

The Reviving Power of Delighting in God's Word (Psalm 119:89-96)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on January 4, 2009

www.goldcountrybaptist.org

One of the key messages of this great Psalm is: *No matter what affliction, difficulty, sickness, trial, God's Word is sufficient and God's glory and purposes are most important.* The writer of Ps 119 certainly believed that, and Psalm 119 by the inspiration of God reveals for us how to think rightly and biblically and to glorify God, and one of the ways we glorify God is by delighting in Him and His Word as our all-in-all no matter what dark or low times, we find here an all-sufficient all-satisfying portion and lasting delight and joy, even in all of the most difficult afflictions of our lives. Our text today (v. 89-96) and next week's stanza (v. 97-104) reach the high point of this Psalm, the peak of praise, exalting God and His Word as well as any text.

Psalm 119:89-96 (NASB95) ⁸⁹ Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. ⁹⁰ Your faithfulness *continues* throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands. ⁹¹ They stand this day according to Your ordinances, For all things are Your servants. ⁹² If Your law had not been my delight, Then I would have perished in my affliction. ⁹³ I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have revived me. ⁹⁴ I am Yours, save me; For I have sought Your precepts. ⁹⁵ The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I shall diligently consider Your testimonies. ⁹⁶ I have seen a limit to all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

Verse 95 lets us know his circumstances and dangers have not changed, that's not the reason this passage is so positive and upbeat. But at the center of his life and thinking, in the center of this stanza, in the center of this psalm, verses 92-and 93 show us that the key for him (and by inspiration of God, this key is recorded for our benefit as well 3000 years later), the key was his delight in God's Word as the only reason he survived such affliction. The end of verse 93, says God's Word revived him.

OUTLINE:

The Unshakable Power of God's Abiding Word (v. 89-91)

The Reviving Power of Delighting in God's Word (v. 92-96)

Up till this point, most of the stanzas or sections of this Psalm begin in their first verse or verses by expressing the great need of the original writer, usually some desperate plea for help or teaching or life to continue. But this text begins not with a petition, but with praise in the first 3 verses. And really there is only one request in these 8 verses (v. 94) and there are no requests in next week's section (vs. 97-104) which elevates the Word even higher. There were numerous questions in last week's passage; this week's passage is focused on the answer. His uplifted spirit in this section seems to be traced to his uplifting of the Supremacy of God and His Word as his supreme focus. I pray the same will be true for us.

After travelling through some low valleys in this psalm emotionally and spiritually and physically speaking in some of the recent sections of this long song, this stanza ascends the heights of Psalm 119 as we cross the halfway mark of this massive psalm that has been called "the Mount Everest of the Psalms." The transition to his fresh air at this higher altitude has been described this way:

‘After climbing up steeply though some very forbidding terrain [the last several stanzas] the spiritually cramping muscles of the man of God have been pushed seemingly beyond their limit and are in desperate need of the kind of rest that only stable ground can provide. Some sure-footed territory is discovered by our psalmist on the firm high plateau of the *Lamed* and *Mem* stanzas [the headings over this week’s text & next]. There he finds respectively both rest and refreshment prior to his taxing descent which will take him through yet more of life’s crags, caves, and crevices.’¹

The passage begins in the highest heights of heaven itself:

⁸⁹ **Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.**

In some psalms the imagery seems to be one tossed about in a sea of trouble, but here he stands elevated on high ground above a shore of solid rock. On the solid rock he stands while all other ground is sinking sand. How firm a foundation we saints of the Lord find laid for our hope in His excellent Word, a Word that is forever settled in heaven.

In contrast to this temporal world of change, God’s Word is eternal and does not change. Forever it remains. God’s Word is settled. However unsettled our lives or minds may be here on earth, God’s Word is settled forever in heaven. However unsettling the news of our nation or our personal lives may be, God’s truth is settled forever in heaven. It is unshakable in its abiding almighty power.

The marginal note of some translations for this word “settled” say “lit. *stands firm*” (NASB, NKJV). Here on earth, politicians may flip-flop positions, stocks may fall, economies may tumble, but God’s Word in heaven stands firm. Other translations say it is “firmly fixed” (ESV), or God’s truths “stand secure” (NET).

It is settled securely, firmly – that’s our final answer. We don’t need to ask the audience or take opinion polls. If God has said it, that settles it, whether you believe it or not, whether anyone believes it or not. Someone may say “well, *I believe* God is a God of love and I just can’t see how He could send people to hell who are nice and sincere but aren’t followers of the Lord Jesus.” But your belief or opinion on earth has no bearing on the fixed truth of God in heaven.

