

The Way To Blessedness

Psalm 1

Pastor John Miller

I'm first going to read all of Psalm 1, then we'll go back and unpack the verses, one at a time.

"Blessed is the man..."—or "woman"—"...who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish."

Psalm 1 has been described as a signpost, pointing the way to blessedness, happiness and prosperity. If you want to be a happy person, if you want to be a blessed person, if you want to be a successful and prosperous person, then Psalm 1 is your psalm. It has been called "God's recipe for success."

When we talk about prosperity and success, you need to understand that we are talking about it in God's estimation. What God calls prosperous and what God calls successful is different than the world's standards. The world has one view of what it means to be successful, and God has another. I don't know about you, but I'm interested in what God thinks. I want to be successful in God's eyes. I want to be successful in God's kingdom. I want lasting, fruitful success by God's standards. Psalm 1 is the psalm for blessing and happiness.

Remember that the psalms use Hebrew poetry, and Hebrew poetry doesn't depend on rhythm or meter but rather on contrast and parallelism. There are several, different aspects to Hebrew poetry, but one of the most common is contrast, which we get in Psalm 1. In Psalm 1, the godly man is contrasted with the ungodly man. The blessed or happy man is contrasted with the man who will perish in all his ways. So there is a contrast between the righteous and the unrighteous.

The contrast between the two is seen in verse 6: "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous..."—That's "the righteous man"—"...but the way of the ungodly..."—That's the contrast —"...shall perish." So you have the "righteous" man and the "ungodly" man. The "righteous" man the Lord knows; He approves of him and sets His love on him. But the "ungodly" man "shall perish."

I want you to notice the first word of the psalm: "blessed" or in the Hebrew it's "O the blessedness." It's in the plural, so it's the "blessings" or "blessedness." Some translations say, "O how happy." Then notice that the last word of the psalm is "perish." What a contrast! The first word is "blessed"; the last word is "perish." You are in one of the two groups; you are either

one of the “blessed,” or you are one of those who will “perish.” You are either a tree of the Lord’s planting, or you are chaff, which is blown away by the wind and destroyed. We’ll see more about that in this psalm. So we have the righteous and the ungodly man, and the blessed and those who will perish.

I want to follow God’s recipe for prosperity. So the first question we need to ask is “What are the conditions to the blessed life?” Or what do I need to do or be if I want the blessings of the Lord upon my life? What are the characteristics of the blessed man? They are found in verses 1-2: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.”

The first thing we see in the psalm, in verse 1, is that if we’re going to receive the blessing of the Lord and we’re going to be prosperous and successful in God’s estimation, we must be separated from the world. We’re not to be isolated from the world but separated. We’re not to be like the world, not letting the world “press us into its mold,” but we’re to live a life of holiness, separate from the world.

The road to blessing has limits; the blessed man will not do certain things. This is the negative. You might note that verse 1 is what we do not do, and verse 2 is what we do. We don’t do verse 1, but we do verse 2. So there is the negative and there is the positive.

Now the minute the Bible tells us what not to do, that’s what we want to do. Why is that? Because we’re sinners. We have a sinful bent; we have an old, Adamic nature. It’s like the sign that says, “Wet paint. Do not touch.” What do we want to do? We want to touch the paint. Stupid. We say, “Wow! It really is wet!” Duh! Isn’t that what the sign said? The sign says, “Stay off the grass.” You’re thinking, You’re not going to tell me what to do!

So often when we’re out doing things, I’ll see a sign that says, “Don’t park here.” I’ll park there, and my wife says, “Didn’t you see the sign?”

“Yeah, I saw the sign.”

“You know, that sign says we’re not supposed to park here.”

“I don’t care what the sign says. Let’s just do it anyway. That sign’s not for me.” Whenever I see a sign that says, “Do not...,” that’s exactly what I want to do.

So God says that the righteous man, the godly man, is not going to do these things. So I need a new nature; I need to be regenerated and given new life to want to follow the laws of God.

