

Some books absolutely blow your mind. I'm talking about the kid's book written by Oliver Jeffers entitled, The Incredible Book Eating Boy. It begins this way. "Henry loved books. But not like you and I love books, no, not quite. Henry loved to eat books. And he was going through them at a fierce rate. But here's the best bit. The more he ate, the smarter he got. He read a book about gold fish and then he knew what to feed Ginger (the goldfish). Before long he could do his father's crossword in the newspaper and was soon smarter than his teacher in school." Henry imagines that if he keeps eating at his current pace, he could eventually become the smartest person on earth. It's not long before Henry's head went bonkers. There was too much information and he couldn't digest it all. He had knowledge, but little wisdom. The truth is, Henry had to learn how to consume and digest books without using his teeth. We all consume information, often much too much and like Henry we get confused. We've got plenty of knowledge. Way too little wisdom. We need a new diet.

Psalms 1:2 talks about the God-centered man, that "his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night." The Hebrew word, "Hagah," translated meditation suggests reading in an undertone, muttering over and over again, chanting the lines of the Word of God. Perhaps some pictures of this rich word will help us. In Isaiah 31:4 the prophet tells us that the Lord Almighty ready to spring into battle is "As a lion grows [=hagah], a great lion over his prey...he is not frightened" by a whole band of shepherds. Like a boy famished by and consuming books right and left, like a lion growling over his prey, like an MN Hulstein chewing her cud, ruminating, savoring breakfast, lunch and dinner; like our dog, Abby gnawing, licking and loving his dog bone to death, God calls us to chew on this book, digest it, chant the lines of this book, mutter and memorize its words day and night [see E Peterson's, Eat This Book, loc 56]

The same idea surfaces in Joshua 1:8 when the Lord challenges Joshua to live between the pages of this book and says, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." Don't let it depart from your mouth. Under your breath in deep undertones, you're chanting the lines of this book. Keep it on your lips. If you go to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, you'll see Jews with a copy of the Word in their hands, gyrating for joy, speaking this book out loud over and over and over again. Eat this book. You might be asking about right now, why bother? Why bother with the Bible. Psalm 1 tells us why. It tells us first.

I. THE PERSON WHO FEASTS ON THE WORD IS FULL OF JOY. Psalm 1 taps into the common quest of the human race for real joy, enduring happiness. Verse 1 begins with the word, "Blessed [or much better] O the happinesses." The word is in the plural. The sense I get then is that this deep joy God's people experience is multi-faceted. Like a garden loaded with acorn squash, mouthwatering corn, orchards of fruit and rows of nourishing vegetables, the deep joy of the Christian spills over into every area of life.

The Psalmist makes it crystal clear that in the common quest for happiness there are considered two ways to achieve it: the way of the righteous (which yields deep, real and lasting joy); and the way of the wicked (which does not). So from the get go the Psalmist states the case negatively. He says, "Oh the

happinesses of the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinner or sit in the seat of mockers." Listen you are what you eat, what you consume, what you take inside, what you digest. And "Bad company corrupts good morals," as Paul insists in I Corinthians 15:33. If you hang around the wrong crowd, their lies, their lifestyle, their example...they'll eat your lunch! I can't put it any plainer. There's two parties going on in the world: God's party and Satan's. Vv-1-3 speak of the utter delight of God's party.

I've heard it said: "If you're going to sup with the Devil you better carry a long spoon." Satan and all those on his team are a dangerous lot. Satan's party is different than God's. "Not so the wicked!" vs. 4 begins. "They are like chaff that the wind blows away." Chaff! Weightless, rootless, worthless chaff. The image is agricultural again. The unbeliever's life, Psalm 1 says produces no fruit, no solid grain. Thresh out the grain and all you have is the empty husk, the fragments of straw which a blast of wind can easily blow away. I have in the margin of my Bible these words: "Sin has a short shelf-life. Its pleasures are so perishable." Jeff Bezos (Amazon), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), Bill Gates can build their impressive Billionaire empires, but the treasures are vain and empty. They're "like chaff that the wind blows away." Why bother with this book? The person who feasts on the word is full of joy. Here's a second reason.

II. THE PERSON WHO FEASTS ON THE WORD FULLY PROSPERS. Look at Psalm 1:3. This verse takes us to a tree farm and we're shown a tree planted by a well-watered irrigation canal which never quits flowing. We're not talking about a desert shrub tree that grows in a desert wadi that only fills with rain sporadically during rainy season. The man or woman who makes this book his daily sustenance, "Is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Ponder that word prospers. The Hebrew word for prospers, **zalach**, refers to being strong, powerful, effective, successful. Do a word search and you'll discover that it refers to Kingdom objectives achieved, battles won, missions accomplished, and tasks finished with a flourish [1]. The word success is not inherently evil. It's evil when you become one-dimensional and reduce it to dollars and cents, its material side. America needs a new paradigm of success. The Bible calls us to full-orbed fruitfulness (fully flourishing) under God's Lordship. Proverbs 3:16ff for example tells us that God-fearing wisdom is the Holy Grail of a quality life. "Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be [blessed=abundantly happy]." Wisdom practiced gives us a taste of paradise. It's the fountain of youth and vitality. We're dancing in sync with the rhythm of the universe. This is how life is wired, how the universe is ordered. This tree farm is abundantly watered. Soak in the nourishment of God's word and your life will prosper in every beautiful sense of the word [See Psalm 112].

What we're after is transformation, metamorphosis. Paul writes: [Romans 12:1-2]. "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual [logikan=intelligent] act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the patten of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will." [2] Perfectionism this side of paradise is

a pipe dream, a neurotic pursuit. What we're after is healthy God-centered progress. What's the secret to such transformation?

