

## **Delighting in God by Meditating on His Word**

### **Psalm 1**

Last week we began a sermon series that's an invitation for us to seek a deeper relationship with God, intimacy with Christ, and fullness of the Holy Spirit. In Psalm 63 we saw what that was like for David. He had a deep relationship with God and we saw how spending time with God took his dry and weary soul and filled it with joy and satisfaction so that he was overflowing with praise. When David spent time with God it was a feast for his soul. And God wants us to have that kind of relationship with him. He wants you to feast on him. In fact, he designed your soul in such a way that it would yearn for him and only be truly satisfied in him.

I think most of us have felt that yearning – a longing deep inside that needs to be filled. Other things can temporarily bring satisfaction or distract us from the void, but only God can truly fill it. And when you experience that, there's nothing greater. David said that the love of God was "better than life." Other experiences and thrills may be exhilarating and fulfilling for a time, but they don't last and always leave you wanting more. There has to be something better, and there is. The joy and satisfaction of knowing God is deep and abiding. It has roots that go deep and don't give way through the ups and downs of life.

That is what we need and in the next several weeks we're going to talk about how to grow in it. Knowing God in a deep and soul-satisfying way is not something that just happens. Nor is it something that God will just do for you. It's something that comes through persistent seeking. I shared Jeremiah 29:13 last week: "*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*" That was spoken in a much different context, but the promise is the same for us today. In order to go deeper with God and satisfy our souls in him, we have to seek the Lord with all our heart, and keep seeking him.

So that's what this series is about and in the next several weeks we are going to look at several ways God has given us to seek him – habits we need to form in our lives. In the same way your body benefits from habits of eating, sleeping, and exercise, your soul benefits from the habits we are going to look at. We will be looking at the spiritual disciplines that are outlined in the book:

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christians Life by Donald Whitney. As I've started to read it, I've found it to be helpful and filled with practical things I won't have time to cover in my sermons. It has a little different approach than I'm taking, but I see it as complimentary and good to get a broader perspective, and I encourage you to read the book. My plan is to go in the order of the book and cover one habit or discipline in each sermon, which will correspond with one of the chapters in the book.

This morning we are going to look at the first habit, which is called "Bible intake" in the book. I'm going to focus on the idea of delighting in God by meditating on his Word. The goal of this habit (and all the rest) is delighting in God and the first practice we must incorporate into our daily lives to experience this is meditating on his Word. I chose the word meditating for a reason, instead of "reading" or "studying" or "memorizing." "Meditating" captures the fullness of what I think we need to do in order to commune with God deeply. A quick 5-minute daily devotional isn't going to do it.

The text I want to start with that gets the main point across is Psalm 1.

<sup>1</sup> *Blessed is the man*

*who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

<sup>2</sup> *but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

<sup>3</sup> *He is like a tree*

*planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.*

*In all that he does, he prospers.*

<sup>4</sup> *The wicked are not so,*

*but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

<sup>5</sup> *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

<sup>6</sup> *for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

You can see that the way this Psalm is written is a contrast between the worthless way of the wicked and the prosperous way of the righteous, and the practice that is highlighted for why the righteous person prospers is the habit of meditating on the Word of God. The righteous person is one who delights in the law of the Lord. He loves to read it, ponder it, and meditate on it – thinking about it night and day. This person prospers in the same way a bountiful fruit tree prospers when it is planted by streams of water. That tree has a steady supply of nourishment in its life and is always producing fruit. Even in difficult times of drought, it is healthy, strong, productive, and never withers.

The person who delights in God’s word and meditates on it day and night is constantly receiving nourishment for his soul. No matter what’s going on in his life, he flourishes and everything he does prospers. I want you to see there’s a treasure that’s waiting for you in the practice of meditating on the Word of God. The Word of God isn’t just a moral code, or instruction manual, or history book. It’s exclusively unique because of what it is – the very words of God. God chose to reveal himself to his people through his Word. It is not the only way he reveals himself, but in our day it is the clearest, most direct, and most detailed.

In Hebrews 1:1-2 it says: “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*” God revealed himself through the prophets – those words are found in the Old Testament. He revealed himself through his Son – his teaching and ministry is found in the Gospels. And now we have the rest of the New Testament which contains the writings of the Apostles who were personally commissioned by Christ to spread his teachings.

