

Word: Joy/Guide/Truth

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: 19 January 2019

Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. If you want to know where your heart is, look to where your mind goes when it wanders. Have you heard that kind of saying again? Let me read it again.

If you want to know where your heart is, look to where your mind goes when it wanders. Hopefully your mind isn't going there just yet. But have you heard this kind of overly sweet, kind of romantic type of comment?

They're really nice, but I don't think they're that helpful. Who knows where my mind goes when it wanders? Probably thinking about the cricket and how bad it is in this country at the moment. Maybe I'm thinking about the things I have to do when I get home. Maybe about the long list of things I need to fix. It's a nice and pithy statement, but should this kind of comment really guide my future?

If I'm trying to figure out what I do, I don't think I should trust my wandering brain. So then, where is our heart?

[1 : 08] What brings us joy? And what should be our guide? If you don't know Jesus, you might not have any idea what should be bringing you joy and what should be your guide.

Maybe that's why you're here with us this morning. Maybe you've been going around in circles looking for joy and satisfaction and purpose, but you haven't found any.

Maybe you're checking out church and checking out Jesus to see if you can find that. Well, it is wonderful to have you today because Jesus does indeed bring joy.

And he does guide us and bring us purpose in our life. If you're a Christian here, I'm hoping you're thinking that kind of classic answer to the question, what brings you joy and guides you?

It's the question I hear answered by all the Sunday school kids on a Sunday morning. It's God, Jesus, Bible. It's going to be one of those and you remix them together. God is the one who satisfies you.

[2 : 09] God is the one who brings joy because he's the one that saved me. God is the one that guides me. But I fear that even for Christians, we know that God should be our joy.

We know that he should be our guide. But there are things that pull us away from God. Today, we're continuing in our series in the summer of Psalms.

And we've come to the longest Psalm in the Bible. It's the longest chapter in the Bible. But this chapter takes us to the very heart of this Psalmist.

We see his delight, his joy, and what guides his steps. It's a wonderful piece of poetry. I'm not a particular fan of poetry.

Is anybody here into poetry? I have got one. Can I get two? Three, four. Okay, wonderful. This is a wonderful piece of poetry. It's an acrostic poem.

[3 : 09] Can someone tell me what an acrostic poem is? Yes, this man down the front. Gary, yes. Yeah, you nailed it, brother.

So this chapter is broken up into 22 sections. There's 22 chapters within this chapter. And each of the first lines starts with the same letter.

So the first one is Aleph or A. And every letter, every first word, starts with that same letter. And it goes all the way through. And it's really clever and poetic and wonderful.

And it has one consistent theme. God's word. The author uses many different words to describe this theme. He uses precepts, commands, word, law.

And they're mostly synonymous. And this author shows us a meditation on why he needs God's word. This psalm is going to challenge us today to read our Bibles.

[4 : 14] It's not going to nag us. It's not just going to be me standing up here for 25-odd minutes saying, read your Bibles. I'm not going to convince you to try and do this.

But the psalmist reveals why we should read the Bible. Why we should prioritize it. Why we should get up early and read it. Why we should not watch that extra TV show that just comes on automatically with Netflix, which is both a blessing and a curse.

But we should go to bed early to read the Bible. And this is because God's word is a joy. Because God's word is our guide. So let me pray as we jump into this.

Dear Heavenly Father, as we come before your word this morning, give us an open heart to understand what your word truly is to us.

That it is amazing that you speak to us and help us to find joy from reading your word together, Lord. Amen. So one of the reoccurring themes in this psalm is the psalmist's love and delight in God's word.

[5 : 23] It's a little bit like, is it Marie Kondo? Marie Kondo? Has anybody heard of the... What's her name, Sam? Marie Kondo? She's the Japanese decluttering expert.

She's got a new show on Netflix. And she goes into people's houses and says, Get rid of your things if it doesn't spark joy. Okay? So, you know, you find something.

Does this spark joy? Yes, it sparks joy. So I'll keep this. This doesn't spark joy. Throw it away. And it's fascinating. But for the psalmist, he grabs God's word and all of it sparks joy.

He doesn't want to get rid of any of God's word, even the tough stuff. The psalmist says in verse 97, Oh, how I love your law.