I want to list them for you. First of all, if you want to be blessed and happy, then don’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly. Verse 1 says that the blessed man “walks not in the counsel of the ungodly.” Who are the “ungodly”? The ungodly, simply stated, are those who live as though God does not exist. They’re not super-bad people, but they just live like there is no God. We

call it "practical atheism." Many of these people are in the church. They come to church, listen to the sermons, but they leave and live as though there is no God; they don't pray, they don't seek the Lord's will, they don't serve the Lord, they don't read His Word, they don't worship the Lord and they don't have a heart for God. They ignore God as though He doesn't exist. If you question them, they say, "Oh, yeah; I believe in God, but I don't seek Him, I don't live for Him and I don't acknowledge Him." So they are living as though God does not exist. If you want to be blessed and you want to be happy, you don't go to those people for counsel. We are not to walk "in the counsel of the ungodly."

Solomon, the writer of Proverbs, says in chapter 1:10-11,15 to young men, "If sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, 'Come with us'...My son, do not walk in the way with them." As a young man, that was a proverb that really spoke to me. Don't follow the sinful crowd. Don't follow the ways of the world. So if you want to be a blessed person, you want to separate yourself from ungodly and worldly philosophy.

Then notice, secondly, if you want to be blessed and happy, don't stand in the way of sinners. Verse 1 says "...nor stands in the path of sinners." "Sinners" goes a little further than the "ungodly." The ungodly just live as though God does not exist, but sinners actually break God's laws. The word "sin" means "to miss the mark." Sinners rebel against God and sin against God.

So we see a progression here: You start walking in their counsel, then you stand in their sin. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." You first believe their philosophy or counsel, and then you act out their sin.

The third thing you need to do to be blessed and happy is don't sit in the seat of the scornful. Verse 1 says, "...nor sits in the seat of the scornful." So the progression starts off with being ungodly, it moves to sinning and then the next thing you know, you're mocking. You're a scorner, mocking the things of God. This is a progression that many are on. They finally rebel against God, mock the idea that there is a God in heaven, they mock that God's Word is true and they put down Christ and Christianity.

I think of men like Christopher Hitchens, Clinton Richard Dawkins, Bill Maher and Sam Harris. These are modern atheists who spill all of their hatred for God. It's not enough for them to say, "Well, I don't believe in God." But they abuse Christians verbally, attack them and put them down, they mock Christianity and mock the Bible and mock the things of God.

So these people start off getting ungodly counsel, they begin to sin and then that leads to scorning the things of God.

How sad that many times Christian parents send their kids away to a secular college, and then college pollutes them with their counsel and introduce to them their sins. The kids come home from college and they're mocking God and Christianity and abandon the faith that they once held to.

So note the progression in verse 1: walking, standing and sitting. That's the way sin is; it starts

out small—you just begin to listen to their counsel. Be careful that you're not taking in too much worldly philosophy in books, movies, television and other forms of media. And even friends. I got myself all messed up in high school, because I hung around with the wrong crowd. I ended up in juvenile hall, because I was following the wrong counsel. I was standing with sinners and began to mock with the mockers. So we find that we start walking with sinners, then we're standing with them and then we're seated with them.

I think of Lot in the Old Testament, who could have followed Abraham and trusted God. But instead he lusted and longed for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The first thing the Bible says about him is that he "pitched his tent even as far as Sodom." The next time you find Lot, he is in the city of Sodom. So there is a progression there. Then we find him condemned and his family overthrown with the sinners in the city of Sodom.

It starts with friendship with the world, progresses to being spotted by the world, then you start to love the world, then you are conformed to the world and lastly, you will be condemned with the world. So God wants us to be separate from the world.

Sin leads to sadness; holiness leads to happiness.

That leads us to our next point, in verse 2. What must we do? We must be saturated with the Word. In verse 1, we must be separated from the world, and in verse 2, we must be saturated with the Word. Here is the contrast in verse 2: "But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And in His law he meditates day and night."

So now we are moving from the negative to the positive, from discernment to what we separate from, in verse 1, to delighting in what we are saturated with, in verse 2. The blessed man not only says "No" to wrong, but he must also say "Yes" to what is right. That's a simple and basic concept. You have to say "No" to sin and "Yes" to the Savior. It's not enough just to say "No" to sin; we must also say "Yes" to God in our lives.

The blessed man does this, verse 2: "His delight is in the law of the Lord." That's the first thing we note. How does the blessed life come to us? By delighting in God's Word. The "law of the Lord" is the Bible.

