

Psalm 1
Summer in the Psalms
Week #1: Psalm 1

Scripture

Psalm 1:1-6

The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

1 Blessed is the man

*who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

³ *He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

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

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

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

Review

Let's walk through this Psalm line by line, and layer by layer.

Motivation

There are many layers to Psalm 1, and I cannot possibly cover them all in a single message. Instead, I will focus on three specific layers, corresponding to the three sections of this Psalm:

- 1. The Good Life**
- 2. People are Fruit Trees**
- 3. Jesus as the Tree of Life**

One quick disclaimer before we start; **deeper** does not necessarily mean **truer**.

What we find as we peel back the layers of the Psalms is not *truer* or *more important* than what we first saw on the surface. One thing that has always concerned me about church-culture is our obsession with the word *deep*.

We have created a system in which we think that “deeper” means “better” Bible study. This is clearly not what Jesus teaches.

He is constantly confronting those who knew the Bible the best in His culture, and exposing them for missing the simpler truths. In fact, He calls us to receive the Kingdom *like a child* (Mark 10:13-16).

Perhaps we should be reminded that the pinnacle of our faith is not to understand all the hidden mysteries of the Scriptures, but rather to fully grasp the one simple truth which the entire Bible is pointing us to—the *good news* of Jesus Christ’s finished work on the cross for our salvation.

Layer 1: The Good Life

Much of our lives are spent dreaming of “the good life”. We make decisions based on what will take us one step closer to our definition of the good life. The people we choose to spend time with, the work we choose to do, where we choose to live, and even how we choose to present ourselves all are rooted in our pursuit of the good life.

We convince ourselves that the good life is out there somewhere waiting for us to just make the right moves to reach it. The picture that comes to our minds when we think of the good life is telling about what we value.

The Scriptures paint us two pictures of two distinct ways of life in just six short verses.

- One is the image of a rooted, flourishing tree with access to all the nutrients it needs to produce healthy fruit.
- The other is the image of the waste produced from harvesting the fruit of a healthy crop. Isn’t that interesting?

The two lives portrayed are one of fruitfulness, or one of waste.

The call of Psalm one is this: your life is an opportunity—*don’t waste it*.

The first word of the Psalm is “Blessed”

1 Blessed is the man

Right from the beginning of this Psalm we are forced to strip back our cultural understanding of the word and place ourselves instead in the context of the Psalmist.

There are two Hebrew words that are commonly translated in our Bibles as “Blessed”

- **bāruḥ** (בָּרוּךְ pronounced: bah-rook’)
- **ashrei** (אַשְׁרֵי pronounced: ah-shray)

Where *baruch* focuses on blessing as *an action* that produces provision, *ashrei* describes the *condition* of being blessed—the state of flourishing that results from God’s favor.

In other words, this Psalm is not telling us the formula to earn God’s action of *blessing* us, this Psalm is describing the Good, fulfilling, and flourishing life the righteous man lives.

The chosen image for this picture of flourishing is **A Tree**

We’ll revisit that image shortly.

1 Blessed is the man

*who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

In this first layer it is apparent that the righteous man **avoids** harmful influences from the world which threaten his flourishing.

Most commentators note the progression:

Walking → Standing → Sitting

The draw into the world is never immediate, but rather a slow fade as we become more and more accustomed to the ways and reasoning offered to us.

Even the hardness of the heart increases in severity...

Wicked (all are born wicked by nature) →

Sinners (giving in and consciously acting on our wicked desires) →

Scoffers (mocking wisdom calling it folly, and jeering at the righteous)

But this man not only avoids swimming in the lies of the world, but offsets them by baptising his mind in the Truth

² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

This is what Paul is talking about in Romans when he says...

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Ro 12:1–2.

Focus in

² but his **delight** is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he **meditates** day and night.

To delight, and to meditate are two words that we don't often associate with each other.

- To **delight** - we think to be happy, to feel good, feel drawn towards
- To **meditate** - we think to be still, quiet, maybe contemplative, dare I say **bored**?

But the more we think about it, perhaps the two are not so entirely disconnected.

Let's look at these two elements more closely today: (Delight and Meditation)

We all **delight in something...**



Westminster's Shorter Catechism

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to **glorify** God, and to enjoy Him forever. (read: **delight** in Him)

- To delight in **God** maybe I can understand, but **His law**?
 - Today we are no longer under the burden of the law thanks to the fulfilment of the Law by Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf on the cross, but when this was written, **the Psalmist certainly was under the law.**
 - We think of the Law as **restrictive**, a list of things that we *can't* or *shouldn't* do, but the Psalmist saw it as a **delight**.
 - They thought of it as life giving instruction (*Torah*)

⁹⁷ Oh how I **love** your law!

It is my **meditation** all the day.

Ps 119:97.

