

How Blessed is the Man
Psalm 1
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 8, 2022

Well, I don't know about you, but the service has been a real blessing so far, hasn't it? It's neat to see all the good things the Lord has done for us this past year on the PowerPoint. Thank you for Judy and Natasha for putting that together. I know those things take a lot of work. And then to hear two of our testimonies like that, it just thrilled my soul. The reason I asked Paul and Caleb to do that is because as you can tell, they have two very different stories. One gave a testimony of how you blessed him when his wife died. And the other told you how you blessed him when his child was born, and family was started and that kind of thing. Because that's what the church does. It helps you at the beginning and the end of life. It ministers to you in both stages. We rejoice with those who rejoice, and we weep with those who weep. And you really excelled at that in 2022. And I just want to say, I commend you for that.

In fact, you did such a good job that we saw a lot of new visitors come through our doors in the last year. I asked the office if we had a count on it. And was it 280, is that right? 321, so 321 new visitors last year, which is incredible. And it means that many of you are still new to our church; you haven't been with us for that long, so you may not know much about our ministry. And if that's the case, you've come at the right time, because this morning, we're going to be talking about the vision statement of our church. Just out of curiosity, how many of you know that we do have a vision statement of our church? Yeah, most of you do. Okay, how many of you have read it and loved it? Okay, good. Your hands are still up. That's great. That's awesome. We put this statement together because - can we put it on the PowerPoint here - several years ago, when our church first started, the agency that helped plant us named Grace Advance, encouraged us to create a document in order to explain who we are, and what we were trying to accomplish as a ministry. And after several weeks or months of work on it, this is what it said. It said that our vision at Grace Fellowship Church is to proclaim grace upon grace to Chilliwack, British Columbia, and to the ends of the earth. John 1:16-17 says,

For of His fullness we have received and grace upon grace. For the Law was given through Moses and grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

Then the next paragraph says,

“At Grace Fellowship Chilliwack we believe that salvation is all of grace and not of works. We believe it is something God alone accomplishes in our lives and nothing we contribute to ourselves. We believe it is unmerited favour where Jesus earns the Father's approval, and in His mercy gives us the benefits of that through His shed blood on the cross and victorious resurrection from the tomb. And since we have received all of this, it is our vision as a church to proclaim grace upon grace in several ways.

“We proclaim grace upon grace through the Bible. We proclaim grace upon grace, through worship. We do it through evangelism and service.” These are all points of the vision statement. “We proclaim grace through counseling, and leadership and equipping the saints.” But as you can tell, just by looking at the statement, we put a very high priority in the subject of grace as a church. That's our vision. It's very important to us because it's repeated several times in the document. In fact, when Grace Advance asked us to write that I said to myself, well, from what I know about the city, what does Chilliwack British Columbia need more than anything else? Well, it's not works because there are a lot of people doing good works here in this community. You see it everywhere. You see it in the food drives, you see in the homeless shelters, you see it in the fundraisers. And it's not religion either because this town has a lot of religion. There's churches on every corner, there's temples on lots of streets. It's not spirituality, a lot of people here like spiritual things. One thing the town needs is grace. People need to have a greater understanding of God's mercy because the reason some of them are so religious and works oriented is because they think that will save them and it won't. Salvation comes through Christ alone. As the paragraph said, it happens as Jesus earns the Father's approval. And then His kindness gives us the benefits of that through His blood that was shed on the cross. And that's what we want to tell people as a ministry.

And I don't have time this morning to go into all the aspects of our vision statement. It's way too big for that. So we can just look at the first part of it together that the first point of the statement goes on to say this, we proclaim grace upon grace through the Bible because the Bible is a revelation of God's grace. We at GFC are committed to preaching it in our pulpit, into teaching it in every aspect of our ministry. The Bible has been called the traveler's map the Pilgrim's staff, the pilot's compass and the Christian's charter. It is the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, the lamp for our feet and a light for our path, because it proclaims grace. It loves to talk about the unmerited favour of God, and to tell people how to find it through Christ. Therefore, we love to teach the Bible as a church. And if you've been with us for a while, you'll know that last statement is very true of what we do here at Grace. We love to teach the Scriptures, don't we? We open it up every week, we walk through it together, we see what it says about Christ. We're doing it right now in the book of Hebrews. We've done it before in the book of Ephesians, as well as Romans, John, Titus, and First Peter, to name a few. We've gone through about eight books of the Bible so far in our time together, you can see that on our website. Because in the words of Charles Spurgeon, we bleed Bibles, so you can cut us, and the Bible pours out. You can open us up as a church, and you'll find Scripture there. Or in the words of John Wesley, we are *homo unius Libere* which means we're a man of one book. We don't have a lot of different priorities as a church, we're not looking to the culture or the news or politics to find out what we're going to do, we just look at this. The Puritan Joseph Hall said, “We don't look to the Bible as a candle, we view it as the sun because it's everything to us.”

