

Summer in the Psalms: The Blessed Life

Psalm 1
ABC 5/23/21

Fairy tales often end with the words, *& they lived happily ever after*. But does that describe real life? Does that describe your life? What will make your life happy & meaningful? If we want to know the answer to that we need to go to the One who created us. God created us & gave us His revelation so we could know our purpose & experience joy in pursuing it. So we need to look to Him for the answers to those questions & Ps 1 is a great place to start. What you look to for meaning & happiness has implications for eternity. God promises in His Word happiness to all who follow what it says. Either it's a fairy tale which we shouldn't take seriously or it speaks truth which tells us how to have lasting happiness. Ps 1 shows us that to *live happily ever after*, we must build our lives on God & His Word. Things can never satisfy us; only God can. Pursuing pleasure, popularity, or prosperity will not & cannot satisfy. Only a life built on God & in obedience to His Word will bring true happiness. That's what this Psalm declares. The 1st vs begins with **blessed**, which in Hebrew is a plural of intensity & may be rendered, *Oh, how truly happy is the man*. The word comes from a verb meaning to go on or advance. If you want to advance to the fullest measure of happiness, the psalmist is going to tell us how.

Psalms 1 & 2 are the introduction to the other 148. Ps 1 begins, **Blessed is the man...** which is echoed in the closing line of Ps 2, **How blessed are all who take refuge in God** (12). Ps 1 speaks of those who **sit in the seat of the scornful**; Ps 2 of the God who **sits in the heavens** (4). Ps 1 commends those who **meditate** on the law of the Lord; Ps 2 mocks the nations who are engaged in a different kind of *meditation*, namely, *devising* or *plotting*, which is the same Hebrew word used for **meditate**. The closing words of Ps 1 claim that **the way of the wicked will perish**; Ps 2:12, addressing those who threaten God's rule, declares **you perish in the way**. There's some evidence that these 2 psalms were sometimes combined as one. Certainly, together they're an appropriate beginning to the entire Psalter since they introduce themes which are heard throughout the book. Ps 1 sounds forth the challenge of the 2 ways, reminding us that worship & the life of faith confront each one

of us with challenges & choices.¹ Ps 1 & 2 prepare us for all that is to come. In them, we see something of the splendor & sweep of the entire Psalter.

Ps 1 gives the only 2 categories of mankind: the **righteous** & the **wicked**. The basic definition of the word **wicked** is those who are guilty of violating God's law & the **righteous** or **blessed** are those who do what is right & good. The problem is, as Solomon tells us, **there is not a righteous man on earth who does good & never sins** (Eccl 7:20). & Paul, quoting from Ps 14 & 53, writes, **there is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one** (Rom 3:10-12). Both the Old & NTs are clear that none of us qualify as **righteous**. We're all among the **wicked**. So, if no one qualifies as **righteous**, how is it that Ps 1 makes a distinction between the **righteous** & the **wicked**? Habakkuk 2:4 helps us understand when it says, **the righteous shall live by his faith**. The **righteous** aren't those who earn righteousness based on their behavior, but those who are declared **righteous** based on their faith. Gen 15:6 provides an example of this when it tells us, **Abraham believed God, & it was credited to him as righteousness**. Paul quoted that in Rom 4 & expanded its application to all believers stating: **Now not for Abraham's sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead** (23-24). Not only was Abraham's faith credited to him as righteousness, but if we have faith in Christ, our faith is credited to us as righteousness as well. We see this clearly in Phil 3:9 where Paul describes himself as **not having a righteousness of my own derived from keeping the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**. He goes even further in Eph 2 telling us that even our faith isn't of our own making, but is a gift from God so we cannot boast. The **righteous** are distinguished from the **wicked**, not based on their own merits or abilities, but because God has graciously given them faith in Christ & then, based on that faith, He's credited Christ's righteousness to their account. As we look at Ps 1 & hear descriptions of the **righteous** & the **wicked** it can be tempting to think, *I'm OK because I do this & I don't do that*. We can easily stray into

¹ Robert Davidson, [The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms](#), pp 8-9

thinking we're righteousness because of our own performance. & so we need to be reminded that, left to ourselves, we'd all be condemned as **wicked**. It's only by grace through faith in Christ that anyone is counted righteous by God.

