

Psalms, Teacher's Guide

Week 1: The Blessed Life Rooted in God's Word

Psalms 1

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Psalms 1 is the gateway to the entire Psalter, and it is doing two jobs at once. First, it is laying down a theological foundation: there are two ways to live, the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, and these two ways end in two destinies. That claim runs straight against the spirit of our age, which prefers to believe that sincerity matters more than direction and that all roads eventually arrive at the same place. The psalm insists otherwise. What is doctrinally at stake this week is the authority and sufficiency of God's word as the food of the faithful life, the reality of a final judgment, and the truth that genuine flourishing is found only in being rooted in God. Be ready to help students see that for the Christian the "law of the Lord" the psalmist loved is now the whole counsel of Scripture read through Christ, not the Old Covenant as a binding code; we delight in the Word, but we do not return to Sabbath, temple, and sacrifice as obligations (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10).

Second, and just as important, this psalm is aiming at formation. It does not merely inform us that two ways exist; it stands at the doorway and asks each reader which way they are walking. The progression of verse 1, from walking to standing to sitting, is a pastoral X-ray of how a heart drifts. The tree of verse 3 is a picture of what a person slowly becomes when their roots reach the right water. Your students do not most need to be told that meditation on Scripture is good; they need to be helped to taste it and to want it. So teach the doctrine clearly, but keep pressing it toward the heart.

Aim, then, at both targets. Send students home able to say what the two ways are and where they lead, and why the word of God holds the place it does in the life of the church. But send them home also having honestly examined what they have been feeding on and where their own roots have been reaching. The best outcome this week is not a class that can define blessedness but a class that goes home hungry for the stream.

Question 1

Student Question:

The psalm opens by calling a certain person "blessed" (v. 1), and it defines that blessedness first by what the person refuses to do, walking, standing, and sitting with the wicked. What does this progression from walking to standing to sitting teach us about how sin gradually takes hold, and what does it mean that true blessedness begins with God rather than with our circumstances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the word “blessed.” The Hebrew term carries the sense of a deep, settled flourishing, the condition of a person whose life is genuinely going well at the level that matters most. It is not the shallow happiness that depends on circumstances. Help students see that the psalm grounds this blessedness first in God and in a person’s relationship to His word, not in health, wealth, or an easy life. This guards the whole study against a prosperity reading of verse 3.

Then walk slowly through the progression of verse 1: the blessed person does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers. The three verbs trace a downward slide. Walking suggests casually adopting the thinking of the ungodly. Standing suggests settling into their patterns. Sitting suggests being fully at home among the scoffers, those who have moved past indifference to mocking the things of God. Sin rarely announces itself; it eases us along by degrees.

Notice too that the psalm defines the righteous person first by a series of refusals. Before it tells us what the blessed person delights in, it tells us what they have declined to be shaped by. This is worth dwelling on, because we often imagine the godly life mainly as activity, when Scripture also presents it as a holy refusal to be conformed to the patterns of a world in rebellion (Romans 12:2).

Finally, make the positive point clear so the class does not hear only a warning. The blessed life is not mere avoidance; verse 2 immediately turns to delight. The refusals of verse 1 make room for the delight of verse 2. A heart has to be emptied of one counsel before it can be filled with another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True blessedness is grounded in God and His word, not in circumstances (contrast the prosperity gospel).
- The progressive nature of sin: walking, standing, then sitting, as a picture of gradual hardening.
- The world’s “counsel” as a rival discipleship that forms us whether we notice it or not.
- Holy nonconformity as part of the Christian life (Romans 12:2), not legalistic withdrawal.
- Blessedness as a settled flourishing of the whole person, deeper than happy feelings.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you see the “walking, standing, sitting” drift happening in ordinary modern life?
- Why does the psalm define the blessed person by refusals before delights?
- What is the difference between the blessedness of Psalm 1 and the world’s idea of “the good life”?

Question 2

Student Question:

Notice the slow drift the psalm describes: first you walk past, then you stop and stand, then you settle in and sit down. Where in your own life have you noticed yourself drifting from passing by something to growing comfortable with it? Name the specific influence, the “counsel” or the company, that has been quietly steering the way you think.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and the goal is honesty, not information. The verbs of verse 1 give you a gentle diagnostic tool. Help students locate themselves on that slope: is there an area where they have moved from merely walking past an influence to standing comfortably within it?

Press gently for specifics. The “counsel of the wicked” in our day is rarely a shadowy figure giving bad advice. It is more often the steady drip of voices we invite into our lives through screens, entertainment, and the assumptions of the people we admire. The forming influence is real even when it is never spoken aloud as advice.