To delight in something requires **giving myself to the object of my delight.**

- **The Steak Theory** - A young child does not understand the delight of a delicious steak, They would prefer a chicken nugget
- Ever give a dog a steak? They eat it the exact same way as they eat garbage...

■ **I delight in them as I partake in them** and my understanding increases

Likewise, we are all meditating on something...

The Hebrew word for meditate is **hagah** and it is used elsewhere to describe gnawing on a bone or the cooing of a dove

hagah (הָגָה pronounced: ha-gah)

We all make choices every day on what we chew on, ponder, consider, study, and think about, and internalize.

- ***It is all shaping you into a certain kind of person.***

These two feed each other...

I like the phrase the Bible Project uses when describing this, calling it an **infinity loop**.

I delight in what I meditate on → the more I meditate on something, the more I delight in it.

That is why Paul says in **Philippians 4:8**

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

“As Mary “pondered...in her heart” what the shepherds told her, as a person’s words often stick in our mind for a long time—as they dwell and work within us, preoccupy us, disturb us, or make us happy without our being able to do anything about it—so as we meditate, God’s Word desires to enter in and stay with us. It desires to move us, to work in us, and to make such an impression on us that the whole day long we will not get away from it. Then it will do its work in us, often without our being aware of it.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

So what are we missing? Why don’t we have this same sense of appreciation for the Word of God as the saints before us?

- It’s usually not because we don’t recognize the importance of it, rather it is because we are **distracted** by other things, even other good things!

***** Distraction is the enemy of delight *****

- Have you ever eaten your food so fast because you were multi-tasking and then asked yourself “*Where did the rest of my sandwich go?*”
 - *You didn’t enjoy it - you just consumed it...*

- Maybe you've experienced a day off completely ruined by your inability to stop stressing about something you have to do the next day.
- Maybe you've been out a restaurant and witnessed a couple on a date completely **distracted** by their phones instead of delighting in each other
 - Or worse, maybe you've BEEN that couple...

Distraction is the enemy of delight

We would be wise to remember Mary and Martha in their time with Jesus in **Luke 10:38-42**.

Mary, of course, chose to sit at Jesus feet and delight in Him...

⁴⁰ **But Martha was *distracted* with much serving.**

Pete Scazzero in the book, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality said

"Martha's problems go beyond her busyness. I suspect that if Martha were to sit at the feet of Jesus, *she would still be distracted* by everything on her mind."

- Pete Scazzero, Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

Let's Pause her for a second:

Does this sound like you?

- Do you struggle to be consistent in your devotional life?
- Do you constantly wage war in your mind about it?
- Wrestling with lack of motivation and desire when it comes time for it, and then wrestling guilt for not doing it as you ought?
- Then when you do finally convince yourself to sit down and open the Bible, is your delight squelched by all the distractions?
- Or perhaps you are the one who actually is consistent in your daily devotional, but you see no fruit from it

You are not alone...

I suspect that much like Martha, the issue is not that you don't love Jesus, but that you have not yet found the Joy of simply being in His presence.

It isn't all about what we do—it's about becoming more aware of what He is doing...

For us,

In us,

With us,

And Through us.

The distractions will always be there - you have to choose to sit at His feet to find the Joy He offers there

11 You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence **there is fullness of joy**;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
Ps 16:11.

Peter says to Jesus... **“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...” John 6:68**

Layer 2: People are Fruit Trees

³ *He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

Fun Fact:

Other than God and people, the Bible mentions trees more than any other living thing.

The Hebrew word is **ets**. - which can be anything from a tree, a shrub, a branch, a stick, or a root.

ets (עץ pronounced *aytz*)

In the KJV the words “tree, leaf, branch, root, fruit, and seed” occur **967 times** (not counting specific tree names such as terebinths, figs, oaks, sycamores, willows, acacias, brooms, tamarisks, and olive.

Nearly every significant theological event in the Bible is marked by a tree (*ets*) in some way, and nearly every major character in the Bible appears in conjunction with a (*ets*) tree of some sort.—once you start looking for it, it’s easy to spot.

ONLY IF THERE IS TIME - VERY QUICKLY!

Trail of Trees:

OT

- Adam and Eve - Trees in the garden (**Gen. 2:9**)
- Noah - Builds an ark of gopher wood, and received the olive leaf
- Abraham - dined with God under “the oaks of Mamre”
- Joseph - is straight up called a “fruitful Tree”
- Moses - stood barefoot before the burning bush, and wielded a wooden staff
- Aaron - was proven to be the chosen priest of the Lord by his budding staff
- David made provisions of special cedar trees from Lebanon to build a house (The Temple) for the Lord, but God was building David a house instead.

