

Psalms for All Seasons

Week 1 Sermon - Pure JOY!

Allow me to say at the outset that this initial message will be somewhat lengthy due to the fact that I am going to provide some foundational teaching that I believe is important to an overall fuller appreciation of the entire study. So, if you need to, you have my permission to pause or stop the message and come back and resume it later is fine. I would encourage you not to neglect to do that however since there is a great benefit to you who receive this entire teaching.

Main Argument- Psalm 1 gives us a vision for healthier, more joyful, and more productive life.

I believe it is important to begin our series with a firm grasp of some of the significant characteristics of the book of Psalms.

The Book of Psalms is not only the largest book of the Bible, but it perhaps the most widely used book in Scripture because of the way **it speaks to the human heart in all of our experiences in life.** Again, and again sighing is turned into singing through prayer and praise. For the most part, though the texts of the psalms do not designate their authors, the titles do often indicate the author of the various psalms. The chart on the screen demonstrates the various authors and their respective writings.

Authorship of the Psalms		
David	73	Book 1, Book 2, 18, Book 3, 1, Book 4, 2; Book 5, 15
Asaph	12	Ps. 50 , 73-83
Korahites	12	Ps. 42-49 ; 84 ; 86 ; 87 ; 88
Solomon	2	Ps. 72 , 127
Moses	1	Ps. 90
Ethan	1	Ps. 89

The Psalms are really five books in one. Each of the following book division concludes with a doxology while Psalm 150 occupies the place of the doxology and forms an appropriate conclusion to the entire collection.

Epiphanius said, “The Hebrews divided the Psalter into five books so that it would be another Pentateuch.” The Midrash of Psa. 1:1 states, “Moses gave the Israelites the five books of the Law, and to correspond to these David gave to them the Book of the Psalms in five books.”

This correspondence to the Pentateuch may be seen in the following outline:

1. Psalms about man and creation (1-41)—corresponds to Genesis.
2. Psalms about Israel and redemption (42-72)—corresponds to Exodus.
3. Psalms about worship and the Temple (73-89)—corresponds to Leviticus.
4. Psalms about our sojourn on the earth (90-106)—corresponds to Numbers.
5. Psalms about praise and the Word of God (107-150)—corresponds to Deuteronomy.

Another way of looking at the book divisions:

Book	Psalms	Author	General Content
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Book I	Psalms 1-41	David	Songs of worship
Book II	Psalms 42-72	David & Korah	Hymns of petition
Book III	Psalms 73-89	Mainly Asaph	Hymns of petition
Book IV	Psalms 90-106	Mainly Anonymous	Anthems of praise
Book V	Psalms 107-150	David and Anonymous	Anthems of praise

Theme and Purpose:

The psalms provide us with a message of hope and comfort through the common theme of worship. They are, in essence, an antidote to fear and complaining. through a personal response to the person and work of God. They are an expression of the worship, faith, and spiritual life of Israel. In the psalms we have a mirror of the heart of God's people recording the simple, universal human experiences of man in the light of God's person, promises, plan, and presence. As a collection of a 150 psalms they naturally cover a great variety of feelings, circumstances and themes. This means it is difficult to make any generalizations about a theme or purpose, but it is safe to say that all the psalms embody a personal response on the part of the believer toward the goodness and grace of God.

All this now being established as some "threshold" information, let's take a look at the specific Psalm we are studying today...Psalm 1.

Introduction

Welcome! As we get started today I'd like you to consider for a moment how significantly the Bible has impacted all of our lives. For starters, it offers incredible promises for those who read it and live it out. A longer life, greater intelligence, prosperity, happiness, success, peace, wisdom, hope, encouragement, guidance, equipping for life, and transformation.

The Bible claims reading it and living it out brings more blessings and increases happiness. There are many people who read the Bible every day...And still there are many people who don't, in spite of its numerous benefits.

One reason some people don't read the Bible is because they don't understand it. They don't understand what it's all about. They don't understand its composition. They don't understand where it came from and how it all fits together.

In light of that, as we begin a brand-new series on the largest book found in the Bible, I want to help bring a little more understanding to how the Bible is constructed. For those who don't already know, the Bible has two major sections, the Old and New Testaments and these larger sections are broken up into smaller sections of scripture.

The first section of the Old Testament is the *historic* section. There are 17 books in the historic section: Genesis through Esther. The second section of the Old Testament is the *poetic* section. There are 5 books in the poetic section: Job through Song of Songs. The third section of the Old Testament is the *prophetic* section and there are 17 books in this section as well: Isaiah through Malachi.