Be careful not to let this become an exercise in shame or in pointing at other people’s sins. The question asks each person to name an influence steering their own thinking. Model that vulnerability if you can. The aim is to make the drift visible so it can be resisted, not to manufacture guilt.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discipleship by default: we are always being formed by something.
- The difference between living in the world and being shaped by its values.
- Self-examination as a healthy and biblical practice (2 Corinthians 13:5).
- The pull of peer approval as a quiet form of the “seat of scoffers.”

Discussion Prompts

- What voices get the most uninterrupted access to your mind each week?
- How do you tell the difference between engaging the world and being disciplined by it?
- What is one influence you sense you need to move from “sitting” back to “walking past”?

Question 3

Student Question:

The blessed person’s “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (v. 2). For us under the New Covenant, the whole of Scripture, fulfilled and unfolded in Christ, is the word we feed on. What is the difference between merely reading the Bible and the kind of delighting and meditating the psalm describes, and why does Scripture hold such a central place in the life of the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 2 is the hinge of the psalm. The blessed person's "delight is in the law of the Lord." Start by clarifying what "law" (torah) means here. It is broader than legal code; it is God's instruction, His revealed word. For the believer under the New Covenant, this delight now embraces the whole of Scripture as it finds its center and fulfillment in Christ.

This is an important place to be doctrinally careful. We delight in God's word, and we honor the Old Testament as Scripture that points to Christ, but we do not place ourselves back under the Old Covenant as a binding system. The Law was fulfilled in Jesus (Matthew 5:17), and Christians live under the New Covenant in His blood (Hebrews 8–10; Colossians 2:14–17). So our delight is in God's Word as a whole, with the New Testament as the pattern for the church, not in Sabbath, temple, and sacrifice as obligations.

Then distinguish reading from meditating. The Hebrew word for meditate suggests a low, murmuring sound, the way a person mutters a thought to themselves while chewing it over. It is the opposite of skimming. Meditation is reading that lingers, returns, prays, and applies. Many believers consume Scripture quickly and forget it just as quickly; the psalm calls for something slower and stickier.

Finally, connect this to the high place of Scripture in the life of the Lord's church. We gather around the Word read and preached, we sing it, and we order the church by it. Help students see that delighting in Scripture is not the private hobby of unusually religious people but the normal, central diet of everyone who belongs to Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority and sufficiency of Scripture for faith and life.
- The Old Law fulfilled in Christ; Christians under the New Covenant, not under Sabbath or sacrifice.
- The New Testament as the pattern for the church (its worship, work, and walk).
- Meditation as slow, prayerful, return-and-apply reading, not mere information intake.
- The centrality of the Word in the gathered life of the church.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the practical difference between reading the Bible and meditating on it?
- How do we honor the Old Testament as Scripture without putting ourselves back under the Old Law?
- What helps a passage of Scripture move from your eyes into your heart and your habits?

Question 4

Student Question:

The psalm pictures meditation as something we return to “day and night,” not a single appointment we keep and then forget. What would it look like, concretely, for God’s word to be present in the ordinary hours of your day rather than confined to a few minutes? What is one habit you could begin this week to feed on Scripture more steadily?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes the “day and night” of verse 2 and asks what it would look like in a real week. The point is not to lay a guilt trip about quiet times but to help students imagine Scripture woven through ordinary hours: a verse carried into the workday, a psalm prayed in the car, a passage talked over at the dinner table.

Help the class move from vague intention to one concrete habit. Research and experience both agree that small, repeated practices form us far more than occasional bursts of enthusiasm. A single verse memorized and recalled often will shape a person more than a chapter read and forgotten.

Watch for the believer who hears this only as more pressure. Frame the habit as feeding, not performing. The tree does not strain to reach the water; it simply stays planted where the water is. The invitation is to stay near the stream, not to earn God’s favor by reading more.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual disciplines as means of grace, not means of earning favor.
- The formative power of small, repeated habits over time.
- Scripture intended for all of life, not quarantined to a religious hour.
- Grace-rooted, not guilt-driven, motivation for the Christian walk.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one realistic way to keep Scripture near you through an ordinary day?
- Why do small steady habits usually form us more than occasional big efforts?
- How can we pursue this without slipping into guilt or performance?

Question 5

Student Question:

The blessed person is “like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither” (v. 3). What does this image teach about how spiritual fruitfulness actually happens, and how does it guard us against both the lie that we produce fruit by sheer willpower and the lie that fruit does not matter at all?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 3 gives us the central image of the psalm: a tree planted by streams of water. Notice the passive verb, “planted.” The tree did not plant itself; it was placed by the water. There is grace at the root of all true fruitfulness. The believer does not generate spiritual life by effort but is planted by God where the living water flows.

