**Peace in the Storm**

Psalm 1

**We moved to Tampa from Chicago almost exactly five years ago.** I preached one Sunday, and the next weekend Hurricane Irma was coming directly at Tampa. We moved the worship service to Friday night because the hurricane was scheduled to arrive Saturday mid-morning.

Kristin had our minivan loaded with both dogs in it - everything ready to go. We made that Friday service only 45 minutes long with a 20-minute message and then we took off driving north, praying for a gas station that had gas. We had to go all the way to Birmingham to find an available hotel room. ***Then we went on to Louisville*** and stayed with Kristin’s sister for the next five days. Up there it was 75 degrees with clear, sunny skies.



We played wiffle ball with our little nephews and enjoyed their home that had electricity for the five days our townhome was without power here in Tampa.

***That is how the Andersons found peace in the storm that was Hurricane Irma.*** The rest of you, from what I’ve heard, found peace in the storm by staying put here in Tampa. Some of you put up your hurricane shutters or put plywood over your windows. Some of you had generators and even shared power with your neighbors. Some of you fled to South Georgia and the storm followed you there!

When it comes to hurricanes, there are different ways to find peace. ***But how do we find peace in the many storms of life?*** Illness, pain, job loss, damaged relationships, abuse, fear, worry, financial stress, loss of loved ones, persecution, and death… The Bible answers that question from Genesis to Revelation but especially the answers are found in the book of Psalms.

These 150 poems, ranging from a couple of verses each to Psalm 119 that has an eight-line poem for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet, address every situation in life - every feeling, every worry, every concern. ***The Psalms cover the full range of human emotion*** and experience from the highest highs to the lowest lows. God shows us in this book how to navigate life with faith and hope - how to find peace and joy in the storms of life.

And ***Psalm 1 is not accidentally placed first***. The Psalms were intentionally organized for their thematic emphasis, to create a deliberate movement. See the church blog for a great video on this arrangement.

<https://efca.network/2021/02/11/the-psalms/>

Psalm 1 sets the tone for the whole book - introducing themes of blessing and life in connection with God’s Word. This picture of a tree planted by streams of water, drawn from Jeremiah 17 a few hundred years before David wrote it here, serves as an invitation to worship. ***Do you want to be like a well watered and fruitful tree or like a tumbleweed?***

That is the question of Psalm 1. It is the warning of the Bible and the invitation of God. Come to the Lord by listening to and loving His Word and you will be deeply rooted, vibrant and fruitful. Ignore God and His Word and your life will be turbulent, unpredictable, chaotic and terrifying. How can we meditate on God’s Law day and night? ***Part of the answer is POETRY! Music! Prayer!*** Use the Psalms as your prayer book every day and you will be blessed! You will draw closer to God and He will strengthen you, encourage you, give you peace, joy, love, life, fruitfulness, stability, hope and everything else.

You may use a devotional book or a journal for your quiet time. You may have an organizer or special system for your prayer requests. You may visit the prayer room at Oakwood. There are lots of ways you can enrich your time with the Lord. But the single best, **most proven resource to draw closer to God is the book of Psalms**. The people of God have been using this prayer book since the time of King David 3,000 years ago and even before that. Oswald Chamber is fine. Max Lucado has some good stuff. You may have a devotional from your favorite preacher - God bless you with that. But no other resource comes close to the beauty and power of God’s actual Word. And no other part of God’s Word so consistently nourishes the soul than the Psalms.

We will spend the next ten Sundays in the Psalms as a sort of ***sampler platter*** to whet your appetite. Jump off from these handful of Psalms we look at closely to do a deeper dive on your own and explore this prayer book. You will be blessed if you do!

What Psalm 1 shows us is **three commitments that will help you find blessing in the Lord** and then the promise of what that blessing will look like. Let’s look at these three commitments.