I meditate on it all day long. Verse 103, how sweet are your words to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth. Verse 112, my heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.

[6 : 29] This is a man who deeply meditates on God's word. He devours it. It's more satisfying than the sweetest thing they had, which was honey. You know, for us, it's sweeter than a Krispy Kreme donut.

I've had a couple too many of them lately, and they're very sweet. But the fact here is, is God, he is a God who loves his people.

He speaks, and it brings immeasurable joy. Our God is not mute. He is not a silent statue. He is not a dead person or ancestor to be worshipped.

All of these cannot respond. This is the God who has crafted and made a universe. He is still involved with it. He saves it, and he speaks to it.

It is amazing. And the psalmist rejoices in his words, in his law. He rejoices, and he loves God's law. Could we do that?

[7 : 31] Sure, we could say that we rejoice in Jesus. We rejoice in God. We love God. We're thankful that Jesus died for us, that he brought us salvation and forgiveness.

He's shown us God's grace. We could even sing that old song, which is going to date me a little bit. I'll see if you can finish it. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice.

That wasn't too bad. That was fine, I suppose. That old song, rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say, rejoice. But the psalmist is not just rejoicing in God.

He's rejoicing and being satisfied with God's word. I saw a good quote recently about God's word. The way we treat the word of God is the way we treat the God of the word.

The way we treat the word of God is the way we treat the God of the word. Well, if we want to know how we treat God, what does our relationship look like with God, a really good indicator for us is how we treat his word.

[8 : 41] Do we listen intently to God's word? Are we deaf to parts of it that we don't like? Like any good relationship, it's built on good communication.

I saw an image that illustrates what a breakdown in communication looks like. It'll come up on the screen. You never listen to me. You only hear what you want to hear.

Yeah, sure, I'll have a beer. It's selective listening. It's bad communication. Does anybody have selective listening in their household? Trying not to look at the parents.

Maybe it's not just parents. Maybe it's husbands and wives finding the same thing. But we shut out voices that we don't like. So how do we treat God?

That quote again, the way we treat the word of God is the way we treat the God of the word. Here at church, we really value Christ-centered Bible saturation.

[9 : 43] We read the Bible every week. We've read it twice today. We sing songs that have the Bible. We read the Bible in community groups. And it shows how much we value it.

Imagine if that husband and wife flipped their relationship. If the husband was actually listening to his wife. She would know how much he loved and appreciated her. It is clear that this psalmist loves God. God is what his heart is set on. God is the one who satisfies him like honey.

Because the very words he speaks, he listens intently. They are a delight to him. It's still about the middle of January.

Many of us would have started a New Year's resolution to read the Bible. Maybe we started in Genesis. Maybe it's been going well for the 20 or so days.

[10:42] Genesis is quite interesting. But what happens when we get to Leviticus? What happens when we get to Deuteronomy? You know, the law. How easy do we find delighting in God's word?

I think one of our issues is that we are overfed. And we become fat with God's word. And we don't appreciate what we have.

If you can cast your minds back about a month to Christmas. Did any of us eat too much over Christmas? I know I certainly did. I can see some young people being honest.

Thank you, brother. Christmas, it gets to the point where food is just no longer delicious. And you're sitting there and there's this giant ham in front of you.

And it's just like, well, it's Christmas, so I'll have my fourth serving of ham. And someone next to you, maybe your husband or wife, you know, puts the elbow in and says, Why are you having that?

[11:45] You don't need that. And it's just, well, it's there. It's not really nourishing me at this point. It's not bringing me joy. It's not satisfying.

It's just there. After my fourth bowl of Christmas pudding and ice cream, I forget how amazing and delightful it is. And it's just going into the face.

But to a starving person, desperate for any morsel or crumb, any small piece of bread, regardless of how stale it is, is an absolute delight to the senses.

Psalms 119, verse 103, How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

How are we going delighting in God's word to us, loving and being joyful?

Because the God who is so distant and far from us has made himself known. But not only that, he speaks to us. He makes himself known. And he talks to us, his creation.

[12:54] Is it possible we need to take a step back and to appreciate how privileged we are that God speaks to us? Of how starved we really are of God's word and how in need we are.

