

Rooted In Eternity

Psalms for Living

In just six short verses of **Psalm 1** we learn the secret of a life that enjoys the blessings of God. It's not about New Year's resolutions, or self-help programs. In a time where so many seek happiness, but few find it; where so many seek meaning and coherence in the confusion of competing philosophies; where many would simply like some peace as the fast-paced changes swirl around them; let us return to the wisdom of the Bible.

In this psalm we discover that blessedness relates to the way we live and the choices we make. From God's point of view, there are only two ways to live. There is the way of the righteous and there is the way of the wicked – those who follow God's directions for living and those who do not. There is no "in-between" category – but to be honest most of us live with one foot in either camp, and some people even rationalize such a stance as moderation or a compromise. Psalm 1 shows us how the righteous live and why this brings God's blessings. It also shows us the end result of living as the unrighteous do. If we want the blessings of God it would help to pay attention to this psalm.

I. The Way of the Righteous

A. Blessed is the one ... Many people doubt we can ever find happiness in this world. There seems to be so much pain, confusion, doubt and sadness all around us. Why? Because something has gone badly wrong in the world and no one knows quite what to do about it.

Psalm 1 assures us that it is possible to have a blessed and happy life, but only if we live on God's terms. The world offers entertainment, momentary pleasure, material comfort, fame and fortune, but true happiness, authentic joy and true contentment are found only in the Lord. Verse 1 begins with "How blessed is the man who ..." In biblical terms "blessed" is this: to be rightly related to God so that your life is fulfilled and you experience deep personal satisfaction. This sort of blessedness is not related to your circumstances, your bank account, your house, or your position and title. Blessedness doesn't come simply by striving for it. You find happiness not by seeking it but by doing certain things (and not doing other things). The blessing comes as a result of our choices. A wise man said that happiness is like a cat. Seek it and it will run from you. But go about your business steadily day by day and soon it comes and rubs up against your leg. True happiness and lasting contentment arise when we live as God would have us live.

B. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers ... Ironically, God's blessing begins with the negative. Psalm 1 begins by telling us what a righteous person does *not* do. He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. He does not stand in the way of sinners. He does not sit in the seat of mockers.

Did you notice? Walk ... Stand ... Sit. You're walking down the road; you stop to hang out with the sinners. They seem to be such good company that you sit down and have fellowship with them. What started as casual contact slides into a declaration of personal allegiance. The "counsel of the wicked" means the advice of the morally unstable or compromised. The "way of sinners" involves a series of lifestyle choices. The "seat of mockers" means those who openly reject the Lord. Psalm 1 is warning us that blessings come not only from what we do, but also from what we don't do. Blessed people avoid certain things, and certain people, and certain situations. They don't quickly buy into every line of thinking. And they are very careful not to join themselves to the company of those who do not love the Lord.

The evil one wants you to surround yourself with people who will lead you astray. The tricky part is those people won't seem to be bad people. They seem to be decent enough. They are just not disciples

of Jesus, that's all. They don't share your personal faith in Christ. It's not like they wear a T-shirt that says, "I'm working for the devil" or "Let's go to hell together." It doesn't happen like that. You're going to become like the people around you, those who influence you. This is true whether they are good or not.

Now I can hear someone object: "But how are we going to reach the lost if we don't spend time with them?" Excellent question. Here's the answer: **You do not win the lost by living like the lost.** You win the lost by loving the lost and living like the saved. If you adopt the lifestyle of those who don't know the Lord, if your life is just the same as theirs, why should they want your Jesus? And if your lifestyle is not consistently in line with God's ways why would they listen to you? We know this simple truth in Tonga: It's a good thing when the boat is in the water. It's a bad thing when the water is in the boat.

Our Christian ancestors advised us to be "in the world but not of the world." That means we are to live among the lost, loving them, befriending them, caring for them, and at the same time we are to live by a different value system. Our approach should be neither condoning nor condemning, but rather loving and transforming. We can't reach people by lowering our standards or compromising our values. Remember what it says in John's gospel: **We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth, John 1:14.** Jesus: filled with grace and truth. That powerful combination of truth backed up by love is an irresistible force in the world.

C. *Blessed is the one ... **whose delight is in the law of the LORD**, and who meditates on his law day and night. **Blessedness comes from building your life on the Word of God.*** You can't get rid of garbage simply by mental effort. You must replace the negative with something positive. The way to diminish the rubbish in your life is to dilute it. The psalmist tells us that the godly person "delights" in the law of the Lord. Everyone "delights" in something: food, a career, a hobby. Some delight in a particular friendship, or maybe money, or the things money can buy. Many delight in evil pleasures and wrong desires. What do you delight in? What floats your boat? What gets you excited in the morning and keeps you awake at night? What do you daydream about? Mark this well. Your "delight" determines your direction.