**How to find Blessing in the Lord:**

1. Ensure your closest friends are **Godly** people

“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.” Psalm 1:1

***The first word of the book of Psalms is BLESSED or HAPPY***. Do you want to be blessed by God? Do you want to find lasting happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment? There is a path to follow to find blessing and there are a million paths to avoid. This short Psalm starts with the word blessing and it ends with the word PERISH:

1. Ensure your closest friends are **Godly** people

“**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 way of the wicked will **perish**.” Psalm 1:1,6

So this poem is clearly a stark contrast between the way of the blessed and the way of the cursed. There is a way to live that leads to blessing and a way to live that leads to death. That is no surprise in the Hebrew Bible. ***Moses ended the Torah***, the Law, with a choice - saying, “I set before you today life and blessings, death and curses, therefore choose life!”

***King Solomon wrote the Proverbs*** which is an extended exhortation to avoid the foolishness and waywardness of sinners and choose the path of wisdom and righteousness. Tragically, the writer of the Proverbs, Solomon himself, did not listen to his own advice and fell victim to the very foolishness he warned young men about.

Psalm 1:1 sounds **a lot like the Proverbs** - and it’s entirely possible that Solomon was inspired by this Psalm from David, his father, when he wrote the Proverbs. He may well have taken a special notice of the writings of his father as he wrote Proverbs as a message to his son. Honestly, if Solomon had listened to only one verse of Scripture and the verse he chose was Psalm 1:1, his whole life may have been different.

Consider what it was that set Solomon on the wrong path. As with young people throughout the centuries a big part of the answer is the friends he chose to spend the most time with. In Solomon’s case specifically it involved women from foreign countries who worshiped other gods. But the principle applies still today for all of us. ***ENSURE YOUR CLOSEST FRIENDS ARE GODLY PEOPLE.***

If the people closest to you do not know and love and follow the Lord Jesus that will begin to change you. You may not notice it at first, but it will happen, and it will not be good.

Notice **the progression of verse 1**: ***Walking*** with the wicked, standing with the sinners, sitting with the scoffers. At first, you are just out for a casual stroll. You’re just walking along - casual acquaintance. But then, before you know it - you’re ***standing still***. You’re in this new place called “the way of sinners” and you’re no longer walking, no longer exploring - you’ve arrived at a new place with a new group. And then, ***you sit down***. This progression of movement matches an internal process of change described in Proverbs.

**A Dangerous Progression**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Walking | Naive, undecided |
| Standing | Foolish |
| Sitting | Scoffer |

At first you are just listening to the counsel of some wicked people, their influence leads you to stand alongside the sinners and finally to take your seat among scoffers. This is the progression in Proverbs from ***the naive, undecided young man*** who unwittingly ***becomes a fool***, stumbling into well-concealed traps. And before long that young fool ***becomes a scoffer himself*** - not only choosing the wrong way but making fun of those who avoid it. The scoffer or the mocker is the grim end point in the Proverbs.

Consider at this moment - ***are there some areas of life that you are walking around, casually exploring something?*** No one sets out to murder someone - first you simply walk down this dark alley called resentment. If you stay in that dark place and find people to feed your bitterness your anger will grow and will begin to take over your thoughts and plans. Then, even if you stumbled unwittingly into a gang of violent people, you will find them encouraging you to hurt someone and helping you find a way to do so.

Apply that progression to **any area of life**. No one sets out to have an affair and ruin their family. It starts with a small stroll down fantasy lane. No one sets out to embezzle millions of dollars. It starts with stressing about finances and dreaming about getting rich quickly. No one wakes up one morning and randomly abandons their Christian faith. It starts with a little walk down philosophy drive or pain parkway. If you run into some fools there or some scoffers and begin to hang out with them a lot, before long you won’t be walking anymore, you will have a comfortable seat with the other fools and scoffers who settled there long ago.

**How to find Blessing in the Lord:**

1. Ensure your closest friends are **Godly** people

“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.” Psalm 1:1

Here is the first commitment to a blessed life - choose your close friends carefully. The people you spend the most time with will shape your life - for better or for worse. The second commitment:

**How to find Blessing in the Lord:**

1. Treasure the **Word of God** in attitude and action

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.” Psalm 1:2

Here is ***the contrast to the wicked***, sinners and scoffers of verse 1 - the blessed man who does not wander carelessly into close friendship with questionable characters. Later we will see this is a righteous man whose righteous way is known by the Lord. ***How does a person maintain a righteous life in a sinful world?*** The answer is right in this verse: know and love and study the Word of God.

