

Loving God
Psalm 119:97-104

Introduction: In this stanza, the psalmist shows us what God's word does, rather than what God's word is.

These eight verses describe the process by which God forms His people into the likeness of Jesus. We are watching spiritual formation unfold before our eyes.

That is important because **every one of us is being formed by something.**

Whether we realize it or not, **something is always**

- shaping the way we think,
- what we love,
- the choices we make, and ultimately
- the people we become.

We become like whatever captures our hearts.

That is why Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:29-30). In other words,

Love shapes us.

The psalmist understood that truth. That is why this stanza begins with, "*Oh how I love your law!*"

Many Christians approach the Bible primarily as a responsibility. We know we should read it, study it, and obey it. All of that is true. But duty alone will never sustain the Christian life. Only love can. Only love will.

The blessed life, which the psalmist is pursuing, begins when God gives us hearts that delight in His Word because we delight in the God who gave it. Once that love takes root, everything begins to change.

- Our minds are renewed.
- Our walk is redirected.
- Even our desires are transformed.

That is the journey this stanza invites us to follow.

Big Idea: God's Word transforms those who delight in it, shaping the way we think, walk, and discern.

First: Loving God's Word Shapes Our Minds. 97-100

Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

⁹⁸ Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.

⁹⁹ I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation.

¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

Notice how everything begins with love.

- The psalmist does not meditate on God's Word in order to convince himself to love it.
- He meditates because he already does.
- Love always captures our attention.
- We naturally think about whatever we treasure.

ILL: Parents think about their children. Grandparents delight in talking about their grandchildren. Whatever we love quietly occupies our thoughts throughout the day.

The same principle is true spiritually. When God's Word captures the heart, it naturally begins shaping the mind.

Notice that the psalmist says he meditates on God's Word "*all the day.*"

- He is not claiming to spend every waking moment reading Scripture.
- He still lived an ordinary life with ordinary responsibilities.
- He's saying that God's truth remained near his thoughts throughout the day, influencing his thinking, emotions, and actions.

Scripture became the lens through which he viewed every circumstance.

- That is biblical meditation.
- That's a biblical worldview.

Biblical meditation is not emptying the mind. It is filling the mind with God's truth until His truth begins reshaping the way we think. The Hebrew word pictures someone continually turning God's Word over in the mind until it settles deeply into the heart.

Notice where that meditation leads - "*Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me. have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.*"

At first those words almost sound arrogant. They are anything but. The psalmist is not exalting himself. He is exalting the wisdom of God.

- His enemies possess experience.
- His teachers possess knowledge.

- The aged possess years.

But God's Word gives something greater than experience, education, or age alone can provide. It gives wisdom.

There is a profound difference between knowledge and wisdom. You know that.

- Knowledge tells us what is true.
- Wisdom teaches us how to live in light of the truth.

Our world has never possessed more information than it does today. Yet information alone has not made us wiser. Wisdom is God's gift to those who delight in His Word.

James reminds us that this kind of wisdom comes "*from above*" (James 3:17), and Paul tells Timothy that the Scriptures "*are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Tim. 3:15).

As God's Word continually shapes the mind, God Himself begins shaping our judgment. We begin seeing life, people, and his decisions differently because we are learning to think God's thoughts after Him.

That is exactly what Paul describes in Romans 12:2 when he calls us to "*be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*"

Transformation begins there. Before God changes our feet, He changes our minds.

APP: That raises an important question for every one of us. What is shaping your thinking every day? What voice speaks most often into your life?

- The endless news cycle?
- Social media?
- Political commentary?
- Personal fears?
- Professional ambitions?
- Or God's Word?

Whatever consistently shapes your thinking will eventually shape your life. The blessed life begins when God's Word becomes the dominant voice forming our minds.

Second: Loving God's Word Directs Our Walk. 101–102

*I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.
¹⁰² I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me.*

Having shown us how God's Word shapes the mind, the psalmist now turns to the feet. That transition is not accidental.

Throughout Scripture, *our feet represent the direction of our lives*. They speak of:

- the path we choose,
- the habits we cultivate, and ultimately
- the destination toward which we are moving.

The Christian life is a journey. We are pilgrims walking toward our heavenly home.

