

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Psalm 119:145-152 on August 24, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Saturate
Today's Focus: Oratio

"Day and Night God's Help Is Near"

Today we're starting a series we've called Saturate. That little video you just saw gives a nice overview of what we're going to talk about. In this series we're going to look at how God grows us spiritually. We're going to look at how that which saturates us, what fills our hearts and minds, naturally spills over into our lives and impacts everything.

Like if I fill my heart and mind with negative, resentful, jealous, or suspicious thoughts about other people, or with the pursuit of money or prestige, or with images of violence or pornography, it's going to negatively impact my life. My soul especially is going to suffer if it's saturated with sin and muck.

On the other hand if I can find a way to let myself be saturated with the thoughts that come from God—soaking my soul with words that are true, that are noble, that are lovely, that are good...it's going to spill over into blessings for my life. My soul is going to thrive. I'm going to experience closeness with God.

So which do you want for yourself? Do you want to be saturated with God's goodness, keep growing in your faith, and spiritually thrive? Or do you want to be saturated with sin, stagnate in your faith, and slowly suffocate?

Well of course you want to thrive, don't you? That's why over the next three weeks we want to learn how to put into practice three important spiritual disciplines that God uses to saturate us with his goodness. Martin Luther once identified these three things as *Oratio*, *Meditatio*, and *Tentatio*. So along with some really practical things for your life in this series, you're all going to learn a little bit of Latin. Now if that doesn't get you fired up, then I don't what else will! Today we're talking just about the Latin word *Oratio*—everybody say that with me, "*Oratio*"—which is prayer. And since we're going to talk about prayer, let's get off on the right foot and begin with prayer asking God to bless our study of his Word today.

Eternal God, pour out upon us today your Holy Spirit who writes the preached word into our hearts so that we may believe it, be saturated with it, and comforted by it always. Glorify your Word in our hearts. Let it soak into our souls that we may find pleasure in it and be positively transformed by it to think what is right and what is lovely and what is good. By your power fulfill your Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

So friends, over the next three Sundays, the portions of the Bible that we'll be looking at all come from Psalm 119. This is a unique Psalm for a number of reasons. If you're just opening up a Bible—like right about in the middle of it—you're likely to just happen upon Psalm 119. It's actually the longest chapter in the Bible. The longest Psalm by far. It has 176 verses. Now, don't worry. We're not going to read them all! We're just going to read 8 verses today. And then 8 verses next Sunday. And 8 more verses the next.

We're going to let ourselves be saturated by Psalm 119. And you'll notice as we go through it that it's going to sound a little repetitious. But don't let that bother you. One of the big things God wants to teach us in Psalm 119 is that the truths of his Word are worth saying more than once. They are worth our time, our attention, and our prayerful consideration. So let's start saturating ourselves in them:

¹⁴⁵ *I call with all my heart; answer me, LORD,
and I will obey your decrees.*

¹⁴⁶ *I call out to you; save me
and I will keep your statutes.*

Right off the bat, one of the unique features of Psalm 119 that we need to be aware of is that there are 8 different words used as synonyms in this Psalm for what we might call "God's Word". In our verses today we find a couple of them. You just heard the first two. Decrees. Statutes. In a little bit we'll hear some more terms like...word. Promises. Law. Commands. Statutes again. This is because in Hebrew poetry these terms are used interchangeably. God's Word. God's Word. God's Word. God's Word. That's the point. That's the focus. We want to be saturated in God's Word. Let's keep going...

¹⁴⁷ *I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have put my hope in your word.*

¹⁴⁸ *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,
that I may meditate on your promises.*

¹⁴⁹ *Hear my voice in accordance with your love;
preserve my life, LORD, according to your laws.*

¹⁵⁰ *Those who devise wicked schemes are near,
but they are far from your law.*

¹⁵¹ *Yet you are near, LORD,
and all your commands are true.*

¹⁵² *Long ago I learned from your statutes
that you established them to last forever.*

Now I'm sure you noticed, there are frequent requests made of God in these verses, aren't there? These are little prayers woven throughout these verses. So, friends, let me ask you this... How's your prayer life? Do you pray as often as you'd like? Do you feel that God's presence is near you all the day long or do you feel distant from God sometimes? Do you think you pray more or less than the average Christian person? I'll be honest. I don't know what the average Christian's prayer life is like. What does that even mean—the average Christian's prayer life? But I honestly wouldn't want you to try and judge mine. I think you'd be greatly disappointed.