King David **starts with attitude** - delighting in the Law of the Lord. If you claim to treasure something but never actually use it, then your actions betray your true attitude. I could ***say I love broccoli*** but if you watched my eating habits you would see that what I really love is ice cream and Reese’s peanut butter cup shakes and Reeses peanut butter cups by themselves. You could say you value personal fitness, but if you never actually make it to the gym then your actions betray your true attitude.

**Attitudes and actions are inseparable**. Values and desires always produce behavior. Or the other way around, behavior always reveals our real priorities. What we do proves what we love.

***What is your attitude toward God´s Word?*** What do your ACTIONS say? I´m sure in our words we would all say we treasure Scripture and our relationship with God. But do our daily practices prove this or disprove it?

The truth is that we need both. ***We need discipline and delight.*** We need to treasure God´s Word and to take time every day to read it. We need both the heart and the hands. Without the discipline of daily time in the Word our positive attitude toward Scripture is just pie in the sky fanciful intentions with no follow through. But the most rigorous discipline and daily commitment to Bible reading without a sincere love from the heart is empty religion that God despises.

**Psalm 1 calls us to the union of attitude and action** - of duty and delight. We should enjoy God´s Word, love it, treasure it - and we do this by reading it, meditating on it, memorizing it, discussing it, applying it.

One key application of this point, if we want to be that righteous and blessed person who avoids the traps of sinful people and walks in the way of the Lord, is to **MEMORIZE God´s Word**. Remember that until the printing press 500 years ago it was not common for the average person to have a Bible of their own, nor was it common for everyone to be able to read. So the two practices that have enabled God´s people to delight in and meditate on Scripture are: 1) gathering for corporate worship and 2) Bible memorization.

Individuals and families could rarely own a **Torah scroll**, but a Jewish Synagogue would save up money and purchase one to share together. It was a special moment to open one of those scrolls and hear the Word of God read. These days Bibles are so commonplace we have lost the sense of awe and amazement that came from seeing God´s Word before you and hearing it read to you. The worship and liturgy of the Jewish people - filled with PSALMS by the way - was what enabled the average God-worshiper to ***memorize Scripture and meditate on it from day to day***.

Jewish children were trained from a young age to memorize first the TORAH - the first five books of the Bible and then the Psalms. Those were the priorities to know in your heart and meditate on day by day.

***How is your Bible memorization?*** When is the last time you used flash cards and worked to hide God´s Word in your heart in a serious way? That is the second key commitment for a life God blesses - to treasure God´s Word in attitude and action. That is the second key to finding peace in the storms of life. First, choose your close friends carefully. Second, treasure God´s Word. Third:

**How to find Blessing in the Lord:**

1. Do the **Right Thing** even when it´s hard

“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” Psalm 1:6

Psalm 1 is a back and forth **contrast between the righteous and the wicked** - between their character and choices and then the consequence of their different lifestyles. We will look at those results in a minute, but here notice that there are only two options in the end - you are either righteous or wicked. There is no middle ground, no shades of gray here.

In the end, the wicked will be condemned in judgment and will not be accepted among the congregation of righteous people in heaven.

**How to find Blessing in the Lord:**

1. Do the **Right Thing** even when it´s hard

“For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Psalm 1:6

**God´s justice is perfect.** He sees every thought, He knows every desire, He evaluates every action, every careless word. God knows our hearts - and that is a daunting, sobering reality.

***Do we follow the way of the righteous*** - the narrow road that Jesus said leads to life? Or do we follow the broad road that most people choose - the usual way that leads to eternal destruction? Here in Psalm 1:6 is an Old Testament expression of Romans 6:23 - ¨the wages of sin is death.” The consequence for sin against God has always been death - that is what introduced death into God´s perfect creation way back in the garden of Eden.

