



Last Sunday afternoon I set my DVR to record the Green Bay Packer game and I took my daughters into San Francisco. I thought, no traffic, beautiful day... I will watch the game at my leisure tonight and fast forward the commercials. The DVR is a beautiful thing.

The first thing I learned is 49er fans like Packer fans publicly express their feelings about their team. Walking out of China Town and down toward Pier 39 we heard a roar. We rounded a corner and saw red-shirted fans throwing a football on the street outside the corner bar, with the game blaring out into the neighborhood. Later while eating a wonderful supper I looked up and it was about 4:30 at this time. Only tourists will be here, no problem. Call me naïve. All these red-shirted guys running and jumping and pumping their fists. Now I'm not the always the sharpest tool in the box, but that looked like celebrating to me!

Some of us as we were having breakfast today were wondering, "What is the longest chapter in the Bible?" Psalm 119. It has 176 verses and most of them teach on the importance of the Word of God in some way or another. Some of us having breakfast were no doubt wondering, "How many letters are in the Hebrew Alphabet?" 22 letters. There are 22 blocks of scripture in Psalm 119 and David began each verse with a word that has that Hebrew letter at the beginning of the word.

This morning we are looking at the section corresponding to the Hebrew letter "MEM." They are the eight verses of Psalm 119:97–104. Some of you are probably saying, "Hey, I already knew that." Over my breakfast cereal this morning I was wondering, "How many different words are used to describe God's Word in the Hebrew Language?" The answer: 8.

Umm...8 Hebrew names to describe God's Word... 8 Hebrew names times 22 sections... that's 176 verses. Word. Law. Testimonies. Precepts. Statutes. Commandments. Judgment. Promise.

Throughout Psalm 119 you will see all 8 of them. In 97-104 alone we will see 5 of them, so open up your Bibles to this beautiful poem by King David about Why He Loves the Word of God. Some of you may have been asking, "Why would I read 100 Bible passages in the next four months? Are they serious?" My prayer is that this short passage in Psalm 119 would give you several motivations to participate in our Essential 100 Challenge.

Why Would I Read 100 Bible Passages?

Because the Bible delights

"Oh, how I love your law!" (v. 97a)

David writes this in the present tense. Not "The law used to be my delight" or "One day I hope it delights me again." It is present, real time. The Bible delights David. The language is like a comparison. I love the law... more than TV, more than my job, more than the power I possess, more than any relationship on earth, more than any other idol out there. I love the law because none of these other things deliver delight. None of these other things deliver joy.

The language expresses a struggle he is having at penning how he feels about God's Word. He is saying, How do I say it? I can't verbalize it. What words should I use? I love it so much, how do I get it across to all of us at CPC? A professor or Biblical scholar may read and understand and even externally obey the law, but the believer loves it. He lives it as if he could not live without it. To the professor or the scholar the word is a task, a habit that is there to satisfy the conscience, relieve guilt. "I did the right thing. I am okay now. It's great literature. It is beautiful."

But the believer can say, God's word is food for my starving soul, medicine for my sick soul, light for the darkness in my soul, comfort for my aching soul, yes, life from what was dead. It is liberty, freedom from bondage, freedom from fear, from guilt, from condemnation. Maybe like David you are saying, "I didn't even know I was starving, sick. I knew I was aching, but the Word of God brought me delight."

As I read this phrase over and over again this week, it tells me that if I don't have passion for the Word of God, I won't ever be all He created me to be. Because the Word not only tells us about God, it guides us to Him and then He goes with us.

Because the Bible goes with us

"I meditate on it all day long." (v. 97b)

Meditating on the Word of God was important to David. Why? Meditation means to engage in thought, to contemplate, to reflect. The idea is that when we meditate and reflect on scripture what we take into our minds doesn't just stay in our mind; it spreads from our minds into our hearts.

David knew that if he meditated on scripture God would go with him throughout the day. Meditation brings a consistency and stability as we walk through daily life. When we seek to contemplate and reflect, we are saying to God, "I have so much room to grow, I want my heart to be enlarged, I want truth, grace and love to affect my entertainment, my work, my finances, my time, my talents, my relationships.

One of the big battles we Christians face is that our faith gets compartmentalized. What do I mean by compartmentalized? It means that we appear to be one way at church, and another way at our job, another way at home, and another way with our friends. Separate compartments. And we hate it. We are ashamed of it. We know we are not being real and true.

For most of us it means confessing the sin of pride, of hypocrisy, and verbalizing that there is actually a gap between what we know in our head and what we live out in our hearts. Most of us get discouraged. Deep down we are terrified that the truth about us will be revealed and we will no longer be loved or admired by those we want loving and admiring us.

David gets our issues. He is saying meditate, reflect on the Word of God and you close the gaps between the head and the heart. In other words, your life can actually change.