To realize that in our country we have it easy. We've got Bibles everywhere. They don't have to be smuggled into our country. How would our relationship change to God and to God's word if we fully understood the gift that we had in our Bibles and in our phones that we carry around with us every day?

God's word and the way we treat it reflects our relationship with God. It shows whether our joy and delight is in him. The second theme from this psalm is that God guides and teaches us through his word.

The psalmist paints an image here that God is a counselor. He is a guide. And he puts the psalmist on the right path. And he's better than any earthly guide.

Have a look from verse 97 with me. I'm going to read this whole letter. Oh, how I love your law. I meditate on it all day long.

[14:15] Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.

I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me.

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth. I gain understanding from your precepts, therefore I hate every wrong path.

This is an awesome picture of God's teaching being better than any other. God makes the psalmist wiser than any elder. He's better than any philosopher or teacher.

Even at school or university, God is wiser. And the psalmist knows how to follow God in the midst of a world that is against God.

[15:17] He knows how to avoid going down evil paths because God's word is a guide. And then we have the most famous line from this psalm, verse 105.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. The ancient world didn't have lights like we do.

They didn't all have an iPhone, a Samsung, a Huawei phone in their pocket. They could just come out and flick the torch on. They carried little clay dishes which had oil and a wick in them.

And the light from it illuminated their feet and their step. There will be a picture here. Imagine it's pitch black outside. There's no moon to light the path to the toilet outside.

And you've got this little clay dish. It fits in your hand. You can see there's a little wick. There's a little bit of oil. And there's a very small light. And what does it show?

[16:21] It shows your feet. And it shows one step ahead. God's word is a lamp to my feet. Literally feet.

It's a light for the path ahead. But we don't see the whole route. We see one step at a time. God's word is not a high-powered, you know, kangaroo-spotting, shoulder-mounted torch to see, you know, a kilometer in the distance.

It doesn't shoot down the pathway of light and go, this is every step that you have to take in the next 50 years of following God. God's word to us shows us a picture of what the future will be like.

That God is in control. That we'll be with him. That he has an eternity for us who follow him. But it doesn't point out every single step of the way.

We walk following God one step at a time. Each act of obedience shows us the next step.

[17:29] And the next step. It's not much light, but it is trustworthy. It does not run out of oil. It does not run out of battery. Jesus, when he was tempted by Satan, is a wonderful illustration of how the word of God is an awesome guide.

If you remember the scene, Jesus has been starving for 40 days and 40 nights. And Satan comes to him at the end. And Jesus, human, is hungry.

I can imagine how I get after four hours. Jesus had been there for 40 days. He was hungry. And the devil turns up to tempt him. And he says, come on, if you're really God, turn this stone into bread.

He's tempted with a physical, fleshly desire. And where does Jesus turn? He goes back to God's word to light his path. No, I don't need to satisfy my physical cravings.

He quotes Deuteronomy to him. What we might find a particularly difficult book to read. Tested by the devil to see if God is again faithful. Jesus goes back to his guide and defense.

[18:45] I don't need to prove anything. And he quotes Deuteronomy again. Finally, the devil says, I'll give you everything if you just bow down to me. Trying to get Jesus to take the easy path of ruling the world.

Jesus doesn't give in to the prideful and easy option. But again, Deuteronomy is his guide and defense. God's word is readily available as his defense.

And it guides Jesus out of temptation. It is easy in one sense to say, go, read God's word, follow him, follow like Jesus.

But it can be really difficult not knowing what's ahead. If we are in a painful season of life, a season of loneliness, a season of despair, it can be hard following God, not knowing what is ahead.

Being guided and satisfied with his word that says, I'm enough, I'm your joy. It can be hard when we don't know what our position in life is.

[19:58] We can hear in one word, you know, God says, I love you, you are my child. But when we are in a season of despair, it can feel tough. There can be a struggle when we don't know what the next year will hold for us, let alone the next day.

Following God means that God is in control. And we won't always know what's ahead. It is tempting to go in the opposite direction. Instead of following God with that very small light, I'm going to turn around and I'm going to use a high beam torch to chase my own desires.

Because do you know what? I can set my own path away from God. To follow God is to trust that he knows the path ahead for us.