But this is not salvation by works. This is not a door to heaven by your own effort. The only way to delight in God´s law in your heart and the only way to choose and follow the way of righteousness is to be PLANTED BY GOD by the streams of the water of life. Look back at verse 3.

**How to find Blessing in the Lord:**

1. Do the **Right Thing** even when it´s hard

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season.” Psalm 1:3

***How much credit does a tree get for where it is planted?*** Did that acorn make a deliberate choice of the will in terms of where it settled into the soil? Of course not! It simply had the good fortune to be planted in good soil near a source of clean, life-giving water.

The key point here is that blessing - real blessing - can only be found **IN THE LORD**. He is the spring of the water of life. He is the One who can change your heart so that streams of living water flow from inside you. The only way to be blessed, happy, joyful now and forever is to be planted IN HIM. He is the vine, we are the branches - apart from the Lord Jesus we can do nothing. We cannot choose the right friends, we cannot treasure and memorize or apply God´s Word, we cannot do the right thing and follow the way of righteousness; in fact, apart from Jesus we cannot even know what the way of righteousness is.

***So here is the GOSPEL in the first Psalm!*** Streams of water. A tree planted, deeply rooted, healthy and flourishing. That is the picture of the righteous person - the one who loves God and is in a close relationship with Him.

And look at the wonderful promises for this person who is bound to the Lord in covenant relationship:

**The Promise of Blessing in the Lord:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * **Satisfaction**
* Protection
* Vindication
 | “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” Psalm 1:3 |

This is what blessing looks like - a healthy, fruitful, well nourished tree.

***Is your soul well nourished?*** Are you drawing life from the spring of living water? Do you feel the satisfaction that only Jesus can provide? Or are you experiencing the emptiness of every other possible source of life? The prophet Jeremiah called idols broken cisterns that cannot hold water. But this is what we do! We dig around in the desert of the world hoping something will satisfy us - but nothing ever does because nothing in this world can give us real life and joy. Only Jesus can. Only Jesus is the source of soul satisfaction.

* **Money** cannot fill that empty place in your heart.
* **Success** and fame cannot satisfy for long.
* **Pleasures, hobbies**, entertainment can distract for a little while but eventually run dry.
* Even **relationships** cannot sustain you for long.

***Everything in this world will eventually disappoint you*** - it will not satisfy the deepest longings of your soul. Only Jesus has that water you can drink and never be thirsty again. Only Jesus can plant you by the streams of water that let your roots drink deeply of the life of God.

But a life connected with Jesus - bound together with Him in a covenant relationship - that is the life God blesses. That is where joy and peace and love and life are found - IN HIM. And not only satisfaction, but also true protection. In Christ we are secure, both now and forever.

**The Promise of Blessing in the Lord:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Satisfaction
* **Protection**
* Vindication
 | “In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.” Psalm 1:3-4 |

***The wickedness of evil people REBOUNDS on them*** in this life and brings judgment on them for eternity. But righteousness is its own protection.

* Honesty protects you; deception damages relationships and gets you into trouble.
* Love protects and blesses you; anger and violence destroys people and rebounds to destroy you as well.
* Integrity protects you from both trouble and the appearance of impropriety; compromise, secret sin damages your conscience and sets you up for a fall when the truth comes out. Because - as Antman learned - Baskin Robbins always finds out.

The wicked are like chaff that are blown away in the wind. That is how wheat was prepared for the mill - it was taken to **a threshing floor** in an open, windy place, often on the top of a hill. There the harvesters would beat the stalks of wheat on the ground and the chaff, which was lighter, would fly up and be blown away while the grains of wheat, which are heavier, would fall to the ground and be collected to be ground into flour.

***Is your life right now like the wheat or the chaff?*** Are you deeply rooted by the streams of living water so your life is stable, connected to Jesus, growing in righteousness and protected by Him? Or is your life being blown around in the wind, like chaff?

