

“Full, Flourishing, and Fruitful Lives”

Psalm 1

¹ *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

² *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

³ *He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

⁴ *The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

⁶ *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

This psalm is what scholars call a *wisdom psalm*. Wisdom psalms are psalms that give practical instruction on how to live as God intended and, therefore, live life to the full. This particular psalm is about the consequences of following advice. There are negative consequences for following ungodly advice, and there are positive consequences for rejecting ungodly advice and following God’s advice. Those positive consequences are summed up in a single word—the word, “blessed”.

In our day the word “blessed” is a sort of benign term with religious connotations that describes a generic sense of well-being. But when the Psalmist used this word he meant much more than that. It refers to a *zestful* life, a *whole* life, a *flourishing* life, a *fruitful* life, a life lived with *purpose* and *significance*. Blessedness is often translated “happiness,” for implicit in the meaning of the word is an inner jubilation, a deep, abiding contentment and peace, and a joyful satisfaction.

Of course, every one of us wants to be happy. Every one of us is *pursuing* happiness in some way. And I’m pretty sure that every one of us believes that the *way* we are pursuing happiness is the most promising way to secure it.

But the truth is, some of us are happy, and some of us are not. Some of us are living full, flourishing, and fruitful lives, and some of us are living empty, frivolous, and inconsequential lives. And the difference has nothing to do with circumstances or money or things or any other external factors, it has to do with the *way* we are pursuing happiness.

The average person in our culture equates happiness with self-improvement, self-gratification and (perhaps most of all) self-indulgence. “Happiness is when things are going my way. Happiness is when I’ve got plenty of money in the bank, plenty of romance in my relationship, plenty of bounce in my step, plenty of toys in my garage. Happiness is when I feel healthy, when I feel pretty, when people like me, when people respect me, when people pay attention to me. Happiness is when I’m busy and needed and productive and comfortable. Happiness is when I’m doing something fun and entertaining and adventurous and exciting.”

But what I’ve just described has nothing to do with the happiness the Psalmist is talking about. Real happiness has nothing whatsoever to do with anything that is self-oriented or self-generated. It’s not based on circumstances or wealth or health or talent or good feelings or good times. It has to do with living well, living like you’re supposed to live.

Therefore, this kind of happiness can be enjoyed whether you live in the ghetto or whether you live in the White House; it can be experienced whether people are patting you

on the back or stabbing you in the back; it can be realized whether things are going well or things are falling apart. Because real happiness comes from fulfilling the purpose for which you were created.

What is that purpose? We were created for God. We were designed to be in relationship with Him. We were wired to be on His frequency, to be on the same page with Him, to walk in step with Him. And we experience true and lasting happiness when we are living in sync with Him.

How do we live in sync with Him? Psalm 1 tells us. And it begins by listening to the right people and following the right advice. Look again at **verse 1**. *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

The first thing it says we need to do in order to be blessed is to reject bad advice, and he sums up bad advice in the phrase, “the counsel of the wicked.” The counsel of the wicked is any philosophy or ideology that leaves God out of the picture; it is any advice, opinion, judgment, or conclusion that rejects or contradicts what God says in His Word. It may be promoted under the guise of self-help, and it may even be promoted in the name of God or religion. But if it contradicts the Bible, it is ungodly advice.

The counsel of the wicked may influence a young Muslim to be a suicide bomber (in the name of God and religion) or it may influence a young couple to max out a credit card. It may influence a person to leave a marriage that has lost its spark, it may influence a person to escape their problems through drugs or alcohol, or it may influence a person to order their lives around sporting events or television programs or video games. In any case, the counsel of the wicked leaves God—what He thinks and what He wants—out of the picture.”

The counsel of the wicked, with which we are bombarded almost 24/7 in our culture, can often *sound* very innocent and benign; it can *seem* concerned and even compassionate, for it is often presented to us in ways that disguise its wickedness and mask its malevolence. But we need to know that the counsel of the wicked is always destructive.

At the very least, it sabotages our humanness, the very thing that prevents us from living like we were designed to live, and, therefore, it is the very thing that prevents us from experiencing the happiness that God wants us to experience. The counsel of the wicked is like putting a garden hose in the gas tank of a high-performance automobile, and then wondering why it won’t run. It’s the very antithesis of what makes us live well, and yet it is often presented to us with such appeal and persuasiveness that we frequently fall for it. And if we fall for it enough we can become desensitized to its danger.