That God knows what he has in store. Against that bright light of satisfying our own desires. Because it's easier when we are in control.

God has given us his word to use as a guide for the path ahead. But we are not in control. God doesn't always say, these are the exact next 35 steps you need to take in life.

[21:13] Buy this house. Marry this person. Get this job. Eat this for breakfast. First, more often than not, God will say, I'm in control.

Trust me. I know it's scary. But this is the way to go. If we know God's word like Jesus, it will show how much we value God.

And he will help guide us. Now, I could stop there. I could stop there saying, you know, know God's word. Delight in God's word.

Know God's word so that he can guide you in those tough seasons. I could stop there. We could think, yes, I've got some things to work on. I'm going to go home and meditate on God's word. I've been challenged and encouraged. You know, new year, new me. I'm going to read God's word a bit more. Great. But there is something that can get in the way. Something we may not even be aware of.

[22 : 13] It's the air that we live and breathe in here in Sydney. It's the cultural phenomenon of being post-truth. Have you heard this term, post-truth?

It was the Oxford Dictionary's word of the year in 2016. I wasn't even really aware that they had their favorite word. How do you decide which word of the year is?

But the Oxford Dictionary defines it as this. Objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

So post-truth is where personal preferences and emotions shape our opinions more than facts. Objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal beliefs. You only have to think about the US President, Donald Trump, and his war against fake news.

[23 : 15] Here's one of his many, many tweets. The fake news media is officially out of control. They will do or say anything in order to get his attention. Never been a time like this.

I thought about trying to do his accent, but I'm glad I didn't. Nick will do it for us later. Don't worry.

So Trump, you know, the aim of good reporting is that it reports truth, objective truth.

But there's a line been drawn now between news and fake news. Fake news is anything I don't like. It's not unlike those many magazines that we see, men and women's magazines, but they seem to craft fictional stories about celebrities dating or breaking up.

You know, they have the hot goss on the latest, you know, royal marriage or, you know, this person's pregnant. But a lot of it is, it's post-truth.

They're creating stories. And so we live in a post-truth age where truth is true as long as it fits me.

[24 : 21] That is true if I like it and it fits my personal preferences. If the evidence fits what I already believe and what I want to believe, then it's good. If I see evidence for something that doesn't fit my preferences, well, it's offensive.

And I'm against that and you're wrong. We let our desires and our feelings decide what our version of truth is. And then we pick and choose the facts to support us.

I've recently started using Twitter a little bit more. Does anybody use Twitter? Yeah, yeah. Well, we've got, you know, one man who's all about Twitter. I really like it.

I really like seeing what my favorite cricket players are talking about, what my favorite TV and movie celebrities are going on about. I've realized one of the reasons why I enjoy it is because I can carefully curate what I want to see.

I only see things from people that I like. And I only hear from voices that I want to hear from. So I'm not seeing any celebrities who have a different opinion to me.

[25 : 34] It's just the ones that I like. No wonder I like it so much. No wonder I'm not going to make any comments about our dear brother Jacob and why he likes it. Facebook's a bit more hit and miss because Facebook is about what my, you know, friends believe.

And so they're going to put on different things. But Twitter, it's a little bit more about what I believe. And what it can easily do is create this thing called confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias is where I see articles that confirm what I believe. Okay, so I believe that, let's go with, what's something, bacon is good for you.

Can I get an amen? Amen? No. Let's see, I believe, I want to eat a lot of bacon. And so I'm going to believe that bacon is good for me.

And then whenever I see an article that says bacon's good for me, I'm like, yes. Pork fat has recently been in the news that it's a superfood. So I'm going to believe that. And then if I see an article that says bacon's bad for you, I'm just going to ignore that.

[26 : 42] Confirmation bias. I'll believe the things that suit my preferences. On Twitter, I can just engage with people that agree with me. In life, I can just engage with people that agree with me,

friends who are like me.

It is easy for us to let our feelings and desires take over and usurp the truth. Whether this is on Twitter, whether this is talking with people in our lives, only reading the newspaper about things that I agree on, our preferences and our emotions cloud the truth.

The problem for us is that I've made two very strong truth claims. First, we should delight in God's word.