At the same time, the psalm does not make the believer passive. The tree stays where it is planted; it keeps its roots in the stream. Jesus uses the same logic in John 15: apart from Him we can do nothing, yet we are commanded to abide. Hold these together so students avoid two ditches: the lie that we produce fruit by willpower, and the lie that fruit is optional because grace covers everything.

Observe the marks of the tree. It yields fruit “in its season,” its leaf does not wither, and in all it does it prospers. Be careful with that last phrase. This is not a promise of financial success or a trouble-free life; the rest of the Psalter is full of righteous people who suffer. It is a promise that a life rooted in God will, in God’s time, bear the fruit He intends and will not finally wither.

Connect fruitfulness to the Spirit’s work in the New Covenant. Galatians 5:22–25 describes the fruit the Spirit grows in a yielded life. The point is not fruit on demand but fruit in season, the patient, organic outcome of staying rooted in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grace at the root: we are “planted,” we do not plant ourselves.
- Abiding in Christ as the source of fruit (John 15:1–8).
- Guarding against both willpower religion and fruitless presumption.
- “Prospers” rightly understood, not a prosperity-gospel promise of ease.
- The fruit of the Spirit as the shape of a rooted life (Galatians 5:22–25).

Discussion Prompts

- What does the passive verb “planted” tell us about where fruit comes from?
- How do we hold together “apart from Me you can do nothing” and “abide in Me”?
- How would you explain “in all that he does, he prospers” to someone walking through real hardship?

Question 6

Student Question:

A tree planted by the stream bears fruit “in its season,” not on demand and not all at once. Where are you tempted to be impatient with the slow, hidden work God is doing in you, comparing your season to someone else’s? What would change if you trusted Him with the timing of your own growth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the phrase “in its season” into the heart. Trees do not bear fruit on the day they are planted, and they do not bear every kind of fruit at once. Growth has a timetable, and it is usually slower than we would like. Help students name where impatience has crept in.

Comparison is the thief the psalm quietly exposes. When we measure our season against someone else’s harvest, we grow either proud or discouraged. The remedy is to trust the Gardener with the timing. The same God who planted the tree governs its seasons.

Aim for a settled patience rather than passivity. Trusting God’s timing does not mean doing nothing; the tree still keeps its roots in the water. It means staying faithfully planted while refusing to panic over the pace of the harvest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s sovereignty over the timing and seasons of our growth.
- The sin of comparison and its fruit of pride or discouragement.
- Patience and perseverance as marks of mature faith (James 1:2–4).
- Faithful waiting as active, not passive.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to force fruit out of season in your own life?
- How does comparing your season to others’ steal your joy?
- What does it look like to wait on God’s timing without going passive?

Question 7

Student Question:

In sharp contrast, “the wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away” (v. 4), and “the wicked will not stand in the judgment” (v. 5). What does the image of chaff teach about a life built apart from God, and how does the New Testament fill out this psalm’s warning about a coming judgment that no one escapes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 4 turns to the contrast: “The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.” Help students feel the image. Chaff is the dry, papery husk separated from the grain at threshing. It has no weight, no roots, and no future; the slightest wind scatters it. The psalmist is describing a life with nothing at its center to hold it down.

The repeated “not so” is emphatic. Everything said of the tree is denied of the chaff. Where the tree is planted, the chaff is blown; where the tree endures, the chaff vanishes. The two ways could not be more different in their outcomes.

Verse 5 names the outcome plainly: “the wicked will not stand in the judgment.” The Old Testament here anticipates what the New Testament makes explicit, a real and final judgment before God. Jesus taught it plainly (Matthew 25:31–46), and the apostles preached it (Acts 17:30–31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27). This is not a metaphor to soften; it is a sober reality the gospel addresses.

Take care to present this without either flippancy or fear-mongering. The same gospel that warns of judgment offers a sure way to stand in it, through Christ. Let the warning do its work, then point to the hope. The wicked will not stand, but those rooted in Christ will.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality of a final judgment (Matthew 25:31–46; Acts 17:30–31; Hebrews 9:27).
- The emptiness and impermanence of a life built apart from God.
- The two ways ending in two genuinely different destinies.
- Judgment preached soberly, never flippantly, always alongside the gospel’s hope.
- Standing in the judgment as a gift received in Christ, not earned.

Discussion Prompts

- What makes the image of chaff such a fitting picture of life apart from God?
- How does the New Testament fill out this psalm’s warning about judgment?
- How can we speak honestly about judgment while keeping the gospel’s hope central?

Question 8

Student Question:

Chaff looks weightless and rootless because it has nothing holding it down. When the winds of culture, opinion, and pressure blow through your life, do you find yourself standing firm like the tree or scattering like chaff? Name one area where you most need deeper roots so the next strong wind does not carry you off.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes the chaff image and turns it toward the student’s own stability. Chaff scatters because it has no roots; the question asks where a person feels most easily blown about by the winds of culture, opinion, and pressure.

