

Psalm 119:89-96 || Ep. 932 – The Power of Delight

Dwelling Richly Podcast – Summer 2024

[lightly edited transcript]

Hey, welcome back. This is Jennifer, and this is the Dwelling Richly podcast. We are continuing in our summer series of how to study the Bible. In today's episode, we're going to be covering Psalm 119, verses 89 to 96.

It's the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet past the middle mark, but it's considered the middle of the Hebrew alphabet for a variety of reasons, which we will not go into in today's podcast. But our focus of this podcast has been how to study the Bible. We've gone through several books of the Bible, and now we're in this big, huge chapter, which feels like a book of the Bible.

We are allowing this particular chapter to teach us how to better be dwelling in God's Word, to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, and then we return the favor by not just doing Bible study, not just reading the Word, but to really dwell in the Word as it dwells richly in us.

So I'm glad you're here with me today. I'm excited to get into this particular one. It was kind of a hard one for me to get started on only because I was just doing so many deep dives into this particular passage. At a certain point, you just say, you know what, I'm just going to go ahead and record this podcast and get on with things and just enjoy this time together with you.

Again, thank you for joining in. I've always loved being a part of this with you. If you're joining for the very first time, hello and hi. And if you're a regular here listening to this podcast, hello and hi. I platform this on several different places. So if you're listening on YouTube or Spotify, maybe you're listening on Audible, maybe you're in iTunes, maybe you're right here on Podbean, which is where I record my main platform for this. Wherever you are, say hi, drop a comment, and let me know you're here. I always appreciate the feedback.

Speaking of feedback, I'm working on a new series that will be coming out. Not sure when, but I'll collect some information and get that out to you soon. It's a new series called "So Glad You Asked," and the idea of that one is to answer questions about the Bible and life and how life connects to the Bible. When we come up against challenges, things we don't understand, oftentimes I'll hear from you, and you'll ask a great question, and I'll add that to my list.

If you have a question, if something comes up in conversation, or if something comes up in your own personal Bible study and you're curious about my thoughts on that or just want to dig in there with me a bit, let me know. Submit that question. I'll leave you the link at the bottom of this podcast. I have a place on my website where you can go and submit a question, and then I'll get back to you. Maybe I'll include that in the podcast in a future episode. So thank you for thinking about doing that as well.

Let's go ahead and get into God's Word. Again, we're in Psalm 119, and we'll be in verses 89 to 96. I'm going to read today again from the English Standard Version, and we'll use a couple of other versions of the Bible to help give us some clarity. So if you're following along, the New International Version is great. The New American Standard Bible is great. I'll also refer to the Good News Translation, which is a lighter, more of a paraphrase of the Bible, but it's a helpful one.

Let's go ahead and read. I'll read from the English Standard Version. We're going to go straight through. Grab your Bible, and read it with me from whatever translation you're using. Then we're going to go back through, and I'm going to talk a little bit about this particular chunk of scripture and how it helps us to better study the Bible.

Psalm 119, 89 to 104. Forever, O Lord. Oh, not to 104. I'm sorry. I had both sections queued up. This is 89 to 96. All right, here we go:

Psalm 119:89-96 || Ep. 932 – The Power of Delight

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"Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Your faithfulness endures to all generations. You have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment, they stand this day, for all things are your servants. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life. I am yours, save me, for I have sought your precepts. The wicked lie in wait to destroy me, but I consider your testimonies. I have seen a limit to all perfection, but your commandment is exceedingly broad."

Wow, do I say "wow" after every passage? I think I do. They're just so beautiful and such great reminders. Maybe you can understand why it took me a while to organize my thoughts and get this particular episode out.

Let's go ahead, and I want to talk a bit about this particular chunk of Psalm 119. This section is from the letter Lamed. It's the 12th, as we count forward in the alphabet. You know, there are 22 letters organized in the Hebrew alphabet. This is number 12, and so that puts it to the right, moving forward of the halfway mark. But in Hebrew teaching and Hebrew understanding, Lamed is actually considered to be the middle of the letter.