And second, God's word should be our guide. These are both big truth claims. It would be easy for us to chop and change and take parts out of the Bible that don't delight us.

Maybe we'll just end up with the parts of the Bible that we like, the parts about love and forgiveness and joy. And we're going to cut out all those things about wrath. But if we cut out those parts, we'll miss seeing God's wrath, but also God's grace and love at the same time.

[28 : 07] We can't make sense of the cross if we don't understand the consequence for sin. If we read the Bible in a post-truth way, we won't let God's word be our guide.

We'll just pick and choose the parts that already support my view. Jesus clarifies all of this for us when he says in John 14, There is only one truth, that God has made the world.

He is sovereign over it. And he is known in only one way, and that's through his son who died so that we could be brought into God's family.

It doesn't really matter how we feel about this. Our emotions don't change this truth because Jesus says he is truth. So regardless of how we feel about Jesus, he is still God's son, he still loves us, and he still died for us.

So for us to go anywhere, we need to submit to God's truth. We need to submit to God. The post-truth mindset comes out of a selfish desire to be in control so that we're not ruled by other people.

[29 : 35] I'm going to ignore that evidence. I want to eat this food, so I'm going to ignore that. I can see how Donald Trump is doing that. He doesn't want to have people contradicting him.

I can see how I do that myself. I don't want to read this part of the Bible because it disagrees with me and how I want to live my life. It speaks hard truth to me.

I had a situation recently where I was trying hard to block out the truth of God's word to me. About six weeks ago, we bought a new TV.

There was the Black Friday sales in our country for some reason. I'm not really sure why we have Thanksgiving sales. We have this new tradition brought in by the Americans.

But Alyssa and I bought a new TV for Christmas. It was one of those OLED TVs, very fancy, and I loved it very, very much. You can probably see where this is going.

[30 : 32] Hopefully not. And my dear son, one of my sons who I love very much, while I was out, I was at the gym and I came back home and we were about to go to visit another church last Sunday morning.

And the time was about, no, I don't remember that much detail. And I came home and there's my very good wife standing at the door saying, one of your sons has done something. Micah has done something.

It's very bad. Everything's okay, but something's happened. And Micah likes to hit things. And he had taken a knife sharpener.

You know those really thick, heavy blocks of steel that you sharpen your knives with? And they make that great noise. Shing, shing. He'd taken one of those and in an effort to gain attention, because that's what we all do, in an effort to gain attention, he'd taken it to the TV.

You're starting to feel my pain. That's good. That's good. And he'd put an almighty crack in it. And modern TVs, the way they are, they're very fragile.

[31 : 41] And it stopped working. So I came home and my good wife confronted me with this news and I just tried to block it out. No, we've got to go to the, we're going to church. So we went to church.

The next day, I call up Panasonic in the repair center and the guy said, it's going to cost more to fix it than to buy a new one.

And so I've got this wonderful paperweight now that is worth nothing. And all the while, I was feeling so much pain. This thing I love is gone.

This thing I spent money on, a fair chunk of cash, it is destroyed. And all the while, I've got ringing in the back of my head, is this an idol?

What do you really value? Do you really love me and love my son who died for me? Or do you love this pretty TV? Is Jesus really the thing that brings you joy?

[32 : 46] Does my word bring you joy? Is it sweeter than honey? Or is it just this thing you devour with your eyes? And do you know what? I tried hard not to listen.

to God because because it was an issue. But this was me trying to shut out God's word and think that my truth that this thing is valuable was more important than what God says is valuable.

We need to submit to God and that means submitting to the truth that His word is the way that He speaks to us. So let's go back to that first quote that we started today with.

If you want to know where your heart is, look to where your mind goes when it wanders. I don't think that was a very good quote so let's change that.

If you want to know where your heart should be, look to the one who guides it in His word. If you want to know where your heart should be, where your joy is found, look to the one who guides it in His word.

[34 : 00] That is our Lord, that is our God who speaks to us. Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we live in a time where truth has become movable, where we believe things dependent upon our desires.

remind us that Jesus is truth. That He helps us to see the world for what it really is. Lord, please help us to delight in Your words to us, to store them deep in our hearts so that when times of testing or question come, that You would guide us, Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.