The New Testament also has three types of literature. But we're not going to be studying the New Testament during this series, so I'll leave those details for another time. For now, I want you to know that of the 39 books in the Old Testament, the first 17 are *stories* – or history. The next 5 are poetry. And the final 17 are prophecy. Often, when people get stuck, it's in the prophetic section, because the prophets used lots of references to contemporary events and locations in their day. When you read those books, it's important to always have a good commentary on hand to explain the background information.

However, for the next 6 weeks, we won't be reading the prophets, because we're going to be reading the poets. Specifically, the songwriters of Israel. We're going to be reading the lyrics of ancient believers who poured their hearts out to God in the form of poetry and song.

That's the book of Psalms.

Psalms is a book for all seasons, because it speaks to every area and every season of our lives. It's a collection of praise and anguish, joy and sadness, triumph and defeat written by many different authors in many different situations and seasons. It is truly a unique book.

Main Teaching

To begin our series, we're going to start at the very beginning, in Psalm 1, where a foundation is laid out for righteous living and having a consistent and blessed life that includes the daily reading of scripture.

Turn in your Bible to Psalm 1, which opens this way:

*¹ How happy is the one who does not
walk in the advice of the wicked
or stand in the pathway with sinners
or sit in the company of mockers!
² Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction,
and he meditates on it day and night.
³ He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams
that bears its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.
⁴ The wicked are not like this;
instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.*

This opening Psalms' promise is, "If you want to be happier, read this book. If you want to be a person who bears fruit in season, read this book." The Bible is a book for all seasons. Because if

you read it regularly, you will be like a tree beside divinely flowing streams. You'll never lack the life-giving water that enables you to flourish and bear fruit.

If you would permit me to take a side trail for a moment. I took some consternation with the use of the word "happy" in the first verse of this Psalm by the Christian Standard Bible translation. I have always been led to believe that there is a difference between "happiness" and "joy". "Happiness depending upon what is happening on the outside and "joy" dependent upon what is going on in the inside, or the heart.

I actually found that some of the major translations agree with me. For instance:

The New Living Translation presents the first phrase of Psalm 1:1 this way:
1 Oh, the *joys* of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked...

The venerable King James uses the alternative interjection form of the original Hebrew when it provides:
1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners...

In the NASB translation, the original word "esher", which can be translated, "happy or blessed" the NASB chooses to use the word "blessed" 41 times and "happy" only 4.

So, for our purposes, we are going to choose the word "blessed" as it applies to what occurs to the person that Psalm 1 is describing.

Based upon this truth, maybe we could develop a formula:

- *More Bible, less binge-watching.*
- *Or, More scripture, less screens.*

Have you noticed you often leave church happier and more settled than when you came? What's happening here? What makes the church environment such a unique one?

Here are a few thoughts to consider:

- In church, you spend time in worship.
- You spend time with God's people.
- And you spend time in God's word.

Those are three of the five things you were born for. Engaging with scripture has the potential to make you happier and more resilient. Anybody want that?

This Psalm is the psalm of happiness.

Psalm 1: The Secret to Joy

In this psalm, the psalmist teaches us the secret to happiness. He says, “Happy people do three things: “they walk, they stand, they sit.” It’s a progression.

And happy people *avoid* three things.

There are three things they do not do:

- Joyful people don’t walk in the way wicked people do.
- Joyful people don’t stand in the pathway of sinners.
- And joyful people don’t sit in the company of mockers.

Write these down:

“Walking” is taking a series of steps. Walking is about the decisions you make all day long.

What Happy People Do and Do Not Do

A. Walking = The decisions we make all day long.

Walking is about where you live mentally, emotionally, and relationally. After you walk for a while, you usually get to the place where you’re going. And when you do, you stop walking. And you stand there.

B. Standing = The commitments we make to various causes.

The kind of thinking you adopt.
The way you choose to see life.

You make your decisions – that’s walking. And your decisions make you – that’s standing. – You stop somewhere and you live there. Once you’ve stood somewhere long enough, you eventually sit down.

C. Sitting = The attitude of our heart.

Let me read it again to you:

¹ How happy (or joyful or blessed) is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! - Psalm 1:1

A happy person doesn’t make decisions under the influence of “the wicked” – under the influence of people who think contrary to God.

A happy person doesn't align with causes or priorities that line up with people who do things contrary to the laws of God.

A happy person doesn't allow their attitudes to be influenced by people who mock the almighty.

So, what does a happy person do?

Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

Psalm 1:2

A blessed/joyful person does three simple things. Three simple things that all of us can do.

A. We delight in God's words.

We like God's words. We take pleasure in them. We look forward to hearing God's words in church, and reading God's words at home, and learning how to live by them.

Blessed/Joyful people delight in God's words.

Second...