It's very unique in that the letter Lamed itself is the tallest letter. If you want to look up the way that the letter Lamed is written, because you can't really see that it's the tallest letter, even when you're reading. If your Bible notes and writes it out like the NIV, it will write the letter Lamed. But it actually goes up above the line, and what's interesting about that, understanding the Hebrew of that, is that it's the tallest letter. It's the only letter that goes above that baseline. It's the 12th letter, like I said, but it's actually considered the middle or the central letter or the heart of the Hebrew alphabet.

It's pretty cool how the alphabet is split right there at Lamed, and that's considered the heart of it. Because it kind of towers up and above the other letters, it really visually, if you write it all out, creates the center position of the alphabet. In Hebrew thought, it represents, I'll say it in Hebrew, then I'll say it in English, it represents the "melek ha-melekin," the king of kings.

The idea of that is supported by the letter right before it. It's the idea of the throne of glory, and the letter after that stands for the kingdom. The people writing, the wise commentators, the older commentators of the Hebrew letters and the alphabet, talk about how those three letters can bring out the word "melek," of king. Here we have the mm sound coming after it, and the kh sound before, like we talked about last time, the chaf. Then coming up next is mem. So those three letters can remind us of melek, the king. Isn't that great? Super cool.

The letter Lamed, actually, the original meaning was probably something to stick something to, go to something along, to smack it and poke it a bit, and it reminds us of a shepherd's staff. If you think about the shape of the letter itself, it's kind of referencing that shepherd's staff. But the idea is to move something into action. The Lamed is to move something into action.

When you take a look at the whole idea of this particular stanza or this chunk of Psalm 119, everything about this is to move us into action toward God and his law and his precepts and his commandments.

Let's take a look at that first verse, 89. In your Bible, our English Bible, that first word might be "forever." The New American Standard has it as "forever." In the New International, the first word says, "your word, O Lord." Okay. But the actual first letter, the first word in the Hebrew alphabet there is the word "le'olam," le'olam. It's the idea of forever, like it's captured here.

It connects to this idea of the psalm in general, talking about the forever nature of God's word. As we go through this, I want us to be looking for the idea of forever and God's word being forever. I want us to see how that juxtaposes or sets us up toward our not being forever. We are the opposite of that. So we look to God and his word as steadfast, standing firm, being faithful, well-established, his law always there, whereas we are prone to perish. We are prone to not being forever if it weren't for, and David, the writer, David or Ezra, whoever, says, that's the beauty of your word.

Psalm 119:89-96 || Ep. 932 – The Power of Delight

Dwelling Richly Podcast – Summer 2024

As opposed to me, I could perish, but your word is forever. So verse 89, "Forever, O Lord, Yahweh, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." Then verse 90, "Your faithfulness endures to all generations. You have established the earth, and it stands fast." By your appointment, they stand this day, or according to your ordinances, they stand this day. For all things are your servants. Everything, the word of God is your servant. The earth that God created is your servant.

Then this beautiful, beautiful verse: "If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction." We've seen that word "perished" come up through Psalm 119 multiple times. In fact, this is the third time it's occurred, and five times in all of Psalm 119, it's right there. "I would have perished in my affliction if your law had not been my delight."

Then in verse 93, he says, "I will never forget your precepts."

Now in the English Standard Version, it says, "I will never." But that word "never" actually has the same idea as the word "forever" back in verse 89. So "I will never," it actually says in the Hebrew that "I will never, ever forget your precepts." It's really strong. I will never, ever forget your precepts.

Why would I forget something that has given me life, right? Why would I forget something that has been the source of complete salvation for me, right? If your law hadn't been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. So he says in verse 93, "I will never, ever forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life."