There's probably no part of the Bible that explains that better than Psalm chapter one. So if you would open there with me in your Bibles. That's what I want to look at with you today. But if you have a copy of the Bible with you, please turn to Psalm chapter one, which has been called the psalm of Psalms or the preface song, because it serves as a preface for the rest of the book. If you want to know what the

book of Psalms is about, you just read chapter one, and it tells you. In fact, to give you a little background, the word “Psalm” in Hebrew means praise. That's what this book is about. It's a collection of praises that were given to you in order to help you worship God. There's 150 of them at all, so this is the first one, but it goes up to Psalm 150. The shortest chapter in the Bible is a psalm, Psalm 117. The longest chapter in the Bible is a psalm, that's Psalm 119. And altogether there were seven authors that composed the Psalms over a period of 900 years. And what that means is that this is the longest running book in the Bible. It took an entire millennia to put this together, so it's quite an incredible thing. And if you want to read Psalm 1 it starts off this way. It says,

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit and its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Now, as you read that, you can tell why this psalm is in the beginning of the book and introduces it, and that's because it's contrasting two types of people here. You see the righteous man and the wicked, right? You see the one who loves God, and the one who doesn't, because that's what the book of Psalms focuses on. It tells you why the righteous worship God so much, and that is because the Lord has given you so much to be thankful for. Because it says in verse one, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.” And that means this is what God does for you if you follow Him, He will bless you. And this is how He treats you when you take His word seriously. He will reward you because He's a gracious God and merciful and kind. And then verse three says, “The righteous man is like a tree, while the wicked are like chaff,” because they blow around everywhere. They have no foundation under the ground beneath them, while the righteous have that. You guys know this, but lost people can be very unstable, right? They buy a new car, and they're happy, and the new car breaks down and they're devastated. And when that doesn't work, they go buy a new house, and when that breaks down, they're devastated again, it's a terrible cycle. The righteous don't live like that; they stand on the Word of God, which is why verse six says, “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous”, and that doesn't mean that He knows them like a book, but He knows them like a friend. They have a personal relationship with Him. They have an intimate acquaintance because they follow the Bible. If you look back in verse two, the reason that they have this relationship with God is because they delight in the law of the Lord.

That's the one thing that separates a believer from an unbeliever and this is the one thing that distinguishes the righteous from the wicked and that's the word of God. It's not works because lost people can do a lot of works. They can't do them like a Christian can, there is a difference, but they can do a lot of them. It's not religion because lost people have religion. It's not spirituality, lost people have

that. The only thing that makes you stand out is your commitment to Scripture. That's it. That's the only thing, your faith in Christ, your love for this book. Which is something I think we can relate to because I bet if I went around this room and asked you what book is it that changed your life, you would say the Bible, wouldn't you? I don't think any of you would say the newspaper. I mean, none of you would say your textbook from college. There were times when you wanted to go the wrong way, but you didn't. Why? Because you knew the Bible tells you not to. And there are times you wanted to sin and throw your life away on some foolish thing, but you stopped because of some verse that caught your attention. Also bet if I went around the room and asked you what book was it that held your marriage together when it was struggling and kept your family united when it was falling apart, you'd say the same thing. You wouldn't say Facebook, it wasn't social media, or therapy. It was the things that you see in here. And I would say it's the same way with the church by the way. I mean, if a church is going to be united, it's going to have to stand on something. And if it's going to be together in the days and months and weeks ahead, it's going to have to have some foundation under its feet. And it's got to be the Bible. I've seen a lot of churches split in my time as a pastor, and I would say that it always happens because someone disobeys the principles that are found in the Word of God. Regardless of what they say, they don't leave churches over the colour of the carpet or the style of the music or the piano. They do it because they don't want to handle the issues biblically and, in a God-honouring way. And we don't want to see that happen at Grace. We want to have our eyes focused on something more substantial.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning in light of vision Sunday. So if you're taking notes, we're going to look at five characteristics of a man who loves his Bible. So in Psalm one, we're going to look at five characteristics of a man who loves his Bible just to give us some vision for the year. Just to remind us of our priorities. These are things that we've already talked about, if you've been with us for several years, none of this is new. It's a review, but it's an important one. And the first one is that he is blessed.

