

Intro and Psalm 1 • A Life of Blessing

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I was reading recently the question asked to someone else. It wasn't asked to me but got me to thinking about it. If you were stranded on a desert island and you had only one book of the Bible with you, which one would it be?

That gave me reason for pause, and I thought about the Gospels, the book of Acts, the book of Revelation. But then, as I thought more and more about the book that we're starting tonight, the Psalms, I'd have to say, this is probably the one that I would want, because regardless of what you're going through in life, whether you're going through a time of great joy and great elation, or whether you're going through the depths of despair, the book of Psalms is there for you.

It literally covers about every possible emotional experience that we can go through in life, and deals with it, and has given such incredible comfort and blessing to people over the years.

The Psalms, I think, is arguably one of the most unusual books of the Bible, and the reason I say that is because it stands out in so many ways from other books in the biblical canon. In fact, I want to put these up on the screen for you so that you can see the unique nature of the Psalms.

Psalms Is Unique

- Most chapters in the Bible
- Contains the longest chapter in the Bible
- Contains the shortest chapter in the Bible
- Written by most authors
- Longest in the making
- Most quoted in NT
- Most prophecies about Messiah

First of all, I don't know if you're aware of it— I'm sure you are— Psalms contains the most chapters of any book in the Bible. Of course, it has 150

different Psalms that are represented. The book of Isaiah is the next longest book — really, it's a distant second with 66 chapters.

Psalms also, and this is the second point, contains the largest chapter in the Bible. Of course, most of you are aware of that Psalm 119—it actually covers 176 verses, which—by the way, that one chapter in the Psalms is longer than some of the shorter books in the Bible.

Thirdly, Psalms contains the shortest chapter in the Bible. Isn't that interesting? Psalm 117 has two verses. So, it's got the longest and the shortest chapters in the entire Bible. That's crazy.

The fourth unique element of the Psalms is that it was written by more authors than any other book in the Bible.

Psalms also took longer than any other book of the Bible to be written. We believe somewhere between 900 and 1,000 years. This book was being written by the various psalmists that contributed to it.

Psalms is, next point, the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. Okay?

And then lastly—and this probably won't surprise you, but—the book of Psalms contains more prophecies of the appearing and the work of the Messiah than any other Old Testament book, possibly, other than Isaiah.

So, really an amazing book. And one of the truly powerful aspects of the Psalms is that its largest single contributor was a man who wrote with prophetic insight. That's one of the reasons I love the book of Psalms. We talk about the Psalms as a book of poetry, but it is a great book of prophecy, and the amount of prophecy that is included here in the book of Psalms is amazing.

A lot of people don't think of David as a prophet. We know he was a shepherd; we know he was a king; we know he was certainly a worshipper of God. But a lot of people raise their eyebrows when you say, well, the prophecies of David, or you just come out and say David was a prophet.

Well, actually he is referred that way in the book of Acts. Let me show you this actually on the screen. It's from the book of Acts chapter 2. Peter is speaking here. He says:

Acts 2:29-31 (ESV)

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.”

²⁹ *“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet (he’s speaking of David), and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.”*

Notice that statement: *Being, therefore, a prophet*. So, David spoke with prophetic insight related to the coming and the ministry of Messiah. We'll see some amazing messianic prophecies in the Psalms.

The Book of Psalms is essentially a collection of worship songs, in its essence, but to us it is so much more. At first, because of its wide variety of these various songs, the book was actually unnamed among the Hebrews. They didn't have a name for this collection, but eventually, the ancient Hebrews called it the Book of Praises, or shortened just to Praises.

The title we know as Psalms actually comes from a Greek word, which means to pluck as in a stringed instrument. The plucking of strings, if you will. It refers to a song that is sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, such as a harp or a lyre or something like that.

But I want to just reiterate that no matter what you may be going through at any particular time of your life, there is a Psalm that speaks to the condition of your heart, and I have, many times over the years, prescribed the book of Psalms for people who are going through difficulties, almost like a doctor prescribes medicine.