That’s what the Psalmist seems to suggest in the metaphors of *walking*, *standing*, and *sitting*. While all of these metaphors have reference to personal participation in matters that contradict or oppose God and His counsel, I think a good case can be made that there is an intent to show *progressive participation*.

“*Walking* in the counsel of the wicked” refers to going along with it, agreeing with it, aligning oneself with it, although I believe it is possible to walk in the counsel of the wicked and not be aware that one is doing so. In other words, it is not always *willful* participation. One might be deceived or seduced into going along with it, although even if he is deceived or seduced he is still fully responsible for making the choice to do so.

Let's say you've been working hard on your job. Work has been stressful. You're tired and you feel the need to get away and relax or have some recreation. Your friend says, "You deserve a break. Why don't you just call in sick and we'll go to the coast tomorrow?"

You say, "But I'm not really sick". And your friend says, "I know, but, hey, you've been working hard! You're exhausted! Just think of all the good things you've done for your company, and they're getting the benefit from it, not you. Besides, everybody calls in sick nowadays. In fact, it's so common that your company *expects* their employees to do it. So just do it and don't worry about it."

So you call in sick and go to the coast.

That's walking in the counsel of the wicked. That advice contradicts God's character, God's standard, and God's instructions about this matter. God has called us to be people of integrity, people who tell the truth, people who are faithful and can be trusted. Calling in sick when you're not is a lie, and it's a sin, no matter how often it happens or how many other people are doing it.

"*Standing* in the way of sinners" means that one is not merely going along with it or agreeing with it, one is *identifying* oneself with it, embracing that philosophy or conclusion or behavior or lifestyle as one's own. And so, to use the same illustration, you no longer have to wait for your friend to tell you to call in sick, you do it on your own. It's become an option for the way you handle fatigue or stress.

Do you see the progression? There's more ownership and participation. It's more deliberate.

Finally, "*sitting* in the seat of mockers" means that one has settled into a position of being an active advocate or promoter of the ungodly philosophy or belief or behavior. You're advising or influencing others to participate in it. The term *scoffer* suggests that you are consciously and even blatantly defying God's law or God's will and counseling others to defy it as well.

And so, getting back to our illustrations, "sitting in the seat of a scoffers" would not only mean that you call in sick at work when you're really not, but you tell others to call in sick at work.

Scoffers try to persuade others to believe lies or participate in wickedness. And so, a scoffer would be the young man who pressures his girlfriend to have sex with him saying, "C'mon, it's okay. How can it be wrong if we love each other?"

Scoffers are biology teachers who teach evolution as fact and leave God out of the picture.

Scoffers are people who counsel women or couples to have abortions.

Scoffers are judges and legislators who try to define marriage as something other than one man and one woman.

Scoffers are talk show hosts that try to influence people to believe something or do something that contradicts what God says or what God wants. I'm not just talking about the left-wing liberal shows, I'm even referring to conservatives—those who may have some good things to say and may, at times, give good advice, but who occasionally promote ideas or opinions that contradict God's word.

Scoffers are "biblical scholars" who sit in judgment on the Scriptures by denying that the Bible is the Word of God and then telling people that it cannot be trusted.

Do you see what a scoffer is? It is someone who tries to get others to believe lies or participate in sin. Again, notice the progression from “walking in the counsel of the wicked” to “standing in the way of sinners” to “sitting in the seat of scoffers”. There is not only a progression of personal participation and identification and ownership. Disobedience has turned into willful defiance.

Nobody starts out sitting in the seat of scoffers. They start out by walking for a while in the counsel of the wicked, until they feel more and more at home in that counsel so that they stop and stand in the way of sinners. And when they’ve stood in the way of sinners for some time their hearts become harder and harder, their consciences become more and more desensitized so that they eventually sit down and become mockers. Usually, by the time they become “mockers” they are so entrenched in sin’s deception that they are fully convinced that not only is there nothing wrong with it, it’s perfectly okay.

This is a very dangerous place to be. But be advised that the progression to a scoffer happens more quickly than you might imagine.

According to the Psalmist, true and lasting happiness can never be found by following or participating in the advice of the wicked. We experience true and lasting happiness when we are living in sync with God.

And the Psalmist tells us, positively, about this in **verse 2.** *² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

The *law of the Lord* is a reference to the Word of God in general, and the first five books of the Old Testament in particular. That’s Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—what is commonly called the Pentateuch or the Torah.