The first characteristic of a man who loves his Bible is that he's blessed, which is a wonderful way to start this out because the Lord will show favor to him if he focuses on the Word. If you read in verse one, this is exactly how it starts off. When it says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." Now, in order to explain this, I've already told you a little bit about this psalm, but I didn't get a chance to tell you about the author. But Psalm one is what's known as an anonymous psalm because we don't know who wrote it. The author's identity is a mystery to us because if you look back in your Bibles, it doesn't have a subscript. Most of the Psalms have that; they give you a few words about who wrote it. If you look in Psalm 3, the subscript there, says "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom, his son." And that means that this is what's taking place when David wrote that Psalm. He's running away from his third son who was trying to take the throne from him. It's a very sad time, which is why it's a very sad song. Then Psalm 4 says, "For the choir director of stringed instruments, a Psalm of David." And that means that's why David wrote that psalm, he did it for the for the choir or the Levites, who worshiped in the tabernacle. Psalm 5 and Psalm 6 are written the same way. But Psalm one

doesn't have that in here. For whatever reason, it leaves all that out. but it's okay because the theme is clear at the outset, and it's all wrapped up in the word blessed.

How *blessed* is the man. That's the Hebrew word *eser*. And it's a hard word to describe because it doesn't translate well into English. But *eser* describes a person who is blessed, and happy and joyful, because they're at peace with God. But it really means more than that, because it refers to someone who has peace in a holistic sense. They're not just blessed, but they're blessed upon blessed, and they're not just at peace, but they're doing it to such a degree that their whole life is covered in peace. They have a peaceful mindset regardless of the circumstances. They're content no matter what happens to them in life. This is something that's hard for us to relate to as North Americans, but most of our contentment comes from the things that we possess, right? If you get a new car, you're content. If you get a new house, you're blessed. If you have an old beat up one, you're not; but it wasn't that way back then because these people didn't own a car. They were very poor, so they had to look somewhere else for their blessings. And that's what this is talking about. In fact, this word is actually pluralized in Hebrew to show the intensity of it. And it's preceded by the word "how", which means the blessings are so great here that the author doesn't know how to express them fully, so he just says, "how blessed." Hebrew poetry, like it is an English, had a tendency to exaggerate things to make them seem as big as possible, and that's what the author is doing here. This man is not blessed, he's how blessed and he doesn't just have Escher he has it to the nth degree. Because this is what you find, if you follow the Bible, it will give you blessings that don't depend on the comings and goings of this life. I don't know about you, but I want that do you want that? I would like to be blessed and content, no matter what happens to me in this life. I told you last week, last year was nuts, wasn't it? If you're looking for your blessings in the stability of the world around you, you're not going to get it.

So the psalmist is telling you here how to get those blessings regardless of that. And he tells you to do that, you have to avoid three things here. And I'm going to go through these quickly because they're repetitive. They all say the same thing from different angles. But the first one in verse one says, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." And that means he doesn't walk in the guidance of the wicked or take their wicked advice. He doesn't look at the things that they do and follow it. He doesn't watch the ways that they act and imitate it, because he knows the world can't bless him like God can, so he turns to the Lord instead. And the verse also says, nor stand in the path of sinners. And that means he doesn't take the wicked's counsel and stand on it. He's blessed because he doesn't take the ideas of the world and build his life upon it. The word standing here gives the idea of a fixed resolve and a stubborn attitude that says, "This is right. I like the path of sinners now. I want to imitate their evil mindset because it feels good to me." And a godly man doesn't act that way. Then it says, "nor sit in the seat of scoffers." And that's an interesting thing to say because if you look in your Bibles, you can see the progression of thought here, because before it was walking, then it was standing, now it's sitting. Because it says, "How blessed is the man who doesn't go down that train of thought." He doesn't hang around the wicked so much that he begins to sit around them and scoff like they do. That's what wicked people do, isn't it? What unbelievers do. You hang around long enough, they're going to

take the name of the Lord in vain. You put yourself in their company for long enough, they're going to mock Him. That's what they do. And this is something that the man of God rejects completely because he reads his Bible, and it gives him a warning and he stays away from it. He sees the world and its bankruptcy, and he says, "I don't want that. I would rather have God instead."