Help the class connect rootlessness to specific pressures: the fear of others’ opinions, the pull of trends, the anxiety that rises when everyone around seems to be moving a certain direction. Naming the particular wind makes it possible to plant deeper roots against it.

Steer toward the constructive half of the question. The cure for chaff is not trying harder to stand firm; it is sinking roots into the stream, into Scripture, prayer, and the fellowship of the church. Depth, not effort, is what keeps the tree standing when the wind comes.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual rootedness as the source of stability under pressure.
- The fear of man as a wind that scatters the unrooted (Proverbs 29:25).
- The role of the church in keeping believers grounded.
- Depth over effort: stability comes from roots, not willpower.

Discussion Prompts

- Which cultural “winds” most easily move you off course?
- Where do you most need deeper roots right now?
- How does the fellowship of the church help keep us from scattering?

Question 9

Student Question:

The psalm ends with a promise and a warning: “the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (v. 6). Jesus is the one truly Blessed Man who perfectly delighted in His Father’s word and was raised to life while the grave could not hold Him. How does reading Psalm 1 through Christ change the way we hear its promise, and how do we come to share in the blessed way, according to the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 6 is the theological summary of the whole psalm: “the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” The word “knows” means far more than awareness; it carries the sense of intimate, covenantal care. The Lord does not merely observe the righteous from a distance; He watches over them, walks their road with them, and brings them home.

This is the place to read Psalm 1 through Christ, and to do so with care. Read on its own, the psalm could sound as if the blessed life is simply earned by sufficiently delighting in Scripture. But hold the psalm up to the whole story and a deeper truth appears. Jesus alone is the truly Blessed Man who perfectly never walked in the counsel of the wicked, whose delight was always in His Father’s word, and who is the Tree of Life. He fulfilled Psalm 1 where we have all failed it.

Then preach the resurrection as the vindication of the righteous One. The way of the wicked perishes, but the grave could not hold Jesus; God raised Him, and He reigns now at the Father’s right hand. This is crucial: the kingdom is present and Christ is reigning now, not waiting for

some future earthly thousand-year reign. The risen Christ is the firstfruits, the proof that the way of the righteous leads through death to life (1 Corinthians 15:20–23; Acts 2:32–36).

Finally, show how we come to share in the blessed way. We do not climb into the tree by our own righteousness; we are joined to Christ. According to the gospel, we hear the good news, believe in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repent of our sins, confess Him, and are baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). Planted in Christ, we then live the rooted, meditating, fruit-bearing life the psalm describes, and we keep walking that way faithfully to the end (Hebrews 3:12–14).

Resist two errors as you teach this. Do not reduce Psalm 1 to moral self-improvement, as if blessedness were a reward for trying hard; and do not so spiritualize it that the call to real obedience disappears. The blessed way is received in Christ and then actually walked.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Lord's intimate, covenantal "knowing" of His people, not bare awareness.
- Christ as the true Blessed Man who fulfilled Psalm 1 where we failed.
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus as the vindication of the way of the righteous.
- The kingdom present and Christ reigning now, against premillennial expectation of a future earthly reign.
- Entering the blessed way through the gospel: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ.
- Continuing faithfully in the way, since the saved can fall away (Hebrews 3:12–14).
- Avoiding moralism on one side and a fruitless spiritualizing on the other.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it change the psalm to see Jesus as the one truly Blessed Man?
- Why does the resurrection mean the kingdom is present and Christ reigns now, rather than later?
- According to the gospel, how does a person come to be "planted" in the way of the righteous?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across all six verses. Psalm 1 has set a tree and a pile of chaff in front of you and asked you to choose where your roots will go. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this psalm. What is the single truth from Psalm 1 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks the student to look back across the whole psalm and name one way Jesus is forming them through it. Give the class a moment of quiet before discussion; the best answers here are personal and specific, not tidy summaries.

Help students land on something concrete and livable. “I want to be more rooted” is a fine instinct, but press for the next step: which habit, which influence, which area of drift? The psalm has handed them a tree and a pile of chaff; the question is what they will do with the picture this week.

Close by lifting their eyes, the way the psalm itself does, to the Loord who knows the way of the righteous. The point of self-examination is never despair over how chaff-like we can be; it is to come back to the stream, to Christ Himself, and stay planted there.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ-centered self-examination that leads to hope, not despair.
- Spiritual formation as specific and livable, not vague aspiration.
- The Word as the means God uses to shape us into Christ’s likeness.
- Assurance grounded in the Loord who knows the way of the righteous.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single truth from Psalm 1 you most need to carry into this week?
- What one concrete step would move you closer to the stream?
- How does the promise that the Loord “knows the way of the righteous” steady you?