

PSALM 119 – DUTY TO DELIGHT

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Scripture: Psalm 119

Today, I'm going to preach from your favorite psalm. This is a psalm that you always like to memorize, a psalm that you probably know by heart. Some of you even pass over it sometimes. I'm talking of Psalm 119. That's what the Lord placed on my heart, and so I grudgingly got into it. But boy, did it transform me! I started reading it. It has 176 verses, and takes about 15-20 minutes to read – a little more if you pause and really take into account everything that's being written.

It's an acrostic psalm. In other words, the Hebrew alphabet from *aleph* to *tey* is followed. The psalm is divided into 22 sections of 8 verses each, and each section starts with a successive alphabet. That is why it's called an acrostic psalm.

And as I started reading, I found that there was so much wisdom in each of those eight-verse sections. I started noting down things that grabbed my attention, going through all the 176 verses. Then I looked to see if there were themes, and I found 6 or 7 themes that stood out in such stark relief. And the one thing that I felt impressed upon me to focus on today was the psalmist's delight for the word of God.

That's where we need to be – that we need to move from duty to delight as we look at the word of God. Sometimes we do our reading in the morning and then say: "Okay. Let me get this done so I can move on. Finish my 2 chapters and then I'm all set. I've done my reading for the day." And the psalmist is saying "No. Those 2 chapters must make you want to read 3 chapters. There must be a delight to what is going on as read this chapter."

I felt that's what we need to be focusing on. That's where the Lord was leading me. He wants us to delight in His precious word, not read it grudgingly. Not say: "Okay. I'll just finish what I can this morning and then head off." But to spend time and to enjoy it. Because the word is life; it's life-giving.

We spent some time, about eight weeks at the start of this year, in going through prayer. If you remember, the last sermon I preached was on prayer, 'Moving in from duty to delight', that we didn't pray because we needed to pray, but prayed because we wanted to prayer, because it was a delightful experience. And I feel that that's the same today. That God is taking us to Psalm 119 and saying, "That's the transformation that I want in My church. I don't want it to be a drudgery. I want you to be excited about My word."

So, we're going to get into Psalm 119 and look and see how we can move it from duty to delight. Let's start with verse 97.

v. 97 *"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day."*

Did you hear that? He doesn't say I tolerate Your law. He says, "I love it." And obedience shouldn't be a chore. It should flow out of a heart of joy.

And the deep emotional love for God's word is woven throughout the psalm. Let me give you a sampling.

v. 127. *"I love Your commandments more than gold."*

vs. 119 and 140. *"Your testimonies I love."*

v. 165. *"Great peace have those who love Your law."*

v. 162. *"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure."*

HOW DO WE MOVE FROM DUTY TO DELIGHT?

I think the more fundamental question must be: Do we have a duty at all? We can't get to delight if we don't have a duty. So the foundational question that we need to ask ourselves is: Do we get into the word at all? How much of the word do you read every day? Do you read it at all? God's word for His children. Do we, His children, treasure His word? Read it every day? Because without that sense of duty that I need to do this, delight is never going to happen. There needs to be a sense of discipline. We start with discipline and it ends up in delight.

Just like watching the 100-meter sprint. You may love it. but liking it doesn't make you a sprinter. I know I may not even be able to finish the 100-meter sprint – all the gasping that I will do. Why? because I am not trained. I don't have a discipline to train my body to run that 100-meter sprint. But the one who sprints and finishes, the joy on their faces! After some time, that 5 o'clock waking up, all the egg flips that they had to drink even though they didn't like it, has done its work.

It's the same with the word of God – that we begin to do it as a discipline first, that we say: "Come what may, I'm going to read the word." That's the beginning. That's the starting point for delighting in the word. Do we have that sense of foundation? Do we dutifully read the word every day?

Paul told Timothy: "Preach the word, in season and out of season." What did he mean? "When you feel like it, Timothy, preach the word. When you don't feel like it, Timothy, preach the word." In season and out of season. And that's the same principle that's involved in the word of God, that whether we feel like it or not, we need to be reading the word. That's the starting place.

LOVE GOD'S WORD.

How do I then fall in love with the word of God?

Falling in love is the road to delight.

1. Ask God for a heart of hunger.

Psalm 119:18 says, *"Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Your law."* Have you ever stopped and asked the Lord as you open His word to show you wondrous things? That's wonderful, isn't it? "Lord, show me these wonderful, wondrous things. I want to see them." And He will. We ask for it, "God, help me love what You've written. Open my heart to see its beauty."

I've been going through the Bible in my own daily reading, and decided to start from Genesis and try and go all the way through again. I got to Numbers and Leviticus. They're not the easiest books to read – the genealogies and all kinds of things that are sprinkled all the way through. I looked to see where the genealogy ended. v. 25. So thought I'd just skip to v. 25. And then I began to pray. I said: Lord, You put it in the Bible. Therefore, it has meaning. So, let me see meaning in what has been written. And beloved, it began to come alive for me. I began to see patterns in it. I had decided that I was going to read only that much that day. But I felt myself wanting to read one more chapter, just one more. The flesh was saying, O you're done. But I wanted to read more.