B. We think about them deeply.

For a Hindu, to "meditate" means, "to think about nothing." For a Hebrew, to "meditate" means, "to think deeply about God's Word." Instead of just skimming over a passage, happy people ask questions, like,

- "Why did God say this?"
- "What does He mean by this?"
- "What am I supposed to do about this?"

And people who are happy...

C. We think about them day and night.

One of the best ways to start your day is to read a chapter of the Bible. And one of the best ways to end your day is to read a chapter of the Bible.

Recently, the American Bible Society released a report based on a national survey they did during the middle of the pandemic.

Here's what they found: All... *"People experience hurt. In the midst of these difficulties, though, the Bible and the church make a critical difference."*

“... when [people] turn to the Bible, they are better able to cope, and they experience higher levels of hope and flourishing.... and they are better able to forgive.”

“...those relying on scripture at greater-than-average levels, also experienced the highest levels of hope.”

“Scripture engagement is significantly related to evidence of forgiveness,” ABS said. “The more scripture engaged someone is, the more likely they are able to forgive others.”

Which, in turn, makes them happier people.

Verse 3 explains why the scripture-engaged person is happier:

³ He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. - Psalm 1:3

The land of Israel has a climate very similar to California. There's not much rain. But the trees there are like trees everywhere: they need a steady source of water. The trees that grow beside streams are constantly being watered and nourished.

The Psalm is saying, “Scripture-readers are happier because...

Why We're Joyful:

A. We're continually taking healthy nourishment.

B. We prosper.

The most important organ in your body is your brain. It does all your thinking. Pound for pound, your brain consumes far more calories than any other organ. It's constantly working and needs constant feeding.

Your brain makes up 2% of your body mass, but consumes 20% of your calories.

Feeding your brain on the Bible morning and evening is like planting it next to a stream so it can get constant nourishment. And when you're constantly giving your brain the right nourishment, it's going to make better decisions, which will make you prosper.

RECAP

You want to be happier?

- Read the Bible.
- Delight in the Bible.
- Read it day and night.
- And obey it.

Happy is the person who does this. And whatever he or she does, prospers.

Conclusion

This is how the book of Psalms opens. It's the "Genesis chapter 1" of the Psalms.

The compilers of the Psalms thought long and hard about the first song in the songbook. They wanted everyone to know the secret to happiness. And, they wanted everyone to know the secret of sadness. Verse 4 says,

***⁴ The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
Psalm 1:4-5***

Chaff is the papery part of the wheat stock that's worthless. It's the wrapping paper around the grain, put there to protect it. Once the wheat is ready to eat, the chaff isn't needed anymore, so the farmer throws it up in the air and lets the wind take it away.

What David is saying is, *the unhappy aren't happy because...*

Why the joyless aren't joyful:

A. They don't have an anchor of truth to guide them (v. 4).

They take advice from CBS or CNN or Fox or Facebook. They get people's opinions, not God's infallible truth. People who live by the media as their source of truth will not sit in the room when the righteous assemble before God in heaven. – Unhappy people...

B. They don't have a happy group to lift them (v. 5).

The final line of the song says,

***⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.
Psalm 1:6***

It's a contrast between happy and unhappy people. Unhappy people...

C. They don't have the Lord watching over their ways (v. 6).

They're on their own.

This is one of the most compelling reasons to become a Christian. As a father, I want to help my children. And as our heavenly father, God wants to help you. But He won't force His help on you. He invites us to ask for His help.

In the book of Revelation, He says, “Listen, I’m right here at the door to your life. I’m knocking on it. If you’ll open it, I’ll come into you and live with you, and you with Me.

He then begins what Psalm 1:6 describes: He begins watching over you – guiding you, calling to your attention things that might harm you. He does this by means of the Holy Spirit, whispering to you, like a voice inside your head. And He does this by talking loudly and clearly to you through the words He’s written to you in the Bible.

Imagine if every person in our city read the Bible on a regular basis. We’d be a happier city, wouldn’t we? We’d be a city planted by streams of water – a city for all seasons.

Imagine if every person in our country read the Bible regularly? We’d be a happier country. A country for all seasons.

Or, imagine if you read the Bible regularly. According to Psalm 1, you’d be happier – a man or woman for all seasons.

So I want to issue a challenge to all of us today:

Assignment:

During this 6-week series...

- 1. Read a Psalm a day.***
- 2. Ask yourself, “What is God saying to me here?”***

SALVATION INVITATION

And I want to issue an invitation to you today. Jesus would like to be in your life. He’d like to lead you and guide you, and reconcile you to God.

If you’d like Him in your life, if you’d like to become part of His family, in just a minute I’m going to lead you in a prayer inviting Him to become the Lord of your life.

The prayer is very simple. Just pray these words after me:

*Lord Jesus,
I admit,
I am a sinner,
In need of a Savior,
And I invite you to be mine.*

Let’s pray together.