior attitude." They are not inclined to submit to God's Word. [Leupold] They are rebellious against God and hate God's people. The "enemies" are the world system and all those who follow the world system.
- ✓ But the psalmist asserts that Scripture is greater than worldly wisdom because **they are ever mine**. He could mean that the wisdom of Scripture is available to him perpetually and that is true. But the word almost always means "eternal." The wisdom of God's commands belong eternally to the psalmist. It's not just that they are always *his*, but that they are eternal truths. God's Word and God's commands are always right, always good, and always appropriate. They are unchanging in their wisdom. They were wise when Moses wrote the Law; they were wise when the psalmist penned this ~1000 B.C., and they are wise and appropriate today, and will be eternally. And they are wise and true on earth and in Heaven. It's always good and wise to obey God.
- ✓ Only when you are heavenly wise will you be "street smart." You can't know how to live in this world until you seek wisdom from and are submitted to the One who has made this world.
- ✓ Huston Smith was chairman of the philosophy department at MIT, where one semester the atheist philosopher Aldous Huxley served as a visiting professor. On the way to one speaking engagement, Huxley said to Smith, "It's rather embarrassing to have given one's entire life to pondering the human predicament and to find that in the end one has little more to say than, "Try to be a little kinder.'" That's the wisdom of the world to the problem of sin. Be nice.
- ✓ The law (Word) of God has a much better answer — **Romans 3:23-26**.

• God's Word makes us wiser than our teachers (v. 99)

- ✓ Not only is the psalmist wiser than those who are antagonistic to him and God, but also wiser than those who sought to teach and instruct him — **I have more insight than all my teachers**. He has more comprehension, understanding, and prudence than any and *all* of his teachers. There is no wisdom in the personal wisdom of mankind (**Ps. 14:2-3**). Even the learned priests of Israel led the people astray when they depended on their own understanding (**Jer. 10:21**).

- ✓ The reason that he has more wisdom than his teachers is not because he is innately smarter — it is because ***Your testimonies are my meditation.***
 - He is perpetually and persistently meditating on the Word of God. He particularly has paid attention to the testimonies — the standards of truth, warnings, and admonitions. This psalm repeatedly affirms the psalmist’s commitment to reflect on God’s truth (vv. 15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148). (Almost 20% of the OT uses of this word are in *this* psalm, which reinforces the importance of meditation for godly living.)
 - (By way of reminder, biblical meditation is not emptying our minds of everything, but it is filling our minds with the singular truth of God, which is in contrast to the world’s meditation.)
 - As the psalmist has meditated on those truths it has transformed his life.
- ✓ The irony here is that the teachers had access to the same Scriptures as the psalmist. But they evidently ignored God and His Word and emphasized their own learning and status and wisdom.
- ✓ Christopher Ash rightly says:

“If the source of my teacher’s teaching is my teacher’s wisdom, then I as his pupil will never get beyond him. But if God is my teacher, which is what happens when the Bible is taught, then I may well get beyond my human teacher.” [Ash, *Bible Delight*, 132.]

- ✓ And isn’t that exactly what made Jesus’ teaching so remarkable — “Where did this man get this wisdom?” (Mt. 13:54; cf. also Mt. 4:1ff). He had His wisdom from God’s Word.
- ✓ You don’t need a high school diploma or a college degree or a Master’s degree or Doctorate to be wise. Wisdom has nothing to do with education. But it has everything to do with submission to the authority of God’s teaching. The wise man is the man who meditates on God’s commands, considers his condition, and then follows God’s instruction.

- **God’s Word makes us wiser than wise men (v. 100)**

- ✓ There is a progression to the psalmist’s thought; he has started from the lowest and least likely to be wise — the ungodly in the world, and now he has ascended to the peak — ***the aged.***
 - Scripture speaks about how the elderly should be wise and discerning (Job 12:12; Prov. 20:29).
 - But the aged are not always wise (Job 32:9). When is an old man not a wise man? When he rejects the counsel of the Word of God. When an older man is intemperate, undignified, insensible, unorthodox in faith, in love, and in perseverance he is not wise, but a fool (Tit. 2:2).
 - He should know better because of his experience in life and because of his exposure to God’s Word. There might be nothing more tragic than an old fool. He is foolish when he should be wise. He is a follower when he should be a leader. He has wasted his life when it is too late.
 - The ***aged*** person the psalmist is taking about is *his* elderly people. It’s not just “old people” in general; it’s the people who are elderly in *his* life, who should be discipling and training him. *His* spiritual elders and *his* grandparents have let him down.