When we ask God, He hears us and He acquiesces to our request.

2. Start small; start real.

You don't need an hour-long study to begin. Start with one verse, one truth. Carry it with you. Repeat it. Think about it. Whisper it. Let it sink in. Hear me clearly – I am not saying that your Bible study is restricted to one verse. I'm saying out of the many chapters you will read, pick one verse that you will take with you.

3. Turn verses into prayers.

Instead of just reading the Bible, talk to God through it. Psalm 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd." Lord, today, would You lead me? Would You guide me? Lord, when I face people who don't like me, would You make me walk tall in their midst? Pray these verses into your day.

4. Stay consistent, even when you don't feel it.

Feelings follow faithfulness. If you are faithful, the feeling will latch on to that faithfulness. It's like training in the gym. The delight grows from discipline. Read when you're tired. Read when you're dry. And watch what happens when God meets you in the habit. God will meet you.

5. Let the word shape your day.

Instead of fitting scripture into your schedule, let it set the tone for your decisions, your responses, and your thoughts. So, put verses where you'll see them everywhere. Find that verse that you said you're going to memorize. Put it on your mirror, your lock screen, on a sticky note somewhere, on your dashboard, somewhere you can see it constantly. Keep it in front of your eyes, and it will get into your heart.

6. Be around people who love the word.

v. 79 "Let those who fear You turn to me, that they may know your testimonies."
That's what the psalmist is saying. "Let those who fear You turn to him, and then learn testimonies from him." Spiritual fire is contagious. Surround yourself with people who talk about scripture, who ask good questions, who stir up the appetite for the word.

7. Obey the word.

Jesus Himself said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word."
The more you obey God's word, the more alive and relevant it's going to become. You don't just fall in love with truth; you fall in love with what truth does in you and through you.

8. Remember the result.

Peace, wisdom, joy. That's what the psalmist says, that spending time in the word will give peace, wisdom, joy.

v. 165 "Great peace have those who love your law." Great peace. Peace is at a premium today. Who wouldn't want to get God's peace to rest upon us?

v. 162 "I rejoice at Your word like one who finds great spoil."

Peace and joy. When God fills your life, there's peace, there's clarity, there's joy in every circumstance.

So, we move from duty until it becomes delight. God's book isn't a rule book, really. It is a lifeline. It's His voice. It's your strength and it will change your life. duty to delight. But if you notice, the psalmist added a second component after love for the law. "Oh, how I love Your law. It is my meditation all the day."

MEDITATING ON THE WORD ALL DAY LONG.

Not only does he love the word, he also meditates on it all day long. What does that really mean? That 24/7 we need to be reading the word? No! It doesn't mean that. Keeping scripture continuously present in all that you do is what he's talking about. It becomes the grid through which you view everything. You take the verse/verses that you read, and your response, your behavior, your words, all are funneled through that filter of God's word. That's what it means to meditate. It becomes a part of your mindset.

How do we begin to meditate on the word of God?

A lot of similarity in how we fall in love.

- **Start your day with Scripture.**

Begin your morning with that small verse or passage. Pick out something that struck you, that is a good learning, something digestible or memorable.

- **Memorize it.**

Write it down and then repeat it. Keep repeating it till you've got it.

Yesterday, I got a SMS that said that Blue Dart delivery was coming, and that an OTP was required. They gave the OTP. I happened to be walking at that time, so I kept saying repeating the number over and over again as I didn't want to go back to my phone when he came and rang the doorbell. When I opened the door for him, I immediately recited the number. The thought struck me – how easily I memorized it. All I did was keep repeating it over and over again.

What would happen if we just memorized the word? That's what we need to do. Repeat it through the day while walking, while driving, waiting at a stoplight, or whatever. Let it become your internal soundtrack.

- **Use it to talk to God.**

Make it a prayer. Your word is a lamp to my feet. Lord, guide me today. When I feel uncertain, would You light my path? Do you see, beloved, what I'm saying? All the verses that I'm quoting to you are things that we can use every moment of every day.

So many times we enter a place and there's darkness – whether it's because we don't have enough knowledge about it, whether there's a spiritual component about it, whether we don't have the wherewithal to go forward. Whatever the darkness is, as the Bible says, Your word is a lamp to my feet. Imagine standing in front of the darkness and saying: Lord, would You light this way for me, please? You think God won't stand by His word?

- **Keep it visible.**

Put the verse where your eyes naturally go, and I talked about that.

- **Apply it in real time.**

Ask yourself, how does this verse shape the way I respond right now? In other words, don't leave the word with the Bible at home. Take it with you in your heart. "Your word have I hidden in my heart that I may not sin against You." Because it's hidden in the heart. Each day, find a verse that you can hide in your heart that's going to allow you to walk confidently.

