


Delight
yourself
in the
Lord



Psalm 37:4



Delight

(de·light / də'lit)

(noun) a source of great satisfaction

SYNONYM: joy

ANTONYM: Discontent; dissatisfaction; unhappy

Psalm 1 contrasts the destructive “way of sinners” (verse 1) with the successful “way of the righteous” (verse 6) and extols the blessings of godliness. According to the psalmist, happiness, joy, and success come to those “whose delight is in the law of the Lord” (Psalm 1:2, ESV). The righteous person “walks not in the counsel of the wicked” (verse 1). In other words, he does not follow the world’s advice but takes pleasure in obeying God and His Word.

The original Hebrew word translated as “delight” indicates “a feeling of extreme pleasure, satisfaction, or joy.” Reading, studying, and applying God’s truth to one’s life is the pleasure and joy of the righteous.

A godly person’s relationship with the Word of God should be like being in love. People who are in love delight in each other. They want to spend time together. They drink in every word they speak to each other. When they are apart, they long to be in each other’s company. That is an illustration of how we should feel about God’s Word.

Believers delight in the law of the Lord by meditating on God’s Word day and night (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8). We consult it often, letting it become a guiding light and roadmap for our journey (Psalm 119:35, 105). **We delight in God’s Word because we know it has the power to:**

- ☀️ sustain us with joy through times of despair (Psalm 119:92)
- ☀️ give comfort (Psalm 23:4; 27:13–14)
- ☀️ give hope (Psalm 119:81)

- ☀️ give protection (Psalm 119:114)
- ☀️ give victory over sin (Psalm 119:11)
- ☀️ lead us securely to our eternal home (Psalm 32:8; 37:23).

Delighting in the law of the Lord means **honoring and cherishing God's Word because it is:** (Psalm 119:47–48, 159)

- ☀ an irreplaceable treasure more precious than “thousands of pieces of silver and gold” (Psalm 119:72)
- ☀ an ever-present companion and friend (Proverbs 6:20–22)
- ☀ the theme of our song throughout life (Psalm 119:54)
- ☀ sweet and satisfying nourishment for the soul (Psalm 119:103; Job 23:12)
- ☀ a light in the darkness (2 Peter 1:19)
- ☀ “my heritage forever” and “the joy of my heart” (Psalm 119:111)
- ☀ a life-giver (Psalm 119:25, 93; 1 Peter 1:23)
- ☀ life-sustainer (Matthew 4:4)
- ☀ powerful force (Hebrews 4:12)
- ☀ liberator (John 8:32; James 1:25)
- ☀ and teacher of wisdom (Psalm 119:66, 98–100).

We delight in the law of the Lord by making God's Word a daily part of our lives:

- ☀ by receiving its “message with great eagerness” (Acts 17:11)
- ☀ reading our Bibles (2 Timothy 3:16)
- ☀ studying and searching “the Scriptures day after day” (Acts 17:11, NLT)
- ☀ letting the Word “correct us when we are wrong” and teach us “to do what is right” (2 Timothy 3:15–17, NLT)
- ☀ hiding it in our hearts to keep us from sinning (Psalm 119:11)
- ☀ trusting in it (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
- ☀ and obeying it (Psalm 119:4; James 1:22).

Love is at the core of delighting in the law of the Lord as God and His Word become what we are most passionate about in life: “Oh, how I love your instructions! I think about them all day long” (Psalm 119:97, NLT). God desires to capture our whole hearts with His Word (Deuteronomy 30:6; Psalm 119:10; Matthew 5:8; 22:37; James 4:8). The picture is one of mutual joy and pleasure in our relationship with the Lord. God delights over His people by blessing them with spiritual abundance and prosperity, “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers” (Psalm 1:3). And we, in turn, delight in God by loving Him with all our hearts and doing what He says in His Word.



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

Psalm 37:4

Since it is human nature to battle against self-worship, we are tempted to focus on the latter half of this verse which seems to promise that God will give us whatever our little hearts desire.

What does the word delight mean in Psalm 37:4? The Hebrew word for delight is *‘ānaq* (אָנַק), which is an imperative verb (a commanded or instructed positive action). It means “live or spend in enjoyment”—put simply, to enjoy. Dictionary.com defines delight as “to take pleasure”. In light of the theme of contentment in Psalm 37, it’s fitting that Thesaurus.com lists contentment and satisfaction as synonyms for delight.