Then in verse 94, I love this complete surrender of this word, this opening phrase: "I am yours. I am yours. Save me." And that word "save me" is the word Hosea, Hosea. It's the word we get Jesus' name from, Yeshua. "I am yours. Save me. I have sought your precepts." Isn't that a beautiful reminder and something that can redirect our thoughts today?

Whose am I? I am yours. Save me, for I have sought your precepts.

Verse 95: "The wicked, they just lie in wait to destroy me." The opposite of who Jesus, who God is, who the Lord is, who Yeshua is, who Yahweh is. The opposite, the wicked, they just lie in wait to destroy. Not God. He's there to save.

Where are the writer's thoughts here? "I consider your testimonies." That's where life is found. Then he says that in conclusion in verse 96: "I've seen a limit to all perfection. Everything else out there, there's a limit to it, but your commands are boundless. They're exceedingly broad," it says in the ESV. Everything else has limits, but not you. Not your commands. Your commandment is perfect, and it has no limits. My life has limits. Everything else I can see has limits, but not your commands, not your law.

As I was going through this psalm and thinking about our approach to the Bible and how to better study the Bible, and of course, we've talked about this before. It's not just studying the Bible. It's loving the word. It's delighting in the word. It's dwelling in the word. All of that is wrapped up in studying the Bible.

How to better study it is to have this as our focus in verse 92, to really think of it this way. Anyway, if your law, your word, your testimony, your commandments had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. As we approach the word, I want us to be thinking about it that way. No matter where you are, you could be reading Genesis, you could be reading 1 John, you could be in any of the Gospels, any corner of the Bible.

Let's approach the word like this: If it wasn't for your word and me delighting in your word, having complete joy in your word, misery would swallow me up. I could perish in my affliction. The truth is, the reality is we will perish in our affliction if we don't have delight in God's law.

Psalm 119:89-96 || Ep. 932 – The Power of Delight

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You see, it's one thing to know God, to know his word. That's great. But we are invited to delight in his word, to just have so much joy in being in his word.

As I record this podcast here right now, I'm thinking about, I just came back from a camping trip with my husband where we kayaked up in through Stanislaus National Forest on a beautiful lake, Spicer Meadow Reservoir, and beauty all around me and just gasping in delight at all the beauty around me and the sunrise and the sunset and the trees and the light shimmering off of the water and the sound of the wind rustling through the trees.

So much delight filled me in God's creation and how restoring that was to my soul, how renewing it was to me. But you know what? That can and will fade away. That tree will come and go. The wind will come and go. The waters will come and go. But God's word is always there.

I could perish because of my affliction and my misery, and I can feel swallowed up by it. But as I approach my study in God's word, I constantly will go back now to this: My delight will be the source of my joy, and your word will be the source of my joy. Knowing God's word.

Not just studying the Bible for a mental exercise or a self-discipline, but really just being in awe and thankful for it. As much as I'm in awe of sunrises and sunsets and wind blowing through the trees, being in awe and being so thankful and having so much joy to be in God's Word.

So that's how we approach God's Word. That's how we study it. We don't just study it to get it done. We study to delight in it, to ask God to give us that kind of joy that we have. And to be in touch with the reality that without the truth of God's word that stands forever, that everything that God created is fixed firmly, including his word, and that we can delight in it and know our salvation is from God's word that he has spoken and given to us so lovingly.

Tomorrow we're going to get into this next section that literally starts off with the love that we have for the law. It's just a perfect segue from this portion of delighting in it to the next portion coming up in our next episode, Mem, the next letter of this Hebrew alphabet.

I hope you'll join me for that. I hope today you'll reread this passage, delight in God's word, and be satisfied in the joy that we have because of what he's given us in his word.

I always appreciate you being here with me, and thank you for sharing and loving this podcast and most of all, loving God's word with me as well. Know as always that you are loved and prayed for, and I look forward to being back here again with you real soon. Bye-bye for now. Thank you.