

A Vision for Fruitfulness and Blessedness

Psalm 1

This week we are going to consider Psalm 1. Next week we'll consider Psalm 2. Together these two psalms provide an introduction to the entire "book of Psalms" (see Luke 20:42 and Acts 1:20). Both speak of the type of person who is "blessed." If you're able, please stand as I read Psalm 1. [Btw, we're going to use Psalm 1 as a grid for our Monthly Prayer night tonight @ 5:30 here in the worship center.]

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

4 The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

If we allow it to do so, Psalm 1 will give us a vision for our lives: a vision of a stable and fruitful life. Listen again to the description we find in verse 3:

3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

If you drive west I 70 past Salina, trees along the road are few and far between. But sometimes you look in the distance and you see a row of trees meandering through a field. You know that those trees are growing by "streams of water." They are strong and green, largely unaffected by the heat and wind. Why? Because their roots go deep and they have a constant source of water and nutrients.

That's a vision for our lives. The psalmist says that it is possible to have such deep roots that we are stable and fruitful even when our circumstances are tough. We all want to have this type of stable and fruitful life, right? None of us want to be the type of person who's doing great when circumstances are good and who's doing terrible when things aren't. None of us want our thoughts and emotions and overall well-being to be dominated by our circumstances. Since life is so unpredictable and since suffering is so

inevitable, we all want to be people who can thrive in every circumstance and every season of life.

We don't experience this stable and fruitful life by accident. Psalm 1 tells us that this type of life is the byproduct of a very intentional way of living. A fruitful, stable life is exclusively reserved for those who take "the way of the righteous."

Psalm 1 lays out very clearly ***The Contrasting Paths of the Godly and Ungodly***: As we consider each of these contrasting ways of life, evaluate how you spend your time, the deepest affections of your heart, and how you're actually living your life.

The Controlling Influence in their Lives. (Psalm 1:1-2)

The psalmist first tells says that if you want a life marked by stability and fruitfulness, you have to be very careful about the controlling influence in your life.

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

The psalmist is describing the person who is "blessed" - blessed by God Himself. God showers His favor upon those who refuse to let ungodly people and ungodly perspectives be the controlling influence in their lives.

First, this person does not "walk in the counsel of the wicked." This person doesn't listen to and accept the counsel/advice of the wicked/ungodly. Rather, as we'll see in verse 2, this person walks in the counsel of God Himself; this person is incredibly attentive to the advice that God gives in His Word.

Second, saying the same thing another way, this person does not "stand in the ***path*** of sinners." If we want to experience God's blessing we are very mindful of the path we are taking. We don't randomly taking different paths hoping that they wind up somewhere desirable; We intentionally avoid living in ways that are at odds with God's will.

Third, saying the same thing yet another way, this person does not "sit in the seat of scoffers." A scoffer is someone who mocks the commands of God and the people of God. It's rather common in our day to hear people say that the God of the Bible is a tyrant and His commands are petty and arbitrary. If we want to be blessed by God we will distance ourselves from such mocking and slanderous voices.

Instead, verse 2 tells us that if we want stability and fruitfulness, the dominant influence in our lives needs to be God Himself.

2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.

When we hear the word “law” we think of “rules and regulations” or a list of “do’s and don’ts.” Sometimes the term law (*torah*) refers to the Ten Commandments and sometimes it refers to the entire Hebrew Scripture. But the most basic meaning of the term law (*torah*) is “instruction.” I think that’s the sense here. This person delights in the instruction of the Lord found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In other words, this person is **teachable**; this person’s delight is in **learning** from God. Instead of listening to “the counsel of the wicked,” this person delights in listening to God.

Not surprisingly, “And in His law he meditates day and night” (i.e., all the time, all day long). As John Ortberg says, if you know how to worry you know how to meditate; it’s the same basic process of mulling something over in your mind. [E.g., “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . .”]

