
Savoring God In the Psalms

Psalm 119



With
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Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

Savoring God In The Psalms

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday *Psalm 119*

Savor. What you savor defines you. What do you savor? Chocolate? Surfing? A hike in the mountains? Seeing your favorite band in concert? Watching a brilliant sunset? Dinner with a close friend? A weekend away with your spouse? Your favorite team winning the Super Bowl? Tri-tip barbecue, with all the trimmings? Curling up by the fire on a rainy day, reading your favorite author?

Everyone has their “savor” list. Things they love to do; people they love to be with; foods they love to eat; music they love to hear. Did you know that God beckons us to savor Him? He says, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

He tells us, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). Sadly, of Israel, God said, “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

In search of satisfaction apart from God leaves one thirsty. Savoring His gifts, but failing to Savor Him . . . fills us with one thing: Emptiness. In *Savoring God in the Psalms*, we will drink from the river of His delights in the following Psalms: Psalm 1, 16, 19, 23, 24, 54, 104, 119, 131, 139, and 150. Each study will provide a verse-by-verse exposition of the biblical text, along with clarifying illustrations and relevant applications for everyday life. Not only will we learn to savor God, but we will acquire greater skill in studying His Word.

What you savor defines you. Do you savor God? Join me on a journey through these soul-satisfying portions of God’s eternal Truth. Discover His Glory.

Delight in His glory. Declare His glory to the nations.

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

Eleanor Schmidt arrived early for her doctor's appointment. She says, "I found the door unlocked and the young surgeon, deeply engrossed in reading, behind the receptionist's desk. When he didn't hear me come in, I cleared my throat. Startled, he closed the book, which I recognized as a Bible. "Does reading the Bible help you before or after an operation?" I asked. My fears were dispelled by his soft, one-word answer: "During."^[i] During operations, this Doctor had experienced the life-changing benefits of God's Word, the Bible.

Gipsy Smith spoke of a man who said he had received no inspiration from the Bible although he had "gone through it several times." So, Smith told the man, "Let it go through you once, then you will tell a different story!"^[ii] Gipsy Smith had experienced the life-changing benefits of God's Word, the Bible. Have you? Have I? Do we grasp how desperately we need the Bible and comprehend its countless blessings to our daily lives? As Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). If we do not saturate our souls with Scripture, we are merely existing—not really living. Are you just existing—like a mannequin—or enjoying the Life of God Himself, pulsating in your spiritual veins?

In the previous chapter*, we learned that *God's Word must take top priority in our lives because of its authority over us, adversity threatens to undo us, and it reveals God's beauty to us*. Today, God reveals a fourth reason why His Word must take top priority in our lives, namely, because of its *life-changing benefits to us*. What are these benefits?

* Find this in my previous E-Book, *Why Make God's Word Top Priority In Daily Life?* Contact Ron.Barnes@socalsem.edu for more details.

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

God's Word Teaches Us How to Pray Effectively

Psalm 119 is a long prayer that includes many kinds of prayers. It is a schoolhouse on prayer. For example, God's Word teaches us to praise Him. *God's Word Teaches Us to Praise Him*

Notice verses 12-14: "You deserve praise, O Lord! Teach me your statutes! With my lips I proclaim all the regulations you have revealed. I rejoice in the lifestyle prescribed by your rules as if they were riches of all kinds." And look at verse 48: "I will lift my hands to your commands, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes" (NET Bible). God's Word teaches us to praise Him.

God's Word Teaches Us to Declare Our Needs to Him

Observe the eight requests found in verses 33-40: "*Teach me*, O Lord, the lifestyle prescribed by your statutes, so that I might observe it continually. *Give me* understanding so that I might observe your law, and keep it with all my heart. *Guide me* in the path of your commands, for I delight to walk in it. *Give me* a desire for your rules, rather than for wealth gained unjustly. *Turn* my eyes away from what is worthless! *Revive me* with your word! *Confirm* to your servant your promise, which you made to the one who honors you. *Take away* the insults that I dread! Indeed, your regulations are good. *Revive me* with your deliverance" (NET Bible, emphasis added). As someone has said, "Prayer is our declaration of dependence upon God!"^[iii]

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God's Word Teaches Us to Express Our Grief to Him

Verses 81-88 declare the psalmist desperate longing for God's deliverance. Have you ever prayed like this? He cries, "I find hope in your word. My eyes grow tired as I wait for your promise to be fulfilled. I say, 'When will you comfort me?' For I am like a wineskin dried up in smoke. I do not forget your statutes. How long must your servant endure this? When will you judge those who pursue me? The arrogant dig pits to trap me, which violates your law. All your commands are reliable. I am pursued without reason. Help me! They have almost destroyed me here on the earth, but I do not reject your precepts. Revive me with your loyal love, that I might keep the rules you have revealed" (NET Bible).