Because here's the thing. I do a pretty good job of keeping myself busy I think. I wouldn't want anyone to think I'm bored you know. After all there's almost no greater sin in our country than to be bored, right? So I keep myself occupied and busy with doing stuff. Stuff that looks important. Like replying to emails. Like entering names in a database. Like formatting a worship folder. Like scheduling Bible

classes. Like meeting with people. Of course many other things too. Oh I can be so busy. But if I'm honest I'm rarely busy with what you'd call prayer. How about you?

I'm talking about prayer like this because for some reason prayer I think has become one of those things we as Christians talk positively about in theory. I mean who of you wouldn't say, "It would be nice to have a little more time to pray?" But in practice we rarely take time to pray because in our busy world we've fallen into the trap of treating all the other things we're doing, or think we should be doing, as more important and necessary for our success in life. And in our fast paced world we've got this need to look busy. We sure don't want anyone to think we're bored. So prayer then becomes a priority in theory, but not in practice. And the world sure isn't going to make it a priority for us.

Case in point. I was sitting on the front porch last week working on my sermon on my laptop except that I was stuck and I actually had my head down and my eyes closed and I was praying for insight from God to help get me unstuck when a neighbor walked by, I didn't see her coming, and she said, "Well you've got a tough job, don't you?" Now what do you say to that? I don't think this person goes to church. Their tone of voice had just a tinge of scorn to it. I don't know if she thought I was napping or even considered I might be praying. Either way I'm not sure it would've mattered. I could've been snarky and said, "Well, I was praying for the salvation of your soul" ... but that wouldn't have been either truthful or loving so I took the high road and just smiled and waved.

But it made think about how little we value prayer sometimes. Even if I could've convinced her I was praying, you know what I'll bet she would've thought? What a waste of time.

Is that what prayer is...a waste of time? This is why I think this Psalm today is so helpful. Prayer isn't a waste of time. Prayer should be a priority for using our time.

¹⁴⁵ *I call with all my heart; answer me, LORD,
and I will obey your decrees.*

¹⁴⁶ *I call out to you; save me
and I will keep your statutes.*

¹⁴⁷ *I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I have put my hope in your word.*

¹⁴⁸ *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,
that I may meditate on your promises.*

¹⁴⁹ *Hear my voice in accordance with your love;
preserve my life, LORD, according to your laws.*

¹⁵⁰ *Those who devise wicked schemes are near,
but they are far from your law.*

¹⁵¹ *Yet you are near, LORD,
and all your commands are true.*

Does it sound like the guy writing this Psalm thinks prayer is a waste of time? Not at all, right!? There's an earnestness to these words. An intensity. To pray is a priority. There's an almost desperate desire here to talk to the LORD. And that's what part one of what prayer is. It's talking to God. About anything.

About anyone. At any time. At any place. With any words. Not just fancy church words. Honest words. Heartfelt words. Simple words. Your words. "I call out to you, God. Hear me. Save me. Answer me."

When you think of prayer like this all of sudden you realize, "My goodness, I can pray like *that* if that's all it has to be. Because I feel that way all the day long. I need help you know. All the time. And you're saying I don't have to use fancy words, Pastor Ben? I can just be driving down the road thinking about everything I've got to do at work and I can just say, 'God, help me today. Give me strength. I need you to show up today and be there for me in the work I have to do'"? Yes, exactly! Prayer's just talking to God. Continually throughout the day. Weaving it into every aspect of your life. Letting it saturate your soul. It's how God wants you to experience closeness to him. It's about keeping the connection going and discovering how near God actually is to help.

This is true because Jesus has opened up a 24/7, 365 direct access channel to the ultimate resource center of Almighty God himself. We don't have to go to God through any third parties. We don't need to take any detours through any other people dead or alive. We can take the direct route to God in the name of Jesus! When Jesus rose from the dead, he demonstrated that he has removed the barrier of our sins that would otherwise prevent us from going directly to God. So prayer can be spontaneous, just talking to God. Yet at the same time, it's really helpful to have a plan for talking to God too.