Listen to verses 101 and 102 - *"I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word. I do not turn aside from your rules, for you have taught me."*

IMP: God first shapes the mind, then He directs the walk. The world begins with behavior. It tells us to change our actions, improve our habits, and become better people. God begins much deeper. He renews the mind, transforms the heart, and the life begins to follow.

That is why Christian obedience is never mere outward conformity. It is the overflow of inward transformation.

Notice the psalmist's deliberate language - *"I hold back my feet..."*

There is nothing passive here. He understands every path leads somewhere. Every decision is taking him either toward greater fellowship with God or farther away from Him. Every step is shaping the person he is becoming.

One of the beautiful characteristics of Psalm 119 is that the psalmist never separates

- learning God's truth from
- living God's truth.

God's Word was never given merely to inform our minds. It was given to transform our lives.

James says the same thing - *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (James 1:22).

- Knowledge without obedience produces self-deception.
- Knowledge joined with obedience produces wisdom.

Then notice the reason the psalmist gives for his obedience - *"For you have taught me."*

That little word for explains everything.

- He does not obey merely because he has learned God's commandments.
- He obeys because he has been taught by God Himself.

The commandments are never detached from the God who gave them. Through His Word, God continually reveals His wisdom, His holiness, His goodness, and His love. As we learn His ways,

we come to know Him more deeply. And the more we know Him, the more we love Him. The more we love Him, the more gladly we walk in His ways.

That is exactly what Jesus meant when He said, *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* (John 14:15 & 21).

Notice, He did not reverse the order.

- Love comes first.
- Obedience follows.

Exactly as it does in this stanza.

APP: There is another lesson here that I don't want us to miss. Nothing around the psalmist has changed.

- His enemies have not disappeared.
- His struggles remain.
- His circumstances are much the same.

What has changed is him. Isn't that often how God works in our lives?

- Most of us pray, *"Lord, change my circumstances."* God is often saying, *"I am changing you."*
- We ask Him to remove the trial. He teaches us to become stronger pilgrims.
- We ask for an easier road. He teaches us to walk more faithfully.

That is the blessed life.

Not because our circumstances suddenly improve, but because, through His Word, God is steadily conforming us to the image of His Son.

As our minds are renewed, our feet begin walking a different path. And one day we discover that obedience is no longer merely something we do.

It has become the joyful expression of loving God.

Third: Loving God's Word Transforms Our Desires. 103–104

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
¹⁰⁴ *Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.*

The psalmist now takes us to the deepest level of spiritual formation.

- He has shown us that God's Word shapes the mind.
- He has shown us that God's Word directs the walk.

Now he shows us that God's Word transforms the heart itself. Listen to his words.

"How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way."

Notice the language.

- It is no longer the language of discipline.
- It is the language of delight.

The psalmist does not simply say God's Word is true. He says it is sweet.

For the people of Israel, honey represented the sweetest delight they knew. The psalmist reaches for the finest comparison available and says that God's Word is sweeter still.

He is not merely describing his enjoyment of Scripture. He is describing his enjoyment of the God who speaks through Scripture. That changes everything.

- Many people read the Bible out of *obligation*.
- The psalmist reads it out of *affection*.

There is a world of difference between the two.

I have become increasingly convinced that spiritual formation is not primarily about becoming more disciplined. It is about becoming more captivated.

Whatever captures our hearts eventually shapes our lives.

- If success captures our hearts, we become driven by achievement.
- If comfort captures our hearts, we begin to avoid sacrifice.
- If approval captures our hearts, we live for the opinions of others.

Anything we love changes us.

That is why we must be so careful about what we love.

For several years now, I have tried to summarize that truth with four simple statements.

God alone is infinitely beautiful.
He made us to love Him and become like Him.
Every created thing is a path to Him or a distraction from Him.
Yet only God can satisfy the longing of the human heart.

I believe those truths summarize this entire stanza and the Christian life.

God created us to love. The question has never been whether we will love, but what we will love most.

Whatever captures our hearts will shape our lives.

And that brings us to the final statement of the stanza - "*Therefore I hate every false way.*"

IMP: Where did that hatred come from? It grew out of love.

- The psalmist does not begin by hating falsehood.
- He begins by loving God.
- As his love for God's Word deepens, his loves are reordered.
- Things that once attracted him lose their appeal because he has discovered something infinitely better.