- ✓ But God hasn't let him down. He had no one to mentor him, so he turned to God's **precepts** and he **observed** them all.
 - He is attentive to God's guiding principles. He has considered, comprehended, and obeyed what God has said to do — and that has given him more wisdom than the elderly in his life.
 - The real tragedy here is that the elderly could have been wiser than this younger man; but because they weren't attentive to Scripture in their early years, when they got to their final years they had a wisdom deficit. It's sad when an older person doesn't have enough money at the end of his life. It's a tragic waste when an older person has plenty of money but is bankrupt in wisdom before God.
 - The principle of the psalmist was really pretty simple: "God said it, and I did it." And that made him a wise man who did not waste his life. As one writer said, "...true wisdom does not depend on a lifelong experience but rather upon obedience to God's precepts."
 - The more we expose ourselves to God's truth and then cultivate the practice of doing what we see and understand from God's Word, then the wiser we will become (Mt. 7:24ff).
- This section followed the psalmist's declaration of love for God's Word and his meditation on it.
 - ✓ Here is tremendous hope for living. You don't need to be a scholar to be wise. You don't need an education to be wise. You don't need money to be wise. You just need a Bible and submission.
 - ✓ William Tyndale was exactly right when he said while working on his translation of the Bible into English — "A ploughboy with the Bible would know more of God than the most learned ecclesiastic who ignored it."
 - ✓ That's why he translated the Scriptures — to put the Bible into the hands of the people. And that's why we preach and teach what we do — because nothing else will transform one's life.
 - ✓ Only this book has the words of life; and only meditating on this book will lead you to wisdom.

3. Love God's Word Enough to OBEY It (vv. 101-102)

- It's not enough to know the Bible. If we will love the Bible and if we will be wise, then we must obey the Bible. So the psalmist builds on what he said at the end of v. 100 — ***I have observed your precepts.***
 - ✓ How did he observe (obey) the principles of God? ***I have restrained my feet from every evil way.***
 - ✓ The implication is that there is something compelling his feet to go a particular direction — and that direction is not toward God. His natural inclination (what the NT calls the flesh) is to go away from God and toward sin and rebellion.
 - ✓ He is ruthless and relentless in his commitment not to go towards evil. The sense is that the battle is hard. It is not easy. But he holds back his feet so that they can't go the way they want (Prov. 4:14). Leupold is right: "One cannot be lax about evil and expect to profit in the use of the Word."

- ✓ Notice that the psalmist does not allow himself to follow any evil way. All forms of evil are off limits to him. This is akin to **Rom. 13:14** — “make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” He is unwilling to consider any kind of evil beneficial or good for him. He understands that whatever the form of evil, it is always a detriment to him.
 - By application, do I allow myself “minor” indiscretions and liberties that the Lord labels as evil?
 - Where do I allow sinful evil into my life? Where am I unrestrained (where do I need to restrain myself)? Where am I deviating from a straight trajectory toward God and excusing it?
 - Recognize also that the flesh is prone to deceiving you about these questions. Be ruthless.
- ✓ The psalmist has a motive for restraining himself — he wants to **keep Your word**. The great influence on his life is a yearning to submit to God’s Word. He’d rather have obedience than ease.
 - There is only one way to purity, wisdom, and joy — it is by obedience to God’s Word.
 - Lasting joy will never be found in disobedience and rebellion. Occasionally short-term thrills may be found in rebellion, but they will always betray one eventually (perhaps here, but always in eternity). The psalmist is convinced God’s way is *always* better than the world’s way.
 - Here is a question: What is my passion and supreme desire — to indulge my personal desires (even if they are evil), or am I resolute in pursuing compliance to God’s Word?
 - And another: If I am unrestrained in my pursuit of some forms of evil is it because I do not have an overwhelming desire to keep the Word of God?
 - Oh friend, come to the river of life and hope and sustenance that is to be found in the waters of the Word of God. Come to the green pastures of Scripture and set yourself to obey God.
- The psalmist reiterates the same truth in v. 102 — ***I have not turned aside from Your ordinances***.
 - ✓ He has not retreated from God or deviated from God’s truth. He has not become apostate in his thinking or in his living. He has stayed on the “path of righteousness” where the Good Shepherd has led him in the Word (**Ps. 23:3**).
 - ✓ He stays on the pathway to righteousness because ***You Yourself have taught me***. When he opened or heard the Scriptures he understood that it was God talking. The double pronoun is emphatic — God and God alone (and no one else) has taught Him.
 - ✓ He heeds God’s Word because it is *God’s* Word. The infinite, eternal, omniscient, wise, and good God has commanded it, so the psalmist has followed the pathway set down by God.
- From these two verses we are reminded that it is good to know God’s Word, but life change and wisdom and joy only come when we know *and do* God’s Word. There is no benefit or joy to the one who knows and does not obey the Word (the NT word for those folks is “Pharisees” — they were trained in the lethal combination of knowledge and self-righteous rebellion).
- Love the Word of God enough to obey it — and then you will find joy, as the psalmist concludes...