We had a great discussion in our life group about this verse. One of the things we talked about was the relationship between “delighting” and “meditating” in God’s Word. I’ve always thought that **delight fuels meditation**; if you delight in something (K-State football, woodworking, grandchildren, etc.) you think and talk about it all the time. I think that’s true. But we also discussed how **meditation fuels delight**. The more we meditate on Scripture, the more we delight in it. We “taste and see that the Lord is good,” and we want more of Him. Instead of thinking that spending time with God through the Word is an obligation, we become so enamored with God and fascinated with God’s ways that we long to learn from Him.

What is the controlling influence in your life? What is the dominant voice in your head? Psalm 1 challenges us to be so teachable (so desperate to learn from God) that we don’t let lesser voices dominate our hearts and minds; rather, we delight in His Word and mull it over day and night.

The Stability and Fruitfulness of their Lives. (Psalm 1:3-4)

As we’ve already seen, verse 3 speaks of the stability and fruitfulness of the person who lives out verses 1 and 2.

3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Prosperity in our day is often associated exclusively with “health and wealth.” But prosperity in Scripture is much more nuanced. Sometimes prosperity does involve wealth, health, a large estate, and lots of kids, especially in the old covenant. But as suggested here, **the essence of prosperity is spiritual success and a way of life that’s satisfying**: bearing fruit (both personal and relationally) and persevering even in the midst of disappointment, hardship, and suffering. Because the righteous increasingly align themselves with God, they naturally avoid “the sorrows of the wicked” (see 32:10) and they experience God’s blessing.

The imagery of a tree suggests that we should think long-term instead of short-term. It takes years, not weeks, for trees to become strong and fruitful. Don't be discouraged if you've just begun to meditate on the Scriptures the past few weeks or months; you might not be experiencing the stability and fruitfulness you'd like. But over the years you will be amazed at how differently you think and act. Sometimes it's said that "we overestimate what we can do in a week but underestimate what we can do in a year." I find that to be true when it comes to spiritual pursuits. If you are truly teachable and therefore saturate your heart and mind with God's Word, you will look back in a year and be amazed at how God has renewed your mind.

By contrast, the lives of the wicked are very unstable and insignificant (verse 4):

4 The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

Chaff refers to the light husks that surround grain such as wheat or barley. In biblical times (and in some cultures today) the farmer would pick the barley and gather it into piles; he would then toss it into the air. The heavier grain would fall to the ground, but the chaff would blow away. [For similar imagery, see John the Baptist's comments in Matthew 3:12.] In contrast to the godly, the ungodly are lightweights.

At this point you may be thinking, "Life doesn't always work out that way. Sometimes the wicked prosper and the godly are persecuted." That's actually a great point which reminds us that we need to see this psalm in the larger context of the Book of Psalms and the rest of Scripture. Psalm 1 is often classified as a "wisdom psalm" because it has the classic features of wisdom literature (such as Proverbs). As such, Psalm 1 is describing the way life generally works, not the way it *always* works. Psalm 1 doesn't give us an iron-clad guarantee that those who delight in God's instruction have an easier life than those who don't.

If you read the rest of the Psalms you will find that they wrestle with this very issue. Psalm 73, for example, records Asaph's internal conversation concerning "the prosperity of the wicked" (73:3). When he pondered the suffering of the righteous and the ease of the wicked he almost abandoned his faith in God. But significantly, it was when he entered into the presence of God that he came to his senses and realized that the wicked are actually in a very unstable condition and that God really is good to those who are "pure in heart." Because he returned to God and His Word, he saw the contrast between the life of the godly and the ungodly.

We should be drawn to the vision of being as stable and fruitful as a tree planted by streams of water, and we should be warned by the prospect of being such lightweights that we're blown away by the wind. Again, the difference involves the dominating influence of our lives.

Their Ultimate Destiny. (Psalm 1:5-6) In these verses the Psalmist looks to the future destiny of the righteous and the wicked. Since "the wicked are like chaff". . .

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

The “judgment” is sometimes called “the day of the Lord.” On that day, “the wicked will not stand.” The idea is that they will fall down and not be able to rise up again. Numerous Scriptures speak of the proud being brought low and the humble being exalted (e.g., Isaiah 2:12ff). Stated another way in the second half of verse 5, “. . . sinners [will not stand] in the assembly of the righteous” - a reference to God’s sons and daughters assembled as one people to enjoy Him forever. Those who have rejected Him in this life will not be welcomed into His presence in the next (see Matthew 13:36-43, 25:31-46, etc.).