**In Jesus there is protection both for this life and for eternity**. Sinners have their sin rebound on them - often very quickly. But the guarantee of judgment is that even if a wicked person has a relatively “successful” life, justice will be waiting for them when they stand before God. Then, when they stand before the throne of King Jesus all of their thoughts, desires, actions and words will be exposed - all the chaff of selfishness, pride and sin will be shown for what it is - and suddenly the soul of the wicked person will be revealed to be either wheat or chaff.

***Apart from Christ, all of us are worthless chaff.*** Only those who come to Jesus in commitment and faith are transformed by Him from chaff into wheat. He takes a sinful heart and makes it holy. He takes a selfish sinner and gives us new desires and new purpose.

***What is the main difference between wheat and chaff?*** They come from the same organic stalk. But one is useful, the other is trash. Wheat becomes flour to feed and strengthen people. Chaff is useless and is thrown away. A grain of wheat can be planted so it can reproduce and multiply its usefulness. Chaff is impotent - it has no life in itself and no ability to reproduce life. Chaff is hollow, dead. Therefore, the Psalm concludes:

**The Promise of Blessing in the Lord:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Satisfaction
* Protection
* **Vindication**
 | “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.” Psalm 1:5 |

Evil rebounds on the evil person - both in this life and forever. That is what hell is - eternally living with the consequences of an unchangeably sinful soul. Being bound to your sin forever, with no escape from it. But Scripture promises vindication for the believer:

**The Promise of Blessing in the Lord:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * Satisfaction
* Protection
* **Vindication**
 | “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Psalm 1:6 |

Blessing is promised for those who trust in and obey the Lord - Jesus Christ. Death is guaranteed for all who do not. There is a way that leads to life - which is narrow and few find it. The broad road that most people choose is the path to destruction.

**Only in Jesus** can you find satisfaction, protection, and vindication. Only Jesus offers true and lasting happiness. Only Jesus offers purpose and security. Only Jesus can change you from chaff into wheat. So, follow the pathway outlined in Psalm 1 - the way of the righteous!

<https://livingbydesign.org/billy-graham-leadership/>

The best recent example of a Psalm 1 life is **BILLY GRAHAM**. Born in North Carolina but trained right here in Tampa, the young man surrendered to the Lord saying:

“All right, Lord! If you want me, you’ve got me…I’m gonna follow you at all cost.” Billy Graham

At the 9th green at a golf course in Temple Terrace, Graham committed to serve the Lord with all he had. Thousands of events, millions of converts for over 5 decades go back to that commitment and the prayerful, zealous, disciplined life that followed it.

One of the keys to Graham’s longevity and effectiveness was ***the team he surrounded himself with***. At every stage, from the Modesto Manifesto and onward, Graham followed the principle of Psalm 1 to not walk in the counsel of the wicked but to keep his closest friends and partners as godly men. Obviously his wife Ruth is at the top of that list.

Graham kept good, godly people around him - one of whom said:

​​“He never let anybody make him a big shot. It’s humility I’ve never seen in anybody else.” Allan Emery, Billy Graham Association Board Member

Billy kept God the main thing - prioritizing prayer and the study of the Bible. He not only preached the word of God, Billy Graham treasured God’s Word in both attitude and action. He “filled himself up” with the Word as much as possible before crusades so that is what would come out of his mouth, from the heart.

And Billy Graham became synonymous with integrity in relationships with his lifelong commitment to never be alone with a woman other than his wife. In addition to that, he maintained financial integrity and strict accountability for himself and his team throughout his long ministry.

He was committed to doing the right thing even when it was unpopular. He said:

“[A compass is narrow-minded-it always points to the magnetic north... We must discipline ourselves, personally, to fight any deviation from the course Jesus set for us. We cannot be tolerant of any other course.](https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1402553)” Billy Graham

And so, in a day when one after another prominent Christian leaders are falling - Billy Graham stood strong through decade after decade even as the most famous Christian of the 20th century. He followed the pathway of Psalm 1 and experienced the blessings God promises there - satisfaction in the Lord, protection from the Lord and vindication in the end. May we follow the path of Psalm 1 ourselves!

Let’s pray!