God's Word Teaches Us to Pray Against His Enemies

In verse 78, the psalmist prays, "May the arrogant be humiliated, for they have slandered me!" He continues in verses 118-119: "You despise all who stray from your statutes, for they are deceptive and unreliable. You remove all the wicked of the earth like slag. Therefore, I love your rules." And so, he concludes in verse 126, "It is time for the Lord to act—they break your law" (NET Bible).

As a young Christian, I did not know how to pray. Then, as I read how people in Scripture prayed, I learned how to pray more biblically, and therefore more effectively. I urge you to read through Psalm 119, observe how the psalmist prays, and then make his prayers your own. As one of its life-changing benefits, God's Word teaches us how to pray, then second, *God's Word provides true delight.*

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

God's Word Provides True Delight

Verse 1 says, “Blessed are those whose way is blameless who walk in the law of the Lord.” The word “Blessed” means the highest quality of existence this side of Heaven. It speaks of someone who is fortunate and enviable because they possess a joy that transcends unhappy circumstances. Be honest—do the following verses express how you feel about God and His Word?

- Verse 14: “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies as much as in all riches.”
- Verse 16: “I shall delight in Your Word.”
- Verse 24: “Your testimonies are my delight...my counselors.”
- Verse 35: “Make me to walk in the path of your commands, for I delight in it.”
- Verse 72: “The Law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver.”

As we read God's Word and savor who He is, we can share the same depth of delight for Scripture as the psalmist. Will you aim for nothing less? In France there once lived a blind girl who obtained the Gospel of Mark in raised letters and learned to read it by the tips of her fingers. But her constant reading made her fingers calloused, and her sense of touch diminished until she could no longer distinguish the characters. So one day, she cut the skin from the ends of her fingers to increase their sensibility, only to destroy it. She felt that she must now give up her beloved Book, and weeping she pressed it to her lips, saying “Farewell, sweet word of my Heavenly Father.” But to her surprise, her lips, more delicate than her fingers, discerned the form of the letters! And all night, she perused God's Word with her lips and overflowed with joy at this new acquisition.^[iv] God's Word provides true delight. And, it also provides moral purity.

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

God's Word Provides Moral Purity

This world is a cesspool of iniquity. Immorality is everywhere we turn. So, the psalmist poses the same question you and I do. In verse 9, he says, “How can a young person maintain a pure life? By guarding it according to your instructions! With all my heart I seek you. Do not allow me to stray from your commands! In my heart I store up your words, so I might not sin against you.” Then ponder verse 37: “Give me a desire for your rules, rather than for wealth gained unjustly.” And verse 133 says, “Direct my steps by your word! Do not let any sin dominate me!” (NET Bible).

Do you have any sin that dominates you? Worry? Anger? Gossip? Complaining? An unforgiving spirit? Watching inappropriate Television, Movies or images on the internet? I like what Christian author, Henri Nouwen, wrote: “I cannot continuously say no to this, or no to that, unless there is something ten times more attractive to choose. Saying no to my lust, my greed...and worldly attractions takes an enormous amount of energy. The only hope is to find something so obviously real and attractive that I can devote all my energies to saying ‘yes.’ We must embrace God as the Superior Attraction, the Superior Pleasure, and then we can say “No” to sin.^[v] God's Word provides moral purity. But, the benefits of God's Word continue.

God's Word Provides an Intimate Relationship with God

As Steve Cole writes, “We don't study the Bible to become Bible scholars. Nor do we study it simply to learn and follow its moral precepts, although we should do that. We study the Bible to seek God Himself.”^[vi] Psalm 119 is not an example of bibliolatry—a worship of the Bible, or the study of it for mere intellectual satisfaction and knowledge. As the psalmist studied the words of Scripture, He fell in love with the Author. Is that true of you? Of me? As he states in verse 2: “Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek *Him* with the whole heart” (emphasis added). Do you seek God half-heartedly, or whole-heartedly? Is God and His Word your holy obsession?

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

The Scriptures are the voice of God; you can no more separate God's Word from God than you can separate the apple core from the apple. As John Calvin observed, "We owe to the Scriptures the same reverence which we owe to God, because it has proceeded from Him alone, and has nothing of man mixed with it."^[vii] A man was discussing the fragile state of many marriages with his girlfriend and posed the following question, "What if you wake up one morning and don't love me anymore?" She immediately responded, "There's always obedience."^[viii] The Lord wants more than legalistic obedience to His Word; He wants us to obey Him because we love Him; because we crave an intimate friendship with Him. This leads to a fifth life-changing benefit of the Bible.

