

The Way of Blessing

Psalm 1

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ February 15, 2026 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church



¹Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
²but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
³They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.
⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Psalm 1,
NRSV)



In a 2012 Monday Night Football game between the Seattle Seahawks and the Green Bay Packers, the game was decided by what many people point to as one of the most controversial football plays of all time. It even has a name, “The Fail Mary.” Referees ruled the play a touchdown, giving the Seahawks the win on the final play of the game, even though many viewers, especially Packers’ fans, were certain that instead they had just witnessed an interception that sealed the victory for their team. Initially, in fact, one referee signals touchdown while another referee standing *right next to him* gives the signal for a touchback, indicating the Packers intercepted the football. After review, the play was called a touchdown. Seahawks fans agreed that it was obviously the right call. Packers fans, I’m sure to this day, are furious that anybody could watch that play and call it a touchdown.

Most of us in this room couldn’t care less. I only use that example to point out something that happens all the time. A group of people all observe the same event in life and yet walk away with very different, often contradictory, interpretations of what it is that they

have just witnessed. Again, this happens all the time, and not just in football but in parts of life far more consequential.

In his book, *How to Know a Person*, commentator David Brooks reminds us that each of us has a point of view which has been profoundly shaped over the course of a lifetime, meaning we aren’t really seeing the world with only our eyes, but with our entire lives. In football, for example, our passionate team loyalties create what has been called “fan bias.” We can’t help but interpret things in ways that benefit our team. Brooks points out that cognitive scientists call this “constructionism.” Backed up by the last half century of research, this is the idea that each of us constructs our own perceptions of reality based not only on objective truth, but on countless memories, attitudes, beliefs, traumas, loves, and fears which have accumulated over the course of a lifetime.¹ The poet John Milton put it this way: “The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.”²

We experience the effects of this all the time. I could point to many recent events we have all seen unfold in living color. There may even be video of these events, including many angles of what happened. And yet people don’t just come away with differing interpretations of what happened, but often with absolutely contradictory interpretations. And you wonder to yourself, “How are those people not seeing what is so plainly obvious?” All the while, they are wondering about people like you, “How are they not seeing what is so plainly obvious?”

I’m reminded of *The Emperor’s New Clothes*, that famous fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. It’s the story of an emperor who is exceedingly fond of his clothes, proud of always being the best dressed person in his kingdom. It was all he cared about. One day two swindlers come along and convince him to pay good money for clothes that don’t actually exist. But their clever scam was to convince others that the colors and patterns of their imaginary clothes were so uncommonly fine that they would appear to be invisible to anyone who was unusually stupid. The emperor couldn’t wait to get a tailored set of these clothes. Now

¹ David Brooks, *How to Know a Person* (Random House, 2023), 64-65.

² Cited by David Brooks, 65.

he would be able to tell which of his subjects was stupid and unfit to serve him.

You know how the story goes. Word gets out that only stupid people will be unable to see the emperor's new clothes. And so when the two swindler's finally declare that they have finished the clothes, and pretend to put them on the emperor, everybody from the king's most wise and trusted officials to the common people in the streets, proclaim that they have never seen such stunningly beautiful threads. At first it seems as if what they are looking at is a naked and foolish emperor, but the widespread praise of the crowds, along with the fear of being found to be a stupid person, convinces them otherwise. In the end, it takes a small child unaffected by such things to declare what should have been obvious to everybody, "But he hasn't got anything on."

Let's be clear about something. We are all vulnerable here. Do you think you are able to look out at the world with a completely unbiased and unfiltered perspective? You are not. Neither am I. Not in football, and not in things far more important than football. So what do we do? How do we become people who are able to see and to know what is really true?

Psalm 1, of all places, offers us some much needed wisdom. The very first word of the Psalm, which is of course also the very first word of the whole book of Psalms, is the word "happy." In a way, this word is the gateway to the rest of what follows. But I don't like the translation. The word in Hebrew is the word *esher*. It can be translated "happy," but I prefer "blessed." Here's why. Blessedness speaks to a deep contentment that comes when a person knows he or she has been the recipient of God's unmerited goodness and grace. You know you are blessed when you know you belong to God, and that his promises to you will be kept. True blessedness is a deep, rich, real, God-bestowed, God-centered sense of well-being that is unaffected by circumstances. Because it is a gift from God, we don't strive for blessedness, but rather rest in it.³ To me, that is so much more appealing than happiness.