When somebody comes to me and they're just laying the heaviness of their burden out before the Lord, and we're talking it over and so forth, I'll just say, man, you just need to live in the Psalms during this time—just during this season, and even beyond—but especially during those seasons of challenge and difficulty, you need to just live in the Psalms. Let that be your address during that time of your life because you will find so much incredible comfort there.

And let me tell you why. I believe that one of the reasons why the Psalms is so beneficial to us, particularly when we're going through difficult seasons, is because it brings us back to a God-centered focus. Don't difficulties have a way in your life to make you focused on your difficulties, and you get so fixated on the thing that you're going through and the pain that you're enduring and what have you? And then we go to the Psalms, and the Psalms just open up heaven for us from the standpoint of changing our perspective.

The Psalms are intensely God-centered, and we need that. We need that reminder. We need to come back to that, and we need to direct our hearts heavenward so that we begin to see life and what we're going through from a different perspective. That's vitally important.

Finally, I want to, in this introduction, share with you that there are various types of psalms. I don't know who did this originally, but somebody sat down with all 150 of the psalms and they basically categorized them in the following categories that you see up on the screen there.

Types of Psalms

- Wisdom Psalms
- Royal Psalms
- Lament Psalms
- Imprecatory Psalms
- Thanksgiving Psalms
- Pilgrimage Psalms
- Enthronement Psalms

There are the Wisdom Psalms. Those are the ones that offer practical guidelines and direction for godly living. That's what wisdom is. Wisdom is telling you what to do, right? Knowledge is knowing the issue, or knowing, perhaps, what's

wrong. Wisdom is knowing how to fix what's wrong, okay? And so, the Wisdom Psalms always give practical guidelines.

Then we have the Royal or the Messianic Psalms, and of course, that is fairly self-explanatory. They foretell and describe the coming rule of Messiah who is Christ Jesus.

Then we have the Lament Psalms. These are just packed full of emotion, and they record the writer's heart as he pours that heart out before the Lord, usually for deliverance from pain or trouble or some kind of a thing that's concerning.

And then we have the Imprecatory Psalms. I bet you don't use the word imprecatory in your regular vocabulary, do you? Yeah, I don't either. These are psalms that call upon God to pour out His wrath and to bring judgment upon the adversaries of the Lord. There are a lot of them. David, particularly—this was a regular part of many of his prayers. He would take time to tell the Lord, ‘Lord, you need to just judge them; judge them for their sin.’ And so, that's why we refer to them as the Imprecatory Psalms.

Then we have the Thanksgiving Psalms, which are those that express, obviously, gratitude for God's blessings that overflow in abundance.

And then there are the Pilgrimage Psalms. Those were psalms that were specifically written for the Jews to be sung when they were on a pilgrimage from wherever they were living on their way to Jerusalem. Because they would go in whole communities; families large and communities would actually traverse the land on their way to Jerusalem—it was safer to do it—and so, they would be encouraged to sing along the way, and there were psalms that were specially set apart for those times. They are the Pilgrimage Psalms. They're toward the end of the Psalms, and we'll definitely refer to them when we get there.

And then, finally, we have the Enthronement Psalms, which are those that describe God's majesty, His rule, and His providential care over all that He has made. These are the Psalms, many times, that you will hear us singing, literally put to music many times in our worship services, those that enthrone the Lord as majestic ruler over all He has made, and so forth.

So, with that fairly briefish introduction, let's get into Psalm chapter 1. Psalm chapter 1 is a Wisdom Psalm, and the reason we call it that, of course, is because it gives wise direction. You'll notice, before we actually read it, it

begins with the words, *Blessed is*, and that essentially means *happy is*, or *oh, how happy is the man*, and so forth—and that's what it goes on to say.

So, we're going to look at this Psalm, and we're going to look at it as a very significant psalm because you know that we live in a day and age when people are in a mad dash for happiness. It seems like there's a book written all the time, someone giving what they claim to be the inside track on how you can find happiness in life.

And right here, it's in the book of Psalms. God outlines it for us and let's see what He says about it.