God's Word Provides Revival for our spirit

When our hearts grow cold toward God, spending time in the Bible renews our love for Him. The psalmist is a believer, but he recognizes that Scripture is the source of spiritual vitality. Ponder the following examples from the NET Bible:

- Verse 28: "I collapse from grief. Sustain me by Your Word."
- Verse 25: "I collapse in the dirt. Sustain me by Your Word."
- Verse 88: "Revive me with Your loyal love that I might keep the rules You have revealed."
- Verse 107: "I am suffering terribly, Lord. Revive me with Your Word."
- Verses 153-154: "See my pain and rescue me! For I do not forget Your Law. Fight for me and defend me! Revive me with Your Word!"

The Hebrew word for "revive" means, "cause me to live." As Steven Cole says, "If the psalmist needed ongoing revival, how much more do we? The source of such revival is vital contact with God through His life-giving Word. If you feel weak and weary, spend time in God's Word and He will revive you!"^[ix] This brings us to a sixth life-changing benefit of the Bible: *God's Word provides stability in trials.*

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

God's Word Provides Stability in Trials

Because God has ordained a time of adversity for the psalmist, this is a common theme in the psalm. Take great courage in the following realities, as rendered by the NET Bible:

- Verses 49-50: “Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope. This is what comforts me in my trouble, for your promise revives me.”
- Verse 52: “I remember your ancient regulations, O Lord, and console myself.”
- Verse 54: “Your statutes have been my songs in the house where I live.”
Verse 57: “The Lord is my source of security. I have determined to follow your instructions.”
- Verses 81-82: “I desperately long for your deliverance. I find hope in your word. My eyes grow tired as I wait for your promise to be fulfilled. I say, ‘When will you comfort me?’ For I am like a wineskin dried up in smoke. I do not forget your statutes.”
- Verses 92-93: “If I had not found encouragement in your law, I would have died in my sorrow. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have revived me.”
- Verse 115: “You are my hiding place and my shield; in your word I hope” (TLV).

Even in the midst of civil unrest and uncertain times, Christians in Cameroon, Africa, find the Bible to be their “source of comfort; a weapon against panic and hopelessness.”^[x] “Sitting by her precious little girl in a lonely hospital room in Nicaragua, Rosa agonized. All she could do was wait . . . for death. Rosa says, ‘I felt anguished and depressed. I didn’t know any hope.’ But in Rosa’s most desperate moment, a Christian shared the good news of God’s Word. Rosa says, ‘I never had a Bible.’ And while Rosa’s daughter is still sick and receiving treatment, she says, ‘I feel comfort from God by reading His Word—as though God was speaking to me in my pain and solitude. God’s Word is transforming my painful experiences into hope. It is changing my life and my family’s life.’”^[xi] We all face trials of various kinds: Financial struggles, persecution for following Jesus, loneliness, health challenges, difficult relationships, a tough work environment, caring for a sick friend or family member, etc. But God’s Word always brings comfort when we spend time reading it.

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

For example, God says, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). “As your days, so shall your strength be” (Deuteronomy 33:25). David declared, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me. Your rod and staff, they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:4-6). God’s Word gives us stability in trials. It also provides wisdom for the many decisions we must make.

God’s Word Provides Wisdom for Decisions

In Psalm 119:105, the psalmist declares to God, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” Literally, the Hebrew text reads, “a lamp to my feet is your Word, a light to my path.” The word order stresses the supreme role the Scriptures should play as we make decisions each day. You should know that the kind of lamp referred to here would provide only enough light for the next step; but it was sufficient for the dark streets of the day and kept you from stumbling. Enveloped in a world darkened by sin and our spiritual vision obstructed by our evil nature, God’s Word provides the light we need for the next step and for every decision we make. As Psalm 37:31 says, “The Law of his God in his heart; his steps do not slip.” Robert E. Lee testified, “In all my perplexities and distresses, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strengthen me.”^[xiii] I read a story about evangelist, Paul Rader, who had many conversations with a banker in New York. The banker would reply that he was too busy for religion. Time passed and the banker, seriously overworked, was sent to a sanatorium for complete rest.

