

The Word for Life

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[0 : 00] Well, let me begin with a question. How do you feel when the topic of Bible reading comes up? How do you feel when the topic of family devotions comes up?

Is it something that you're happy with, that you kind of feel a bit guilty about, something that comes naturally or not? I know for some of my kids, it's not their favorite part of the week or night.

Often they'll try and get out of it some way or other. Sometimes by making up names to Bible characters, like the last one was Bob the Baptist.

Can he baptize? Yes, he can. And actually, there was another one that was not, it was actually genuine, so I won't say that one. But of course, it's what I did with my parents.

I used to hide the Bible when it came to Bible devotions time at home. I would also, with my brothers, I would also suddenly have homework to do.

[1 : 00] It was the only time we preferred to do homework. Is that kind of feeling that it's like for you? You know you should, but you don't really want to.

In other words, do you delight in God's Word? I remember at an old church of buying, as soon as the preacher opened his mouth, you could hear an audible doot-doot as someone put his stopwatch.

Actually, it wasn't a stopwatch. It was a countdown timer. And so at the particular mark, the time went off. Everyone heard it. And it was his way of making sure that the preacher stopped talking. For this guy with the stopwatch or the timer, God's Word was not something he delighted in, but that he endured through. Yeah, we know we've got to have it, but as little as possible.

What is the highlight for you at church? Is it the hearing of God's Word, or is it another aspect of the service? Perhaps the community, the tea break, the singing, or something like that.

[2 : 04] In other words, do we delight in God's Word? So much so that even if it's hard to read and understand, we'll get help to do so. Even if it's a hot morning, we'll work hard to follow.

Do we delight in God's Word? Well, today's psalm is written to help us do that. But let me give you two bits of background first. Firstly, about the psalm.

It's written all about God's Word. But God's Word is mentioned in almost every verse of the psalm. But the psalmist uses eight different terms to describe God's Word. So if you've got your Bibles open, you can see some of them there.

Verse 1, he says, according to the law, the Torah of the Lord. So that's one word. Verse 2, you've got statutes. Verse 4, you've got precepts.

Verse 5, decrees. Verse 6, commands. Verse 7, laws, plural, which is actually a different word. Judgments or God's decisions, where he decides one day he will punish the wicked and he will restore his people.

[3 : 12] Those kind of decisions. Then verse 9, you've got just the word, word. And then later on, you've also got promise. These are eight different terms, but they're all describing God's Word.

But it's as though our psalmist loves God's Word so much, he wants to cover every little aspect of it, lest he miss anything out. And the psalm itself is actually an acrostic poem where each stanza or paragraph is based on a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

So if you look underneath Psalm 119 there, can you see the little X in your Bibles? That's the Hebrew letter Aleph. It's their A. And every verse in that paragraph or that stanza, we can't see it in English, but in the original Hebrew, every verse would have started with Aleph.

And then he moves on to the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which looks like Beth, but it's pronounced Bet and Gimel and Daleth and so on. Even the poem, even the psalm itself is structured around words or letters.

And there is 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, which means there's 22 stanzas and each one has eight verses, 22 times eight.

[4 : 28] Anyone? Just look at the end, 176 verses. This is long. And so you'll be glad to know we're not looking at it all today.

But the second bit of background is about the psalmist himself. He's one of God's people who describes himself 13 times as your servant. But people around him have wandered from God's law, like in verse 21.

And so now he feels like a stranger on earth, verse 19. And what's more, he was afflicted with some sort of sickness in the past, but now he's afflicted with persecution in the present.

The persecution takes the form of lies, but either way, there are people out to get him. In other words, the psalmist lives in a hostile world. And not too dissimilar to our world today, where people will smear Christians and be intolerant of them, and some even out to get them.

And yet this psalmist still delights in God's word, come what may. And so that brings us to the first point and one of the big themes of the psalm.

[5 : 37] Now, his delight for God's word is seen in four ways, and you've got those in your outline. Firstly, he just simply says it. And we're going to have to jump around a bit because we can't cover all 176 verses.

So have a look at verse 14 in your Bibles there. Notice how he describes his attitude to God's word. He says, I rejoice in following your statutes.