By the way, we don't know who wrote Psalm 1; it's called an "orphan psalm." Psalms 1 and 2 are orphan psalms. We don't know their human authors. My guess would be David, but it's only a guess. But we know that the real author is the Holy Spirit, because "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." It is breathed by the Spirit of God. So even though we don't know the human author of Psalm 1, it is good advice to know that the man who wants to be blessed is to be saturated and delights in the Word of the Lord.

A delight for God's Word is an indication that you are a child of God. Nature determines appetite. Before I got born again, I didn't read the Bible. After I got born again, all I wanted to do was read the Bible. I couldn't get enough of God's Word. Have you been born again? Well, what's your relationship to the Bible? In many ways, we should treat the Bible the way we

would treat Jesus. The Bible is His Word. We love Jesus, so we want to hear Him speak. God speaks through what He has spoken. So your relationship to the Bible is all important. Do you delight in God's Word?

In 1 Peter 2:2, Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire..."—that's the "delight"—"...the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby." The Bible teaches that you cannot grow apart from the Bible. If you just come to church and sing, you're not going to grow. If you just serve the Lord, you're not going to grow. You're not going to grow until you open the book, you read and then God will begin to speak; the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and transforms the child of God into the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God's chief, number-one way to sanctify you, make you holy, is His Bible, His Word. In John 17:17, Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth."

So to "delight...in the law of the Lord" is not just referring to the Ten Commandments or Decalogue, or to the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. It's talking about the whole of Scripture. Remember when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness? The first temptation was, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." In reply to the devil, Jesus said, "It is written..."—so He drew from the Word of God—"...'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Jesus is telling us how important God's Word is for us. Bread is not enough.

I'm a big fan of baked goods. I probably shouldn't tell you that; don't give me any donuts. I love donuts, but I don't need them. Anything baked—praise Jehovah! I love it—bread, donuts, muffins. But more important than my daily baked goods is my feeding on God's Word.

I love what Job said in Job 23:12. He said, "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured..."—or "esteemed"—"...the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." Isn't that great? He says that he needs God's Word more than he needs food. Psalm 119:103 says, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

Do you love God's Word? Do you delight in God's Word? Do you meditate on God's Word?

Let me summarize it for you. The blessed man or blessed woman is a man or woman of the Book; the Bible is the center of their life. They first of all read the Bible. You say, "Well, you're a preacher; that's what all preachers say, and that's what you get paid to do. You tell us to 'read the Bible.' But do I really have to read the Bible?"

"Yes, you really need to read the Bible." Someone said, "You need a nook and then you need to open the book." I like that. Find yourself a little quiet place where it's just you and God and open the Bible and let God speak to you. You want to discover God? You'll find Him in the Bible. You want God to speak to you? He speaks to you through His Word. You want to become more like Christ? Then spend time reading His Word. It will transform your life. Just read the Bible.

The greatest danger in the church today is that we just don't read the Bible. If everyone in our

congregation just started reading the Bible every day, revival would break out. I believe it with all my heart. If they spent time in prayer and in reading God's Word, this church would be transformed by His power. And the community and the world around us would be transformed. That's because revival starts with "re-Bible." You need to get back to the book, read the Word of God.

Secondly, you need to delight in the Bible. That's because God gives you a hunger and a desire for His Word. You delight in God's Word. You take joy in the Scriptures.

Thirdly, you meditate on the Bible, verse 2. So you read the Bible, you delight in the Bible and then you meditate on the Bible. It has been said—and it's true—that what delights us, directs us. I like that. If you love the Bible and delight in the Scriptures, that's going to direct your life. Then you meditate on it. How often? "Day and night."

Let me explain what it means to "meditate." Notice the verse doesn't say "medicate." Everyone's getting medicated today. What does it mean to "meditate" on God's Word? In eastern thought, in transcendental meditation, it means to empty your mind. I don't need to empty my mind; there's not a lot up there to start with. I need stuff in my mind. You're supposed to empty your mind, recite a mantra, which really is the name of a Hindu deity. People don't realize that they're worshipping a Hindu god. So it's emptying your mind.

But Biblical meditation is filling your mind. The word "meditate" is tied in with the word meaning "to murmur." It's called that because the Jews would read the Bible and read it out loud. They would repeat it over and over. They would meditate by reading the Bible and muttering the words and Scriptures. You see them at the western wall in Jerusalem today as they bob back and forth and read or mutter the Scriptures.

