The Joy of Learning

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Psalm 119:1-16

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord. [2] Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart, [3] who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways. [4] You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. [5] O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! [6] Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. [7] I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances. [8] I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me. [9] How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. [10] With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. [11] I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. [12] Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes. [13] With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. [14] I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. [15] I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. [16] I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

1. What Gives Us Joy?

If we make a list of 10 things that bring us joy, what would your list include? Everyone might have a different list. Here is one list. The list is 1. Do something creative, 2. Spend time with close friends, 3. Create something artistic, 4. Give thanks, 5. Take a 30-minute walk, 6. Do a good deed, 7. Sing my favorite songs, 8. Volunteer in a local community, 9. Give more hugs, 10. Plant a garden, 11. Listen to music.

If I could add one more thing to this list, I think I would add “learn something new.” My brother is three years older than me. I remember that I begged my mom to send me to school when my brother started going to elementary school. My mom took me to the elementary school and met with the principal, and I was allowed to have a seat in my brother’s classroom. I was so happy that I was able to learn something at school. Even though I don’t go to school anymore, my favorite place to go is still a library. We can experience joy when we learn new things and oftentimes our lives can change even dramatically by what we learn.

2. Teach Me Your Word

When we read Psalm 119, we see that the writer is passionately devoted to the word of God. We do not know who wrote this Psalm. But the writer wants to learn more about the word of God. He says in verse 12,

"***Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes***." In verse 26, he says, "***Teach me your decrees***" (NIV). In verse 108, he says again, "***Teach me your laws***" (NIV).

The author wants to learn more about God's Word. As we see in these verses, the word of God is central to the writer. The writer uses eight synonyms of the word of God: the laws, testimonies, judgments, statutes, precepts, commandments, promise, and ways. For the psalmist, the word of God would mean the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. But for us, the whole Bible is what we consider the word of the Lord.

Let's look a little more into Psalm 119. You may already know but this psalm is both the longest psalm and longest chapter in the Bible. It has 176 verses. Psalm 119 is called an "alphabetic psalm." It consists of twenty-two sections each with eight verses. Every verse in each section begins with the Hebrew alphabet in order.

The author praises God's word in almost every verse and tells us how wonderful the word of the Lord is. The writer describes the mysterious powers of God's word. I wonder whether the writer perhaps collected different experiences from the people around him about the word of the Lord and put them together. Some say that the motivation of the writer for writing this psalm is to teach every child about the word of God with great excitement and expectation.

3. The Word of God Gives Us Happiness

Why does the author of Psalm 119 want to learn more about the word of God? The writer believes that the word of God gives him true happiness. Verse one says, "***Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord***." "Blameless" means "perfect." Is there anyone who is blameless or perfect? Of course, the answer is no.

Romans 3:10-12 say, ***"'There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless."*** But we can see here that the writer uses this passage to say that "happy are those whose sins are considered blameless, or forgiven." The Bible tells us that God is willing to forgive our sins regardless of how large or small they may be and considers us blameless because of the sacrifice that Jesus has already made on our behalf.

In verse two, the author says, "***Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart***." "Seek" means "demand" or "ask for." I would interpret this verse as "happy are those who want to have an intimate relationship with the Lord." When babies are born, they are

always looking for their parents. They are like the sheep that David uses as an image in Psalm 23 saying "I shall not want." The Bible reminds us that God is like our parents who take care of us when we seek him.

We are able to find joy in knowing that God is with us. That's why in verse 14, the author says, "***I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches***." When we put our trust in God, we trust that God is in control and cares for us in all situations. Because of this, we are able to have hope in all situations. The author in Psalm 119:43 says, ***"Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for my hope is in your ordinances."*** Do we have hope that the author of Psalm 119 has?

4. A Saved Life in Houston

You have probably already seen much of the news about the flooding in Houston, TX. You may have seen the scene where a Houston television news team saved the life of a truck driver stranded in rising flood waters. KHOU reporter Brandi Smith was broadcasting from north Houston's beltway when she saw a tractor-trailer surrounded by water with the driver still inside.

Moments later, a Harris County Sheriff's Office truck and boat came in her direction. She flagged down the truck and told them the truck driver was stuck in about 10 feet of water. The truck driver was rescued and would later thank the TV news team but also thank God for saving his life.

The Bible tells us God sent His son to rescue us all. The author of Psalm 119 repeats the joy of being with the Lord in the word of God in verses 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143. and 174. Do we have such joy that the writer of Psalm 119 has?

You may have already heard, Texas Governor Greg Abbott proclaimed this Sunday, September 3, a "Day of Prayer." "It is right and fitting," he wrote in his proclamation, "that the people of Texas should join with their fellow residents and with others from across the country and around the world to seek God's wisdom for ourselves and our leaders and ask for His merciful intervention and healing in this time of crisis." I am glad that Texas Governor believes that we can have hope in God.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief is currently working with disaster coordinators and early response teams to provide relief to the many people whose lives have been impacted by hurricane/tropical storm Harvey. As you read in the bulletin, our bishop asks us to help them through our giving. By giving we witness that God gives us hope through other people.

5. The Bible Became Available for Everyone

When we read and meditate on the word of God, we are able to delight and share the joy of having a God that loves and cares for us with other people through our words and actions. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, the apostle Paul says to Timothy, "***All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*** ***17*** ***so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work***." So Paul encourages Timothy to teach the Bible.

In the Old Testament time, the Bible was kept in the Temple. Written copies of the Word of God weren't shared until the 16th century. The Latin Vulgate Bible was used in Western Christianity through the Middle Ages. That was until a German language Bible from Hebrew and ancient Greek was translated by Martin Luther and was published in 1534. The first printed Bible in English was completed in 1535. It is called the Tyndale Bible. The King James Version is an English translation of the Bible for the Church of England published in 1611. As of September 2016, the Bible has been translated into 636 languages with portions of the Bible being translated into 3,223 different languages. These days it is so easy to have a personal copy of the Bible. Yet many people do not read and study the Bible. If we do not learn the word of the Lord, we cannot enjoy all the blessings that God has provided.

6. Conclusion

What image comes to mind when we think of the Bible? For me, the Bible is God's love letter to His people. The Bible reminds us of how much God loves us and that we are nothing without God and his love. If we believe that the Bible is God's love letter, we would read it over and over again.

These days we have Bibles in written form, on the internet, and even on our smartphones. The Bible is more accessible than it has ever been, and we are reminded this morning that God's word helps us to be happy, delight, have hope, and grow in knowing God and sharing more of God's love and goodness with the people around us.

7. Application

Hosea 6:3 says, "***Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.***" In the Bible, "know" God is not to know about Him in an abstract and impersonal manner, but rather to experience all aspects of God. The more we understand who God is and how much He loves His people through the Bible, the more we are transformed and are filled with more joy. We'll be hosting a Bible study on Exodus from the third week in September. I pray that many of us can get together to learn more about who God is, how much God loves us, and why we are here. May the Holy Spirit inspire us and give us the joy of learning in Exodus study during this beautiful season. Amen.