That is one of the great marks of spiritual maturity. The mature believer does not simply obey God's truth.

- He begins to love what God loves.
- He begins to hate what God hates.

His worldview has been transformed.

- He no longer evaluates life by asking, "*What do I want?*"
- He asks, "*What pleases the God I love?*"

That is how sanctification ordinarily works.

IMP:

- God usually does not change us by making sin more frightening.
- He changes us by making Christ more beautiful.
- The more clearly we see Him, the more deeply we love Him.
- The more deeply we love Him, the less attractive every competing love becomes.

In other words,

Beholding is becoming.

We become like whatever captures our hearts. As we behold Christ in His Word, the Holy Spirit gradually transforms us into His likeness. Our minds think differently. Our feet walk differently. Our desires love differently. That is the blessed life.

Fifth: And This Is Where the Gospel Meets Us

As beautiful as this stanza is, it confronts every one of us with an uncomfortable question. Who among us can honestly say, *"Oh how I love your law!"*

- Not occasionally.
- Not on our best days.
- But continually.

- Who among us meditates on God's Word all day?
- Who among us has always walked in perfect obedience?
- Who among us has loved God's truth so completely that we truly hate every false way?

The longer we sit with this passage, the more we realize it describes a life beyond us. And that is exactly where the gospel meets us.

- The Father did not simply give us His Word.
- He gave us His Son. (Hallelujah!)

Jesus Christ is the living Word, and He is everything this stanza describes.

- He loved the Father's will with an undivided heart.
- He delighted in His Father's Word. He walked in perfect obedience.
- Every thought, every desire, every step of His life was governed by His love for the Father.
- He alone could say, *"I always do the things that are pleasing to Him"* (John 8:29).

- Where our loves have been divided, His love was perfect.
- Where we have wandered, He never turned aside.
- Where we have loved lesser things more than God, Christ loved the Father first and most.

Then, in astonishing grace, He went to the cross for people whose loves were disordered. There He bore not only our acts of disobedience but the guilt of every rival affection, every misplaced desire, every time we loved something more than we loved God. Through His death and resurrection, He reconciles us to the Father and gives us a new heart.

That is the promise of the New Covenant.

- God does not merely forgive our sins.
- He changes our loves.

Now, through the Holy Spirit, He writes His law upon our hearts. He opens our eyes to the beauty of Christ. He renews our minds by His truth. He strengthens our feet to walk in His ways. Little by little, day by day, He conforms us to the image of His Son.

That is why the Christian life is **not** first about trying harder. It is about *seeing Christ more clearly*.

Paul says, "*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another*" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Do you hear what Paul is saying? As we behold Christ, the Spirit changes us.

- Our minds are renewed.
- Our walk is transformed.
- Our desires are reordered.

The very process the psalmist describes in Psalm 119 is fulfilled through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