Several years ago, one of the most popular courses at Yale University was on the subject of happiness, or the psychology of happiness. Half a million people signed up for it when COVID-19 hit because everybody was looking for that. They were trying to find happiness. And this study was incredible because it told everyone that said after \$75,000, nobody gets happier. Do you believe that? Nobody. After cosmetic surgery, nobody gets happier. After random acts of kindness, like giving money to charity, and helping the poor, nobody gets happier. But the sad reality of the course is, after everybody sat through the whole thing, it never told you how to get happier, because it doesn't know. They had no idea because true happiness or blessedness can only come from God, amen? Nowhere else.

This is something the Bible says repeatedly, but I did some research on this years ago. And it might interest you to know that scholars believe there are more than 5000 promises of blessing in the Bible. More than 5000, which means if you boil it all down, it comes to about 75 promises per book. It boggles the mind because every time you read a book of the Bible, you could be reading a promise on every page, and they cover all sorts of things. The Bible has promises for victory and promises for hope. It has promises to bless you with help and promises to bless you with relief when you're suffering. It gives you promises for mercy, and promises of grace, and promises of strength, and promises of power. In fact, if you take one big book like the Psalms, you can come to a psalm like Psalm 23. Just listen to the blessings in this one chapter.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell on the house of the LORD forever.

You guys feel blessed right now just by reading that? That's why the Lord gave it to you. But the warning the psalmist has given you at the front of the chapter is all of that won't do you any good if you turn your back on it and sin. From the very beginning here, he's telling you none of that's going to help you if you throw it out and pursue the ways of the wicked instead; so you want to be careful not to do that. He's drawing a line in the sand at the beginning of the chapter. And he's saying it's either God or this, it's the world or the Scripture, you need to pick the Scriptures.

Because it brings us to another characteristic of a man who loves his Bible in Psalm 1, and that is that he delights in the law of the Lord. A second characteristic of a man who loves his Bible in this passage is that he delights in the law of the Lord. Which means that he enjoys it. I think we all understand there's a difference between reading your Bible as a duty and reading it as a delight because you love it. That's what this is describing here. And verse two starts off with the word "but" because the author's forming a contrast with what he's saying before, because before he was telling you what a godly man doesn't do, now he tells you what he does. This is the put off put on in the passage. And it says,

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! [for this reason] but his delight is in the law of the Lord.

And the word "delight" here, it's a term that means aching or craving. So you could translate the verse like this, his aching is in the law of the Lord and His hunger is for it. Can't get enough of it. This is a guy who doesn't read his Bible because he has to, he reads it because he wants to. And this is the man who doesn't study Scripture because someone told him to do it. this is the man who does it because he just can't help it. There's something inside of him pushing him in that direction. If he doesn't read his Bible in the morning, he knows it all throughout the day. And if he doesn't go back to the Scripture later on in the day, he still remembers it. When it mentions the law here, "his delight is in the law," that's an interesting expression because the Hebrew Bible was divided into three sections. You had the *Torah*, or the law, you had the *Nabhi*, or the prophets, and you had the *Katha Vehm*, or the writings, but it all began with the law. That was the first and foremost thing in the list, and the psalmist uses that here to say that this is where this man's love for the Word of God begins. It starts all the way back at the beginning. He loves the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, or back then it would be Genesis to Malachi. He loves the Bible from the very first word to the very last.

And not only that, but verse two says he loves it so much that he meditates on it day and night. That's another way of saying that he reflects on it repeatedly, over and over again. So that if someone says to you, "Tell me John 3:16." He just says, "Well, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life,'" without thinking about it. The verse just spills out of him. If they say, "Tell me Romans 6:23," he'll say, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord." That's just natural to him. He knows that just as much as he knows his own name. And I've heard meditation described as being like the act of a cow chewing its cud. Because if you've ever watched them do that, you'll know that they chew the grass and swallow it, only to spit it up again. And then they chew the grass and swallow it only to spit it up again. And then they chew the grass and swallow it only to spit it up again, repeatedly. And that's what a Christian does when he meditates on the Bible. He takes the time to regurgitate it, swirl it around in his head because some verses take chewing, don't they? I mean, some parts of the Bible they take time to figure out; you can't get them all at once. And the only way to do them is let them marinate for a while in your soul. When we were going through the book of Hebrews, several of you were very gracious, and you told me that you really enjoyed our study of Melchizedek in

Hebrews seven, because you never understood that passage before. And what we talked about helped to unpackage it for you. Well, that's because I chewed on it for weeks, not days, but weeks. Because I couldn't understand it the first time I read it, or the second or third or fourth time, so I read it a fifth and sixth and seventh time. Sometimes you have to do that with the Word of God. And can I just say that one reason a lot of Christians are so weak in their faith right now is because we've lost the practice of this. And one reason a lot of us are apathetic and missing it is because we don't do this anymore. Because we read a verse of the Bible today, and then we forget about it. And we look at a passage on Melchizedek one week, and then walk away and never think about it again because we're too distracted by other things.