So the Bible, first and foremost is God’s revelation of himself to us. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16: “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*” Peter had a similar understanding when he wrote 2 Peter 1:20-21: “*No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*”

The Word of God is a precious gift and reading it, understanding it, and meditating on it is a critical habit for us to develop in order to know God more deeply and grow deeper in our relationship with him. God has given us his Word, and the gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts so that when we read the inspired Word of God we are able to spiritually discern what we're reading. The same Spirit that worked in the hearts and minds of the writers is working in us so that reading the Word of God isn't just an intellectual experience, it's a spiritual transaction. The Holy Spirit opens our spirit to understand the deep things of God that goes beyond a natural experience.

Paul described this to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 2:10-14: *“these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. <sup>11</sup> For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. <sup>12</sup> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. <sup>13</sup> And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. <sup>14</sup> The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”*

If you want to know what it's like to communicate with God and experience the soul-nourishing satisfaction of delighting in him, you must get into the habit of meditating on the Word of God.

Now, what does that look like and how does it happen? I think a common reaction to what I've said this morning is: “That sounds great, but the Bible is so big and hard to understand. When I try to read it, I have no idea what it's talking about most of the time.” I think there's this assumption that you have to be a Bible scholar or genius to understand it, or at least have gone to seminary. But that's not the case at all, and I want to show you why and how you can understand the Bible much more easily.

When you look at who the Bible was written to, it was not scholars and geniuses. It was ordinary people like you and me. Most of them were actually biblically illiterate, wrapped up in false teachings, and brand new to the

teachings of Christianity. So when the Bible was written, the authors were writing to these kinds of people.

So why is it so hard for us as Spirit-filled believers to understand? I want to point out two reasons. I think the primary reason we have a hard time understanding the Bible today is because we live in a completely different context than when it was originally written. The people to whom it was originally written understood it because it was written into the culture they were living in, or something very similar. They were familiar with the terms, practices, situations, and ideas that were written about. Imagine if the Bible was written for us in our 21<sup>st</sup> century American context, and then given to the Israelites 3,000 years ago. They would have just as much difficulty in trying to understand it as we do.

So that's one reason, and that ties in with the second and that's the method we use when we go to read it. There are 66 books of the Bible, written by over 40 different authors, covering 16 centuries and a huge variety of cultural, historical, and situational circumstances. If you just pick up a Bible, open it up, and start reading, without knowing what you're reading, who wrote it, what was going on, and why it was written, it's almost a guarantee that it will be confusing and hard to understand. Yet that's the approach that many people take when it comes to reading the Bible. No wonder it's discouraging and not something we would look forward to.

So, if you've been overwhelmed by reading the Bible and kind of given up, there's a good chance it's because of what I've just described. But it doesn't have to be that way... The good news for us is that a whole bunch of people have done a whole bunch of work to make the Bible much easier for us to understand by helping us understand the setting and details into which every book of the Bible was written. Now, this too can be overwhelming because there are tens of thousands of resources, but there's one that I think is perfect for most people today to help you understand what you're reading and read it like the original readers would have.

The first thing I would recommend to anyone that quickly and effectively gives you a huge boost in your ability to understand the Bible is simply a good study Bible. There are many good study Bibles to choose from today and they're not

very expensive. The best one I've run into so far is the ESV Study Bible. It's currently only \$20 on Amazon – I'm quite certain it's the best \$20 you'll spend, so go ahead, get out your phone and get ready to buy it before you leave today – and here's why...

At the beginning of every book of the Bible there's an introduction that tells you vital information to increase your understanding. It tells you who wrote the book and when it was written. It describes the people whom it was written to, the situation that was going on, the historical background, and the purpose it was written. It then gives various details about the content that will help you understand it more clearly. All of this is usually contained in 2 or 3 pages, and once you understand those things, the actual words of Scripture will make a lot more sense and start to come to life.

As you start reading verses you'll find all kinds of helpful notes on the bottom of the pages that correspond with the verses and tie into what you read in the introduction. I can't stress enough how important it is for you to get a study Bible for yourself – so go ahead and buy one right now. And if you're short on money but want to get one, let me know and I'll buy one for you.