This word for settled is often used in the Old Testament for setting up a monument or pillar or some structure or boundary for generations to come. The idea is that it is intended to be permanent and for the ages in the future to see and know. That’s the idea here.

The language may allude ‘to the Word pictured as God’s eternal monument firmly foundationed in His own heavenly presence.’² The liberals may succeed in taking down some Ten Commandment monuments on public buildings in our country, but God’s Commandments will never be removed from heaven. Moses may have broken the original Ten Commandment tablets on the mountain, and replicas copies in the Ark of Covenant may never be found, but God’s eternal Word will never be broken or lost, ever.

⁹⁰ **Your faithfulness *continues* throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands [i.e., “firm” or “fast”; others “endures” or “abides”]**

The prophet Isaiah said “the grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God abides / endures forever.” The Apostle Peter called it “the living and *abiding* Word of God.”

In v. 90, the power of God’s abiding Word moves from spiritual heaven (v. 89) to physical earth where it is manifested. Then in v. 91 it’s also illustrated in the literal heavens which are not only created by, but are also sustained by the abiding all-powerful Word of God.

Genesis 1 begins with God’s Word: “And God said” (each day). How should this truth affect us?

Psalm 33:8-9 (NASB95) ⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.
⁹ For **He spoke, and it was done [creation of the world]; He commanded, and it stood fast.**

Psalm 93:1 The LORD reigns ... The LORD has clothed and girded Himself with strength; Indeed, **the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.**

The immovable world was firmly established by the Word of God which is also immovable, and His same strength upholds all things. Heb. 1:3 says Christ “upholds all things by the word of His power” 119:91 says “*all* are his servants” – we need to be His servants too.

I hope the reality of v. 89-91 thrills you like it did the writer (and me). These works of God demonstrate the power of the Word of God. God’s faithful Word upholds and sustains the universe, His faithfulness and Word as personified in the Lord Jesus Himself. The same Word that upholds and sustains the universe will uphold and sustain us through any affliction as we delight ourselves in it.

As one hymn captures the truth illustrated in verses 90-91:

*Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, sun, moon and stars in their courses
 above join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.*

Jeremiah 31:35-37 (NASB95) ³⁵ Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for light by day And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: ³⁶ “If this fixed order departs From before Me,” declares the LORD, “Then the offspring of Israel also will cease From being a nation before Me forever.” ³⁷ Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done,” declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 33:25-26 ²⁵ “Thus says the LORD, ‘If My covenant *for* day and night *stand* not, *and* the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, ²⁶ then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.’ ”

The existence of Israel and the Jewish people is not a coincident or of no significance, as I’ve heard some modern “replacement theologians” say. So many nations have tried to exterminate the Hebrew peoples for thousands of years and still try, but they are still here, defying natural explanation. And we like many faithful Christians since Reformation times, we pray for Israel’s spiritual reformation and restoration and salvation as Romans 11 promises.

God’s abiding Word, the unshakable power of His promise, is the only explanation why Israelites have not been wiped out through the ages.

And His promise that His Word would never pass away is also the only explanation as to why this Book has survived and thrived as well when so many wanted to annihilate it. Heaven and earth may pass away; God's Word never will. The universe would dissolve sooner than one jot or tittle failed to be fulfilled.

Many have tried to destroy the Bible throughout history. Bibles were burned, translators of the Bible into other languages were burned to death. The path that brings this book to our hands is a path of blood. God's Word has always been established in heaven, but it has not always been available on earth to most people.

In fact we are incredibly privileged in all of human history to be living at a time in recent centuries where anyone can easily and affordably own an entire copy of the Bible written in our own language, many Bibles, helps, resources so amazingly available.

James Boice reminds us that 'such conditions did not always prevail. Until the time of the Reformation, when Gutenberg's remarkable discovery of moveable type enabled the Bible as well as other literature to be mass-produced and distributed easily throughout civilized lands, the text of the Bible was preserved by the laborious and time-consuming process of copying it over and over again by hand, at first onto papyrus sheets and then onto parchments. Throughout much of this time, the Bible was an object of extreme hatred by many in authority. They tried to stamp it out, but the text survived ... If the Bible had been only the thoughts or work of mere men, it would have been eliminated long ago, as other books have been [in fact there have been far greater efforts to destroy this book than any other book in history] ... yet the text survived. We know from passing references in other ancient books that we have lost masterpieces by many of the greatest writers of the past. But the Bible has endured and has endured intact.'³