John Piper once said that one of the greatest uses of Facebook will be to prove at the last day that our lack of Bible study was not because we lacked time. We have the time to study the Bible, we just don't use it. That's something we need to improve on as a church. In fact, if you're wondering what this looks like because you'd like to meditate on the Bible, but you're not sure how, let me just give you a few tips. One is to take a note card with you throughout the day with a Bible verse on it. Not Bible verses, I mean, depending on your memory, I wouldn't put a bunch of them, just put one down, carry it in your pocket throughout the day. If you don't know what a note card is, you can put it on your phone. Note cards are kind of old now, but just do whatever works for you. And I would also say choose a verse that relates to your life. Find something that's very relevant to where you are, because it makes it easier to dwell on it. So if you're struggling with anxiety, find a verse on anxiety, meditate on that. If you're wrestling with peace, find a verse on peace, and meditate on that. If you're having some struggles in your marriage, find a verse on marriage, so that it'll be personal to you. I would also say, learn how to say it out loud, not real loud, because depending on where you are people are around you, they may think it's kind of odd. One of the best ways to meditate on the Bible is to go throughout the day, just whispering it to yourself. Take Ephesians 2:8 and say, "For by grace, you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, so that no one may boast," and just say it out loud over and over again. But whatever you do, if you want to be blessed by God, the psalmist says we have to take this seriously.

And it brings us to another characteristic of a man who loves his Bible here. And that is that he is like a tree. A third characteristic of a man who loves his Bible is that he is like a tree. Which means that as he meditates and pours the Word of God into his soul on a regular basis, he has something firm to stand on. He doesn't blow this way and that, like the rest of the world. And as you come to the next verse, here, you're going to notice the psalmist does something interesting, because he changes the image from a man to a tree. Because after saying "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, but his delight is in the law of the Lord." Verse three tells us that this is what happens next, "he will be like a tree, firmly planted by streams of water." Now that phrase, "like a tree," it's a grammatical expression that's known as a simile, which is a figure of speech that compares one thing to another using like or as. And the psalmist uses that here to say that this is what happens. When you read the Word of God, your life will become settled like a tree. So that when the world goes like this, you'll go like this. And when the culture goes backwards and forwards and crazy, you won't do that because your soul will

be firmly planted on the Bible. If you look in that verse, it doesn't say it's planted, it's *firmly* planted. And it's not just fixed, it's *tightly* fixed. So that it doesn't budge. Because one of the benefits of meditating on Scripture is that it settles you. It builds your life on something that is stable. All the stuff out there in the world is not stable. One day they like this, next day they don't. One day they have this law, next day they change it. We remember that in COVID, right? It was hard to follow because the laws kept changing. We don't build our life just on that; we build it on the law that doesn't change. Amen? That's where your stability comes from.

In fact, anytime someone is worried and anxious and doing this, I know there's only one reason for it, and that's because they're not standing on the Word of God. And anytime someone is settled and at peace and at rest in their soul, I know there's a reason for it as a Christian, and that's because you are. In fact, I don't know what comes into your mind when you think about this word "tree," but where I grew up, every house had a big oak tree in front of the yard that went up about 50 feet in the air and had a trunk that was four feet in diameter. I don't know if you've seen an oak tree, but those things were massive and they're several hundred years old, which gave you a sense of stability as you looked at them, because you knew that tree had seen its share of battles, and it was still there. And that big mighty oak had seen its seasons of storms, and it didn't fall. And the reason it could do that is because the roots of an oak tree are massive. They go out in every direction, about 100 feet in diameter, which enables them to stand when the storms of life come crashing in. And the psalmist says it's no different for a man who loves his Bible, because he will have his roots firmly planted by streams of water. And that phrase "streams of water," it may not mean a lot to you, because most of our trees, they don't have to be planted by streams in British Columbia because we live in a rain forest, and you get lots of rain. Trees can be anywhere; they get water. But in Israel, it was different because they lived in a desert. So the only way for a tree to survive in a lot of parts of that country was to be planted by a lake or river or stream. And the psalmist says this is what the man of God experiences. Not only does God plant him next to water, but He plants him next to streams of water, plural, many streams, multiple streams, streams upon streams upon streams, so that he has all that he needs for every occasion. This is what the rest of the verse says as well, it says, "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers." And when it says that the man of God prospers here, that doesn't mean financially it means spiritually. Because this is referring to the type of prosperity that allows a person to grow in his sanctification, and do good works for all to see. That's the fruit that's being described. This is what the Bible does in your life. It doesn't make you rich, it makes you grow. It doesn't give you financial prosperity, it helps you go deeper into things of God and make progress in your sanctification.