Scripture interprets Scripture. This means our interpretation of Psalm 37:4 must also line up with the rest of the Bible. We can see in verses like Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:11–13, 1 Timothy 6:6, and 1 John 2:15–17 that the things of this world—material wealth and worldly power—will never satisfy us. The only way to experience true contentment is by delighting in the Lord. Alexander Maclaren, a Scottish minister and expositor of Scripture, said in his commentary on Psalm 37:4, “Longings fixed on him fulfill themselves.”

We often misunderstand Psalm 37:4 to fuel our selfish desires. But based on the information we’ve just gathered, we can conclude that it doesn’t mean God will give me that coveted dress or the acreage of my dreams as long as I’m a good person. Instead, Psalm 37:4 means that enjoying God—taking pleasure in him—results in complete satisfaction and contentment *in him*. When we delight in God, our desires are fulfilled because our contentment is satisfied *in him*. It lines up perfectly with what Paul said in Philippians 4:11–13. He had learned that even in the most terrible circumstances (such as persecution or imprisonment), contentment is found in Christ alone.

Also, realizing the context of Psalm 37:4 will help us better comprehend what it means to delight in the Lord.

True delight in Him causes us to take our sights off of what we want in order to long for what He desires. The command to delight in God appears amidst this list that King David penned in the Psalms as the antidote for his fretting people:

- ☀ Know the fate of evildoers (Psalm 37:2)
- ☀ Trust in the Lord (37:3)
- ☀ Do good (37:3)
- ☀ Befriend faithfulness (37:3)
- ☀ Delight yourself in the LORD (37:4)
- ☀ Commit your way to Him (37:5)
- ☀ Rest in, and wait patiently for, The Lord (37:7)

So, wow. Right in the middle of fretting over circumstances God wants us to apply all of these principles and somehow delight in Him. That sounds great, but how is one to muster up delight in God when everything around you seems to be going wrong?

The best way to stop fretting is to take your eyes off the circumstances and fix them on Christ who is the true source of a believer's delight. There are many reasons to delight in the Lord but for now, let's unpack just five ways to delight Him:

1 | Delight in the excellencies of the Lord our God

We are all bent to admire our heroes. Whether it's an athlete, musician or entertainer, we enjoy following their accomplishments. But God created us with the longing to admire all the wonders of who He is and His excellent greatness. Looking to a person to fill this God-given desire will never bring true delight or satisfaction.

Realize "the god of this world blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4). So, their desire to worship will always turn toward idolizing a person, or belief system, unless the Holy Spirit opens their eyes to the truth. Be humbled to consider Paul's observation in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "And such were some of you." (Take a deep breath. Let that sit with you for a moment. Delight in how excellent is God that He opened your eyes to realize your need for a Savior!)

When you delight in the excellencies of God you will come to understand that everything about Him is the answer to your longings. Devote yourself to discovering in the Bible what He reveals about His character and ways and you cannot help but delight in His excellence.

If you spend the rest of your life learning the immeasurable greatness of God, admiration for Jesus will explode in your heart and mind. This will ignite an insatiable desire in you to know more of His excellencies — resulting in even greater delight and true satisfaction in Him. And nothing — not even fretful circumstances, will steal away from you this supernatural delight.

2 | Delight in The Lord's presence

The Hebrew word for delight (anag) commands us to find enjoyment in God. The Lord wants us to incline our hearts toward Him — to lean in to Christ where we will discover unspeakable joy. James 4:8 promises, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” How cool is that? The Creator of heaven and earth is more than willing to draw near to you if you would but lean into His presence through prayer, meditation on Scripture and hearing Him speak to you through His Word.

3 | Delight in God's help

When you hear that God commands you to delight in Him you may be tempted to think, *I'd better pull myself up by my religious bootstraps and figure out how to enjoy God.* But God does not want you to delight in Him out of duty. Rather, whatever God commands Christians to do, He always provides not only the ability, but also gives us the unction to do it.