He says:

¹*Blessed (or happy) is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked (your Bible may say ungodly),
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers (your Bible may say scornful);*
²*but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

I want you to stop there for just a moment. We'll get into the rest of this Psalm, I promise. Obviously, the writer is using highly poetic language, but each of these descriptions of action, such as walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the way of sinners, sitting in the seat of mockers, they all describe the act of associating with people of influence, but people whose influence upon you will be nothing but negative.

And so, we ask, what does it mean then to do these things? What does it mean to not walk in the counsel of the wicked or the ungodly?

Well, back in biblical times, it was a pretty simple thing because most counsel that you would receive from people occurred face-to-face. You'd sit down with somebody and you'd talk and they would give you their advice, which is another word for counsel.

Well, today, that's no longer the case. Today, we have the ability to be powerfully influenced without ever seeing the face of the individual who's doing the influencing. All you have to do is read a blog post, or perhaps watch a video on YouTube or some other website that is talking about this, that, or the other thing, and the influence of bad counsel can come in so many ways.

So, the psalmist tells you not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly or the wicked. That basically means refusing that counsel, refusing what they are saying or how they are attempting to influence you that is contrary to the Lord.

For you and I, that means refusing to adopt any philosophy that essentially rejects a worldview that encompasses God and embraces a humanistic worldview, which is really largely what most of the things that you and I read and hear and watch. That's pretty much what we see.

I mean, if you've spent any time on social media or perusing the Internet with the things that— the opinions of people, or watching the news (which, I shared on Sunday, I have stopped doing for the most part just because it was so discouraging), you're going to be influenced by those who come from a godless worldview and who, in fact, come from a humanistic worldview— which means a starting point of viewing life that is really absent of any reference of God or idea or belief in God. It means rejecting a worldview that puts self at the center of the universe, and advocates living for a worldly pleasure.

In the same way, refusing to stand in the way of sinners, the next thing he talks about. What is that all about? What is standing in the way of sinners? Well, it speaks of resisting the lure of the crowd and following the crowd in the direction they go.

We talk a lot today, in news areas and whatever else, about popular vote and someone's popularity rating. It's a big deal. Our president is very concerned about his popularity— well, I'm not saying he necessarily is, but presidents historically are concerned about their popularity rating because they want the people to approve the things that they're doing. These are huge, and you can tell they're huge because the news services talk about them all the time. He makes a decision here, his popularity rating skyrockets. He makes a decision over here, his popularity rating plummets, and so forth. Well, that's the world. That's the fickle characteristic of the world.

And the psalmist is saying the godly person is going to find joy and happiness as they refuse to go that direction, to just follow the crowd and doing what is popular and cool, and so forth.

And then finally, not sitting in the seat of mockers—that is, to refuse to have a close relationship with those who ridicule God and the idea of believing in and serving God. That pretty much counts out a lot of colleges. I mean you literally are sitting in the seat while they are mocking the Lord. I've talked to so many people who've come out of college. I'm not talking against college, but I'm

telling you that it is a reality of our world today. People, Christians will come out of college with their faith shaken to its core because of the constant mocking of the things of the Lord that takes place there.

And of course, obviously, movies that we watch today. Now, that wasn't an issue back in the culture in which the Psalm was written, but the movies that we watch talk about sitting in the seat of mockers. How about sitting in the seat of the theater where the movie that is playing is mocking the idea of God's existence or any faith in Him?

I remember as a young person I was very influenced by movies. I mean, I remember that—and most of the influence was pretty ungodly, but—I found myself being shaped in my thinking, in my morals. When I was a young kid—I'm talking like grade school, upper grade school, junior high—I remember going to movies and learning a lot about the world, and I realized, I knew at the time I was being influenced. I was being affected. My morals were being fashioned according to what I was watching. And I think that happens with a lot of kids.

But the Bible pronounces a blessing upon those who reject that ungodly influence. It basically tells us that the world has nothing of lasting value to offer to the godly man or woman who is in search of happiness. Happiness instead comes another way. Notice what this person does do in verse 2. Now, we go to the positive aspect of this. It says in verse 2: *but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Obviously, what does that say to you? That to me speaks of the person who constantly sets their mind on the truths of the Bible, focusing on scripture rather than the stupidity and moral emptiness that's going on in the world that is constantly coming across our path.