In Matthew 7:15, if you remember that verse, Jesus gave a similar idea when he said that "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." If you notice, he didn't say you'll know them by just their Bible reading, because false prophets can do that. And he didn't say you'll know them by their meditation because they can do that as well; false prophets can know a lot about Scripture. But he says you will know them by the things

that come out of their lives, and that's what this is describing. The same verse says that people do not pick grapes from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles. And the logic there is simple. And that is that if it's a grapevine, it produces grapes. And if it's a thorn bush, it makes thorns. And in a similar way, a Christian makes fruit of the Spirit. The Bible goes in, the Bible goes out. The Word of God settles in his soul and sprouts out for all to see.

Which brings you to another characteristic of a man who does all this, and that is that he is not like chaff. A fourth characteristic of a man who loves his Bible is that he's not like chaff, which means that he's not fickle. And if you notice that the next verse here, it starts a new paragraph in your Bibles to show you that the author is making a transition from the first part of the psalm to the second, to talk about a different topic that's related. And he says this in verse four, "The wicked or not so." in other words, so far, he's been describing the righteous man, now he'll describe the wicked. And up to this point, he's been telling you what the person is like who reads his Bible and does what it says. But now he's going to talk about the person who does not do that. When he says, "The wicked are not so but they're like chaff which the wind drives away." He's saying that to make a comparison to this image of a tree, because whereas a tree stands, the chaff doesn't. Chaff just blows everywhere. And whereas the tree is planted, the chaff is not planted; it has no roots in the ground. Whereas a tree makes good fruit, the chaff doesn't do that. Whereas the tree is stable, the chaff isn't stable, and on and on, because it serves no purpose except to be discarded.

And the word chaff here it's a Hebrew word, that's another farming term. It refers to the husks or shells or pods that are left over after you harvest a wheat field. Because the way it worked back then is when they harvested grain, a farmer would go through his field with a sickle, which was a large curved blade, so that he could mow it down by swinging it back and forth chopping down the wheat. Then another farmer would come along behind him in order to take all the wheat and bind it into bundles before taking it to the threshing floor in the barn, which was a flat surface where they would take sticks in order to separate the edible part of the plant from the rest of it. Sometimes when that didn't work, and the wheat didn't come off right away through the beating, they would go through another process called winnowing where they would wait around for a little while and let the wheat get old before taking it outside and tossing it into the air so that the husks or the chaff could just blow away with the wind. The Bible says the wicked are like that. They're like the part of a plant that just blows away with the wind. You just throw them up in the air and they just dissipate because they have no foundation at all. The Bible doesn't mean anything to them. So when the world says let's do something, they just do it. And when the culture says let's sin, they just sin. They don't think about it, they don't ponder it., they don't talk about it, they just give in and it feels good to them. I like it. Many of you were like that before you became a Christian, so you can identify with this. But if someone asks you, "Why did you do that?" You would say, "I don't know." And they turned to you and said "Why? Why do you sin like that? Why are you proud like that? Why are you angry like that?" You'd say, "I have no idea." You're not lying. You're just chaff. It's a really sad description here, isn't it? But it's accurate.

I just told you that Yale University did a seminar on the subject of happiness during the COVID-19 time. And the ironic thing is they did they didn't know how to get it. But I didn't tell you that another major university did a similar survey several years ago, when they asked some of the major thinkers of the 20th century, "What is the meaning of life?" And they had the same response. They had no idea. They asked Leonard Bernstein; he had no idea. They asked T.S. Eliot; he had no idea. They asked Aldous Huxley; he had no idea. They asked Bertrand Russell; he had no idea. Why? Well, because they're like chaff. They're smart chaff, but they're chaff. They're very brilliant men, but even though they appeared to be wise, they're fools in the things of God. Which should break your heart. This is where the majority of people are out in the world today.