What does meditation look like? It simply means realize the presence of God throughout your day. Look for him in the events in your life. Connect what you read in God's word to the events in your life. Let God's word simmer, maybe one thought, one verse, or even one word. Let it cook. Not in the microwave; let it slow cook in the crock pot; let it slow cook all day.

As Charles Spurgeon says this about meditation: Think about the justice, the mercy and goodness of God as your boss puts pressure on you, as your child exasperates you, as your bills are coming due. Think about the frailty, corruption, sinfulness in your heart and your need for grace every day as you navigate your way through each day. Think about what God forbids and why. Think about what God blesses and why. Think about that one take-away thought that stuck with you as you went to close your Bible after reading your E100 passage. There was a reason it flew into your head, and there is a reason it didn't fly out of your head when you closed the book.

The Christian life is like running. You have seen it outside today in the 10-mile run that is taking place here in Foster City. Those that have trained are running along and maybe don't even look winded. They are aerobically balanced. The output of oxygen to propel them forward is matched by the input they breathe in as they run. Some will end the race and say, "Next time I'm doing a half. Or next time I know I can run this faster."

Then we will see some people who look like they are in terrible pain. They didn't train well enough aerobically. They got the new shoes, the fancy shorts and shirt, they run fast off the starting

line, they churn along for a short time feeling pretty good, and then something changes in their body. Their muscles start to ache, their legs get heavy, their muscles then cramp, their lungs burn. That's called anaerobic (without oxygen) running. It's caused by a body using up more oxygen than it takes in. And anaerobic exercise is great in short bursts, but can't be sustained for a long haul.

Many of us read God's word like an anaerobic exercise. We hear a good sermon on Sunday, we read a quick devotional and we are off and running, one compartment to the next. Why did I yell at that person? Why does no one at work see that I am different? Why? What was the scripture I read this morning again? I can't even remember. Because I am an anaerobic Bible reader.

Meditation and reflection on Scripture is an aerobic. Meditation puts us on a daily pace where our output matches our input—God's word—not for 5 minutes but throughout my day. Of course I can't walk around holding my Bible while I do my job, But I can think about what I know about God, my sin, what God loves, what God hates and that the one thought that stuck with me from my morning reading isn't stuck there by accident. God put it there for a reason.

As I meditate I increase the spiritual oxygen to my soul. It's interesting, the more I meditate the more spiritual oxygen I take in, and my capacity to apply more spiritual energy to life increases. My life changes. I am actually growing. My light shines brighter. The gap between what I know and what do shrinks more. I see more spiritual fruit.

Pastor Rob sent out this wonderful illustration. In her book, *Walking in the Dust with Rabbi Jesus*, Lois Tverberg retells the following story about a famous first century rabbi named Rabbi Akiva. One day as Rabbi Akiva was shepherding his flocks, he noticed a tiny stream trickling down a hillside, dripping over a ledge on its way toward the river below. Below was a massive boulder. Surprisingly, the rock bore a deep impression. The drip, drip, drip of water over the centuries had hollowed away the stone. Akiva commented, "If mere water can do this to hard rock, how much more can God's Word carve a way into my heart of flesh?" Akiva realized that if the water had flowed over the rock all at once, the rock would have been unchanged. It was the slow but steady impact of each small droplet, year after year, that completely reformed the stone.

She comments: "When I first started studying the Bible's Hebrew context, I wanted one commentary that would teach me everything, one class that would explain it all. If I could learn all the 'right answers' in one marathon event, all the better. I find now that God likes to reveal truth over many years, as I study alongside others. I realize now that big 'splashes' aren't usually God's way of doing things. Instead, through the slow drip of study and

prayer, day after day, year after year, he shapes us into what he wants us to be."

As we begin the E100, start slow and then get slower. The goal for the first week is just keep moving. Drip, drip, drip. A big splash didn't change the rock. It is a slow drip, drip, drip of God's word that will change a heart.

Because the Bible equips us

"Your commands make me wiser than my enemies" (v. 98)

The Bible equips us with wisdom. This wisdom will help us against our enemies, our weak flesh, trials or storms that come our way. Who starts to build a shelter in the middle of a storm? The idea is the blessings of the Scripture we read and meditate on today will not only help us in the moment, they will give us wisdom and the stability of knowing they are always with me when storms hit, maybe ones we can't even yet see forming on the horizon.

"I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes." (v. 99)

Students love verses like these. But what David is saying is people who really know their scripture are not intimidated by those who hold worldly authority and power. Have you known a friend that went into a highly intimidating situation and they come out and you look at them and say, "You didn't even seem intimidated. They tried to intimidate you and you were not rattled." You look at yourself and think, "Man, I would have been curled up in a ball sucking my thumb." Your friend had this inner strength and confidence and trust.

"I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts." (v. 100)

If there is anyone who understands and connects with verse 100 it's our Elders and our Pastoral Staff. Any pastor or elder worth their weight in salt hungers to become more mature. To be teachable until the day Jesus takes them home. To realize they don't have the corner on truth and wisdom. To become stronger in faith, to have greater understanding and humility that leads to more and more obedience.