Did you know that the very first thing God does for Adam and Eve after he creates them is that he blesses them: **"God blessed them, and God said to them..."**⁴ They hadn't done a thing to earn it. God blesses them anyway. And then when God chooses for himself a covenant people through Abraham and Sarah, the first thing he does is he blesses them: **"I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."**⁵ And maybe in your own life you have had a

sense of this, a time when you realize that every good thing you possess, even your very life, is a gift from God, that he choose you as his beloved son or daughter when you did not deserve to be chosen. Better yet, you discover that the deep joy and contentment which come from these realities cannot be threatened by anything or anyone. Do you know what it is like to live and rest in God's blessing?

The beginning of Psalm 1 actually reads as an exclamation: "Oh, the very blessedness of this person!" And right away we should be intrigued. Tell me more. Tell me what sort of person lives with the sort of blessing all of us long to know. But the psalmist makes us wait, because first he is going to tell us about the sort of person who will never know such blessing. There is a way that leads away from the blessing which God originally extended to all people, and that way is marked by following the advice of the wicked, going down the road that sinners travel, and getting comfortable in the seat of mockers.

Do you notice the progression here, what some have called a descent into hell. First, you're just passing by, eavesdropping. But then before you know it you're hanging around. Eventually you sit down and settle in. And I think you know how this works. If you give your attention long enough to almost any idea, even a false idea, even an ungodly idea, and then you surround yourself with people who keep spouting this false idea over and over again, eventually you aren't just listening. Before long you're making decisions and setting priorities in your life based on this false idea. And if you stay on this path long enough, you will eventually come to a place where you have turned truth and righteousness into objects of derision. You become somebody who actually mocks what is right in the world, even though you would never characterize yourself as somebody who is doing so. We ought to pay attention when scripture tells us that the final bitter fruit of the embrace of ungodly ideas is outward scorn towards what is good and beautiful in this world.

A 2016 BBC article cited a psychological experiment in which participants were asked to rate the truth of various trivial statements presented to them. Sometimes the statements were true, statements like, "A prune is a dried plum." But sometimes similar but false statements were presented, statements like, "A date is a dried plum." After these initial questions, participants were given a break, sometimes a few minutes and sometimes a few weeks. Then they were called back to do the procedure all over again, but this

³ <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/835.htm>

⁴ Genesis 1:28. This and all biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

⁵ Genesis 12:2

time some of the statements were new, while some were repeated. The key finding from this study was that when false items were repeated, like the idea that dates are dried plums, there was an increase in the number of people who rated such statements as true, and they seemingly did so for the sole reason that those false statements were more familiar. In other words, the more often you hear that dates are dried plums, the more likely it is that you will come to believe it.⁶

The idea here is simple. Listen to a lie long enough and it will become, for you, the truth. Repetition, of course, isn't the only factor that influences our judgment. We lean on experience and reason just as much, and these things can protect us from falsehoods. Still, if we continually expose ourselves to advice from those who deceive, our inevitable pathway seems to be laid out before us. And don't forget, what is ultimately at stake here is blessing, a deep contentedness that rests in the fact that we are chosen and favored by God. That blessedness is threatened by overexposure to what is not true.

The psalmist, thankfully, offers another way. Blessed people instead are those whose **“delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.”** “Delight” is an interesting word choice here. The word describes the favorable posture of a person's heart towards an object or person or purpose. The thing you delight in is your chief desire, and reveals the truest part of your character. Beyond that, delight isn't just admiring something or paying attention to something, but it is allowing that object of your delight to influence the way you live your life. In a way you might say that to delight in something is to obey something, regardless of what it tells you to do.

Years ago I did some study on healthy eating and I'll never forget something I learned. I used to think that we eat what we crave. I assumed that my problem with potato chips is that I crave potato chips. If only I was wired to crave broccoli! But what I learned is that we don't eat what we crave, we crave what we eat. If you keep eating salty potato chips, you are re-wiring your body to keep craving salty potato chips. But if you start eating vegetables, your body will eventually reward you by learning to crave vegetables. This explains why people in other parts of the world have strong cravings for food many of us might never even consider edible.

This was such a revolutionary discovery for me because I soon saw that this isn't just a physical, but also a spiritual principle. I don't think someone gives his or

her attention to God's Word because he or she delights in God's Word. No, it's the other way around. The more you meditate on God's Word, both written in the scriptures and embodied in the person of Christ, the more you will increasingly delight in God's Word. Conversely, the more you give your attention to ungodly ideas in this world, the more you will delight in those ideas.

