

Pursuing the Life We All Want

Psalm 1

Lilly Tomlin once commented, “When I was a kid, I used to tell people, ‘When I grow up, I’m gonna be somebody.’ Now I realize I should have been more specific.” She makes a good point because every single one of us is in the process of becoming someone. Unless we are very intentional - persistently intentional - we will become people that we don’t want to become. We will wake up a year from now or ten years from now and ask, “How did I become a bitter, angry, cynical person?” Or, “How did I lose my faith? I haven’t sought the face of God for months.” Or, “How did I become an addicted person? I had no idea that the patterns of the flesh could ever be this strong.”

We might articulate it in different ways, but we all want a life that is stable and satisfying and fruitful. We want to be people who enjoy God and who help others do the same. We all want freedom, not bondage. None of us wants to be dripping with shame; we all want to be able to say, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . and my soul knows it very well” (Psalm 139:14). We want to be able to look back with satisfaction over the life we’ve lived. We all want to finish well.

Psalm 1 makes an astounding claim. It claims that the person who “delights in the Law of the Lord” will have this very type of life – the type of life we all want. It claims that the person who “meditates day and night” on God’s truth will have a stable, satisfying, fruitful life. If you’ve never experienced this, you might think that such an idea is absolutely absurd. “You mean to tell me that the entire course of my life is wrapped up in meditating on ‘the Law of the Lord’?” The short answer is “Yes.”

The longer answer is “Yes, but . . . you need to hear humbly what the psalmist is saying.” He’s not talking about a casual reading of the Scriptures. He is talking about a thoughtful, substantive, ongoing encounter with God through the Scriptures. He is talking about viewing the Scriptures like we view food – something we simply cannot live without and therefore something that we savor and therefore allow to nourish us all day long.

Instead of limiting our experience with God to an isolated activity (such as a “quiet time” or a “worship service”) once a day or once a week, the psalms advocate experiencing God all day long. Beginning in Psalm 1 and continuing throughout the Psalms we find an emphasis upon using the Scriptures to place God front and center morning, noon, and night.

I think that this perspective will both challenge us and give us hope. It will challenge us because we’ll see that seeking God is a full-time calling; half-hearted, lukewarm attempts at experiencing God will keep us shallow and immature. That reality is challenging to consider; we may have to face some hard facts about our own lives and our habits of seeking God. But I think we’ll also find hope because the Psalms make clear that this type of life is actually available/accessible. It really is. It was true in the old covenant (the context of the psalms); it is doubly true in the new covenant in which God has promised to write His law on our hearts.

This morning's message is the first of three messages about seeking God all day long. Today we look at Psalm 1; next week we look at Psalm 5, a morning psalm; the next week we'll consider Psalm 63, an evening psalm. Psalm 1 makes a very simple point: ***God gives us stable, fruitful, satisfying lives as we delight in His Word "all day long."***

The author of Psalm 1 describes the person who is "blessed." To be blessed by God means that His favor rests upon us, His grace sustains us and keeps us strong and faithful – even during the tough times. The psalmist describes the person who is blessed in terms of what he doesn't do and then in terms of what he does do.

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.

Negatively, this person refuses to imitate the ungodly. He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked – he doesn't follow their advice on how he should live his life. He does not stand in the path of sinners – he rejects their "path" or "way" of living. He does not sit in the seat of scoffers – he rejects the company of those who mock God and His ways. This person consciously refuses to accept ways of thinking and acting that are incompatible with the life God wants him to have.

Positively, this person "delights" in "the law of the Lord." The "law" or ***torah*** is a term that simply means "instruction." I don't think that the psalmist is restricting himself to the Pentateuch or the 10 commandments; rather, he is talking about the instruction of God in a broad sense. This person takes great pleasure in everything God says.

Some people come to the Bible and ask, "How much (or how long) do I have to read each day to be pleasing to God?" That's like asking a teacher, "Is this gonna be on the test?" Psalm 1 describes a very different attitude. The instructions of the Lord are this person's "delight." When you delight in something you think about it all the time; you probably talk about it whenever you get the chance. It's never far from your mind or your lips. That's the attitude toward the Scriptures in Psalm 1.