Be inspired by this promise found in Philippians 2:13, “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” And be encouraged by the Apostle Paul’s words, “[I am] confident of this very thing that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

If you even *want* to figure out how to delight in God it’s evidence of His work in you. Isn’t that exciting? And when God gives you the will He also empowers you to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

When I realized I didn’t delight in God I asked Him to help me by the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit. And do you know what? God answered that prayer, and He will be faithful to answer yours too. God says, “You have not because you ask not.” Ask and He promises to answer when you pray according to His will because it brings glory to His Son (see James 4:2b & John 14:13-14).

4 | Delight our Lord's great love for you

In Ephesians 3:18-19 the Apostle Paul seemed to be concerned about their understanding of God’s love for them when he prayed that they would be “able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with the fullness of God.”

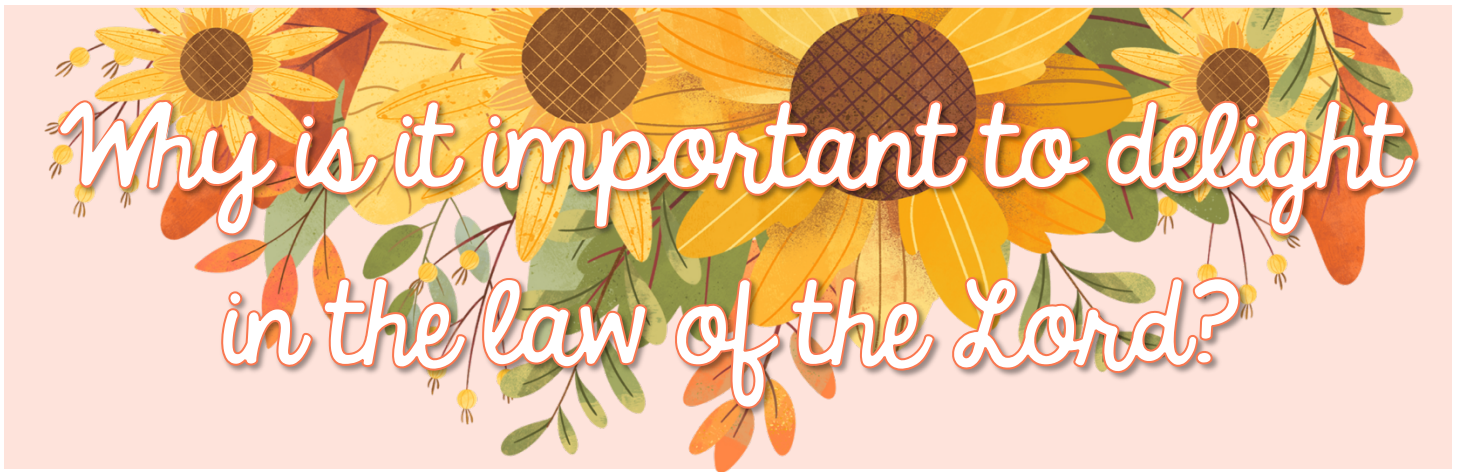
May God answer Paul’s prayer in the lives of believers so that our comprehension of His great love of us will cause our delight in Him to be a beacon of hope to this generation who is in desperate need of a Savior. Amen?

5 | Delight in God's mercy and compassion

God's abundant mercy is something I will never fully comprehend. Because He is merciful we can stand before Him whiter than snow under the cleansing blood of Christ. I don't know about you but I know I don't deserve God's mercy or Christ's compassion. "Come now and let us reason together," Says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be white as snow...' (Isaiah 1:18). I know the shameful woman I would have become without Christ's saving mercy. And I stand in awe that He would save a sinner such as I. How about you?

Together let's pray the words of Lamentations 3:22-23. And may it stir in us genuine delight in The Lord: "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness."

A.W. Tozer said, "We pursue God because, and only because, He has first put an urge within us that spurs us to the pursuit (and) when the Holy Spirit shows us God as He is we admire Him to the point of wonder and DELIGHT." Oh that His Spirit would raise up a generation who so admires God that delighting in Him becomes our insatiable pleasure that far exceeds anything this world has to offer.



God's commands are both for our good and his glory (Hebrews 12:3–11). He doesn't prescribe actions for the sake of power, but because he knows what's best for us. This is certainly true of the Bible's encouragement to delight in the Lord.

BENEFITS OF DELIGHTING IN THE LORD

When you delight yourself in the Lord, you experience satisfaction and contentment. God fulfills the desires of your heart because, when you delight in him, *he is your desire*.