- Solomon was the first arborist and was said to “speak of trees” both great and small
 - ³³ *He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall.*
(1 Ki 4:33)
- Elijah sits under the broom tree and is restored by God
- In the Proverbs we are told that “*she (wisdom) is a “tree of life” to those who lay hold of her (Prov 3:18)*”
- In the Psalms we are told that the man who meditates day and night on the word of God is “like a fruitful tree” rooted by streams of water - never drying up. (Psalm 1)
- Isaiah and many other prophets - constantly use tree imagery in their messages of hope
- Or if they want to describe how bad things are or will be, they will use the imagery of a dried up fruit tree like in Joel 1:12.

NT

- Nathaniel was seen by God sitting under the fig tree
- Zacheous - climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus
- A blind man sees people as “walking trees” in Mark 8:24
- The Disciples gather together on the “Mount of Olive trees” Luke 22:39
- Paul says in his letters that christians are like “branches” grafted into the “tree” of the family of Israel (Romans 11:16-21)
- Jesus declares that the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that grows into a great tree (Matt 13:31-32)
- Jesus tells us that He is the *Vine*, and tells us that we are the *branches*
- Jesus cursed a fig tree
- Jesus of course was hung on a tree (1 Peter 2:24)
- Then after Jesus resurrected, he was mistaken for a gardener... (come on) (John 20:15)
- Paul tells us in Galatians that we are to cultivate the “fruit of the Spirit”
- We see the Tree of life again in Revelation 22
- And Jesus' last “I am” statement in the Bible is “*I am* the root and the descendent of David.” Rev. 22:16

We are planted to bear fruit

The Psalmist tells us that People are trees, and Jesus agrees

Who enjoys the fruit of a tree?

Other creatures, not the tree itself.

Burt, my banana tree, will never produce bananas...

...very disappointing...

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

Useless. A waste of potential. Frustrating.

- What we meditate upon determines where our roots grow
- What our lives produce (our fruit) is evidence of what we are rooted in

Mt 7:15–20

A Tree and Its Fruit

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their **fruits**. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus **you will recognize them by their fruits**.”

This Fruitfulness will manifest itself in 3 ways:

1. Internal Character

a. Ga 5:22–23.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

2. External Obedience

a. Mt 22:36–40.

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

3. Practical Effectiveness

a. James 2:15–17.

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

It is possible to neglect one or more these areas of fruitfulness, convincing ourselves we are growing more than we really are.

- **The Pharisees** - scored high in external obedience, but failed miserably in the areas of internal character and practical effectiveness thereby revealing that they were not actually healthy trees!

Layer 3: Christ as the Tree of Life

⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

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

By the time we reach this third layer, we are scratching our chins...

it becomes apparent that no man on earth is truly like this tree as described...

If we are honest with ourselves, even on our best days we feel much more like a scrubby *bush* than a flourishing *tree*.

Who then is *the man* whom this Psalm is describing?

It is only Christ.

Only He is the blessed man who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Who truly meditates and delights day and night on the law of the Lord,
Who truly IS a rooted tree of life, unmovable, unshakable, giving life, shelter, fruit, and nourishment to all who would take shelter in Him
Who's way is truly known and approved by the Lord
Who truly prospers in all He does.

This is the man. This is Christ.

I want you to consider something for just a moment...

What if God *designed trees specifically* to teach us about how we are to relate to Him and to others...

...So that every single day we would have before our eyes a living metaphor for **life In Christ**.

The most common way to describe a follower of Jesus in the NT is "In Christ"

Perhaps that is why all of the metaphors and analogies in the Scriptures are just so perfect, they were intentionally designed to be so.

- It made sense in Adam's day, It made sense in Jesus' day, and it still makes sense today
- From the dawn of creation, It is the lesson forever right in front of us
- Every apple we bite into, every tree we climb or sit under...
 - **It is the Gospel sermon we cannot escape**

He is the True Vine, the Tree of Life - we are the branches

The most used phrase for a "christian" in the early church was "In Christ".

Only as we are **in Him** are we blessed, able to live, to flourish, to be fruitful, to thrive. Apart from Him I am deadwood.

Jn 15:1-6

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

In Close

Here is where we complete the circle back to the first two layers.

Remember I said that it becomes painfully obvious that we can never truly become like this tree.

In what way could I ever truly become like a rooted and perpetually fruitful tree?

I cannot—**except** that by my faith in Christ Jesus work on my behalf...

As I am *in Christ*, it is no longer I who live, but Christ in me. His righteousness is imputed to me (or put on me), and God now sees me only **through** the blood of Christ.

In other words; Christ **is** the Tree of Life, and if I am in Him and He is now in me - then I am like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in its season and his leaf does not wither.

Not because I studied enough, or mediated long enough, or said no to sin enough, or said yes to being helpful enough, or carried my cross well enough...

**To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
For my life is wholly bound to His
Oh, how strange and divine, I can sing, "All is mine"
Yet not I, but through Christ in me**

Yet not I, but Christ through me.

This is the first Psalm.

Pray to Close