¹⁴⁷ *I rise before dawn and cry for help;*

I have put my hope in your word.

¹⁴⁸ *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,*

that I may meditate on your promises.

It kind of sounds like prayer is something here like a habit, doesn't it? He says, "I rise before dawn. I pray at night." Of course habits can be good or bad, right? And bad habits? They're pretty easy to fall into. But good habits....they take time, don't they? They take work. Your kids don't just learn how to be consistent tooth brushers after every meal until they've practiced doing it over and over again. I've heard it said you need to do something 30 times in a row before it becomes a habit. If you stop halfway and then you can pick up where you left off... it won't stick. You need to start the process over again. But anything can become a good habit if you let it saturate your life. So why not prayer? In fact a good habit like prayer is something that you do over and over again like brushing your teeth to the point that when you don't do it, like you forget your toothbrush on a trip, it just doesn't feel right.

The Psalmist says, "I rise before dawn. I pray at night." Some of you I'm guessing have found that for you, morning and/or night are good times to pray—when everything's quiet and still. What do you do when you wake up and your brain starts going a hundred miles an hour about all the things you have to do today? How about talk to God? What do you do when you're so weary but worry keeps you up at night? How about pouring out your thoughts to God? How about making that a healthy habit?

But finally why is it helpful to develop the habit or the discipline of prayer? Because let's face it. We all have times where we start to feel distant from God, don't we? When the problems we face are near and God seems far away? When the people who frustrate and anger us are close at hand while God seems

far away? When the devil shows up to accuse you something fierce while God seems to stay silent? But what comfort do we find here?

¹⁵⁰ *Those who devise wicked schemes are near,
but they are far from your law.*

¹⁵¹ *Yet you are near, LORD,
and all your commands are true.*

Not too long ago there was a Canadian woman who tried to row across the Atlantic Ocean by herself in a rowboat. On day 83 of her journey however she got out her radio, called for help, and told her team back home that barring a huge miracle, her trip wasn't going to end well. In a tiny towboat, in the middle of the Atlantic, she had no way of knowing if anyone would actually come to help. She felt alone. Imagine then her great surprise when the Queen Mary itself, the grandest ocean liner of them all, showed up and stopped for her to offer assistance. Can you imagine? The Queen Mary made a detour and stopped to help one woman in a tiny rowboat.

Friends, do any of you feel like that woman right now in your life? Like you're exhausted, discouraged, on the brink of hopelessness? Like you're all alone? Friends, it only seems that way. **Day and night God's help is near.** Just radio him for help. Pray. God, help me. God, save me.

And does God answer? Absolutely he does. We have a Queen Mary sized God! Now here's what I mean. Sometimes God shows up in a big way and it's self-evident. Like he actually sends the Queen Mary to help you when you're in the middle of the ocean! But a lot of the time he answers with his soul reviving promises through his Word. You see, here's what *Oratio* really is. It's talking to God alright, but right in the midst of that it's also hearing what God has to say to you through his Word as you search it for his promises and his directions. In this way God gives you the strength you need to get through whatever you need his help getting through. *Oratio* is talking to God honestly from the heart and it's letting God's Word saturate your soul with promises that are true and hope that is real and directions that are wise and good.

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I have put my hope in your word.*

¹⁴⁸ *My eyes stay open through the watches of the night,
that I may meditate on your promises.*

Next week we'll talk more about meditation or *Meditatio*. But of course when the Psalmist talks about meditating on God's promises...the greatest promises that God has ever made to any of us are those that fall under the umbrella of the Gospel—the good news that Almighty God is also our dear Father in Heaven. And He always hears our prayers because Jesus has done everything to make us part of his family. **Day and night God's help is near.** Amen.

My Next Steps

Connect: When something is weighing heavy on our minds or we have an important decision to make, we often feel compelled to seek out someone we trust, share our thoughts with them and see what kind of wisdom we can glean from them.

Aha: We don't generally think of prayer this way, but prayer is a two-way conversation. We lay before God the things that are weighing on our minds, and then we search his word for his answer or encouragement.

Treasure: *Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law* (Psalm 119:18).

Challenge: In your devotional time this week, work toward making your Bible reading time more of a conversation, listening to God and then responding with your own questions and praise.