We see more reasons to delight in the Lord in Psalm 1:1–4, which says those who delight in the law of the Lord are "like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit in each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do" (NLT). Delighting in the Lord produces spiritual stability and fruitfulness in our lives.

Imagine a flourishing tree by the river, continuously bearing fruit to fulfill its God-given purpose and benefit those who eat of it and shelter in its shade. Even when storms come, the tree's roots provide the stability to keep it safe and sound. In dry seasons, it has enough nourishment stored up to sustain it, keep it healthy, and minister to the needs of others. It is not shielded from trouble, but stands firm and thrives in trouble. It is sustained, satisfied, and prosperous.

Delighting in the Lord enables us to be like this flourishing tree—spiritually nourished and healthy, bearing fruit for the kingdom of God, blessing the body of Christ, and able to stand strong in the storms of life. When we delight in the Lord, we are content, satisfied, and sustained, even in hard seasons of suffering and trials.

Possible reasons we don't delight

- ☀ Unthankful heart
- ☀ Unresolved Conflict
- ☀ Comparison/Envy
- ☀ Complaining
- ☀ Pride
- ☀ Anxiety
- ☀ Religious Legalism
- ☀ Works of the Flesh
- ☀ Habitual Discernment

When We Don't Delight in Reading Scripture

A slight majority of Americans agrees that Scripture's message is particularly helpful, with 54 percent saying the Bible contains everything a person needs to live a meaningful life. But fewer than half bother to engage regularly with the Bible, according to a new report by the American Bible Society and Barna Group.

About one-third of U.S. adults (34 percent) read the Bible once a week or more, while half (50 percent) read the Bible less than twice a year (including never). In between these two extremes, the study found that about one in six adults read the Bible more than twice a year, but not weekly. Combining all these categories reveals that about one in six U.S. adults (16 percent) read the Bible most days during the week, up from 12 percent in 2020.

What to Do

The prophet Jeremiah said about God's revelation, "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty" (Jer. 15:16). Can we say, like Jeremiah, God's Word is "my joy and my heart's delight"? Has reading Scripture become more drudgery than joy? About one in ten Americans (11 percent) say they struggle to feel excited about Bible use. We can take comfort in knowing we are the problem.

That may not *sound* encouraging, but there is a reason we can be thankful the fault lies with us: We can do something about it. If you are one of the millions of Bible users who are falling on the lower end of the usage scale (or have fallen off completely) there are a few things you can do to get back in the habit of engaging with Scripture.

READ MORE/READ LESS

Sometimes we lose our delight when we try to gulp down the Bible in huge chunks. This can often occur when we try to read multiple chapters each day. If this is your situation, scale back and focus on reading a single chapter, or even meditating on a few verses.

Other times—and this is more common—we lose our delight because we are taking small bites of Scripture (a chapter or less a day). Focus on a broader survey of the Bible and

then read longer sections to find the nourishment you need.

GET HELP/GO IT ALONE

There has never before been a time in history when believers have had so much access to resources for Bible study. There are thousands of learned and wise Bible handbooks and commentaries, and ten times as many useful articles, videos, podcasts, and sermons. These resources can be both a blessing and a curse.

If you find your delight has waned because of a lack of understanding Scripture, seek these resources for help. But if you find you spend more time reading *about* the Bible than you do reading the Bible, it may be time to rely less on helpful tools and focus your attention directly on the Word of God.

PRAY AND BEGIN AGAIN

The most common reason we lose our heart's delight in reading Scripture is we've stopped reading Scripture altogether. We've told ourselves that we do not enjoy reading the Bible. The longer we go without reading the more we lose our delight, since it's hard to see and appreciate beauty when we have our eyes tightly shut. Open your heart by asking God to give you a desire for his Word. And then begin reading again.



The Wrong Way to Delight in the Lord

First, let's look at how *not* to delight in the Lord. Isaiah 58 describes the people of Israel as *seemingly* delighted to learn about God; they act pious and righteous, but they're really just pretending (v. 1–3). It's all outward appearance, willpower, and manufactured "delight"—it's not from the heart. God tells the people that as they go through the motions, they're doing it to please themselves, not to please him. They're selfish, neglecting to care for the needs of others (v. 3–5). They fail to care about what God cares about. So genuine delight in the Lord is more than self-determination or checking off the boxes of a spiritual to-do list.