Many men have tried to destroy the Word of God. In the second century A.D., the famous pagan philosopher Celsus wrote against the Bible, calling Jesus' birth the result of adultery, His incarnation as God as being absurd, the idea of resurrection as being foolishness, and many other attacks. But God's Word lives on. Emperor Diocletian made a decree in 303 A.D. to extinguish the Bible and slaughter all Christians, but God's Word endured. The story has been told often of how the French philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778), held up a Bible and said, "In 50 years I'll have this book in the [grave]." Well, in 50 years *he* was in the [grave] and the Geneva Bible Society owned his house and used it as a place to store Bibles that they first printed on his press.⁴

Its critics are dead and gone, but the Bible is a living life-changing Book. There's a lot of books in the world, but this book rocks your world! Skeptics try and chip away at it, but the damage is done to them, not the solid rock of Scripture. I've read a lot of books; this is the only book that reads me! It knows me and shows me my sin and the solution I need, but wouldn't seek alone. Its depth seems unapproachable, its demands are non-negotiable. It's settled forever, sufficient forever. It never needs to be "made relevant" as so many people seem to think we have to do today. We don't need to "make the Bible relevant" – it is relevant! And the farther away we get from the living Word of God, the more quickly we become irrelevant! We don't need to change its core message for our culture, the message is our culture needs to change at the core!

God's instruction manual is unlike manuals written by men, even some of the smartest men today, which continually change and have to be fixed, updated. Law / tax codes, computer manuals, Microsoft help (if we can put those two words together!). The Bible is not like the writings of brilliant men or even the most religious of men outside of Christianity. It's not like the Book of Mormon, which had errors to be fixed, and went through many corrections and changes in the 19th century. It's not like the Jehovah's Witness translation that had to go through so many corrections in the 1960s and forward because they kept finding verses on the Deity of Christ that they neglected to mistranslate away in the prior version.

We have in the Dead Sea scrolls manuscripts over 2,100 years old, proof of the faithfulness of the Jews in copying their Scriptures, and proof of prophecies *about* Christ written *before* Christ, fulfilled to extraordinary detail, and which prove the ancient text was not tampered. *Translations* are not inspired, but God's truth is.

English wording of a particular verse or phrase can sometimes be improved to better convey the original language, but the original message of Scripture can never be improved or changed by changing cultures. God's Word in the original is inspired, inerrant, infallible and infinitely sufficient. It is immovable, immutable, irrefutable, indisputable ... unchanging, non-aging, unfading ... unalterable, unconquerable ... unchangeable and unassailable!

*That's the unbreakable unshakable power of God's abiding Word
Now, The Reviving Power of Delighting in God's Word (v. 92-96)*

Our text last week ended with the prayer in v. 88 "revive me." In our text this week, this prayer has been answered: v. 93b says God's Word has revived him. Its reviving power comes in v. 92:

If Your law had not been my delight,
Then I would have perished in my affliction.

I haven't been a pastor many years, but I've already seen this verse to be true in some of the dear senior saints in our church here. In their affliction, when doctors and friends and even I at times have been surprised they did not perish in their affliction, it's been the power of delighting in God's Word that has revived them before my very eyes. And it can do the same for us if we delight in it. The power of God's Word is shown 5 ways in the rest of this text. 5 reasons and rewards to dive into this book and delight in it

1. Its Joy-Producing Power (v. 92)

No other book, nothing else can produce joy in affliction like God can and His Word. We may not be able to delight in what is going on in the world, but we can delight in what God says in His Word, and this delight in His sufficiency keeps us in life's suffering from perishing, as the writer of v. 92 testifies, as do many Christians.

In the year 1631, in Samuel Rutherford *Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (a Puritan classic) a letter is addressed to 'Marion Mcnaught, When Persecuted for Her Principles: Well-beloved Sister [in the Lord] ... I beseech you, therefore, in the bowels of Jesus, set before your eyes the patience of your forerunner Jesus, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again ... Worthy and dear sister, know to carry yourself in trouble; and when you are hated and reproached, the Lord shows it to you [this verse from Ps 119]

... “Unless Thy law had been my delight, I had perished in mine affliction” (Ps. 119:92). Keep God’s covenant in your trials; hold you by His blessed word, and sin not; flee anger, wrath, grudging, envying, fretting; forgive a hundred pence to your fellow servant, because your Lord hath forgiven you ten thousand talents ... the way to overcome is by patience, forgiving and praying for your enemies, in doing whereof you heap coals upon their heads, and your Lord shall open a door to you in your trouble: wait upon Him, as the night watch waiteth for the morning ... Now, again, I trust in our Lord, you shall by faith sustain yourself and comfort yourself in your Lord, and be strong in His power; for you are in the beaten and common way to heaven, when you are under our Lord’s crosses. You have reason to **rejoice** in it, more than in a crown of gold; and **rejoice and be glad** to bear the reproaches of Christ. I rest, recommending you and yours forever, to the grace and mercy of God. Yours in Christ, Anwoth, Feb. 11, 1631⁵