Have you ever read those books? If you have, you may be wondering if the psalmist is describing a mythical figure when he says that the blessed man “delights” in the law of the Lord. I mean, we all love Genesis. Exodus is *pretty* interesting. But many of us get bogged down in Leviticus, and downright bored in Numbers. How is it possible to *delight* in all those rules and regulations and detailed specifications?

It kind of makes us wonder if the psalmist was out of touch with reality or if he “had a life”. Maybe he was sheltered and had never been exposed to things that are *really* and *truly* delightful. Apparently there weren’t any good programs on television when he wrote this. He certainly must not have had any kids in sports, and he must have never been to a tailgate party at Reser Stadium.

I’m being facetious only to point out that either he knew something that perhaps some of us have yet to comprehend, or *our* concept of delighting in something is different than his—and, therefore, distorted. I say “distorted” because I think most of us would admit, at least on an intellectual level, that the psalmist is speaking the truth. He really *is* describing what it takes to be truly blessed, and that blessedness is inextricably linked to our relationship with the Word of God—more specifically our exposure to and interaction with and application of God’s Word. But, somehow, in our culture, that link is obscured by things that *seem* to be *more* delightful.

So why does the psalmist insist that the blessed man, the truly happy man, delights in the law of the Lord?

Because real happiness comes from fulfilling the purpose for which you were created. We were created for God. Just as a bird was designed to fly, just as a fish was designed to swim, so we were designed to be in relationship with Him. We were wired to be on His

frequency, to be in sync with Him. And we experience true and lasting happiness when we live in sync with God.

You say, “Okay, but what does that have to do with the law of the Lord?”

The law reveals the Lord. It reveals His glory, His holiness, His majesty, and His love. It reveals countless demonstrations of His power beginning from the creation of the world to the miraculous deliverances of His people. It reveals His promises to His people—His promise to be their God, their Protector, and their Provider. It reveals His Son, the Messiah and Savior of the world, who is the image of the invisible God and the exact representation of His being. And it reveals how one is able to have a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The blessed man delights in the law of God because being in relationship with God—a personal, intimate relationship—is the most precious thing to Him. The blessed man is personally engaged with the law of the Lord because that law not only reveals who God is, how God thinks, and what God wants, it is a means by which he can *directly* and *personally* encounter God, and having a direct, personal encounter with God is what He delights in more than anything else.

A blessed man doesn’t delight in the law of the Lord merely because he wants to be a good theologian or because he wants to have an intellectual head-trip or even because he wants to find the answers to life’s most profound questions. He delights in it because the law of the Lord reveals His God and enables Him to connect with Him. And that direct, personal connection is what provides the pleasure, the enjoyment, and the delight.

Look at the second part of **verse 2**. “...*and on his law he meditates day and night.*”

Meditation is one of those concepts that, for many of us, produces a mental image. We think of some Indian guru sitting in a trance with legs crossed and arms outstretched, who is trying to empty his mind and detach himself from the material world (including his own body) so that he can merge his identity with the cosmos.

But biblical meditation has nothing in common with eastern mysticism. For one thing, it is not a passive mental activity, it is an active mental activity, the purpose of which is to *engage* the mind, not *empty* the mind. It is also an activity that is very much connected to the real world and everyday life. Biblical meditation does not necessitate that you get off by yourself so that you can be uninterrupted or undistracted. It doesn’t even require that you be quiet or still. Meditation can be practiced in the midst of a busy schedule or simultaneously with many of our ordinary activities.

Deuteronomy 6 gives this familiar instruction. “*The commandments of the Lord are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up*” (6:6-7). If Moses were writing those words today he might have said, “Think about them when you are commuting to work, or on a jog; talk about them when you are sitting in the hot tub or watching the ballgame.” The point is, there are numerous times in each of our days that are appropriate times to reflect upon the Word of God and assimilate it into our lives.

The particular word translated “meditate” in Psalm 1 literally means, “a low sound.” It is used in Isaiah to describe the cooing of a dove or the growling of a lion when it is standing over its prey. But when used with reference to people its basic meaning is, “to mutter” or “to mumble.” It is used in another psalm to describe a secret plot—a group of rebels who conspire to overthrow a government, and who talk in low voices so they will not be heard.

The word is also used of a wizard who whispers and mutters his magical incantations.