How did David delight himself in the Lord?

Now let's turn our attention to an example we want to follow. God called David "a man after my heart" (Acts 13:22). Chased by murderous King Saul, battling against Philistine armies—including Goliath—and betrayed by his son, David faced much adversity and wickedness. Yet he wrote a majority of the Psalms and delighted in God despite all his troubles.

How did David delight himself in the Lord? David's delight in God was a natural byproduct of *knowing* God. David knew God's character because he sought the Lord in prayer and through God's Word (Psalm 1; 19; 27:4; 119). As he did, David experienced God's power, faithfulness, grace, and mercy, and he saw the nature of God demonstrated in God's creation. He displayed his delight in the Lord through obedience to God's laws, praise and worship, remembering God's wondrous works, and proclaiming his worthiness to all who would hear.

We see an example of this in 1 Samuel 23 and 26 when, from one rocky wilderness hideout to another, David hid from Saul who sought to kill him. During this nomadic and terrifying season, David penned Psalm 54 which expresses David's confidence in God as his helper, sustainer, and deliverer. Because of his knowledge of God, David refrained from killing Saul when he had the

opportunity, content to wait for God to act in his perfect timing. David demonstrated delight in God through his obedience and praise to God despite his difficult circumstances.

3 Ways to Delight Yourself in the Lord

To delight in someone means to enjoy them or take pleasure in them. Consider how you delight in others—maybe your spouse, child, or closest friend. Typically, we choose to spend time with the people we enjoy. We want to know them more, so we listen to them to grow in our understanding of who they are. We want to do what pleases them. We delight in the Lord in the same ways.

1. Know the Lord

“The reason many apparent Christians do not delight in God is that they do not know him very well,” wrote respected theologian and Bible teacher James Boice. “And the reason they do not know him very well is that they do not spend time with him.”

The people you spend the most time with are usually the people you know the most. Simply because you’re with them often, you learn their likes and dislikes, their personalities and habits, the way they talk, and how they think. You know them well enough to anticipate how they’ll respond in certain situations. This is especially true when you genuinely enjoy these people. You want to be around them, watch them do what they do best, celebrate their accomplishments, hear about their heart’s desires, and meet their families and friends.

Likewise, we get to know God by spending time with him, and we can do that in various ways, including:

- Observing his creation by spending time in nature (Psalm 19:1)
- Recognizing, receiving, remembering, and celebrating his gifts to us—this includes partaking of the Lord’s Supper (James 1:17, 1 Corinthians 11:23–24)
- Connecting with his family—the Church, the body of Christ—in worship, the preaching of God’s Word, and fellowship (Ephesians 2:19–21)
- Praying to him—he’s listening! (Psalm 116:1–2)
- Prioritizing your relationship with him (Matthew 6:33)

God desires a relationship with you (John 17:1–3), and he proved this by sending his son Jesus as the sacrifice to atone for our sins (Hebrews 9:22; 10:1–22). This is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Because of him, we have direct access to the presence of God despite our unworthiness. And he promised to draw near to those who draw near to him (James 4:8). That’s a reason to delight yourself in the Lord!

2. Love God's Word

Psalm 1:2 describes a person who is blessed because they delight in the law of the Lord. One way we delight in the Lord is by delighting in his Word. Yet few Christians truly enjoy reading or studying the Bible.


It's not surprising that studying the Bible becomes dutiful drudgery when our only motivation is intellectual knowledge or legalistic expectations. But the Bible is God's Word to us—the primary way he's chosen to reveal himself. The entire book is about Jesus (Acts 8:29–35). God's Word reveals to us who he is—his heart, his thoughts, his plans, his works. It tells God's story of his love for us, the story of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's this gospel that restores delight to our daily devotional life, so we become like Mary who chose to spend time with Jesus whom she knew and loved because she delighted in him (Luke 10:38–42).

We read and study the Bible to know God more in the same way that we're attentive to the words of others we delight in. The more we know him, the more we love his Word. And there are plenty of reasons to love his word! As the psalmist says:

In my experience, delight in God's Word doesn't usually come with casual reading—especially the hard parts! The more I dig in, meditate on it, and memorize it, the more I love it because it's God-breathed and powerful (2 Timothy 3:16–17, Hebrews 4:12).