4. Love God's Word by **HATING EVIL** (vv. 103-104)

- When the psalmist loved God's Word, meditated on that Word, and obeyed that Word, he discovered the benefit of joy — **how sweet are your words to my taste**. They were particularly palatable to him.
 - ✓ They were **sweeter than honey to my mouth**. The sweetest, most delightful, invigorating thing the psalmist could think of was honey. That's what Scripture was to him (cf. also 19:10).
 - ✓ The psalmist has ventured into life, applied the Scriptures to his life and conformed his actions to God's Word, and as he has meditated on the results, found sweetness, joy, and satisfaction.
 - ✓ There is no bitterness from his obedience to Christ. His obedience has not left him with the bitterness of regret. He is not sorrowful for his obedience.
 - ✓ That doesn't mean that the obedience will always be easy; but it does mean that obedience, when considered in light of God's Word, will leave one satisfied with God.

- The reason that God's Word is sweet to the psalmist is that **from Your precepts I get understanding**.
 - ✓ From the principles of God that dictate life, he gets what he needs to behave wisely.
 - ✓ And because he has understanding, **Therefore I hate every false way**. Mom always said it was bad to say "I hate..." But this one time it's good to hate. It's good to hate evil.
 - ✓ The evil he is speaking about here is **every false way** — it's any pathway that is a lie; it's any direction or course that leads one away from the truth. It doesn't matter how well-intentioned or how prosperous it seems; if it's a false way, hate it. And when you are tempted, tell yourself what it is: it's a pathway to evil. When you see an advertisement with an alluring woman, tell yourself, "That's the seductress of Prov. 5 — she's a prostitute who is leading men to death..." When you are told of the benefits of hiding money from the IRS, remind yourself of Romans 13, that God says you owe that money to the government and that the government is good for you. When you are tempted to speak or live a lie, remind yourself that the way of the transgressor is hard.
 - ✓ Friend, do you *hate* everything that is false and against God?
 - If not, it indicates that the Word of God has not shaped you as much as it can, because God and His Word hate every false way. If you are being conformed to this Word, then you will hate every false way as well.
 - That doesn't mean you will do it perfectly, but it does mean that you will hate the evil.
 - I am closer to the end of life than the beginning; I have been a pastor longer than some of you have been alive (that's humbling!). I can't begin to remember how many times I have counseled people or fought against one of my own sins. But in all these years of living and ministering, I have figured out one thing — no one will ever win the battle against sin if he does not hate his sin. I will only be victorious against sin when I love God and His Word more than I desire my sin; and when I love God, then I will also hate my sin.
 - If you and I are going to grow spiritually this year, it will take a love for God's Word and a hatred for sin. We won't grow or change until we hate what we do in the flesh.

- Let me add that if you are not a Christian, you can't love God's Word and hate sin. In fact, until you submit to Jesus' Christ's authority, you will love your sin and hate God's Word.
 - ✓ It may not look like you love your sin. You really may not like the consequences of your sin and because of that you really may be frustrated that you can't change yourself.
 - ✓ But the fact that you have been unwilling to submit to Christ means you are still loving and wanting your sin and not wanting Christ to be King of your life. Until you submit to Him, you are a hater of Him and incapable of loving Him.
 - ✓ If that is your condition this morning, I urge and compel you to come to this book and find the Words of life and hope. I read some of those life-giving words earlier (Rom. 3:23ff). The wages of your sin will only lead to death, but God's free gift is eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - ✓ Will you begin to trust Him today? Will you believe that He paid the penalty for your sin and can remove the power of sin in your life so you can live obediently for Him. There is nothing in life that will ever be more joyful and *sweet* (like honey!) than trusting in and living for Jesus.

CONCLUSION:

One thing I have not mentioned about this stanza — it is somewhat unique in that it makes no requests of God. Most of the other stanzas make some kind of petition of God, based on the psalmist's commitment to the Word and Him (e.g., vv. 73, 76-80, 82, 86, 94, 107, 108, 116-117). Here the psalmist makes no request, but he does make a commitment — he commits to love and delight in the Word of God and he commits to run away from every kind of evil.

Those two commitments lead to two questions for us today:

- Do you love the Word of God? Is it your delight and do you savor it for its sweetness?
- Do you hate evil and do you run from it?

This isn't just a sermon to say, "Read your Bible." That will help and that is the beginning point. But this really is a sermon to say,

- "Take in the Bible in a way that stimulates your love for it."
- "Run from and hate evil so that you can take in and love the Bible."

BENEDICTION: 1 Thess. 5:23-24