Then verse 16, just a bit below. I delight in your decrees, he says. On the right-hand side of the page, bottom right-hand corner there, verse 47, he says again, I delight in your commands because I love them.

On the next slide, I think it is, verse 111, further on in the psalm, he says, Your statutes are my heritage forever. They are the joy of my heart.

In other words, throughout the whole psalm, he says he delights in God's word. And this means then that he values God's word.

[6 : 46] So back in verse 14, he says, I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in what? Great riches.

He's equating God's word with great riches. That's how valuable they are. Or on the next slide, another verse from later on, verse 103, How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Honey's pretty sweet, right? The Bible's sweeter. Verse 72 on the screen there as well. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver, and in case that's not enough, and gold.

You see, he delights in God's word so much so that he values his Bible more than his bank balance. I wonder how many of us could say that. Thirdly, his delight for God's word also drives him to meditate on God's word.

Meditation in the Bible is not the yoga style of meditation where you empty your mind. Meditation in scripture is about filling your mind with God's word. Thinking about it.

[7 : 56] Pondering it. And so again, corner right hand side of your page, verse 48. He says, I reach out for your commands, which I love, because he loves them and he reaches out for them, that I may meditate on your decrees.

You see, because he delights in God's word, he wants to meditate, ponder it, think through it as well. Or verse 97, which is on the side as well. Oh, how I love your law, I meditated on it all day long.

And I think that means he has no job and all he does is read the Bible all day. I think it means that he ponders it from time to time throughout his day. But you see, his delight for God's word drives him to meditate on it, to chew it over, to think about it.

And not just to think about it, but also, fourthly, to follow it, to obey it. His delight for God's word means he's determined to obey it. In verse 8 of our reading, it says, I will obey your decrees. That's how determined he is. His role, I will do it. Or verse 16 again, I delight in your decrees. And because he delights in them, what's he going to do the next line?

[9 : 10] Therefore, I will not neglect your word. You see, he delights in God's word, so he's determined to keep it as well. This continues throughout the whole psalm. So on the next slide, 112, he says, My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.

Now, it's not as though he is oblivious to the fact that he's a sinner. He knows he needs God's help to keep these things. And so throughout the psalm, we also see him asking for God's help. Like in verse 12 of our reading, Praise be to you, Lord. Teach me your decrees. Help me to understand it, not just with my head, but then live it out with my heart.

In fact, he says 11 times through this psalm, Teach me. Or over in verse 18, the top of the next column of verse 18, he asks God, Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. What a great thing to pray before you start reading the Bible. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your word. But the point here is that throughout the psalm, he's not just determined to obey God's word, but he prays for God's help to do it.

[10:26] So in verse 102 on the next slide, I think, thanks, Tina. He says, I have not departed from your laws. Why? Well, for, because you, God, you yourself have taught me.

We cannot accept, be convicted by, live out God's word apart from God's help. Or 171, May my lips overflow with praise.

Why? Well, for you teach me your decrees. He delights in his word, so it's valuable. He meditates on it, and he's determined to obey it with God's help.

My dad loves tennis. So this time of year is paradise for him and a nightmare for my mother. But he delights in tennis so much so that it's more valuable than any other sport.

It's the only sport he watches. It's the only sport he plays. And because he delights in it, he thinks about it, ponders it, thinks about who's around, who he can line up with, another game, who's back from holidays.

[11:30] When can we put another game on? What's the weather like? In fact, he even keeps a tennis racket, a spare tennis racket, in the boot of his car, just in case the opportunity arises.

And he's determined to follow every game. And so if he knows he's going out, he'll record them. In fact, when we were visiting at Christmas time, he was recording them just in case he had to go out, even though he was at home.

But you get the parallel, don't you? God's word is like that. The psalmist delights in it so much that he values it above all else, sweeter than honey, better than money. He meditates or thinks about it during the day, and he's determined to follow every word of it with God's help.

Why? Why is he so wrapped up with God's word? Why does he value it even more than his bank balance? Well, because God's word is what enables him to live the blessed life, the happy life in a hostile world.

And here we come to the second point and the second big theme that works its way throughout the psalm. So have a look, come back to the beginning of the psalm, verses one to three. He says, blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord.