As I said, this Psalm describes the difference between the **righteous** & the **wicked**. But here in vss 1-2, **righteous** isn't the descriptive used in contrast with **wicked**, *happy* is. So Ps 1 begins by putting a choice before us: We can either be like the **wicked** or we can be *happy*. That flies in the face of what the world claims. Remember Billy Joel singing, *I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints. The sinners are much more fun.*² That sums up the world's perspective. The **wicked** are the ones who are having a good time. & the **righteous** are nothing but up-tight, miserable people who are missing out on all the fun in life. But the Bible declares the opposite to be true. Because, in the end, sin doesn't make good on its promises of happiness, but leads to disappointment, enslavement, & eternal ruin. Ps 1 tells us happiness isn't found in being conformed to the world but by being transformed by God & His Word.

1. Blessedness (1-3) Ps 1 begins by telling us some things the *happy* person does not do. Your happiness, both now & in eternity, depends upon your choice of one of two ways. Choosing one means rejecting the other. If you leave God out of your life & reject His ways, you won't have true happiness. The psalm begins with that which the happy person must reject.

A. Negatively The **blessed man** is described 1st in terms of things he doesn't do. I've already said what we do & don't do is NOT the source of our righteousness. & yet there's a clear difference between the behavior of the **wicked** & of the **righteous** which is the result of a believer's faith. The faith that God has used to credit us with righteousness is the same faith He uses to produce obedience in us. The invisible, internal presence of faith produces a visible, external change in our behavior. True happiness is found in living as our Creator designed us to live. Obedience & happiness go hand in hand such that the **righteous** man is the **blessed** man. Believers have the capacity to be truly happy in a way the **wicked** can never begin to know. **1**

² *Only the Good Die Young*

1) Do Not Walk in the Counsel of the Wicked This refers to those who live life based on the world's wisdom. The word **wicked** comes from a word meaning loose or out of joint. It's someone who doesn't take God seriously & disregards God's Word. The scary thing about the **counsel of the wicked** is you don't have to go looking for it. We're bombarded with it every day from every side. How can we discern the **counsel of the wicked** from the wisdom of God? The **counsel of the wicked** denies the sufficiency of Scripture for dealing with the problems of the soul. It exalts the pride of man & takes away from the glory of God. The world's wisdom builds self & minimizes the need for trust in God, whether for salvation or for daily living. The **counsel of the wicked** denies or minimizes the need for the death & resurrection of Jesus by asserting either the goodness of man or by downplaying or redefining sin. The **counsel of the wicked** denies God's moral absolutes & substitutes man's ideas. But God is holy & righteous & His standards as revealed in His Word are absolute (1 Pt 1:16). Human wisdom makes a god in its own likeness rather than submitting to God & His Word. 2nd, the **blessed...**

B. Do Not Stand in the Path of Sinners The **path of sinners** refers to their way of life or behavior. To **stand in the path of sinners** means involvement with sinners in their sinful behavior. The word **sinners** comes from a word meaning to miss the mark. It refers to deviating from God's standard as revealed in His Word. In that sense, we're all **sinners**. We've all missed the mark by deviating from God's Word. But when we trust in Christ as Savior we become converted sinners. Instead of living to please self, the converted sinner seeks to please God (Col 1:10), to deny self (Mk 8:34), & to love God & others (Mk 12:28-31). The Bible teaches that the purpose of our relationship with lost sinners needs to change after we come to Christ. On one hand, **Bad company corrupts good morals** (1 Cor 15:33). If we **stand** with sinful people in their godless way of life, we'll be influenced by them. On the other hand, we aren't supposed to cut ourselves off completely from sinners. Otherwise, we'd have to go out of the world (1 Cor 5:9-11). Instead, our objective has changed. Before we associated with sinners as one of them to join in their evil deeds, now we associate with them as a sinner saved by God's grace to seek to bring them to repentance & faith in Jesus. Finally, the **blessed...**

C. Do Not Sit in the Seat of Scoffers Scoffers are wise in their own eyes & sneer & reject God & His Word. They seek to justify themselves by openly ridiculing God. **Scoffers** think they know more than God & are too *smart* to believe in the Bible. They aren't just indifferent toward God, they're hostile toward Him, mocking Him & ridiculing His Word, His ways, & His people. They don't want God interfering in their sinful lifestyles. **The seat of scoffers** refers to the place where such people gather to reinforce their godless philosophy. Those who scoff at God love to get together to reinforce their beliefs. To sit in their **seat** means to belong to such a crowd, comfortable & content in their presence.

Before we leave vs 1, note the downward progression of the life of sin. There are degrees of departure from God, as implied in 3 sets of 3 words in vs 1:

1) **Walk > Stand > Sit.** 1st, you *walk*, you're moving, but in the wrong direction. Then, you *stand*, lingering in sin. Finally, you *sit* & are at ease in the company of scoffers.