The Hebrew word here for meditate, by the way, has an ongoing aspect to it. So the person who meditates on God's Word doesn't just give attention to it at certain times during the day or week. It begins there, of course. But meditation is about *constant* attention to God's Word in the course of daily life. Joshua 1:8 captures this well, **“This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.”** Obedience and conformity is the result. Again, true delight in something isn't just about paying attention, but to delight in something is to ultimately obey something, to allow the object of your delight to shape and guide your heart so that your whole life, in turn, is shaped and guided.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer so believed in the claims of this Psalm, specifically that the Word of God is as vital to our souls as water is to trees, he once wrote this: “Because I am a Christian, therefore, every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's Word in Holy Scripture is a lost day for me. I can only move forward with certainly upon the firm ground of the Word of God.”⁷

Here's where all this becomes very practical and relevant. I think all of us in this room would agree that there are a lot of things happening in our world right now, even just in our own nation, which disturb us because they seem to fall into the category of wicked advice, the ways of sinners, the place of mockers. In response, I am often tempted to use this pulpit as a place to speak directly to some of those things. Some of you, I know, would like me to do so more regularly. Believe me when I tell you that I wrestle with this question, not just recently, but always. Things may seem especially bad to you in this season, and perhaps they are. But frankly, I can't remember a time when things in our world weren't bad off, especially when you take a broader view than just our own nation. There is always great injustice taking place all around us in this world, deceit at the highest levels, mockery that takes

⁶ Tom Stafford, “How liars create the ‘illusion of truth’”, *BBC News Online*, October 26, 2016. Read the full article at

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20161026-how-liars-create-the-illusion-of-truth>

⁷ Cited by Ben Patterson, *God's Prayer Book* (Salt River, 2006), 26.

aim at what is most good and beautiful. I could spend every moment of every sermon on every Sunday addressing some heinous injustice and evil in this world.

Here's what I do instead. My hope and aim is to do my part in keeping us as a community meditating on the Word of God so that we might increasingly delight in the Word of God, both the Word of God in scripture, but also the Word of God embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Why? Because we don't eat what we crave; we crave what we eat. So the more we feast on God's truth and God's ways, both day and night, the more we will crave God's truth and God's ways. And then when you are sent out into the world to represent Christ, as we are all sent out into the world to represent Christ, I don't need to tell you how to vote, or protest, or speak out, or serve, or love, because the consciousness of Christ will have been so formed in you by his Word, that delight will have turned into obedience. And so when you encounter the advice of the wicked, or the ways of the sinful, or the abuse of the mockers, there will be nothing in what you hear or see which will have the ring of truth, and you will stand with Christ in loving opposition.

As we consider this invitation of blessing, Psalm 1 presents to us two possible outcomes. First, for those who continue to delight in what is ungodly, things will not end well. Blessing will be forever out of reach. The psalmist compares such people to chaff. You know what chaff is, right? In those days, and still in certain parts of our world today, farmers use a winnowing shovel to toss grain seeds into the air and then beat them again and again, what's called threshing. The result is that the husks and other waste from the grain are blown away in the wind, leaving only the valuable grain seeds behind for either grinding into flour or replanting. The point is that the chaff that is blown away has zero use. It has no life or benefit in the end. It doesn't produce fruit. I can't nourish anybody. It is literally dust in the wind. Let that sink in. Those in this world who continue to allow themselves to be guided by false narratives in this life will ultimately see their lives come to nothing. They don't start out that way, but they end that way. It's tragic.

But there is an alternative presented to us. As we continue to meditate on the Word of God, cultivating delight for God's truth in our lives, we will come to know the sort of blessing presented at the beginning of this Psalm. The Lord will continually and increasingly use his Word, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, to create in you not just happiness, which can be fleeting, but deep and lasting contentment that comes to people who know that they belong to God and that

the Lord's ways can be trusted. Such people are not shaken by the circumstances of life, either the circumstances which affect them personally, or the circumstances they see playing out in the world around us. Their trust in a God who is working to eventually set all things right runs deeper than their dismay that things, as they stand now, are not right.