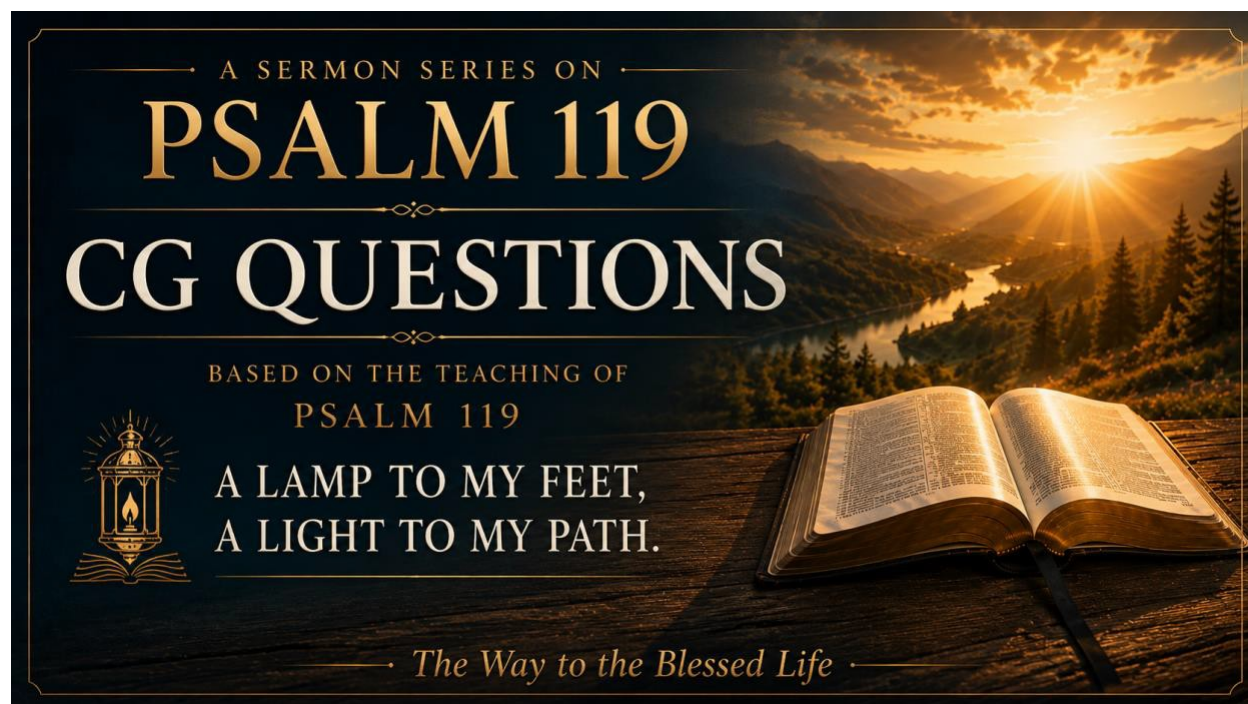
Conclusion: One final thought -

- The blessed life is **not** found by becoming more disciplined.
- It is found by becoming more captivated.

That has been the lesson of the *Mem* stanza from beginning to end.

- The psalmist began with love.
- That love led him to meditate on God's Word.
- Meditation shaped his mind.
- His renewed mind directed his walk.
- His obedient walk deepened his delight.
- And that delight transformed his desires until he loved what God loves and hated what God hates.

That is spiritual formation. That, friends, is the blessed life.



Observation
(What does the text say?)

1. According to verses 97-100, what relationship does the psalmist make between loving God's Word, meditating on it, and gaining wisdom?
2. In verses 101-102, what deliberate actions does the psalmist take with his "feet," and what reasons does he give for those actions?
3. How does the psalmist describe God's Word in verses 103-104, and what effect does it have on his desires?
4. What progression does the sermon identify throughout this stanza regarding the work of God's Word in a believer's life?
5. According to the sermon, how does the gospel fulfill what the psalmist longed for in Psalm 119?

Interpretation
(What does the text mean?)

6. Why does the psalmist begin this stanza with love rather than duty? What does that teach us about the source of genuine obedience?
7. The sermon distinguishes knowledge from wisdom. Why is that distinction so important for the Christian life?
8. Why is the phrase, "For you have taught me" (v. 102), so significant in understanding biblical obedience?
9. The sermon says, "God usually does not change us by making sin more frightening. He changes us by making Christ more beautiful." What does that mean, and how does it explain Christian growth?

10. Why is Jesus presented as the perfect fulfillment of this entire stanza?

Correlation
(What other texts support my interpretation?)

11. How does Romans 12:2 reinforce the psalmist's teaching that transformation begins with the renewal of the mind?
12. In what ways does James 1:22 support the psalmist's connection between hearing God's Word and walking in obedience?
13. How do Jesus' words in John 14:15 and 14:21 deepen our understanding of the relationship between love and obedience?
14. How does 2 Corinthians 3:18 expand the sermon's statement, "Beholding is becoming"?
15. How does 1 Corinthians 1:30 help explain why Christ is both our righteousness and the source of our sanctification?

Application
(How can God use this in my life?)

16. What voices most consistently shape your thinking each week, and how can God's Word become the dominant influence in your mind?
17. Is there an area of your life where God is seeking to change you rather than simply change your circumstances? How should you respond?
18. What competing affection most threatens your love for Christ today? How does this passage call you to reorder your loves?
19. The sermon says, "The blessed life is not found by becoming more disciplined; it is found by becoming more captivated." How can you intentionally behold Christ more clearly this week?
20. What is one practical step you can take this week to delight in God's Word rather than merely reading it out of duty?