2) **Wicked > Sinners > Scoffers.** 1st, you're with the *wicked*, those don't take God seriously. Then you're with *sinners*; those who openly violate God's commands. Then you're with *scoffers*, those who openly reject God's truth.

3) **Counsel > Path > Seat.** 1st, you listen to *counsel* & begin thinking wrong thoughts. Then, you stand in the **path** & engage in wrong behavior. Finally, you **sit** in the **seat** & belong to the wrong crowd & adopt their deadly attitude.

2 quick applications: 1st, guard your mind. Wrong thoughts lead to wrong behavior which leads to rejection of God & His truth. Guarding your mind doesn't mean you become a non-thinker. It means you filter everything by the unchanging standard of God's Word. 2nd, guard who your friends are. Those whom you choose as close friends should be committed to the things of God. As Paul asks, **what fellowship has light with darkness?** (2 Cor 6:14). Guard your mind & guard your friends. What starts out as passively listening to what the wicked say, ends with actively speaking as they speak. That's where the slippery slope of compromise leads.

Kids, teens, this is why your parents are so concerned about who & what is having an influence on you. Who are you hanging out with? Who is shaping your thoughts about what's good or important?

Whose example are you following to gain acceptance? Those are all major concerns for parents because we know the reality of how this works. We've been there & don't want you to learn the truth of Ps 1 the hard way.

Nobody gets up in the morning & says, *Today, I think I'll make a complete mess of my life.* No one starts with that as their goal. & yet that's exactly where many end up every day. & they never saw it coming because sin is a seductive trap. It will lure you in one little compromise at a time. Sin will take you further than you ever wanted to go, keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay, & cost you more than you ever wanted to pay. But don't think this psalm is telling us to avoid all contact with unbelievers; it's not. It's warning us not to allow ourselves to be drawn into thinking & acting like them. We're to be ambassadors of Christ & a good ambassador live in daily contact with people completely different from him. But he never forgets why he's there, what his mission is, or where his allegiance lies. So don't get involved with unbelievers because you admire them & want to be like them. Get involved with them because you love Jesus & want others to know & love Him too. As we do that, we need to guard our hearts against being influenced by the people whom we're called to influence for Christ. How do we do that? How can we be in the world &, at the same time, not give into the temptation to **walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the path of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers?** The negative isn't enough in & of itself to produce true happiness.

B. Positively (2-3) True happiness is found in a life built on God & His Word, being transformed by Him. Many of us can probably claim a negative sort of purity, but how many of us can truly say we **delight** in the Word of God & **meditate** on it continually? There's both a responsibility & a result given here. To the extent that we fulfill the responsibility, we can expect to see the result. **2-3**

The battle against sin isn't won merely through what we avoid. It's won through what we say *yes* to. The battle for godliness is won through the transformation brought about as we embrace the Word of God.

1) The Responsibility a) Delight (2) Instead of walking, standing, sitting, we're to **delight** in God's Word. What does **delight** mean? It's used in the OT (Gen 34:19; Esther 2:14) of a man delighting in a woman. Have you noticed that when a man delights in a woman, he rearranges his priorities

so he has plenty of time to spend with her? He doesn't do it because he has to but because he wants to. Now let me ask, do you **delight** in God's Word in that same way? Do you make time to spend in the Word because you **delight** in it? Do you look forward to it or has it become a duty? It's easy to fall into the duty mentality: *A chapter a day keeps the devil away; No Bible no breakfast.* So you grind through a chapter & check it off on your list, but you didn't actually commune with the living God or apply His Word to your life. It's a duty not a **delight**. But remember, the Bible is God's love letter to you. When Muriel & I were dating we spent 8 months 750 miles apart. This was in the dark ages before cell-phones or personal computers. No email, no texting, no Snapchat, Twitter, or Instagram. The way we communicated was through letters. I'd take a piece of paper & a pen & write on it. Then I'd put that letter in an envelope, put a stamp on it (20 cents), & mail it to her. A few days later, she'd receive it. If you're under 35, you probably can't imagine living under such primitive conditions. But those letters were treasured. If you're a follower of Christ, that's what we have in the Bible. It's God's love letter to us. Do you **delight** in it? Is it sweeter than honey & more precious than gold to you? It's the counsel of a loving, all-wise heavenly Father to you. His commandments are for your blessing & good. It should be no more of a duty to spend time in God's Word than it is for you to spend with your love. The way to true happiness is to **delight** in God's Word. As it molds our thinking & shapes our affections & our desires, sin & worldliness lose their power over us. What guards us from being conformed to this world & instead transforms us is the Word of God. & the chief way God's Word operates in the life of a believer to both protect from sin & produce happiness is by drawing us into a deeper love for God Himself. The **righteous** person isn't happy because they spent their life in pursuit of happiness. The **righteous** person is happy as a result of their pursuit of God, because it's in relationship with God that true blessedness is experienced. That's why the **blessed** person **delights** in God's Word. It's through the words of Scripture that God's love for us is revealed & the God we love reveals Himself to us. Our 2nd responsibility is to...