In the book *Martyrs Mirror*, one imprisoned to die for his faith wrote a letter to his beloved wife and son, also models v. 92 as he was able to delight in Scripture till the very end: ‘my dear wife, I cannot forbear to write your love briefly also, though it is done with many tears, **to comfort and rejoice your heart, and this by the Word of God**, for this must now be all our comfort, even as the prophet David says, "**O Lord, unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in mine affliction.**" Ps. 119:92. And as also the prophet Jeremiah says, "... thy word sustains us, since we have received it; and **thy word is the joy and comfort of our hearts.**" Jer. 15:15, 16. Hence, my dear wife, we must have our **delight** in the word of the Lord, and meditate upon it day and night (Ps. 1:2) , even as a rich man has his **delight** in his treasure, meditates upon it, and often counts it to **rejoice** his heart⁶

I’ve mentioned before our trip to Germany where we got to see a couple significant sites of Reformation history, including a museum with some of Luther’s books with his handwriting. In another museum in Germany, Brandenburg Mark Museum, Martin Luther’s Bible is preserved, and the verse written in his own hand is Psalm 119:92. His delight in God’s law is what preserved him and kept him from perishing in the great afflictions he had to face. ‘Philip Melancthon, friend of Luther, said that the handmaid Heme told him at Dresden that it would have been impossible for him to bear up under the manifold miseries of so long an imprisonment, had it not been for the comfort of the Scriptures in his heart.’⁷

2. Its Life-Giving Power (v. 93)

I will never forget Your precepts, For by them You have revived / given me life

God’s Word gave him life, not after the affliction, in the affliction.

v. 50 This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me.

To those who feel they’re spiritually dying, Scripture is the lifeline for spiritual reviving. But notice how he prayed for it desperately:

v. 25 My soul cleaves to the dust; **Revive me** according to Your word.

v. 37 Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, And **revive me** in Your ways.

v. 40 Behold, I long for Your precepts; **Revive me** through Your righteousness.

v. 88 **Revive me** according to Your lovingkindness, So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.

Revive me *by* Your Word so that I may *delight* in Your Word, and keep it as the treasured testimony of the very mouth of my Lord. I don't love for and long for Your Word like I should, revive me, enliven me. If you pray this way repeatedly, God will give you life.

3. Its Saving Power (v. 94)

I am Yours, save me; For I have sought Your precepts.

In the movie *Luther* that came out a few years ago in the theater, when Luther is struggling with his own lack of salvation, assurance, and peace with God, I believe this is the verse his mentor urged him to pray: "I am Yours, save me."

Scripture is sufficient to save. It has saving power. In the classic NT text on the inspiration of God-breathed Scripture and how it is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, Paul says right before that in 2 Timothy 3:15 says its the "Scriptures which are able to make you wise to salvation."

One of the best illustrations of the saving power of Scripture I've ever heard came from Phil Johnson, our men's conference speaker last year, about the 18th century preacher George Whitefield. It's a true story 'about a man named Thorpe, who was a bitter opponent of everything that is holy. He and a group of his friends—all of them young, rebellious thugs—conspired together to mock and oppose George Whitefield's evangelistic ministry while Whitefield was preaching in Bristol, England. George Whitefield had severely crossed eyes, if you have ever seen a realistic likeness of him. And these guys used to refer to him as "Dr. Squintum." [These hecklers] called their little gang "The Hell-Fire Club," and they disrupted meetings, mocked Whitefield on the streets and in public places, and generally tried to make his ministry a reproach in their community. Whitefield's preaching had already made a deep and lasting impact in Bristol, and these young ruffians hated him for it. So this guy Thorpe got one of Whitefield's published sermons and took it to the local pub, where the "Hell-Fire Club" was gathered to drink together while they make a [big joke out] of Whitefield. Thorpe was apparently pretty good at doing impressions, and he had all Whitefield's mannerisms and gestures down pat. So he stood in the center of this pub and crossed his eyes and began to deliver a derisive rendition of Whitefield's sermon. But in the middle of the sermon, the Word of God pierced his heart, and he suddenly stopped and sat down, trembling and broken-hearted. Right then and there, he confessed the truth of the gospel and gave his heart to Christ. His aim was to taunt and ridicule, but he accidentally converted himself! Or rather, the power of the Word of God penetrated his soul and cut him to the heart. He became a preacher himself and quite an effective evangelist, because he knew so well the power of the Word of God to penetrate hardened hearts.'⁸

