

Reading the Bible for Deep Delight

First Methodist Church of Tulsa
Spring 2024

PSALM 119:77

Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.

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I. OVERVIEW & SCOPE

Many Christians pick up their Bibles and read, but how many of them read in such a way that their souls are overflowing with joy?

In this class, Pastor Matthew will lead you through a way to read the Scriptures that will not only open your eyes to new information, but more importantly will lead you to greater transformation.

II. SUGGESTED READINGS & RESOURCES

Primary Texts:

The Holy Bible, any modern translation (*Tell Pastor Matthew if you need a bible*)

Russell, Brian D. *Astonished by the Word*. Invite Press, 2023.

Bauer, David R. and Robert A. Traina. *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*. Baker Academic, 2014.

Supplemental Texts:

Beynon, Nigel and Andrew Sach. *Dig Deeper: Tools for Understanding God's Word*. Crossway, 2010

Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Zondervan, 2003.

Jenson, Irving L. *Enjoy Your Bible*. World Wide Publications, 1969.

Jordan, James B. *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World*. Wipf & Stock, 1999.

Merton, Thomas. *Opening the Bible*. The Liturgical Press, 1986.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Eat This Book*. Eerdmans, 2009.

III. SESSION SCHEDULE

Session 1: Delight and Desire – Why do we read the Bible?

Session 2: The Stone of Stumbling - What is the Bible?

Session 3: Through New Eyes – A new way of seeing the world.

Session 4: Who Makes Meaning? - How do we read?

Session 5: “I see people, but they look like trees, walking” -
Understanding the Bible.

Session 6: “Is not my Word like fire?” – What the Bible does to us.

Session 7: Laying the Foundation – Applying the Bible

Session 8: Mastication and Meditation – The value of memorization.

Session 9: Paying Attention – How structure affects our understanding.

Session 10: The Potting Shed – Tools for understanding

Session 11: Putting it all together.

Session 12: What do you desire? – A life of encounter.

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Delight and Desire – Why do we read the Bible?

Why do I read the Bible? (You can write it here or in your Kingswood Notebook)

What do I want from the Bible?

What would your life look like if you got it?

**Psalm 1:1 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;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

Delight and Desire

Psalm 37:4- Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

What do you desire?

Why do you read the Bible? I'd love to list out all the reasons you might have for reading the Bible.

- 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- Etc.

What do these answers say about us? I'm not contented to remain on answers like, "because that's where I learn about God," which is a *great* answer, but it doesn't get to the root. It's good that we learn about God in the Bible. Why do we want to learn about God? Again, there's a list of Sunday School answers we could give to that question that would be factually good, upright, and moral. But I want us to start this semester with one fundamental answer as to why we come to the Bible to read.

Think about what Psalm 1 says:

Psa. 1:1 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;
² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

What do you do with that? How do you read that? How does it land in your soul?

My own history with the Bible is full of complicated motivations and emotions. I remember the first one I ever got. My mom went to a Bible bookstore in El Paso, TX to buy me one because it was on the packing list for a church camp in Sacramento, NM. It had a lot of pictures in it and that's all I remember. I don't know what ever happened to it. I was fascinated by the Bible stories from Noah to Jesus' miracles. But I didn't know what I was holding when I went to camp. Right before we left El Paso in May of 1985, the church we attended, St. Paul UMC presented me with my third grade Bible because I wouldn't be there in the fall to receive it with all of my friends. That Bible was my Bible for years. I read passages that I was asked to look at for Sunday School or Wednesday nights but I didn't know what to do with it. When I flip through that Bible and look at the things that I highlighted, I see a record of things my pitiful newborn faith thought were important. When I became a Christian at 15, I remember coming home and opening the Bible and trying to read it and feeling frustrated because I didn't know what I was supposed to get out of it. I had met Jesus and I wanted to know more about him, but the whole thing seemed so inscrutable and almost unapproachable. I did everything that I could with my

limited understanding to make something out of it, but I never got very far. And then I was called the ministry at 17, and I knew that I would have to make the Bible a central part of my life and ministry, but I didn't even know where to begin. So I languished scripturally.

The years in college before I got to seminary and the studied of the Word became more academic than it did anything else I remember the warnings not to let my Bible assignments replace my personal time in the Word but I didn't really even understand why there was a difference. I was at times thrilled by the Word, when some of the greatest Bible teachers of the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st would lay out a vision for the story of God. And then I would collapse in shame and lament that there was no way this pea brain of mine would ever get a understanding or revelation, the way these people had. I wanted the scriptures not just to excite my desire and need for information but the spark change inside of me as a result of reading and studying.

Mixed up in all of this was a competing emotion of fear. Fear that I was going to misunderstand and misapply the Word. Fear that I was going to get a bad grade on an assignment. Fear that I would look like a fool in front of my colleagues who were also training for ministry. That's the way I left seminary. I spent time listening to some of the greatest preachers and teachers I've ever heard, living off of their encounters with the word because I was afraid that I wouldn't see things correctly, or worse, not see anything at all.

So I got into a local church, and I spent the better part of 20 years preaching out of the Bible, leading Bible Studies like Disciple I, or Sunday school classes teaching through different books of the Bible. When I started my Doctor of Ministry in 2012, those same old feelings of not knowing if I was doing things correctly began to resurface. Was what I was putting into my dissertation true or was I going to be exposed as a fraud? The result was that for about 30 years I came to the Bible with a lot of fear and trepidation. Now I think there's something to rightly trembling before God and His Word like Isaiah did in Isaiah 6. That's not terribly fun spot to find oneself in.

I acknowledge that not everyone's Bible reading has been like mine. But that's my story and it's part of the roots of this class. The beautiful part is that despite the years, the locusts of my fear had eaten when it came to the Scriptures that God has done what he does. He's drawn me into himself and I've begun to encounter Scripture much differently than I have in the past. Which is the underlying motivation for why I want us to talk about some of the themes that we're going to talk about over the course of this semester. I know that not everyone is like me. Not everyone has had the same experiences I have. But I do know that's some folks have experienced frustration with their Bible reading, where they feel like it's just not enough or that they sensed that they've gleaned a lot of knowledge about God but haven't truly encountered God in the reading of the scriptures or that you've become so familiar with the stories and the theology that it all just seems kind of out there. And you want it in the here in the heart and so that's my purpose for spending several weeks exploring both what the Bible is and how God intends to use it in your life but also to provide you some teaching and resources so that when you come to the Bible each day you encounter the LIVING GOD.

So, without further ado, I want us to consider a question: what do you desire. Desire is a controlling feeling to have or do something. You don't have to share this with anyone, but write down a couple of your strongest desires. At a fundamental level, we desire to stay alive, right? Those come down to Maslow's hierarchy of needs: food, shelter, clothing, and wifi. As those needs and desires are met, though, and we start moving up the hierarchy, you get into things like self-actualization and a desire for meaning. So what is it that you desire?

I may not have given you enough time to wrestle with that question, but it's worth taking some time and writing them down and ask yourself and God why?

Desires can change. I've noticed that over the course of my life. The good news is that the Spirit of God can change our desires.

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psa. 1:1 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;

² but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.

Not the law as the words on the page, but on the God who is leading you in good counsel.

I hope to challenge you this semester with some aspirational teaching and some strategies that move our desires toward a reality in which we're astonished and delighted by the God of the Bible through this Bible he has given us.