b) Meditate We're responsible not only to **delight** in God's Word, but also to **meditate** on it continually. This means to think about what the Word says & how it applies to all of life. **Meditate**

literally means to murmur or mutter. It has the idea of talking to yourself. That's the idea here as the blessed person meditates deeply on the Word of God. George Mueller wrote:

The first great & primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord... the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God & to meditation on it... As the outward man is not fit for work ... unless he eats, so it is with the inner man. What is the food of the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; & not the simple reading of it, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, & applying it to our hearts.³

We need to ruminate on God's word, savoring, & digesting it until we've absorbed it. Meditation is to reading what digestion is to eating: chewing it & letting it become part of you. We're to be doing this continually (**day & night**), which implies knowing the Word well enough to think about it all day long. **Blessed** is he who **meditates** on the Word of God **day & night** because such a person is so infused with Scripture, so saturated with it, when they hear the counsel of the wicked, it's foolishness to their ears. When they see the path of sinners, it's repulsive to them. & when they look upon the assembly of the scoffers, they're saddened by the mockery of God. Whatever shapes your thinking will shape your life. That's our responsibility: to **delight** in & **meditate** on the Word of God. Do you do it? If you're like me you have to answer, *Not always!* What do we do then? We need ask ourselves if there's unconfessed sin in our life because that will squelch our **delight** in God's Word. When we don't **delight** in & **meditate** on God's Word, the problem isn't with Scripture. The problem is with us. Although we were created to **delight** in God & His Word, sin has disrupted our ability to do that. It's like our hearts are a magnet, but through the fall & presence of indwelling sin the polarization of our hearts has been reversed so we're repelled by what should attract us & we're attracted to what should repel us. When we don't **delight** in God's Word, rather than blaming the Bible for not being more engaging, we need to recognize that Scripture is perfect as God Himself is. Our inability to appreciate that is due to the sin that continues in every one of us. But rather than that being a discouragement to us, that's actually a reason to have hope. Because, if you're a believer, sin doesn't get to have the last word. God is at work in you to will & to do according to His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). Our desires, appetites, & cravings can change & God is

³ Addresses by George Mueller, vol. 1, pp. 272-273

working in us to do just that. The best thing we can do is to cooperate with the work He's doing by fighting for that change. We need to fight for **delight**. We've entertained & amused ourselves to the point we expect to sit-back & be passive receivers of **delight**. The idea that we'd have to work at generating **delight** is foreign to our thinking. But the reality is, delighting in the things of God will always be different than the inclinations of our flesh. This side of glory, it'll never come naturally to us. Godly affections need to be cultivated. The author of Ps 119 understood this when he wrote: **I shall delight myself in Your statutes (16) & commandments (47)**. He's expressing a commitment to **delight** in God's Word, trusting that God will help do just that. The **blessed** man of Ps 1 doesn't just happen to **delight** in Scripture. He chooses to **delight** in Scripture. He trains his heart to desire what is truly desirable & to **delight** in what is truly delightful. Is it easy? Not always. Does it take effort? All the time. Is it worth it? Absolutely! The more we fill ourselves with the things of this world, the less appetite we'll have for delighting in God's good Word. But remember, **blessed** is the one whose **delight** is in the Word of God! & because he **delights** in it, he reads & studies it constantly, regularly, & repetitively. To the extent you build your life on God & His Word, you'll have true happiness.