- **Journal or voice-note it.**

Write it down. Something struck you, write it down. I began to do voice notes. I find that my mind works faster than my two-finger typing. So I do voice notes. It comes easy to me to just talk. I read something and say: Wow! I never saw that before. That's why the Word of God remains so relevant even after so many years. Because God's Spirit will take something and just shine upon it, and you say, I never saw that. talk about why it's so important. Why did you feel surprised by that? Make a note about it.

- **End the day with a review.**

I don't know about you, but I take about 15 to 20 minutes to fall asleep. In that time, what I do is think about what has gone on in the day. It's a good time to reflect. Saturdays especially. I'm thinking about my sermon; I don't have any of the notes in front of me and I'm saying: Okay, let me see it in front of my eyes, and then pretty soon I've gone to sleep. I hope it's not the same with you all as you listen.

We get an opportunity before we go to sleep to just think about what the word has done through the day for us, and then to say: Wow! Look what the Lord has done! He used that one word and it transformed these situations that came across in my life.

So journal it and end the day with a review.

Meditation is intentional remembering, interacting with the Word and applying it in real time.

So how do we move from duty to delight?

- We love the Word of God,
- Meditate on the Word, and
- Let it guide us day and night.

Psalm 1 – *“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,”* and then it goes down to v.4, *“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law, he meditates day and night.”*

Imagine, beloved, we're talking about God's blessing to rest upon us. Who wouldn't want that? I've got in the habit of writing 'many blessings' when I end a missive that I send to you, and I mean it. when I say that, I'm saying, “O Lord, I pray many blessings upon this person.” He's the One who blesses, and that's my most ardent wish for you as I end any message to you. Many, many blessings. *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked but his delight is in the law of the Lord on which he meditates day and night.* A blessing in store for us.

Biblical characters who enjoyed this kind of delighting in the Word.

I was intrigued. I finished this work and I was thinking: I wonder whether there were biblical characters who enjoyed this kind of delighting in the Word.

- **David:** David is the first person who comes to mind when you think about delighting in the Word. “O, how I love Your law.” Many psalms exalting God's Word and he found strength, comfort, direction from the law.
- **Ezra:** Ezra 7:10. *“Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach His statutes.”* He devoted his life to teaching scripture, led a national spiritual revival through the word of God.
- **Jeremiah:**
- **Jesus:** Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.
- **Paul:** Colossians 3:16 he says, *“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.”*

All of them used scripture fluently. It wasn't a duty for them. It had become a delight. The Word of God led them, shaped them. It gave them wisdom. It taught them how to relate to others, helped them stand by their convictions and equipped them to live life in full obedience to the Word.

Are you convinced? Or are you saying "I need something more to convince me to read the Word." For those of you who are not saying it, let me give it to you.

What does meditation on the Word do for you?

What is the result, the consequence?

- It clarifies truth for you. Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
- It helps us make wise, God-centered decisions.
- It brings inner peace. *Great peace have those who love Your law.*
- It offers moral and spiritual protection. *I've hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You.*
- It guides our speech and response. *Let the words of my mouth be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord.*
- It strengthens us. *You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in Your Word.*
- It gives wisdom for daily life. *The unfolding of Your words give light. It gives understanding to the simple.*

It does so much, beloved, and I believe God is placing His words squarely in front of us and saying: "Will you allow it to become a delightful experience in your life? As My children who love My word so that I can be more real to you as you read My words each day."

How does meditation help us in our different professions?

How does meditation help us in the various walks of our life? That's the ultimate question. It's okay for Sunday, but what about Monday when I go to my workspace?

- For business leaders and entrepreneurs:
Proverbs 16:3 *Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.*
When you go to work, isn't that what you want, your plans to be established? Commit your work to the Lord.
- For those in education, teaching and students:
Proverbs 1:7 *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and understanding and knowledge."* All that is required in education.
- In the judiciary, legal professions:
Micah 6:8 *"Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."*
- First responders or armed forces, police:
Joshua 1:9 *"Be strong and courageous. The Lord, your God, is with you."*
Imagine facing something and you don't know what's going to happen, and you have God's word saying, "Be strong and courageous. The Lord, your God, is with you."
- For anything else that we may be doing:
Colossians 3:23 *"Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord, and not for men or women."*
You don't have a boss who controls you or to whom you report. You actually report to God. I guarantee you this, that when you do your job, it is for God alone. Automatically, you'll find that it is an excellent output for your boss. Because when you do work for God, it is of excellent quality. Let the word of Christ dwell richly within you.

Beloved, that's where we want to be. When we started this year, as we looked at this year through the leadership meetings we had, we felt that the accent needed to be on the basics. Come back to the basics. So, we spent two months on prayer. And half-way through the year, we got that established so beautifully. We want to let it grow even more, but I felt that God was saying, "My Word as well." My Word, establish the Word and let it become a delightful experience for my children. that's God's heart, beloved, for you and me, to let the Word of God dwell in us richly.

Amen.