I have to tell you I get a lot of emails from people who link for me videos or articles that they've come across on the Internet that have upset them. And so, they'll link it to me and say, Pastor Paul, would you watch this, and I need you to give me your feedback because this really upset me when I watch this. And they want me to give them my thoughts. Well, here are my thoughts. Don't watch that stuff. It's really not a big, confusing sort of an answer. Don't watch it. If it bothers you, if it upsets you, then don't watch it.

I really think that we need to be filling our heart with things that are going to build up our faith and encourage us in the Lord and not things that are tearing us down. But you know what? It's all out there, and for some reason, these things

that are more sensational and whatever, they draw a lot of people, a lot of views, and so that's going to probably come up on your feed, showing that this is what's trending on social media. Well, that doesn't mean you should watch it. If it's something that is going to just tear you down, and it's going to upset you, and it's going to hurt your faith, weaken your faith, don't watch it.

Now, I want you to listen here as we go on to verse 3. The psalmist goes on to describe the quality of life of the person who rejects these things and instead drinks in the truth of God's Word and godliness. Look what he says; verse 3:

*³He is like a tree
planted by streams of water (number one)
that yields its fruit in its season, (number two)
and its leaf does not wither (number three).
(And number four) In all that he does, he prospers.*

Tree planted by streams of water. It never ceases to amaze me how we get to July and August here in this end of the valley and, really, all around, even the Boise Valley as well. You see how brown everything gets, the hills and so forth. It never ceases to amaze me. When I'm driving home from Boise and we're coming over the hill down into Ontario and I can see the Snake River, as brown and as barren and as everything is right along the river, those trees are thriving, and there's this lush greenness on both sides of the river, and it's just this incredible contrast to the deadness of the hills.

And I think to myself, that had to have been what the psalmist had in mind when he talked about this individual who made a purposeful effort to say, no, I'm going to reject all these other things; I'm instead going to focus on the truth of God's Word and the things that are going to build me up in my faith. That man is going to be like a tree that's planted right by the river or the stream or whatever the water is, and there is going to be a fruitfulness. You'll notice it says he yields his fruit in its season.

We all want to be fruitful for the Lord. What's one of the keys to fruitfulness? Having your roots down in a place where they're getting constant nourishment, not where they're getting singed by the heat and the toxic waste of this world.

Jesus said something very similar related to staying connected to that which nourishes. Let me show you a passage from John chapter 15, verse 5. It says:

John 15:5 (NIV)

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

⁵ *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, (look at this) he will bear much fruit; (but then he reminds us the other side of the coin; he says) apart from me he can do nothing. But when you're connected and you're receiving that constant nourishment, listen, you're going to bear fruit.*

If your roots are in an area of soil—and I talk to people about this from time to time. When they come up and they're bemoaning their lack of growth as a Christian, and they're saying, man, I'm just not understanding; I'm not growing in the Lord; I feel like my prayers are just hitting the ceiling and going no further, I ask the same question: Are you in an environment of growth? And I usually tell them some dumb little illustration about if you try to take a palm tree up to Alaska, it's not going to grow because that's not the environment for that sort of thing to grow.

And then I begin to ask them the question: Have you taken your Christian faith and have you put it in an environment that is contrary to growth? Or are you in an environment that is going to be beneficial to the growth of your Christian faith? Well, what do you mean? Well, I'm talking about the people you're hanging with; I'm talking about the movies you're watching; I'm talking about the things you're looking at on social media; I'm talking about the influences of people and things and stuff that you're putting in your heart.

The Bible says in Proverbs that we are to guard our hearts because they are the wellspring of life. Here again, we use this picture of water, and a wellspring is that which feeds all the other wells and streams. So, guard your heart for it's the wellspring; it's literally what feeds the rest of your life. Guard what you're putting in there, and be careful that you're connected to an environment that is conducive to growth.

And that conducive environment, by the way, is Jesus. He says, you connect to Me, you abide in Me, and let Me and My Word abide in you, and you will be fruitful. You can't help it when you are connected to the vine.