Now the word "meditate" actually comes from the concept of a cow chewing its cud. Cows have several stomachs, and they would take a big bite of grass and swallow it. Later they would bring it back up and chew it again. Then they would swallow it again. The next day they would bring it back up again and chew it again and swallow it. That's what you need to do with the Scriptures. Memorize Psalm 1. Hide God's Word in your heart. It's the pathway or signpost to happiness and blessedness.

Clovis Chappell said, "This amazing thing, the Book, the Word of God, is one that does not grow old and stale through being read too often or too constantly. Through all the changing years, it remains to those who win their way into its heart as fresh as the first rose of June and as inexhaustible as a gushing spring from the hills." I like that. No matter how long you've been reading the Bible, no matter how many times you read Psalm 1, something new and fresh and wonderful reveals itself to you. You never grow out of the Word of God; you keep reading and meditating on it day and night.

Here is another point: You not only read the Word of God, you must obey God's Word. You not only delight and meditate on God's Word; you have to obey the Word of God. James 1:22-25

says, "But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks..."—that word means "to stoop down to take a deep look"—"...into the perfect law of liberty..."—that's "the Word of God"—"...and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." There you have it, the secret of a blessed life: You are separated from the world and are saturated with the Word of God.

The second thing I want to note in verse 3 are the consequences of the blessed life. We first saw the conditions for a blessed life: we separate ourselves from the world; we saturate ourselves in God's Word; and we read it, delight in it, meditate on it and obey it. Now we will see the results and benefits of being a man devoted to God's Word. Verse 3 says, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." That's what we want: We want to prosper.

Notice these things. "He shall be like a tree planted." When you delight in God's Word, you meditate in God's Word, you obey God's Word, then you become like a tree. It's a beautiful imagery of a believer. It implies that God planted you and has a purpose for you.

So you want purpose to come into your life? Do you want to know where you've come from, why you're here and where you're going? You find it in God's Word. God's Word brings purpose into the life of a believer.

Secondly, you are "planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season." This implies the power of the Holy Spirit and the productivity or the fruit of the Holy Spirit. So God's Word brings purpose into my life, God's Word brings power into my life and produces fruit in my life. Whenever the Bible speaks of water, in the sense of drinking water, it's a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the Bible speaks of water in washing us, it's the symbol of the Word of God. So the Spirit of God uses the Word of God to bring power into the life of a believer. We have power or fruit and productivity.

Thirdly, verse 3 says, "whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." This speaks of longevity and prosperity. So we will be living a fruitful life and a prosperous life. Now remember that this prosperity is not cars, money and earthly treasures. At the risk of losing their marriages and children and their character, so many men and women abandon God's path for worldly success. They sell their soul to the devil and then perish. Satan makes it look really good.

Now as you read this psalm, keep in mind that everything in it is the antithesis of the world's philosophy. Everything we're reading about in this psalm is running the opposite direction of what the culture is saying to us. That's why we need to shut our ears to what the world is saying and open our hearts and our ears to what God is saying in His Word about true success.

So we are planted—we have purpose; we are by the water, bearing fruit; we have power and productivity; and our “leaf also shall not wither”—we shall prosper.

Someone said, “All of God’s trees are planted evergreens.” I like that imagery. An interesting thing about evergreens is that in the spring, they don’t really produce a lot of buds or beautiful flowers. And evergreens in the summer are no different than any other tree. If you look at the trees in summer, you can’t always tell which is the evergreen. In the fall, the trees that get all the attention are the ones that change color; they are beautiful and glorious. But the evergreen just stays green; it never changes. But in the winter this is where the evergreen and the child of God stand out. The other trees have lost their leaves and just look like a bunch of branches. When I go back to other states that get cold in the winter and the leaves fall off, all the trees are brown and gnarly. Then when you come to California, you see more evergreens. In the middle of winter the evergreens are lush and green. They are planted by the Lord, by “the rivers of water.”

The Christian is likened unto an evergreen; we never wither. We bear fruit in God’s season. We have that blessing and longevity. So we are trees planted.

Now in verses 4-6, we see the contrast. The ungodly are not so. They “are like the chaff.” This is an intended, Hebrew, poetic phrase in contrast to the tree. So Hebrew poetry is saying that the righteous man is a tree bearing fruit; the ungodly or unrighteous man is “like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

I want you to note that in the Hebrew, verse 4 opens with, “The ungodly are not so.” This is an intended contrast. You go from the godly, planted by the Lord, bearing fruit, whose leaves do not wither and everything they do is prospering. Even Joseph in the Old Testament is an example; when he was in jail, he prospered. Even though things may not be going your way, you’re prospering; your soul is enriching. But the ungodly “not so.”