The psalmist pictures such a person as a tree that was planted by streams of water and has come, in time, to flourish. It takes a long time for such trees to grow. Similarly, you don't meditate on God's Word one day and find that the next day you are filled with this deep contentment of blessing. At least it hasn't played out that way in my life. But a tree next to a stream of water will, in time, find that it is able to thrive even in the middle of the most severe drought because the roots are perpetually nourished. We are never promised that our lives, or our world around us, will be free of hardship and injustice. We're actually promised the opposite, that these hard things will come and keep coming. But as we root our lives in Christ, such hardship does not have to shake us.

And I love that it's mentioned here that these trees bear fruit. Chaff is good for nothing. Fruit, on the other hand, has great value, but not for the tree itself. Fruit nourishes others. And the seeds it contains can produce other trees, meaning the impact even one well-nourished tree can have beyond itself is remarkable, even incalculable. May it be the same through the lives of those who meditate on God's Word so consistently that it becomes a delight that leads to blessing. May the Lord use such lives to bring nourishment into the lives of others around us whose souls are thirsty. Followers of Jesus are meant to represent him in this world in ways that make an eternal impact. Might that begin where Psalm 1 suggests that it begins, with a daily choice to put our attention on the truth of God's Word, rather than on the false messages which fill the world around us. In doing so we might just find ourselves used by God to change the world's ways.

This week some of us here read and then prayed through Psalm 37. That Psalm, like all the Psalms, flows out of Psalm 1. In this case the connection is obvious and striking. And so I want to end by slowly reading to you the first seven verses of that Psalm. Meditate on them as I do. Take them into your mind and heart. Let them shape you a little more today. And then after I read them, I will use them to guide our prayers together. Blessed are those who find delight in these words...

**Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,**

**for they will soon fade like the grass
and wither like the green herb.**

**Trust in the Lord and do good;
live in the land and enjoy security.
Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

**Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the
light
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.**

**Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for
him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their
way,
over those who carry out evil devices.**

Let us pray.

Lord God, you see how much we fret. We watch what is happening in our world and we become anxious, worried, even afraid. So much injustice. So much that is wrong. So much pain. So many around us with evil motives who nonetheless seem to thrive. Help us to believe what your Word declares over and over is true, that all evil in this world will one day fade like the grass of the field. Yes, one day it seems to be thriving, but the next day it withers away. As improbable as this may seem to us in a day when evil seems so deeply rooted and firmly entrenched, help us to believe it nonetheless.

We are trying to trust you, Lord. Help us trust you. Help us rest in the blessing you have given us as your people in Christ. Shape us into people who do good, and who do so instinctively. Help us delight in you and your ways. Make our hearts desire the things which you desire – compassion, goodness, beauty, truth, justice, holiness – and then give us the desires of our hearts.

On this day we commit our ways to you once again, Lord. Tomorrow we will do the same, and the day after that. Helps us trust you, trust that you will do everything you have promised to do. Hold nothing back, Lord. In the end, will you vindicate our devotion? Validate our faith in you. Stamp our lives with your favor and blessing.

In the meantime, help us to be still. Even when the world seems to rage out of control around us, help us to be still before you and wait patiently for you to come, resting in your unshakable blessing. We know evil will seem to prosper. You told us to expect this. But you also told us that in the end evil

will become dust in the wind. You also told us that those who trust you will endure and produce fruit for your glory. Do this in us. Come back, Lord Jesus, and do this soon. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

All this we pray in the name of the one who makes all this possible, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Psalm 1 again. Read it slowly. Remember that this Psalm is the gateway to all the Psalms. What stands out to you? What image strikes you here?
2. What does it mean to be blessed? How does one know he or she is blessed? How is being blessed different from being happy? Or is it different?
3. Consider the pathway that starts by following the advice of the wicked and ends with sitting in the seat of mockers. Is this a progression? How have you seen this play out in your own life?
4. Have you found it true for you that that longer you listen to a lie the more you come to believe it? Before jumping to how you see this in others, examine your own life and your own vulnerability here.
5. Reflect carefully on verse 2. What are we being told here? How does a person come to delight in the law/Word of the Lord?
6. The psalmist declares that the blessed person who learns to delight in God's Word will become like a flourishing tree which bears fruit in season. What do you think that fruit symbolizes?
7. As you look out on the world today, do you remain a person filled with hope? Why or why not?
8. What is the main thing you sense that Christ is teaching you through this message? How will that change the way you think or live?

Table to Table: Something for kids and adults to consider together.



Read Psalm 1 together again as a family. Remember that the Psalms are a book of prayers. How can you turn this Psalm into a prayer?