All right, now we turn to the contrast. Look at verse 4 in your Bible. It says:

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

You guys all know that chaff is the outside husks of corn, or maybe the outside husk of the wheat, and the whole word *chaff* came to mean biblically that which is worthless, thrown away, and only good for burning.

And so, when the Bible talks about the wicked man being like chaff, it means that his life has become a worthless thing because of his influences and because of his wicked heart, and so forth.

And then we're given the conclusion; verse 5:

⁵*Therefore (that tells you that you're about to read the conclusion) the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

And then it ends this way by saying:

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

And, of course, that last verse contrasts the two ways of living.

But I want you to see something here. Did you notice it says, *the Lord knows the way of the righteous*? If you have a different Bible translation, your Bible may say, *the Lord watches over the way of the righteous*. I want you to know something. This means a whole lot more than he just knows what's going on.

When people are going through a hard time and we start to encourage them about the things of the Lord, many times they'll come back almost in a frustrated tone and say, listen, I know God knows what's happening. In fact, sometimes that even causes bitterness in their heart. If God knows what's happening in my life, why won't He change my circumstances, and that sort of thing.

I want you to know that this statement here means more than just He is informed about your ways, as if He received a memo somewhere that you were going through a difficult season. This statement here has the connotation of His being personally and intimately acquainted with the circumstances of your life to the point where He guides and guards you through those issues of life.

And I wanted you to know that God more than just knows; He is intimately acquainted. And I personally believe that He feels the things that we feel. I really do, and I think there's even biblical proof for it.

First of all, we know that He's the head, we're the body. Is your head aware of what's going on in your body? Does it feel?

There's also a statement, a powerful statement that Jesus made to the apostle Paul when He met him in a blinding light on the road to Damascus. When Paul fell to his knees and said, who are you, Lord? Jesus said, I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. He didn't say I am Jesus and you're really making it hard on my people, and I want you to knock it off; He said you're persecuting Me.

There is a special connection between God's people and the Lord Himself to the point where whatever persecution you're going through, that's persecution He is going through. Whatever pain you're going through, I believe it's pain He's going through. Whatever difficulty, whatever season.

Listen, do you think God's going to say to you and I, rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn, and He's not going to do it? You think He's exempt as the head of the church, and He's exempt and just hanging out there, all cut off and aloof from all the things that you and I are enduring in this life? Absolutely not. Absolutely not.

But this whole discussion about staying away from the influences, those negative influences of the world that are only going to drag you down and be negative on your faith, begs the question of what should our relationship be to unbelievers. Because obviously we can't— Paul talked about this to the Corinthians. He wrote them and told them to stay away from certain people, and they took it to mean the people of the world. And so, he had to write back and say, that's not what I meant. When I told you to stay away from adulterers and fornicators and the greedy, and this, I wasn't talking about the world. He says, in that case, you'd have to leave this world. He says, what I was telling you to stay away from is those who call themselves Christians but who are living in immoral lifestyle. That's another message.

Here's the point. We have to deal with the people of this world. We have to interact with them. In fact, we should interact with them. But our interaction should be limited so that it is not an interaction of influence.

Listen, when I hear Christians say, the best friends I have in the world are atheists, I get a red alert that goes off in my heart. I think to myself, you know

what, you are playing with fire, and the influence of that is going to have a powerfully negative impact in your life.

What the Word of God is telling you and I is that we are not to have an intimate relationship with those who are going to lead us astray. Remember, this is about where you get your counsel; this is who you stand with; this is who you sit with through life.

The intimacy of fellowship and communion should be coming from believers, and from those who are going to build you up. Well, Pastor, I don't know that many believers. Get to know them. They're all around you. And it's one of those things—

You may find this difficult to believe, but I'm an introvert. And that means I find it difficult meeting new people. But you know what? We got to do it. I mean, if the primary influences that are happening in my life are coming from unbelievers, I'm in trouble. I need people to pray with me and for me, and I need people to pray for, and I need people to encourage me, and I need to be encouraging people. That's going to happen when I have a connection with other believers. But if I don't have that connection, I'm in trouble.

And that's one of the reasons why we get this exhortation in Psalm chapter 1. Be careful about your influences, where they're coming from, because, listen, it's going to mean a lot in your life in Christ.