The psalmist restates this idea by saying, "And in His law he meditates day and night." "Day and night" simply means all the time; it's not an infrequent, isolated activity. The term translated "meditate" has a variety of different connotations. For example, Eugene Peterson points out that in Isaiah 31 it is used of a lion "growling over" its prey. It's the picture of a lion savoring a goat or a sheep it has killed. A lion meditates on a goat by chewing and swallowing and digesting it – "using teeth and tongue, stomach and intestines" (*Eat this Book*, p. 2). The lion who is growling over its prey is a picture of how we should approach the Scriptures. We settle in and assimilate the Scriptures in the depths of our being; we allow the "word of Christ to richly dwell within us." The person who meditates in this way "taste(s) and see(s) that the Lord is good." This will often be during quiet times with focused attention on God alone, but it will also be in the midst of

the rest of our lives. We hope this happens on Sunday mornings; this can happen when you're talking with a Christian friend ("speaking the truth in love"); this can happen when you've got a couple of minutes in your day (like grabbing a snack out of the fridge). If you delight in God's teaching, you will find a way to come back to it throughout the day.

Verse 3 explains just what it means to be "blessed" - to have the favor of God rest upon you. Here the psalmist describes the life we all want.

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.

We all understand what is being described here. You can have a very dry, desolate landscape (like much of Kansas), but when you come to a river you see lush, healthy, vigorous trees growing. Because it has a continual source of water, that tree is largely unaffected by hot, dry weather. It yields fruit when it is supposed to and its leaves don't dry up and fall off.

That tree is a metaphor for the person who is nourished by God's Word! This person's roots go deep into the mind and heart of God; the word of God is therefore a continual source of nourishment. This person bears fruit at the proper time. This fruit could be personal character (i.e., the fruit of the Spirit); this fruit could be influence in the lives of others (helping them experience God too). Again, this is an extraordinary statement about the power of God's Word when we delight in it.

When the dry times come (and they will come!) – this person doesn't shrivel up; this person continues to bear fruit because of the continuous nourishment of God's Word. As a matter of fact, "In whatever he does, he prospers." The word prosperity has a negative connotation to many people because of the way some have misused the term. Some teach that God will give us a type of prosperity that eliminates suffering and hard times. That understanding of prosperity is far from what the Scriptures describe. Prosperity in the Scriptures (such as here in Psalm 1) is fruitfulness and faithfulness ***in the midst of hardship***. I think it is accurate to say of David, Jesus, and Paul, for example, that "in whatever [they] did, they prospered." They each persevered and bore fruit. But they each experienced great hardship and suffered deeply.

Those who were described in verse 1 as the "wicked" and "sinners" and "scoffers" will have a very different experience and destiny.

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

Compared to the righteous (described as strong, fruitful trees), the wicked are lightweights (Craigie, p. 61). They are like "chaff which the wind drives away." The wheat or barley was tossed into the air; the grain fell to the ground, but the chaff was blown away by the wind. The wicked are just that insignificant.

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

Just as the righteous man *refused* to “stand in the path of sinners,” on the Day of Judgment, the wicked will not be *allowed* to “stand” in the assembly of the righteous. The separation of the righteous and the wicked will be complete. The righteous will enjoy eternal life in the presence of God Himself; the wicked will experience eternal punishment, banished from God’s presence. The reason that this judgment is so certain and assured is given in verse 6:

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

Nothing escapes the notice of God. He “knows” (is intimately acquainted with; has “interactive relationship” with) the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

As in all of Scripture, two starkly different ways of life are described (e.g., Jesus spoke of the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction). The life that we all want is available to us through the Scriptures. Many, many people have confirmed that the Scriptures can transform a person’s life in this way. Here at Faith we not only want to have a high **view** of Scripture; we also want to have a deep **experience** with Scripture. We need to allow our lives to be formed by the Word. Psalm 1 tells us that this formation happens when we are nourished by the Word all day long.

In our time remaining, I’d like to discuss how we might begin to cultivate delight in God’s Word that will prompt us to meditate all day long. If indeed such delighting and meditating leads to the life we all want, this is a critical, front-burner issue.

How do I begin to cultivate such delight in God’s word?