III. THE ONE TOOL OF TRANSFORMATION YOU CAN'T DO WITHOUT. The text is explicit. The most important tool for your transformation (there are a number, but the most important) is this book. *"His delight is in the law [torah] of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."* Awhile back I picked up from the store this cheaper version of the Swiss Army knife. It has 14 functions. There's the normal blades for cutting, but also a wood saw, fish scaler. Why you can pick your teeth, pluck your eyebrows, and with this puppy yank out the scrub brush growing in your nose. The Bible is such a powerful tool. It's a surgeon's scalpel to excise tumors attached to your soul. Here is a first-aid-kit: bandages and Neosporin for with this book, God binds up the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit. This book is an ethical roadmap for a culture radically confused about what's right and wrong. I like the way the Contemporary Testimony puts it. *"The Bible is the Word of God record and tool of his redeeming work."* [#32]. If you want transformation, the tool God uses is the law of the Lord, this book. This book is alive with power, teeming with organic material, brimming with life. The God who spoke the universe into existence; who caused the sun, moon, stars, whales and walruses, peach trees and pomegranates to burst into existence, speaks in and through this book to reclaim and reorder fallen humanity. This is the record and tool of God's mighty acts.

Calvin Education Prof, Dr. Marion "Spud" Snapper said, *"Happiness has a lot to do with unloading the garbage floating around in your brain."* The Desert Father, John Climacus (*The Life You've Always Wanted*, 180) who said the fallen thoughts that hatch in our brain are like maggot eggs. Grisly isn't it. Well how do you take care of those maggots? How do you get rid of them? How do you think God's thoughts after Him and get your mind renewed? Wisdom literature often speaks to young people on the threshold of Adult life. Psalm 119:8 asks young people with sexual impulses pulsating and an economic world to conquer: *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word."* I learned this phrase from Pastor Tony Louwse over 40 years ago. He said, *"Sin will keep you from this book. This book will keep you from sin."*

Vs. 2 tells us, *"His delight is in the torah of the Lord, and on His torah he meditates day and night."* The word torah refers not just to law, ordinances, the boundaries, the explicit boundaries God has given for human living. When you open this book and digest its contents, feasting on it day and night, you enter a history that climaxes with the coming of Christ. [Hagadah=story; Halakah=walk] This book takes you to the foot of the cross where all your sin was banished, once and for all. It sets you free from the grave clothes of your old life. You come with Christ out of the empty tomb. You run out of that tomb with Christ to begin a whole new chapter in your life story. You were there when the Spirit fell on the 120 at Pentecost. And now fueled and fired by presence of the Holy Spirit, you get busy living the story and telling the story so that the whole world might know.

You don't have to be a rocket scientist. If your life is undermined by chaos, if your mind is nest for grisly maggots, a major reason may be that your intake of the Word is rather sporadic. I want to help, not lay a new guilt trip on you, but redemptively take you to a new level of joy and full-orbed wholeness. I want you to think about five levels of biblical growth.

READ: Every literate follower of Jesus Christ must read this book. At the beginning it may be only a chapter a day. Make a commitment to read 5 chapters a week through this next year.

LISTEN: I know a brother [Lanny Speyer] who has made enormous forward progress in the Christian life by just listening to Christian talk radio. You can purchase the whole bible on CD; the whole NIV Bible or TNIV with sound effects and great meaning. You can get it for \$60. Or you can download the Bible App free and listen to the ESV, NIV, The Message, TLT. You can listen to and sing the songs of artists like Matt Redman, Chris Tomlin, the hymns Keith & Kristin Getty and others whose music is almost all Scripture. You can take in great draughts of Scripture while you're walking or exercising. And the music will become the medicine your heart longs for.

STUDY: For \$28 you can purchase an NIV Study Bible. [I just downloaded a Kindle Edition for 2.99. I've also purchased the ESV Study Bible and have already begun to dive into it. You can get involved in Precept Ministries inductive study of the book of Romans on Sunday p.m. Some of you may be bored with this book, because you never get below the surface. It's like snorkeling. Plunge beneath the surface and explore and you'll see fish dodging in and out of the staggering coral reefs of this book. I've read the Bible through multiple times for breadth. But now I'm reading it for depth. This last year, the Psalms: Songs of Jesus by Dr. Tim Keller. I've fallen in love with the Psalms all over again. Next year, God's Wisdom for Navigating Life (Prvbs).

MEMORIZE. *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"* [Psalm 119:11]. Give yourself a challenge. Memorize the Sermon on the Mount. Memorize a psalm and when you finish one begin another. You want to stave off Dementia. Use your brain. Memorize.

TEACH. 7-Up Baby bottle. Some of you have been Christians for 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years or more and are still Hebrews 6 says at the Kindergarten stage of Christian growth. Your only intake of this book is *The Today*. Take it to the next level. Teach youth. Teach adults the treasures of this book.

God is calling you today. Get off the bottle. Sink your teeth into the steak of the Word. Consume Christ, the living bread. *"Oh the happinesses of the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he mediates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers!"* Go, ahead. It's the best 7 course feast in the universe. Like the incredible book eating boy, get smart! Eat this book!

[1] Consider these texts: Isaiah 54:17; Numbers 14:41; I Kings 2:132; Genesis 39:2; 24:21; Deuteronomy 28:29; 2 Chronicles 26:5.

[2] R.C. Sproul in *The Holiness of God* comments on Romans 12:1-2 when he says, This means nothing more and nothing less than education. Serious education. In-depth education. Disciplined education in the things of God. It calls for a mastery of the Word of God." [p. 248