And that leads to the next part of the passage, which is just as tragic in verse five, because it says, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." They don't stand for God in this life, they're not going to stand up in the next one. When it says "therefore" here, it means therefore this is what will happen to the wicked as a result of their chaff like behavior, they won't stand on Judgment Day. And that doesn't mean they won't face Judgment Day. And it's not telling you they won't appear before the throne of God to give an account for their sins. It's telling you that when they do so, they won't have anything to say for themselves because they're wicked. The word "wicked," it's repeated twice in this section for emphasis. It's repeated more than that in the psalm. But you see it in verse four, and again in verse five, to remind you that this is how God looks at those who are like chaff. He sees them as evil. They're not misunderstood, they're evil. They're not innocent, He's going to send them to hell. That's what farmers did with chaff. They burned it. They would go through their field after they would do the winnowing or threshing, or they would go through the barn and all that and they would put it into a pile and just light it on fire. It served no purpose to them. In a similar way, the Psalmist says the Lord will do that for those who have rejected Him because of their sin.

I'll never forget the time one of the preachers at the Shepherds Conference kind of shocked us when he said, "What do you have to do to go to hell? Nothing. Do absolutely nothing, and you will go to hell." Why? Because you're already going there. If you're without Christ, you're already headed in that direction. You don't have to do anything special to get to hell, just be the sinner you are without any salvation. It's not the way most people think about this, is it? Most people think you have to do something drastic, like murder somebody or act like Adolf Hitler to go to hell. But the truth is that you don't, all you have to do is be chaff because there's only two types of people in this passage. There's the righteous and the wicked. There's the trees and the chaff. And the chaff relates to anyone who hasn't trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Let me tell you something friends, I don't know where everyone's at this morning, but you may not be as bad as Adolf Hitler, but that doesn't matter. You're still bad enough to go to hell on your own if you're without the Lord because you've sinned, and you've failed, and you've fallen short of the glory of God. I mean, how many lies have you told? You don't remember. You could be five years old; you won't remember how many lies you've told. And how many times have you stolen something regardless of its value? How many times have you coveted, and

blasphemed, and sworn, and gotten angry? You don't even know; you've been doing it since you were born. And that's why the Lord will punish you. But that's also why God has given you the Lord Jesus Christ, to show you grace.

The Bible says Jesus never sinned. Where you did these wicked things, He did none of them. Where you failed, He never failed. And with His perfect life, He allowed the Father to punish Him on the cross for the sins of everyone who would believe in Him, so that you could be forgiven and avoid this judgment. The psalmist doesn't go into all of that here because he's writing before Christ came, but we're living after Christ came; we can talk about that. You have mercy in the Saviour.

And it brings us to one more characteristic of a man who loves his Bible to finish off with. Just to review these other ones, the first one is that he's blessed. Second, his delight is in the law. Thirdly, he's like a tree. Fourthly, he's not like chaff. And then fifthly, here's one more. For a man who loves his Bible, the Psalmist says, the Lord will know him.

A fifth characteristic of a man who loves his Bible is that the Lord knows him. Which means that this is the reason why He rescues us from hell, and that is because we have a personal relationship with Him. And as you come to the end of the psalm, you can tell the author's wrapping things up, because he mentions the righteous and the wicked one more time. In order to say this in verse six, "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." Now, that may sound a little unusual to you when you read this, because you might be wondering, "Well, of course the Lord knows the way of the righteous because He knows everything. He's omniscient. So why is he saying this here? That doesn't make a lot of sense." Well, it does make sense, because the word "know" is the Hebrew word *yada*. And it means to know something on an intellectual level, but in the context, it also means to know them in a personal way and understand them relationally like one friend to another. If you want to write this verse down, but in Genesis 4:1, the same word is used to say that Adam knew his wife, and she conceived and bore a son. And that doesn't mean that he knew her like a book or something you would read in a dictionary, he knew her as his spouse. He had a personal investment in her life that went beyond just a simple acquaintance. And the psalmist uses that to say, God does the same thing with us if you're saved, because He knows our way. Our way means the way that we go in life, whatever it may be. He knows our way on Saturday night. He knows our way on Sunday morning. He knows our way on Monday, He knows our way on Tuesday. He knows our way when we go to work. He knows our way when we come home. He knows all these things about us.