If you're like me this can be discouraging. Who can avoid the counsel of the ungodly in our society? Who can meditate on the Word of God **day & night**? Certainly we can't fulfill this high calling. Moses couldn't. David couldn't. & neither can we. But take heart, One can, did, & does. It's Jesus who lives in perfect communion with the Father (Jn 5:19–20). It's He who **delights** in the Word of God & who **prosper**s in all His ways. In Christ we become the **blessed** person of Ps 1. He is the God-man who fulfills the divine demand & incorporates us into His life (1 Jn 1:3). It's He who gives us His own righteousness. As we live in communion with Him, we are that tree planted & our way will be known to the Lord. As we live in communion with Him the road to happiness, to blessing, is ours.⁴

2) The Results (3) The psalmist describes the person who delights in God's Word as a tree planted by streams of water. This is a tree that's been deliberately cultivated, even transplanted, near a canal or stream. It's healthy, well-fed, & able to withstand drought or storms. **a)** It's fruitful & has

⁴ Donald Williams & Lloyd J. Ogilvie, [Psalms 1–72](#), vol. 13, *The Preacher's Commentary Series*, pp 30–31

continual evidence of life & vitality. **b)** Its leaves don't wither. & then the psalmist sums it up by applying it: **c) In whatever he does, he prospers.** There's a truly happy person: the person God blesses with His prosperity, no matter what circumstances of life he finds himself in. God isn't promising financial prosperity here, but soul-prosperity. The health & wealth, name it & claim it teaching is false. God's servants may be poor in this world's goods & afflicted by many trials. But they are rich toward God (Lk 12:21), which is true prosperity.

2. Wicked (4-5) The psalmist now describes the **wicked** in contrast to the righteous. The righteous is like a sturdy tree, rooted, firm, & fruitful. **4-5**

A) The **wicked** is like **chaff**, rootless, weightless, & useless. This isn't man's view. From our vantage point, many who leave God out of their lives are powerful, prosperous people. Rather, this is God's view, as vs 6 shows. God's view takes eternity into account & says, *Those who leave Me out of their lives are like chaff.* They have no substance. They may be great before men, but before God they'll be blown away like chaff in the final judgment (5).

B) They won't have a leg to stand on. Their case won't hold up in God's court. They won't be in heaven, where those who've been made righteous through faith in Christ will be assembled. Even though it may not look like it at times, **the Lord knows**, He is intimately acquainted with **the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish** (6). The wicked will be condemned to eternal punishment (Rev 21:8). This is the plain teaching of God's Word. **It is appointed for men to die once & after this comes judgment** (Heb 9:27). We all must stand before God.

If you take God out of the picture, all you are is an accident, the product of random chance. Your birth was an accident & your death will be an accident. All you are is an accident suspended between 2 accidents. There's no happiness in that view. God declares you aren't an accident. You're here as His creation, made in His image, designed to find true happiness in Him & in His Word. But due to your sin & rebellion, you're alienated from God. He could rightfully judge you, but because of His love & mercy, He sent Jesus Christ to die in your place on the cross. You must turn from your rebellion, trust in Him, & accept the pardon He offers. If you do that & build your life on Him & His Word, you will live happily ever after, both now & throughout eternity.

Ps 1 focuses on the individual, the ideal of the **blessed** man. Those who listen to the Word of God, live the Word of God, & love the Word of God. The **blessed** man is the one who meditates on it day & night so his mind & heart are saturated with it. He takes personal responsibility to know & live out the Word. He doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, meaning he doesn't take their advice. He doesn't stand in the way of sinners, meaning he doesn't copy their behavior. He doesn't sit in the seat of mockers, meaning he doesn't join their scorn for the truth. The **blessed** man lives as he does because he loves the Word of God. He **delights** in it. This description of the **blessed** man ought to describe every believer. We should all aspire to live that **blessed** life. But if we're honest, we know we don't measure up to it. Of course, it's good to have a goal even if we can't realize it. But does this psalm present more than that? In the pressure for gender-inclusive language, some translate vs 1 either as **blessed is the one... or blessed are they...** But that misses the point that the Hebrew word used here is the word for a male, not some inclusive term. It's rightly translated as **blessed is the man...** This is important because it draws our minds to the pivotal figures in redemptive history: the 1st man, Adam & the last Adam, Jesus. The 1st Adam was a **blessed** man when he was created & until he fell into sin. The last Adam, Jesus, was the **blessed** Man all His life. He never failed to listen to, live out, & love the Word of God. He declared, **Behold, I have come to do your will, O God** (Heb 10:7), & that's what He perfectly did. Ps 1 isn't only an ideal for which we should strive; it's also the description of our Savior who fulfilled all righteousness for us. Our delight, then, is in the Word, both written & incarnate. & neither is a fairy tale. They are the only way to abundant life, true blessedness, & to *live happily ever after*.