6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

The Lord “knows the way of the righteous” in the sense that He is “intimately acquainted” with and compassionate toward those who follow Him. Because He knows the way of the righteous, He will safely bring them home. By contrast, “the way of the wicked will perish”; because they have rejected God and His ways, they do not experience His protection or His welcome.

Jesus spoke about the two paths/ways in Matthew 7:13-14. One path is wide; if you take that path you will have lots of traveling companions. But the problem is that it leads to **destruction** (perishing). The other path is narrow; relatively few people take that path (the path of discipleship). But it leads to **life**.

If this sounds harsh (that “the way of the wicked will perish”), consider a Scripture like John 3:16. God Himself provides the remedy for the wicked.

16 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

This is the good news for those who are traveling on the broad path that leads to destruction: You can come to your senses and begin traveling on the path that leads to life. God was so compassionate toward you that He sent His unique Son to die for your sin. If you believe in Him, instead of perishing, you will experience life - **eternal life**. When you believe in Jesus, God puts His Spirit within you and He begins writing His law/instruction on your heart. After you trust in Jesus and experience this new birth, your experience with God’s Word will be tangibly different. You will now be poised to “delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night.” You will increasingly begin experiencing the type of stability and fruitfulness described in Psalm 1.

Eugene Peterson tells a parable that puts into perspective this vision for life that we’ve been discussing today. He has us imagine a group of men, women, boys, and girls who live in a huge warehouse. They were all born in this warehouse, and unless something changes they will all live out their days, and die in this warehouse. It contains everything

they need to live physically. There are no exits in or out of the warehouse, but there are windows which are coated with an inch of dust that has accumulated over the years.

One day some of the children get curious, drag a stool over to a window, wipe the grime off of it and look out! They discover a world that they never knew existed. They see a group of people pointing upward and talking in animated voices. The children look up, but all they see is the roof of the warehouse. Eventually they conclude that “those people out there are crazy.” There’s no reason to look up and get excited. In reality, those people were looking at airplanes and flocks of geese and magnificent cloud formations. But the children thought they were crazy.

What would happen, though, if one day one of those kids cut a door out of the warehouse, coaxed his friends out, and discovered the immense sky above them and the grand horizons beyond them? That is what happens . . . when we open the Bible - we enter the totally unfamiliar world of God, a world of creation and salvation stretching endlessly above and beyond us. Life in the warehouse never prepared us for anything like this. (*Eat This Book*, pp. 6-7)

Many of us have grown up living in a warehouse. We’ve grown up listening to voices that advocate small, self-centered, destructive ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. But what if we allow ***this vision of stability and fruitfulness to coax us out of the warehouse into the vast expanse of God’s kingdom?*** What might our lives be like if we are so hungry to learn from God that we meditate day and night on God’s word?

For example, what if meditated day and night on the dozens of Scriptures that talk about our words? Many Christians are living in a warehouse when it comes to the words we speak; many have no idea that there is a vast body of teaching in Scripture about the potential ways we can either give life to others or deal death to others by our words.

- * James 1 - If a person doesn’t bridle his/her tongue, that person’s religion is worthless.
- * James 3 - The tongue is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.
- * Matthew 12 - We will one day be accountable for “every careless word” that we speak
- * 1 Peter 3 - Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead
- * Proverbs 15 - The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable
- * Ephesians 4 - Speaking the truth in love (with patient, kind, not arrogant)
- * Ephesians 4 - Speak only those words that address the need of the moment, giving grace to those who hear

What would the body of Christ be like if we understood and believed and delighted in everything that Scripture says about our words! And what would our witness be like if we embodied everything the Scripture says about our words!

Psalm 1 is inviting us into the vast, fascinating, life-giving world of His kingdom when it tells us to “delight in the law of the Lord and meditate day and night.”