Those who love the law of God find blessing as they meditate on it. The word translated as "meditate" carries the idea of digesting something thoroughly. I was unable to find the quote of one ancient Christian teacher, though I recall it goes something like this: when reading Scripture be not like the horse who bites off much but much goes out the back end. Rather, be like the camel who bites off little and chews on it much. It means to ruminate on a truth, to "chew the cud," by considering a verse or a passage from the Word from various angles. There is no "wrong" time to meditate on the Word of God, but it is a very good practice to begin and end the day with the Bible - "day and night." Start and end the day right.

Suppose I came here with a 50-gallon drum filled with crisp \$100 bills. Suppose I offered \$100 for each verse anyone memorized by next Sunday. That would change things, wouldn't it? I imagine some of you who never open your Bible would figure out a way to memorize dozens of verses by next Sunday. God's Word is actually more precious and lasting than our money. If we delight in the Word, we will find a way to read it, to meditate on it, and even to memorize it.

D. *That person is **like a tree planted by streams** of water, which yields its fruit in season ...* The blessing that comes from God is marked by the twin virtues of stability and fruitfulness.

1) Stability - A "tree planted" by streams of water speaks of a tree with deep roots that go down to where the water is. A large tree that has been growing for many years certainly has a vast unseen root system. Their unseen root system gives them stability against the changing forces of nature.

All the trees look pretty much alike when the sun is shining or a gentle rain is falling. But let a mighty storm with fierce rain and howling winds pass through you'll see which ones have deep roots. They aren't blown over. So it is with the child of God. The only way to be ready when the storms of life crash against you is to spend time now delighting in God's Word day by day, meditating on its truth, and building a foundation deep and strong for whatever may come. This is what St. Paul means when he says **... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, Romans 8:37.**

2) Fruitfulness - This means that the tree produces fruit that expresses its true inner character. How do I know 'Ofa planted an apricot tree in our backyard? It had apricots on its branches. You know an orange tree by the oranges it produces. Whatever is on the inside must eventually be seen on the outside. This is also a spiritual truth. When our roots are deep in the Word, we will be given what we need. If we need love, from the Word of God will come the strength to produce the fruit of love. If we need a forgiving spirit, from the Word of God will come the strength to forgive. If we need courage, if we need patience and perseverance, the Word of God will produce it in us. This sort of supernatural life is available to every believer, but it will only be fully realized over time as we continue to walk with the Lord and to delight in his Word.

E. ... and whose leaf does not wither - *whatever they do prospers*. People so connected to God are like leaves that never wither. They are constantly refreshed by the Word of God, constantly renewed by God's word, being filled with Holy Spirit strength and wisdom for each new situation. They don't live off yesterday's blessings, but enter each day in the strength of the Lord whose mercies are new every morning.

The blessedness we speak of here prospers in all situations. Most people think of material wealth when we say "prosper." The truth is **the greatest poverty is not material poverty; it is spiritual poverty**. The blessed prosper because no matter what happens they find strength for the day and hope in the midst of the hardest difficulties. They bring forth godly fruit in good times and bad. Why? Because they are rooted deeply in good soil and their roots reach to the refreshment of the Word of God. They are rooted in eternity. Some days just to survive is to prosper. That, too, is a kind of prosperity for the people of God.

II. The Way of the Wicked

Not so the wicked! *They are like chaff that the wind blows away*, Psalm 1:4. Because they do not follow God's Word, but have chosen a different path, God's estimation of them is entirely different.

The wicked may look powerful on earth, but to God they are like dust that is quickly blown away. Their "wisdom" is like chaff, changing every day, new theories, new ideas, new beliefs, but nothing solid, nothing definite. Because the wicked live for them selves they don't know right from wrong or good from bad. Wake up! Life without God is empty and trivial. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!

I freely admit that things don't always appear to work out this way. Sometimes the wicked quite literally get away with murder. Things today may seem quite inverted from the moral perspective of Psalm 1. But God will have the final word because this life is not the final judgment.

Nero was one of the most sadistic, brutal, evil, and perverted men ever to be Roman emperor. He was a pervert's pervert and a world-class sadist. He took out his wrath on Christians and he had St. Paul put to death. Later Nero died. At his death, he was far more famous than Paul. Yet today we name our sons Paul and our dogs and cats Nero. ... the Lord watches over the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish forever.

True character will be revealed on the Day of Judgment. The wicked will not stand because they have no roots. They will wither away when the breath of the Lord blows over them. Their "way" comes to a "dead end." This is why sinners won't be in the assembly of the righteous - the winds of judgment will already have removed them. The righteous will endure because they are known by God. The righteous will stand because they are like trees by the stream, with deep roots in the Word of God. **The word of our God stands forever, Isaiah 40:8.**

Lord, we cannot read this psalm without asking ourselves, "What are we living for?" Are we still chasing the chaff, the wind, and the dust that rises from a collapsing world system? Or, have we discovered the blessedness that comes from a God-centered life?

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.
Psalm 1:6.