Evaluate your life. Begin by evaluating your own life and your own experience of Scripture. For starters, in light of Psalm 1:1, evaluate whether there are things you need to stop doing – things that hinder you from delighting in the law of the Lord. Are you “walking in the counsel of the wicked” in some area of your life? Are you standing in the path of sinners in some way? If you identify some type of sin in your life, admit it to God and allow Him to re-form that area of your life. You will need the help of others in the body of Christ; you were not designed to deal with your sin in isolation from others.

Evaluate your current experience of “delighting in the law of the Lord.” Are the Scriptures your fascination and your preoccupation? Do you find that you consistently go to the Scriptures for nourishment? Or would you have to say, honestly, that you are bored by the Scriptures and that you rarely find yourself nourished by Scripture?

My point is that you need an accurate diagnosis of your condition if you want a life that is stable and fruitful and satisfying. There’s one more possibility I need to mention. If you are bored with God and His Word, it might be that you are not born from above. When

you admit that you are lost (you're not where you should be and you cannot find your way there) and you come home to God through Jesus' death and resurrection (you trust that His death paid for your sin and that He now lives), God places His Spirit within you. The same Spirit who inspired the writing of the Scriptures, now illumines the Scriptures. He shines the light so that you "see" and understand truth. This was my experience. I grew up with a type of reverence for the Bible, but when I trusted Christ at age 20 I began to experience the beauty and the power of God's Word. I became a new creation in Christ with a new appetite for God's Word.

Ask for desire/delight. Second, ask God to give you such delight. More specifically I'd recommend that you use Psalm 119 to express this request. The psalms give expression to the deepest longings of our hearts; the psalms express things we might never think to express. For example, consider these verses:

36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies
And not to dishonest gain.
37 Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity,
And revive me in Your ways.

When our hearts are inclined toward so many other things, we can ask God to redirect us. We can lay before Him the things that preoccupy our minds/hearts and ask Him for the motivation and desire to delight in the Word. Sometimes I would never think to ask for such motivation. Verse 73 expresses a desire for understanding:

73 Your hands made me and fashioned me;
Give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.

The psalmist doesn't view meditation as an activity that can be profitable apart from the grace of God. So he asks for understanding so that he might *learn* God's commandments. We shouldn't be satisfied with merely showing up in God's presence (although that's half the battle sometimes); we should desire to learn and grow. Again, Psalm 119 prompts us to ask for things we might never think to ask for ourselves.

I find that when I ask for such desire/delight that God loves to give it. I'm convinced that God loves to answer this prayer. He loves to give us a longing to delight in His truth "all day long" so that we might have the type of life He wants to give us. Let it not be said of us, "You do not have because you did not ask" (see James 4).

Follow a simple plan for experiencing God through His Word. If your vision is to be like a "tree firmly planted by streams of water," make it your intention to "meditate day and night" on His Word. Develop a simple plan and (by God's grace) carry it out. Here are a few examples:

In 2016 I decided to read through the Bible and write down every mention of prayer. I got one journal for the OT and one for the NT. I recorded every mention of prayer in the Bible. I got up every morning with anticipation about what I might learn about prayer. I found that the Scriptures teach and exemplify specific, bold, faith-filled praying. God

really wasn't offended when people took Him seriously and asked for whatever they wanted and needed. I would commend this type of focused reading of Scripture.

A friend was meditating on Psalm 103:2 which says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits." He decided to read through the Psalms and notice every "benefit" that is mentioned. The idea is that if he is going to "forget none of God's benefits" he needs to know what they are. . . .

- * Protection: Psalm 27:1 The Lord is the stronghold of my life (ESV)
- * Security: Psalm 9:10 - Lord has not forsaken those who seek You
- * Prayer: Psalm 3:4 - The Lord answered me

Your plan might be to read the same paragraph or chapter from Scripture 3 times each day, once in the morning, once at lunch, and again in the evening. You might ask the question, "How have I seen the truth of this Scripture throughout the day?" When you meditate "all day long" on the same portion of Scripture you put yourself in a position to hear the voice of God through that specific passage.

If you need help deciding on a simple plan for experiencing God through the Word, talk with a friend or your life group leader or someone else you respect. A simple, clear plan is a huge benefit in experiencing God through the Word.

Every single one of us here today is in the process of becoming someone. Psalm 1 gives us a vision and path for becoming people who are stable and fruitful and satisfied. The past is the past, but you and I have a say in what we experience in the future. Please listen again to the words of Psalm 1:

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.