I also want to help you by suggesting a method for how you can go about reading, studying, and meditating on God's Word. This is on the back of the sermon notes. First, choose a book that you'd like to read. If you're new to this, I'd suggest something in the New Testament and something that's not too long. There are many options to choose from – Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or 1 Thessalonians would all be good. Romans, Hebrews, and Revelation will be more challenging.

Next, you need to set aside a regular time every day that works for you and when you're most alert. For me that's 6:00am. Set aside at least 30 minutes or you'll have a real hard time going deeper. 60 minutes would be better if you're able. If that sounds impossible, I highly encourage you to make some changes so that it is possible for the reasons I brought up last week. Bring your study Bible, notebook, and pen (and a cup of coffee works well too!)

I'm going to encourage you to not try to cover too much content. Some Bible reading plans have you read 3-4 chapters a day – that's fine if you're trying to

read the Bible in a year, but if you actually want to understand what you're reading and meditate on it and hear from God about how it applies to your life, you're going to have to cut way back. I think a good starting point is spending 2 or 3 days on one paragraph or chapter. Once you've studied the Bible for a few years and are more familiar with it, you can probably handle more. And if you're just looking to get more of a big picture of the content of the Bible, you're going to have to go with a much different plan. But the habit I believe is most beneficial for you to build into your life is delighting in God by meditating on his Word and from what I've found, that requires you to stick with much smaller sections.

On the first day, I suggest you pray and ask God to open up the eyes of your heart so that you hear from him and experience him in his Word – pray that prayer every day. Then, open up your study Bible to the book you want to study and read the introduction. Read it slowly so you comprehend what you're reading. You want to become familiar with the background information of the book. If you don't understand something, do more digging. This is one way your phone can actually be a help and not a hindrance. You can quickly find answers to most questions by doing a search on your phone. It will likely take all your time on the first day to just read and understand the introduction – don't skip this! Doing this will help unlock the meaning of the whole book and you will find yourself regularly going back to the introduction as you read and study. If you come across things you need to remember, use your notebook to write it down. Keep a notebook just for Bible study.

On day two, start with the same prayer for revelation. If you feel like you have a good understanding of the background information, start reading the first chapter. You could read the whole chapter but then go back and focus on just the first section. In most study Bibles you'll look for the end of a paragraph or maybe the next sub-heading. You're looking to find where the subject changes. Re-read that first section and think about it and study until you think you understand what the author is trying to say. Use the study notes on the bottom of the page. Use your phone to ask more questions. You're trying to get inside the author's head and understand what he meant when he wrote it. Do this before you try to understand what it means for you, or you will probably come away with a faulty interpretation. Understanding the text might take you one day, but it could be two or three. Sometimes I'll spend 15 hours

just trying to understand one statement. And that might sound grueling to you, but when that revelation comes, it's a wonderful experience because you're connecting with the Spirit of God! There's no hurry. The goal isn't covering content; it's understanding God's Word so that you can know him and delight in him. Write down what you learn. Summarize the passage in your own words. Try to think about it throughout the day.

Let's say you understand the passage on day two – on day three, pray again for revelation. Re-read the verses you're studying, explain them to yourself, then get out your notebook and start writing down a prayer, asking what God wants to say to you from that passage of Scripture. How does he want it to influence your life? Does the passage bring up any areas of sin in your life? Any areas you're lacking and need to grow? Is the Holy Spirit prompting you to take action in any way? Just spend the whole time in an attitude of prayer, journaling, openness, and humility, asking the Lord to speak to you.

That would be 3 days on one passage – 30-60 minutes each day. And I hope you can see that's a pace at which you can read, study, understand, meditate, and listen to God. Once you've finished this process with the first section, move on to the next one and do the same thing. Do it every day. Go all the way through the book. You might end up covering 2 or 3 passages a week, depending on how long they are. In addition to this, if you want to grow even more, ask a friend or small group to study the same passages together and get together to share what you've learned each week. You could agree to just cover one chapter a week, which would be a pretty good pace.

The point of this is not to just complete your Christian duty, or gain more knowledge. I hope you can see that when you meditate on God's Word like this, you're actually able to connect with God and hear from him. And as you do that your spirit will delight in him and you will go deeper. You will be like that tree that's planted by streams of water, always being nourished and overflowing with life.