[12:46] Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. They do no wrong, but follow his ways. And now these three verses here are the only verses in the whole psalm that are not directed to God.

They kind of stand out at the beginning like a statement of fact. And they also sound like Psalm 1, which we looked at a few weeks ago. Both psalms speak about delighting God's word and about the blessed life.

Only Psalm 119 is like that on steroids. It just kind of expands on those two themes. But the word blessed here means happy in a sense of contentment and peace.

Of course, our world thinks happiness is found in wealth and health. That's how you get happy, isn't it? But the problem is, those things never last, do they? I mean, wealth goes much quicker than it comes in, doesn't it?

Or is that just my house? Is that your house too? Health is up and down. And unfortunately, as you get older, it seems to be more down than up. And so lasting happiness, happiness based on those things cannot last because those things themselves don't last.

[13:57] But happiness based on a life with God can last because he is constant. He's always there. And so the contentment, the peace in God is constant and is always there on offer.

What's more, we were actually created for life with God. And one of the great heroes of the early church was a guy called Augustine, depending on how you pronounce it. And he said this on the next slide. He said, praying to God, you have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.

You see what he's saying? We've been made for life with God. And until we find life with God, our hearts will always be restless. We'll never find lasting contentment.

And it's why non-Christians have to keep looking for happiness in different places because the first place they go to, it doesn't last very long. And then they've got to look for another place and then another place. Rather true happiness, true blessedness, that lasting contentment and peace that is available through the ups and downs of life comes only with a relationship, a life with God.

Mark Tu mentioned a guy at our Doncaster Carol service last month, a guy on the next slide called Philip Ng.

[15:17] He's a property developer in Singapore. He and his brother, their net worth is \$12 billion. And yet he became a Christian. Why?

Well, look at what he wrote on the next slide. He says, I was always in search of a better life, a better purpose, a better me, a better everything, happiness.

But I was just looking in all the wrong places. What I've discovered is that we are all broken. We all have a piece missing. For me, I discovered that missing piece was God through Jesus Christ.

This guy had it all and he still wasn't happy because he was created like us for life with God. And then he found contentment, peace, when he trusted in Jesus.

How about this? Life with God comes from the word of God. So come back to verse one. Look there. See verse one again. Blessed are those whose ways are blameless who walk according to the word of the Lord.

[16:22] Or verse two, blessed are those who keep his statutes. You see, this blessedness comes from God's word, doesn't it? God's word is what brings this blessed life.

For it's God's word that makes us his people in the first place. And for us, it's God's word in Christ, the gospel, the good news that Jesus died and rose again so that we can be forgiven and given life with God as one of his people.

But God's word then enables us to live out that blessed life, to experience that happiness, that contentment, even in a hostile world.

In other words, God's word keeps us trusting in God in whom we find contentment. Imagine two people going for surgery. Both are Christian. Both are very anxious.

but one of them remembers to read their Bible and reads Philippians 4 verse 6. Do not be anxious about anything. Do you remember this one? But in everything by prayer and petition, present your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

[17:36] The other one forgets to read the Bible. Which one do you think is going to have more chance of being at peace and content even facing surgery? Let me say I've seen both at this church.

God's word helps us to enjoy the blessed life that Christ has brought for us you see. And it does that by helping us to walk with God without sin. I'm going to move a bit quicker now so have a look at verses 5 and following.

The psalmist now cries out Oh that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees. He wants to obey God's word. Why? Well verse 6 Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commandments.

In other words as I think about your laws I'm not going to be ashamed that I've messed them all up and broken them all because I've obeyed your word. It's kept me safe and it's protected me from shame.

Indeed it's given me a clear conscience verse 7 I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your righteous decrees. God's word God's word helps us to live God's way so that we don't need to feel shame or guilt but it gives us a clear conscience and that might not sound like much but shame often takes happiness doesn't it?