I want you to note three things about the ungodly. First of all, they are driven, verse 4. “...but are like the chaff which the wind drives away.” What is chaff? Chaff is the thin skin around a kernel of wheat. It’s like a peanut that has a thin skin around the peanut. You peel it off and pop the peanut in your mouth. The Jews had threshing floors that were outside, on a hilltop, open to the wind and breezes. They would lay out all the wheat and an oxen would pull a heavy board or log and roll it over the wheat. It would thresh the wheat or break up the skin around the kernels and separate the chaff from the wheat. Then someone with a winnowing fork would throw the wheat and chaff high into the air, so the wind would blow away the lighter chaff and the wheat would then fall back onto the threshing floor. The wheat was then put in the barn, but the chaff, which is a picture of the ungodly, would be burned up. The chaff was worthless and headed for destruction.

So you have two categories: the righteous man, who is a tree planted that bears fruit and never

withers, and you have the unrighteous man, who is like worthless chaff. The unrighteous man is driven away by the wind and headed for destruction. So the first characteristic of the ungodly man is that he is blown away.

John the Baptist, describing the ministry of Jesus, actually used this imagery when he said, "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor." So Jesus is coming back in His Second Coming and will separate the wheat from the chaff.

You are either a tree of the Lord's planting, a child of God, or you are chaff. I hate to tell you that, but if you're not a Christian, you're chaff. The ungodly are not only blown away, but secondly, they are doomed, verse 5. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." That is a figure of speech saying they won't have a leg to stand on. They have no voice on judgment day. They can't plead their case before God. The Bible calls it "the great white throne." The wicked dead will be resurrected and stand before Christ, who sits upon a throne, the books will be opened and their names will not be found written in the book, so they will be sent away to judgment, they will be thrown into a lake of fire. So the wicked or the ungodly are like chaff driven and doomed.

Thirdly, verse 6, they are damned. "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." So the psalm opens with "blessed," but ends with "perish." You are in one of those two groups: Either you are "blessed" of the Lord, or you will be cursed and judged for your disobedience and sin in rejecting Christ and will "perish." The Bible says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Some of the reasons these wicked men, like chaff, are driven away and destroyed is because they walked "in the counsel of the ungodly," they stood "in the path of sinners," they sat "in the seat of the scornful," they did not delight "in the law of the Lord," they did not meditate in His law "day and night." They rejected God and rejected His Word; they didn't do what God's Word says.

Everything we've read in this psalm is the opposite of what the world says. The world says to go for the gusto, do what you want, have a good time, accumulate things, possessions, power and popularity, live for pleasure—the hedonistic philosophy. The world is pursuing that. But God says that the blessed man is separate from the world. He doesn't follow "the counsel of the ungodly," he doesn't stand around with sinners, he doesn't sit "in the seat of the scornful." But he devotes himself to the Book, to the law of God. He delights in it and meditates on it "day and night." He is guided by it and directed by it. Whenever I come to this verse, it humbles my heart so much.

When I was a senior in high school getting ready to graduate, my sister left a little, paperback, dog-eared, New Testament Bible in my bedroom. I picked up the Book and began to read it. God's Spirit began to convict me of my sins. I got on my knees and repented and turned to Christ. I've never put the Book down since. As a matter of fact, I have that same little paperback in my office here at church; my sister sent it to me a few years ago. She said, "John,

I think you should have this book.”

I look at that little, paperback book and think of the power of God's Word to change a life. How God can set you on a path of blessing and happiness, of prosperity and fruitfulness. God's Word is irreplaceable in your life. What a glorious thing that is to be devoted to God's Word, to be committed to the Book.

So there are only two roads. Jesus actually spoke about a wide gate that led to a broad road, which led to destruction. He said that many are going down that road. Then He said that there is a narrow gate, which leads to a narrow way, which leads to life. Everyone is on one of those two roads. There are two roads: the blessed life and the perishing or cursed life; the narrow gate, which leads to life or the broad gate which leads to destruction.

Which road are you on? Let's pray.