Why do I just stand up here and preach the Word of God, instead of trying to entertain you or flatter you or tell jokes to you or do any number of things others might want me to do or that might make me more popular? It's because only the Word of God is *living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword and able to cut to the bone and cut hard sinners to their knees. To whatever degree a ministry or minister departs from this book, the power of God also departs in same measure.*

In the Hebrew, this word for “save” speaks of the LORD’s ‘saving care over individuals, especially over those who in their helplessness and trouble need and claim His protection.’⁹

Unbelievers need initial salvation and deliverance from their sins, and believers like David and like us must pray for God’s continual deliverance and saving us and sustaining us through our troubles.

4. Its Sustaining Power (v. 95)

The wicked wait for me to destroy me; I shall diligently consider Your testimonies

The wicked consider me dead meat, but I consider Your message diligently. While they wait to try to destroy me, I will wait and rest in Your testimony that preserves me. The *world wants to make me dead*, but the *Word makes me alive!* It both saves and sustains me.

But again notice the man of God in this verse is not just doing nothing while *requesting* God’s help – he is *reading* God’s help.

James Boice again notes that when ‘we get in trouble we usually go to God for help, which the writer did too. But we often stop at that point, expecting God to intervene all by himself, miraculously, without any work on our part. The psalmist was wiser than we are, for while he prayed for help, he also did what he was able and obliged to do: He studied and meditated on the Bible. He knew that although it is God who must work, God nevertheless works through means, and in the matter of lifting us out of our trouble and setting our feet on a sure foundation, the only indispensable means of deliverance and growth is Bible study.’¹⁰

5. Its Perfect Power for all of life (v. 96)

I have seen a limit to all perfection; Your commandment is exceedingly broad.

All human perfection is limited or comes to an end. If this is David writing, he had seen the most perfect warrior ever, Goliath, come to an end. He saw Asahel, the swiftest and most perfect runner, Ahithophel, the wisest and most perfect counselor, and Absalom the most perfect looking one, all came to an end.¹¹

This verse could be translated “*I have seen the consummation of all perfection* [or, better, ‘I have seen the end to all (earthly) perfection’], / *But, Your commandment is exceedingly broad* [‘wide, unlimited’].” Even the most nearly perfect things in this world come to an end. Only God and His Word are “exceedingly broad,” that is, unlimited and endless.¹²

The world thinks the Bible is exceedingly narrow and constricting, but actually the Bible is exceedingly broad and even liberating. God’s truth sets us free. God’s commandment (the unified whole of His revealed will) is not limited like the things of this world.

Watson concludes: What a wonderful picture of the sufficiency of God’s Word! So broad and spacious is it that it encompasses all issues, all subjects, and all answers. We need nothing else ... love it passionately, trust it implicitly, and obey it unconditionally.¹³

As we do we will experience more and more the reviving power of delighting in Scripture, a power that is joy-producing, life-giving, saving, sustaining, a perfect power for all of life. May we hide His Word in our heart as a treasure so we might not sin against God.

¹ George Zemek, *The Word of God in the Child of God*, p. 217.

² *Ibid.*, 220.

³ James M. Boice, *Psalms*, 3:1012-13.

⁴ J. D. Watson, <http://www.thescipturealone.com/Psalm119-14.htm>

⁵ Samuel Rutherford, *Letters of Spiritual Counsel : Taken from Samuel Rutherford's Letters*. Simpsonville SC: Christian Classics Foundation, p. 18.

⁶ *MARTYRS MIRROR OF THE DEFENSELESS CHRISTIANS, COMPILED FROM VARIOUS AUTHENTIC CHRONICLES, M., AND TESTIMONIES, BY THIELEMAN J. VAN BRAGHT*, p. 1031-32.

⁷ Herbert Lockyer, *Psalms: A Devotional Commentary*, 574.

⁸ http://www.thegracelifeulpit.com/articles/Better_Than_Any_Fad.pdf

⁹ Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 124.

¹⁰ Boice, 3:1013.

¹¹ *Matthew Henry's Complete 6-Volume Commentary*, Vol. 3, p. 274.

¹² Donald Williams, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 14 : Psalms 73-150*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., p. 365

¹³ Watson, *Ibid.*