[18:55] Even if we do have wealth and health it can take happiness away from us. A year and a half ago a Melbourne writer who writes for The Age ABC I think the Sydney Morning Herald as well this is him on the next slide Ben Pajobi I can't pronounce his last name but he wrote this this is what he said on the next slide in an article he said I was burning all over with embarrassment my body felt like it was coming apart at the seams breaking up like a submarine that had dived too deep under the pressure of the shame and guilt of what I had done the trouble I had caused it was shame that had driven me to declare my desire to end my life now I'm not exactly sure what he did he just says he didn't feel good enough but God's word protects us from that shame especially God's word

in Christ for starters it reminds us that we don't have to be good enough for God because Jesus was he died for us instead there's always forgiveness for those who trust in Christ what's more God's word in Christ also reminds us we are of great worth we are God's dearly loved people or as John said before we've been made in his image and so God's word not only protects us from doing dumb things that will bring shame but it also reminds us when we do do dumb things that there is forgiveness that once God forgives us he forgets it slates wipe clean sadly Ben has not found Christ and so he wrote in his article I don't think I will ever stop feeling that shame God's word not only keeps us from shame it also leads us in holiness so verse 9 how can a young man he's talking about himself say on the path of purity well by living according to your word I seek you with all my heart do not let me stray from your commands I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you here he's as I said he's talking about himself so these verses still apply to old men young women older women and he's saying how do I stay on the path of purity how do I stay in holiness the answer verse 9 by living according to your word it's pretty straightforward isn't it remember the memory verse does anyone remember the memory verse I've got some Freddo frogs at home I think your word is a light to my I can't even remember it but it's just that's that idea isn't it your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path it helps us to walk the path of purity that's what he's talking about here and not just that but also even grow in our relationship with God so that we can keep enjoying the blessed life and notice verse 10 he says I seek you with all my heart and what does that mean well do not let me stray from your commands seeking God with all his heart means not straying from his commands see same thing verse 2 blessed are those who keep his statutes keep his word and seek him with all their heart do you see what he's saying there to seek God with all our hearts is to read and keep his word now I realise at HCD we go on a bit about the Bible but one of the best insults I've ever heard about us was from another minister at a church not too far from us some people had moved down to Melbourne for work some of you might even remember these guys they've since had to move back to Sydney for work but we went to the first church they came to they went to another church first which didn't use the Bible that much and so this couple I think pretty politely just asked about do you use the Bible much the minister became a bit indignant about it and in a tone of disgust this is apparently what they told me he said oh if you really want a church that goes on about the Bible you should go to Holy Trinity Doncaster best insult ever it's a compliment isn't it now we mustn't let it go to our heads especially because it's only by God's grace we like that but you see the reason we do go on a bit about the Bible is not because we worship it as sometimes we've been accused of actually it's because it enables us to worship the God who speaks it it's what enables us to seek God with all our heart that we might grow in our relationship with him that we might know him more deeply please him more fully and so God's word helps us to walk with God without sin to enjoy the blessed life that he's won for us in Christ but it also helps us to sustain our faith in God despite suffering so have a look at verse 17 he says be good to your servant while I live that I may obey your word open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law notice verse 19 I'm a stranger on earth and so do not let your commands be a stranger to me and then verse 20 my soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all time why well there there are arrogant who are a curse those who are strayed from your commands remove from me their scorn and contempt this is the persecution for I have kept your statutes though rulers that is leaders and princes sit together and slander me your servant will meditate on your decrees your statutes are my delight they are my counsellors you see our psalmist is suffering as a stranger in this world how people are slandering him lying about him persecuting him out to get him and yet he longs for God's word verse 20 why well verse 24 because God's word is his delight and his counsellor just like a counsellor reassures their patience and helps them to persevere so too God's word reassures him and helps him to persevere and this is not true for us [25 : 07] I mean I remember around the time when there's Christians were getting a lot of flack on social media around the vote time think Margaret court all that sort of stuff we happen to be working through the book of Daniel in the Bible and the book of Daniel reminds us that God is in control of all kingdoms that there's no kingdom lasts forever kingdoms come kingdoms go but God's kingdom lasts forever and I remember a number of people saying to me how encouraged they were how reassured they were that despite what was happening out in society with Christians God's still in control God's word was like a counsellor to them you see reassuring them encouraging them

similarly God's word also comforts us in our suffering so on the next slide verse 50 I think it is now keep going we don't have time for that verse 50 it says my comfort in my suffering is this your promise preserves my life the arrogant mock me unmercifully but I do not turn from your law I remember Lord your ancient judgments and I find comfort in them see as he reads God's word he's reminded of