The idea the psalmist wants to convey is that meditation has to do with engaging the mind and intensely concentrating on a particular object. With the lion it's her prey, with the rebels it's their plot, with the wizard it's his magical spell, and with the blessed man it's the law of God. Meditation is *not* a relaxation technique. Meditation is not shifting the mental gearshift into neutral in order to relieve stress or conjure up a nice mood or contrive a peaceful feeling. Meditation, in the Bible, always has an object, and in this case it is thinking about, reflecting upon, and mulling over the Word of God.

Look at **verse 3**. *³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.*

In the Willamette Valley you can pretty much plant a tree anywhere and expect that it will thrive. But in a semi-arid region like Palestine a tree's health and survival depends upon its proximity to water. In *ancient* Palestine, where irrigation systems were primitive and unreliable, farmers planted fruit bearing trees on the banks of year-round streams or rivers so that the roots of those trees could go down deep and be nourished by a continual source of water.

A happy person is comparable to a fruit-bearing tree that is planted by streams of water. Those streams of water are a metaphor for the Word of God, which, verse 2 tells us, is the continual source of nourishment for the blessed person. As we are exposed to the Word, as we interact with it and assimilate it into our lives, our roots go deep and we are able to enjoy spiritual health and vitality.

That's what is meant by the statement, *"...in all that he does, he prospers."*

Please understand that this is not an absolute statement, just like the Proverbs are not absolute statements. This is not saying that the blessed man never fails, never makes mistakes, never suffers, or never has setbacks. Nor is it saying that a blessed man has the Midas touch, or that all of his judgments and decisions are the right ones.

What the psalmist wants to communicate is that spiritual health and prosperity are the by-products of listening to God and taking to heart and applying what he says in his Word. If you do that, you can expect a *pattern* of success—not material success, necessarily, but spiritual success. You can expect, for example, to reap the benefits of wisdom, because God's word *is* wisdom, and the more you take it to heart and apply it the wiser you become.

On the other hand, **verses 4-6**. *⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

⁶ for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

These statements are intended to show not just the futility, but the *danger* of listening to the wicked and following their advice. When he says *"the wicked will not stand in the judgment"* and *"the way of the wicked will perish"* he means that they will be pronounced guilty on the Day of Judgment, and suffer the consequences of that guilt, which is eternal separation from God.

The Psalmist ends with this warning, because he wants his audience to know the perils of not listening to God and not living according to His will. It's serious. It's dangerous. It's eternally consequential.

However, God *has* made provision for each of us to live a deeply satisfying, thoroughly enjoyable, richly rewarding life with Him. God's will for each of us is fruitful abundance, His plan for each of us is that we walk in ever-increasing joy and freedom and victory, and He intends for us to experience a profoundly personal, intimate friendship with Himself that is the very source of our spiritual health and strength.

We do, indeed, experience true and lasting happiness when we are living in sync with God.

“Full, Flourishing, and Fruitful Lives” Psalm 1

Main Idea: We experience true and lasting happiness when we live in sync with God.

The meaning of “blessed”

Listening to the right people and following the right advice (1)

The counsel of the wicked

- Any _____ or _____ that leaves God out of the picture
- Any _____, _____, _____, or _____ that rejects or contradicts God’s word

The progression of participation

- “Walking” means _____ along with it, _____ with it, _____ oneself with it
- “Standing” means _____ yourself with it, _____ that philosophy, conclusion, behavior, or lifestyle as your own
- “Sitting” means you become an _____ or _____ of the ungodly philosophy or belief or behavior.

Listening to God and following his advice (2-3)

Delighting in the law of the LORD (2a)

The meaning of the law

The possibility of delight

Meditating on the law of the LORD (2b)

The meaning of biblical meditation

The practice of biblical meditation

Metaphor of a fruitful, flourishing tree (3)

The continual source of nourishment

The promise of prosperity

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

“Full, Flourishing, and Fruitful Lives”

Psalm 1

Main Idea: We experience true and lasting happiness when we live in sync with God.

1. What are some of the avenues through which the “advice of the wicked” come to you personally? In what specific ways are you susceptible to this advice? How can you protect yourself from being influenced by this advice?
2. Do you “delight” in the law of the LORD? How is it possible to increase your delight in God’s word?
3. Think about your daily schedule and routine. When might you be able to *meditate* on the Word of God? How do you actually get started in the activity of meditation? Describe a successful meditation “session” from start to finish.