And yet it strikes me. If I read and meditate on God's word, as I accept and participate in the E100 challenge, I have the potential for more stability in the storms of life, more insight, more understanding, more maturity. Why wouldn't I want to read 100 Bible passages in the next four months?

On Christmas Day my wife Julie and I drove down to Orange County. The next day we took some family members to the Ronald Reagan Library and burial site in Simi Valley. It's a beautiful spot, up on a hill with a 360 degree view of the surrounding valleys. One of the coolest things is that they had shipped in the actual Air Force One plane that was in active service during

the Reagan Administration. There is was in this beautiful glass hangar and we could tour it.

As we walked through and saw the president's quarters, the communications desk with the nuclear football where they kept the codes, the places for the VIPs and the crew and the press, I thought, there were really smart people that rode that plane. Really smart, wise, insightful, experienced, even mature. Then we read David's words and he says, Think of the smartest people who ever rode Air Force One. If you read and meditate on God's word you will have more insight into how things work, human nature, the hopes and dreams of people, the peace that the world can't give, the way to not carry burdens, the ways to actually help people who are suffering, in poverty, addicted, hopeless. It was pretty humbling.

Because the Bible directs us

What do I mean by that? David taught us about his love for God's word in verse 97 and then in verses 98-100 he taught us about how God's Word equips us with wisdom, insight and understanding, even more of it than people who ride Air Force One. So our aerobic love for God's Word (reading and meditating) produces applied knowledge (insight and wisdom/maturity/understanding) which is then applied to a situation, circumstance, challenge in our lives. And what does David say comes out on the other end? Obedience. Look at verses 101-102.

"I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me."

Maybe some of us are starting to think, this is too hard. My feet end up on the evil path all the time. I have tried and tried and I obey for a while, but sure enough I blow it again. Some of us just can't seem to stop doing the wrong things. And not to discourage you, but we can't change. We won't ever be obedient in a pure sense if we are motivated to change by fear of punishment. We may stop doing something that is wrong for a while, but our hearts are not in it so it won't last.

Thank God that the Christian walk isn't just staying away from the evil path to be a good Christian. It isn't about working harder or doing better. It's about embracing the love that God extends to us. Love is the most powerful motivator for obedience because love's motivation is about God offering us the opportunity to embrace something better, something good, something that brings an abundant life.

As you are challenged to obey God's Word in your E100, keep thinking about how good God is, how much he loves you, and that his plans are for you to prosper. And E100 is a chance to get to know him better. He gives us verse 103 to drive home what is better.

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

David was confronted with the same kinds of words the world speaks to us to trick us to go down the wrong path. And he says the words that come from the world are not sweet. The words that come from God are sweeter even than the best honey I put on my bread. David sees God's Word as a gift, so therefore he hungers to know better the gift giver.

I got this email from a group called 6:4 Fellowship. Some generous family at CPC paid my way to be part of this pastor-to-pastor community to learn and grow. The 6:4 Fellowship is about encouraging pastors to focus on the Word and prayer and have the courage to say no to other things that distract from a pastor's calling. Do you know what happens when I get gifts like a Packer candy dispenser and a ticket to join a Pastor's Network that will help me grow? I want to get to know the gift givers. They care about me. They are showing love. I want to get to know them better. I want to say thank you. It's the same way with God. Whatever is good and perfect that comes to us in this life and after this life is a gift from him. I get to know God the gift giver when I read his word. I get to say thank you. I know God is watching out for me.

"I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path." (v. 104)

So it's love, it's understanding and it's obedience.

Because it's God speaking

"....for you yourself have taught me."(v. 102)

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson go on a camping trip, set up their tent and fall asleep. Some hours later, Holmes wakes his faithful friend.

"Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see."

Watson replies, "I see millions of stars."

"What does that tell you?" asks Holmes.

Watson ponders for a minute. "Astronomically speaking, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, it tells me that Saturn is in Leo. Hourlogically, it appears to be approximately a quarter past three in the a.m. Theologically, it's evident the Lord is all-powerful and we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it seems we will have a beautiful day tomorrow."

After a pause, Watson says, "Well, Holmes, what does it tell you?"

Holmes is silent for a moment and then he speaks. "Watson, you twit. It tells me that someone has stolen our tent!"

There is a danger when we come to Scripture that we look for the complicated rather than looking for the obvious. I must keep telling myself, keep it simple stupid. It's not that complicated. Remember what you are reading. These are the words of God, not men. The Apostle Paul gave thanks to God when those who heard from him when he taught heard his words for what they were—God speaking.

"And we thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1st Thessalonians 2:13).

When I open my Bible 100 times to read 100 passages in the next four months, 100 times I get the privilege to hear God speak.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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Catalog No. 1393-FC