

Psalms

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

There is a fork in the road, and you are standing on it right now. You may not feel it. The morning probably looked ordinary, the coffee was the same temperature it always is, the commute ran along the same gray stretch of highway. But the very first poem in the prayer book of God's people opens by quietly insisting that ordinary life is never as neutral as it looks. Every day you are leaning, a little at a time, toward one of two ways of living. One leads somewhere green and alive. The other leads to dust. Psalm 1 stands at the doorway of the whole book of Psalms like a doorkeeper, and before it lets you in to all the lament and praise and raw honesty that follow, it asks you a single, searching question: which way are you walking?

The picture it paints is unforgettable. On one side there is a tree, the kind you find planted near a stream in a dry country, roots reaching down into water that never quits even when the sky does. Its leaves stay green through the drought. It bears fruit without straining for it, in season, year after quiet year. On the other side there is chaff, the papery husk that gets thrown into the air at harvest so the wind can carry it off. Weightless. Rootless. Here one second and scattered the next. The psalmist is not being harsh. He is being honest about what we are all becoming, slowly, by the things we feed on and the company we keep.

What makes the tree a tree is not luck and not effort exactly. It is location. It is rooted where the water is. The blessed person, the psalm says, has learned to delight in the word of God and to chew on it day and night, the way you turn a good thought over and over until it becomes part of you. This is not the grim duty of someone choking down medicine. It is delight. It is the difference between a person who reads Scripture because they are supposed to and a person who has tasted something there they cannot get anywhere else and keeps coming back hungry.

So before we walk with God's people through their tears and their trust over these eleven weeks, we begin here, at the root. Read these six verses slowly. Notice where your own roots have been reaching lately, and what you have been letting the prevailing winds do to you. The God who wrote this poem is not standing at the fork with a clipboard, keeping score. He is pointing down one of the two roads and telling you, plainly and lovingly, that He knows the way, that He walks it with His people, and that it leads home.

Group Discussion: Psalm 1 sets two ways of life side by side, the way of the righteous that flourishes like a well-watered tree and the way of the wicked that blows away like chaff (vv. 3–4). Our culture tends to resist the idea that there are only two ways, preferring to imagine endless shades of gray. Why do you think people are so uncomfortable with the picture this psalm draws, and what is the psalm actually claiming about where each path finally leads?

Personal Reflection: The blessed person of Psalm 1 “meditates” on God's word “day and night” (v. 2), turning it over until it shapes the way they think and live. Be honest with yourself for a

moment. What do you actually meditate on in the quiet minutes of your day, when your mind is free to wander? What does that tell you about where your roots have been reaching, and what is one small change that could move you closer to the stream?

Read Psalm 1

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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.

9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Jeremiah 17:5–8, the two trees and where each one sinks its roots; Joshua 1:8, meditating on God’s word day and night so that we live wisely; Matthew 7:24–27, the two builders and the two foundations in the teaching of Jesus; John 15:1–8, abiding in Christ as the true vine so that we bear lasting fruit; Galatians 5:22–25, the fruit the Spirit grows in a life rooted in God.