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

One day, in keeping with Jesus' command to be His witnesses in Acts 1:8, God prompted Paul Rader to once again tell his banker friend about Jesus. Rader obeyed, catching a train to the sanatorium. When he arrived, he saw the banker standing in the doorway. "Oh, Rader," said the banker, "I am so glad to see you." "I received your telegram," said Rader. "That's impossible," said the banker. "I wrote a telegram begging you to come, but I tore it up. I did not send it." "That may be," said Rader, "but your message came by way of Heaven." Paul Rader found his friend under deep conviction of sin and he pointed him to Christ. And right there the banker trusted in Jesus as his Savior and his heart filled with joy. With new eyes, he said, "Rader, did you ever see the sky so blue or the grass so green?" Rader replied, "Sometimes we sing, " 'Heaven above is softer blue, Earth around is sweeter green; Something lives in every hue that Christ-less eyes have never seen.'" Suddenly the banker leaned against Paul Rader and fell into his arms, dead. Paul Rader followed the light of God's Word in urging his lost friend to trust in Jesus for eternal life. And God gave him the eternal blessing of rescuing him just one yard from hell."^[xiii] God's Word provides wisdom for decisions. Now then, there's a final life-changing benefit from the Bible to observe in this chapter, a benefit we all so desperately need: *God's Word creates a hatred for sin.*

God's Word Creates a Hatred for Sin

The psalmist's holy hatred for sin inspires us to think long and hard about the depth of our hatred for sin. On a scale of 1-10 (1 representing being hardly bothered at all by sin and 10 representing shedding tears over the sin in our lives and in the lives of those around us), how would you measure your current attitude toward sin? Consider memorizing the following Scripture, as rendered by The NET Bible:

- Verse 53: "Indignation grips me because of those who don't keep Your Word."
- Verse 104: "Your precepts give me discernment. Therefore I hate all deceitful actions."
- Verse 136: "Tears stream down from my eyes, because people do not keep your law."

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

When do we know that we treasure God above all others and all things? It is when we are grieved by sin because we know that sin insults God, treating Him as unworthy of trust and obedience. This is when we know we love God. Do you have a growing hatred for sin in your life and the culture in which we live? In this chapter, God has clearly taught us that the Bible should take top priority in our lives because of its countless life-changing benefits to us. With deep gratitude to God, let's review these eternal benefits: The Bible teaches us how to pray effectively, it provides true delight, moral purity, an intimate relationship with God, revival for our spirit, stability in trials, wisdom for decisions, and it creates a hatred for sin. All these benefits belong to us if we resolve to read, trust, and obey God's Word, the Bible.

Anatoli Scharansky, a dissident Soviet Jew, kissed his wife goodbye as she left Russia for freedom in Israel. His parting words to her were, "I'll see you soon in Jerusalem." But Anatoli was detained and finally imprisoned. Their reunion in Jerusalem would not only be postponed, it might never occur. During long years in Russian prisons and work camps Anatoli was stripped of his personal belongings. His only possession was a miniature copy of the Psalms. Once during his imprisonment, his refusal to release the book to the authorities cost him 130 days in solitary confinement.

Finally, twelve years after parting with his wife, he was offered freedom. In February 1986, as the world watched, Shcharansky was allowed to walk away from Russian guards toward those who would take him to Jerusalem. But in the final moments of captivity, the guards tried again to confiscate the Psalms book. Anatoli threw himself face down in the snow and refused to walk on to freedom without it. Those words had kept him alive during imprisonment. He would not go on to freedom without them. ^[xiv]

Anatoli understood what God has taught us here: *God's Word must take top priority in us because of its life-changing benefits to us.*

Why We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

[i] www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible.htm, Accessed 8/2/2017.

[ii] www.fbcyazoo.org/hp_wordpress/wp-content/.../01/2017-Revival-Devotional.pdf, Accessed 8/2/2017.

[iii] odb.org/2010/10/26/declaration-of-dependence, Accessed 8/2/2017, adapted.

[iv] www.biblecharts.org/thebible/wherethereisawillthereisaway.pdf, Accessed 8/2/2017.

[v] Compiled by the editors of “PreachingToday.com., “*More Perfect Illustrations*,” “Temptation: Devotion Greater Than Temptation,” (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003), 280.

[vi] Steve Cole, “*Psalm 119: The Priority of God’s Word*,” cited at Bible.org, Accessed 8/2/2017.

[vii] www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-sacred-script-in-the-theater-of-god, Accessed 8/2/2017.

[viii] www.christianglobe.com/Illustrations/a-z/o/obedience.htm, accessed 8/2/2017, adapted.

[ix] Cole, Ibid.

[x] Bible-A-Month Partner’s Report, “*South America*,” September 2014.

[xi] Bible-A-Month Partner’s Report, “*Central America*,” May 2014.

[xii] George Sweeting, Ed., “*Great Quotes & Illustrations*,” (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 28.

[xiii] www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/g/guidance.htm, citation from “*Morning Glory*,” July 13, 1993.

We Desperately Need the Bible Everyday

[xiv] www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible_value_of.htm, a citation from *Discipleship Journal*, Issue #43 (1988), p. 24., Accessed 8/2/2017.