But on the other hand, He doesn't have that relationship with the wicked, because it says, "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." When it says that the wicked's way will perish. I looked it up and found this is another very multifaceted word in Hebrew, because it can be translated a lot of ways. It can be rendered to say that the way of the wicked will vanish or disappear or evaporate in the cloud of smoke. Because when they die, nobody will remember them. You can think of some of the greatest men in history, like Genghis Khan, who remembers Genghis Khan

anymore? Or some of the most amazing individuals like Julius Caesar, who talks about that today? Because the way of the wicked will perish. It could also be rendered to say that their way will be destroyed or exterminated because God will send them to hell. One author said that you could say the way of the wicked will be erased, because the Lord will take out His pencil and block them out from the pages of history. One commentator summed this up well, when he said that one of the most striking effects of this verse is that it reminds us that at the Last Judgement, there will be a perfect separation between every soul on earth, the righteous will go to one side of the throne, and the wicked will go to the other. Here in this life, the righteous and the wicked live together, they're protected by the same laws, they live in the same city, they frequent the same restaurants and shops and stores and places of business. And yet on this final day, all that will be finished permanently. And the point is that when it does, if you're with the Lord, you will be on the right side of the separation. And it will only happen simply by the grace of God.

This chapter closes on a tender note because remember, it starts off by saying "How blessed is the man" in verse one. And now it tells you why he is blessed, and it's simply because God knows him, and loves him, and cares about him with this type of affection. It's not because he's worthy, because he's not. And it's not because he deserves it, because he doesn't. And it's not because he's a good person, because he's not a good person. We were all like chaff at one time. The only reason you're blessed like this is simply on the basis of love. That's the message of the Bible at the end of the day. And that is that God loves sinners even though they don't deserve it. Even though they've sinned, He still chooses to forgive them if they believe. It happened in the days of Israel. It happens in the days of the Church, which means that if you want to know more about the love of God, today, there's a simple way to do it. And that is to read your Bible. And if you want to learn more about His grace and mercy, it's not that hard to do; just take out the book and see what it says. Or come back to our church and study it with us. It's a major theme of our ministry.

In fact, if you're wondering what this looks like in the life of our church, you can look at the back of your bulletins and see that we have a 2023 calendar on there. And it shows us how we're going to be teaching the Word of God this year through the ministries of grace, because we're going to be teaching it on Sunday mornings, and our care groups and home Bible studies that meet all throughout the week. So you can learn the word of God personally and talk about it in an intimate setting. We're going to be doing it in our youth group, and young adult group, and children's ministry. We're going to be studying the Word of God when Carl Hargrove joins us in a few weeks for the Principles for a Healthy Church conference. We'll be doing it at Shepherd's Conference after that, and the Women's of Grace events and the backyard Bible Clubs, and on and on and on. But everything we do is built on the Word of God here as a church.

I remember some time ago when I was in seminary, we had an opportunity to do a Q&A session with John MacArthur, where he opened up the floor for questions from the student body. And I got to ask him the first thing that popped into my head when I walked on the campus, and that is that, "Did you

plan on the church getting this big? Because when you first started, there was only a couple hundred people here in the 60s. Now there's thousands of people. Did you plan on that?" And he said, "No. We just preached the Bible, and they came." He said, "When I first began to pastor, the Jesus Movement was in full swing, and the hippies were getting saved in the 60s and 70s. And the word started passing from one to another, that if you go to that church, they'll teach you the Bible." He said, "It was so crowded at times that I would preach and there was no room in the pews; so the people would sit on the floor like they used to do in the 70s." I mean, if you remember that, "in their jeans with no shoes on, long hair. Because we taught the Scripture and God blessed us." That's what we want to see as our church. We want God to bless us as He sees fit as we teach the Word of God. Can you think of a better New Year's resolution than that? I can't. So let's pray for the Lord to help us and show us grace as we do that together. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank You for Your Word, and the blessings that we've read in this psalm. Lord, we all want to receive these things. We all want to be like the righteous man in here. He was like a tree, planted, firm, stable, consistent, at rest, content. Lord all those words are words we want to describe us, and yet they only come from one thing and that's Your word. Help us to apply it to our lives as a church. Help us to work on the ministries of the church so that they build us up in this area.

Lord, thank You for saving us. Thank You for Your kindness and showing grace and mercy to sinners like us, that we can show grace to others. But at the same time, Lord, we want to continue this commandment that we've laid out in our vision. Would you help us do that? Father?

Thank You for Grace Fellowship for the good things You've done this past year. It's amazing to look at all the pictures and hear the testimonies and think of how Your hand sovereignly orchestrated all these things. Lord, no one gets saved without You. No one grows in sanctification without Your mercy. No one moves from a chaff to a tree without the power of the Holy Spirit. This is all about You. The work of the church is simply based on Your kindness to act in the lives of your people. We pray You would do that in 2023 and that Your name will be glorified as a result of it. I pray this in Jesus' name for His glory. Amen.