

PSALM 37:4
By Andy Manning
August 1, 2017

The title of this sermon is “Psalm 37:4.”

Psalm 37:4 just might be the most exciting and encouraging verses in the Bible.

It answers two huge questions.

First, what is the key to success in life?

Second, how can I know God’s will for my life? So let’s begin by reading the verse.

Psalm 37:4 (CSB) Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires.

On the surface, this is what Psalm 37:4 seems to be promising: **Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you what you want.**

That sounds pretty exciting. But it also sounds too good to be true.

Take delight in the Lord and He will give us whatever we want?

That sounds like the prosperity gospel which we know is not biblical – the idea that if you just have enough faith you will be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous.

We know that can’t be true because many of the greatest heroes in the Bible were not healthy, wealthy, and prosperous – Jesus, Paul, the apostles, etc.

So what does this verse mean?

This verse has a command and a promise. It has an action, and a reward for that action.

Let's start with the command: Take delight in the Lord.

To take delight is the Hebrew word 'ānaq (Phonetic Pronunciation: aw-nag'). It means to take great pleasure in something. It means to enjoy something greatly.

To delight in the Lord means to take great pleasure in the Lord, or to greatly enjoy the Lord.

What does that mean? In other words, Psalm 37:4 says that God wants more from you than your mere obedience, or faith, or reverence, or service, or sacrifice, or gifts.

God wants you to delight in Him. To enjoy Him greatly. To take great pleasure in Him.

Perhaps the best way to explain what it means to take delight in the Lord is with Jesus' words in **Mark 12:30.**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

This is also the conclusion of pastor and theologian John Piper. He said, "I think delighting yourself in the Lord is another way of saying, 'Love the the Lord your God with all your heart.'" (Source: DesiringGod.org)

The idea of loving God is very similar to the idea of delighting in God.

God wants more than obedience, and faith, and service, and all those things. He wants us to enjoy Him. To take pleasure in Him. To love Him. To have strong, intense affection for Him. And more than that, the idea of love indicates that God also wants us to pursue a loving relationship, or a friendship with Him.

Let me try to illustrate. My boss at FedEx does not want me to love him, or take delight in him, or have an intimate friendship with him. He just wants me to obey him; to do good work for him.

But God is different. God wants your obedience; He wants your service; He wants your tithes; He wants your respect.

But that's not all He wants. He wants you to take delight in Him; to take great pleasure in Him; to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; to have an intimate friendship with Him.

So a **practical definition** of what it means to take delight in the Lord is **to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.** Jesus said that this is the greatest commandment in the entire Bible.

How to Love the Lord

How do we take delight in, or love the Lord?

1. First, pursue a deep and intimate friendship with Him.

The word "love" implies relationship.

God wants more than just your obedience and service and gifts, He wants a relationship. So to love the Lord we need to pursue a relationship with Him.

But more than relationship, He wants a *friendship*.

That's what the Bible says of Abraham in James 2:23, that he was friend of God.

God doesn't just want a master/slave, or boss/employee, or king/subject type of relationship. He wants a deep, intimate friendship with you, like a father/child relationship. So to love the Lord we need to pursue a friendship with Him.

How do you pursue a friendship with God?

Well, you need to spend time together.

The best way to do this is to schedule a daily quiet time with God in which you read your Bible and pray. That's the best way to develop a friendship with God.

But God doesn't just want a casual friendship. God wants you to pursue a deep friendship with Him. In other words, He wants you to know Him deeply. He wants you to know all about Him. Everything that can be known about Him.

The Bible says that God wants us to know Him.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 says, "But the one who boasts should boast in this: that he understands and knows me—that I am the Lord, showing faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things. This is the Lord's declaration."

The apostle Paul said that nothing has more value than knowing Christ.

Philippians 3:8 says, "More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...." And in

Philippians 3:10 Paul said knowing Christ was his goal. "My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death."

John 17:3 says that the purpose and meaning of eternal life is knowing and having a relationship with God. “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent— Jesus Christ.”

2 Peter 3:18 commands us to grow in our knowledge of God. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

What’s the best way to grow in the knowledge of God; to learn all about God?

Study your Bible. Read your Bible. Study it at church on Sundays and at Home Group. Read it on a daily basis in your quiet time.

And read great Christian books. One of the best Christian books in existence is a book called Knowing God, by J.I. Packer. It’s all about the character and attributes of God.

But God doesn’t just want a deep relationship with you in which you know all about Him.

God wants an intimate friendship with you. In other words, He wants you to be close to Him. Best friends.

Micah 6:8 says, “Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

God wants you to walk with Him.

Not just visit Him every once in a while; but walk with Him.

That means God wants you to stay connected with Him all the time.

When you are driving to work, connect with Him in prayer. When you are working, stay connected to Him in prayer. When you are at school, relaxing on your day off, playing sports, on vacation, stay connected to Him in prayer.

Do everything while conversing with God.

So the first way to love God is to pursue a deep and intimate friendship with God.

2. Second, obey Him.

Jesus made it clear that to love God we need to obey Him.

John 14:15 says, “If you love me, you will keep my commands.” To love God means we keep His commands; we follow His orders.

In other words, loving God means to seek happiness within His will.

To put it negatively, loving God means don't seek pleasure and delight and enjoyment and happiness outside of His will.

It's very tempting to look at sinners who seem to be very happy and having lots of fun and think that you might be missing out; to think that you might need to join in with sinners in order to enjoy life and be happy. Don't. Loving God means that you seek pleasure and happiness and enjoyment within God's will. You stay in His boundaries.

To do that you need to have faith in God, that loving God and living within His will is the ultimate path to happiness.

And this is what the Bible says.