3. Live it Out

God gave us his Word not only to read but to live by. James 1:22 exhorts us to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only”. David declared his delight in doing God's will because God's law was in his heart (Psalm 40:8). When we love someone, we want to please them. In the same way, when we delight in God and his Word, we delight in living according to his will. It's our response to his love for us.



*“The law of the Lord
is **perfect**,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord
is **sure**,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord
are **right**,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the
Lord is **pure**,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord
is **clean**,
enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord
are **true**,
and righteous altogether.”*

PSALM 19:7–9



I coasted into the new year like a car running on fumes. Every tank that fuels my life—my spiritual tank, my emotional tank, my physical tank, my relational tank—each one had been emptied by a year full of struggle and stress. But, here I am cruising down the Highway of 2022 with a full tank. What shifted? *I discovered the surprising power of delight.*

Delight—it seems like such a fluffy word. Perhaps it conjures images of a little girl squealing with laughter or some small indulgence like the perfect hot fudge sundae. **But open your Bible and you'll see that delight is not a cotton ball emotion. It has the power of a nuclear warhead.**

The Bible is chock-full of the word “delight” and it teaches that, like most of our emotions, delight is a two-edged sword.

On the positive side, God and His Word are so easy to delight in, and when we enjoy Him, our affections are transformed.

The pattern is clear. First, we delight in God, and then He expands that delight, helping us want more and more of Him.

On the negative side, misplaced delight pulls us toward all manner of sinful choices and patterns. After all, it was Eve's *delight* that led her to reach for the fruit her Creator had forbidden.

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, *and that it was a delight to the eyes*, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Gen. 3:6 ESV, emphasis mine)

For better or for worse, what we delight in is what we dwell on.

For better or for worse, **what we delight in is what we dwell on.** In 2021, my delights were haphazard at best and misplaced most days. A shiny new year gave me an opportunity to assess what I enjoy most and to think about how misdirected glee can keep me from experiencing the flourishing life Scripture promises.

A Delightful Way to Pray

Let me show you the practical side of this.

- Instead of praying that God would help us read the Bible more, we can pray that He would **help us to delight in His Word** until we can agree with the Psalmist, “[My] delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2 ESV).
- Instead of praying that God would help us to stop yelling at our kids or holding on to bitterness toward our husband or a friend, we can pray that God would give us genuine delight for them. **I’m learning it’s much harder to sin against those you delight in.**
- Instead of praying for God to help us get our work done, we can pray for God to teach us to **delight in the job He has given us**. Happy workers are productive workers.

Every year is filled with joy and sorrow, trials and triumphs, most of which we cannot control. Such is the human condition. But there is an area well within our grasp. *We get to choose who or what we delight in.* When we spend our days enjoying God and His many, many good gifts we will find the tank of our lives full of the unique power that comes from the pleasure of knowing Jesus.

Delighting in God Again

Here are some first-love ideas to rekindle the fire.

- ☀ **Experience creation.**
 - Take a walk outdoors and meditate on His wonders (Ps. 19:1-6).
- ☀ **Pray using another’s words.**
 - Use biblical prayers to jumpstart yours—like David’s in the Psalms.
- ☀ **Plan a God-hunt.**
 - Look for ways the Lord has shown Himself throughout the day: answered prayer, encouragement through someone, or a way He used you.
- ☀ **Use music.**
 - Grab the hymnal off the bookshelf and sing your favorites. Memories from the past of God’s faithfulness are resurrected. Meditate on each hymn. Look up Scriptures that come to mind.
- ☀ **Make a date with God.**
 - Light a candle and read an inspirational book or take a day to be alone with Jesus.
- ☀ **Dress for the occasion.**
 - One by one remove the tattered old clothes and put on the right ones created in God’s likeness (Eph. 4:20-24).
- ☀ **Look at photos.**
 - Pray when viewing the photos, enjoy the memories, and then praise God for the gift of family and friends (Ps. 143:5).
- ☀ **Make us of technology.**
 - Feed your soul with an online or podcast study.
- ☀ **Rally the troops.**
 - Call on the family of God for prayer (Jas. 5:16).