God's promises his judgments his decisions never to leave them nor forsake them and to one day punish the wicked and restore his people and it brings him comfort and this is true not just for suffering and persecution but for all suffering I've conducted more funerals than I'd like to I mean one funeral is one too many but God's word gives genuine comfort if they are Christians comfort of knowing we will see our loved ones in Christ again and the comfort of knowing that God knows suffering himself firsthand in Christ the comfort of knowing that God is still with us and will help us and while it is still hard God's word offers genuine comfort that helps us trust God through it to keep finding some sort of contentment even though it's hard I mean it's why I don't know about you but I know lots of Christians who have suffered greatly and yet somehow continue to be content to smile I remember one lady who passed away last year constant pain can't feed herself couldn't walk couldn't go to the toilet by herself walk in she smiled how are you going yeah today's alright how could she say that because when I walked in she was always reading the Bible which reminded her about God's promises you see and God's word not only counsels us and comforts us it also renews us so on the next slide verse 54 he says your statutes have been my song such that verse 62 at midnight I rise to praise you that sing because of your righteous rules or judgments God's word comforts them so much so that it renews him and he can even sing in the midst of his persecution last December they think they found the mass grave of those Christians who were beheaded back in 2015 I don't know on the next side yeah back one sorry Tina that was the image you might remember that image from a few years ago and do you remember at that time this is when ISIS was really kind of getting going it was reported that they not only kept their faith but they were singing songs to

Jesus how can you do that well they can do it because they knew God's word which spoke of the hope of glory to come and not only sustained their faith it even renewed their faith to the point of being able to sing praises to God not necessarily at midnight but worse at the point of their death you see God's word not only gives us the blessed life where we have a relationship with him but also then helps us to live out that life to enjoy the contentment on offer to enjoy the peace on offer if we trust in his word if we had more time I'd show you how his word provides hope for our life and guides us with wisdom in life but let me wrap up by asking you is God's word something you'll delight in this year because only God's word that will help you to live the blessed life is it something that you will value above all else this year is it something that you'll seek to meditate ponder read think about this year not once this year but regularly this year we've been given a blessed life in Christ

God is our father we have eternal life but God's word is what enables us to enjoy that reminds us to stay on the path keeps us from shame and guilt reminds us we have forgiveness when we do mess up encourages us comforts us counsels us if you are reading your Bible regularly then let today encourage you to keep doing so to keep delighting in it because you've been reminded of how good it is but if you struggle to read your Bible regularly then why not start with this Psalm Psalm 119 there's 22 paragraphs one a day there's 22 days I've also got some booklets of Bible readings based on Colossians they look like this they're just out in the welcome table you can grab one of those if you've only got five minutes a day take one minute to read eight verses four minutes to think to meditate we don't want to just read it and go tick done okay I feel good about myself now done my quiet time

[31 : 01] I'm godly off you go I know it's not how it works time to think about it and above all pray pray that God might open our eyes to see the wonderful things in his word and teach us to do it let me finish Martin Niemola I can't pronounce it right this guy on the screen who Graham Nichols one of our members actually met when he was younger in 1968 he was a German pastor who opposed Hitler at the time he was arrested and spent seven years in Dachau concentration camp the last four of those years were in solitary confinement before being set free by the allies in 1945 and this is what he wrote about the Bible in the next slide he says the word of God was simply everything to me comfort and strength guidance and hope my master by day my companion by night and solitary confinement ceased to be solitary that's what the word of God does for us

I'm glad very thankful concentration camps don't exist around here anymore but we do need to have the same view of God's word that he did and so let's pray that we might let's pray our gracious father we do thank you for your word we thank you that it equips us for every good work and it helps us to live out the blessed life you've won for us in Christ that like Martin we could even find contentment in a concentration camp because of your word our father we pray that you would help us to delight in it this year to value it above all to meditate upon it and with your help to follow it and to keep it we ask all this in Jesus name amen