In **John 10:10** Jesus said, “I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.” That means a full and meaningful life.

Psalm 16:11 says, “You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.”

Psalm 1:1-2 says, “1 How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! 2 Instead, his delight is in the Lord’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.”

Psalm 34:8 says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him!”

Psalm 112:1 says, “Hallelujah! Happy is the person who fears the Lord, taking great delight in his commands.”

To obey the Lord you need to have faith that you will be happier staying within God’s will than outside God’s will.

3. Third adore Him.

The word love implies relationship, but it also implies strong affection.

To love someone is to have strong affection for them.

And God wants you to have strong affection for Him.

He wants us to have strong feelings for Him.

And He wants us to express those feelings for Him in words and songs.

Notice how the Psalms say we should feel about God.

Psalm 2:11 says “Serve the Lord with reverential awe and rejoice with trembling.”

God doesn’t just want us to serve Him.

He wants us to revere Him, or to feel deep respect for Him.

He wants us to be in awe of Him, to be in a state of wonder at His attributes. He wants us to rejoice in Him, or to celebrate Him; and He wants us to tremble, or to truly fear His power and His wrath toward sinners.

Psalm 30:4 says, “Sing to the Lord, you his faithful ones, and praise his holy name.”

God doesn’t just want us to have strong affection for Him. He wants us to express it with songs and praises.

Psalm 40:16 says, “Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; let those who love your salvation continually say, “The Lord is great!”

The Lord wants to rejoice in Him; to celebrate Him; He wants to be glad in Him; to feel happy about Him.

He wants us to express our adoration and affection for Him with words like, “The Lord is great.”

To love the Lord we need to adore Him. To praise Him.

Take time in your daily prayer time to praise and thank God.

And when we come together on Sundays and sing, express heartfelt, passionate praise to God.

4. Fourth, put Him first.

The fourth way to love God is to put Him first. Make God your priority. Make your relationship with God the most important thing in your life.

God doesn’t want to be a part of your life. He wants your life to be all about Him.

In **Luke 14:26** Jesus said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

This is a figure of speech called hyperbole. It’s an exaggeration to make a point. Jesus doesn’t really want us to hate our family. He is exaggerating to make a point. What’s His point? His point is that He wants to be so important to you, He wants you to love Him so much, that you won’t let anything or anyone, even your own family, even your own life, come before Him, or to interfere with your relationship with Him. God wants to be first in your life.

How do you know if God is your highest priority?

Look at the way you spend your time, and your money, and your energy.

Transition

So Psalm 37:4 begins with “**take delight in the Lord.**”

And we just learned how to do that. It means to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Now let’s move on to the second part of the verse – the promise, or the reward. “Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you Your heart’s desires.”

What does it mean that He will give you your heart’s desires? It means two things.

First, God will shape your desires so that you want what He wants for you.

At first glance we tend to think that this verse means that God will give us anything we want.

But that can't be true because we know that God won't give us sin. We also know that God won't give us what is bad for us spiritually or physically.

So what does it mean?

It means that God will shape your desires so that you want what He wants for you.

He will literally give you your heart's desires.

In other words, as you take delight in the Lord; as you focus on loving God with all your heart, He will change your heart and make you want what He wants for you.

When you first begin this journey with God, you may want all kinds of things that God doesn't want you to have.

And you may be thinking, "If I can just take delight in God, if I can just love God with all my heart, He will give me this and that!"

But that's not what happens.

If you truly take delight in the Lord and love Him with all your heart, then God will change your desires so that you want only what He wants and nothing that He doesn't want.

This means that **this is the way God reveals His will for our lives.**

If you want to know God's will for your life, take delight in the Lord, and then follow your heart.

Take delight in the Lord, and then God will lead you in the direction that He wants you to go by causing you to desire His will.

How do you know if God wants you to take a promotion or not? Take delight in the Lord, and then follow your heart.

How do you know what God wants you to be when your grow up? Take delight in the Lord, and then follow your heart.

How will you know if you've found the person God wants you to marry? Take delight in the Lord, and then follow your heart.

Now to be clear, this doesn't make throw caution to the wind.

Anytime you make a big decision it's important to pray about it. Make sure that you don't do anything sinful or unbiblical. Make sure you get wise counsel. Make sure you ask, "What's the wise thing to do?" And if you are married I encourage you to always aim for enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse. If your spouse is against something, then it is marital suicide to pursue it anyway.

Second, God will give you what you want.

Once you take delight in the Lord, and God shapes your desires so that you want the right things, then He promises that He will give them to you.

He will give you what you want. What an amazing promise!

This means that this verse is the secret to success in life.

By success I mean simply achieving your goals.

How do you succeed in life, achieving your goals?

First, take delight in the Lord and God will shape your desires so that you set the right goals.

And then, as you continue to take delight in the Lord, God will help you achieve your goals. He will give you what you want.

We see this same promise in other places.

Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit your activities to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”

Psalm 37:5 says, “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act.”

Psalm 145:19 says, “He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry for help and saves them.”

Proverbs 10:24 says, “What the wicked dreads will come to him, but what the righteous desire will be given to them.”

John 15:7 says, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.”

Notice in each of the above verses a condition, and a promise. An action, and a reward.

The actions:

Commit your activities to the Lord;

Commit your way to the Lord;

trust in Him;

fear Him;

be righteous;

remain in Christ and in His word.

And then the promise, or the reward:

Your plans will be established;

He will act;

He will fulfill your desires;

He will hear your cry for help and save you;

your desires will be given to you;
you can ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.

This is why I believe Psalm 37:4 to be one of the most encouraging, inspiring, and motivating verses in the Bible.

“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires.”

Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength, and He will give you what you want.

Love God, and He will reveal His will to you; and He will help you succeed.