



Sunday, July 26, 2026 - Planted by the River – Pastor John Henry Raskin

Key Scripture: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.” — Psalm 1:3

The blessed life is not accidental; it is rooted in Christ. Jesus is the truly righteous Tree—perfectly planted, fruitful, and unwithered—and He is also the One who plants us in Himself so that His life becomes our source, strength, and fruitfulness.

Main Takeaways

- Where you are planted matters. Psalm 1 contrasts the way of the righteous with the way of the wicked; the direction of our lives is shaped by what we listen to, where we stand, and who we sit with.
- Jesus is the righteous Tree and the life-giving Vine. Psalm 1 points to the blessed person who never withers; Jesus fulfills that picture perfectly. In John 15, He also says, “I am the vine; you are the branches,” showing that we bear fruit only as we abide in Him.
- Christ plants other trees in Himself. We do not root ourselves by willpower. By grace, Jesus draws us to Himself, establishes us near living water, and makes us fruitful through union with Him.
- God’s Word is the river that nourishes the soul. Delight and meditation in Scripture keep our roots deep and our hearts alive because the Word leads us to Christ.
- Fruit comes in season. Spiritual growth is not always instant, but a rooted life will bear fruit at the right time.
- Leaves that do not wither point to endurance. A planted believer can remain faithful through pressure, drought, disappointment, and change.
- Prospering means living aligned with God. True blessing is not merely success; it is a life sustained by Christ and useful for His purposes.

Personal Reflection

1. What voices, habits, or influences are shaping the direction of my life?
2. Am I merely near God’s Word, or am I delighting in it and meditating on it?
3. Where do I need God to deepen my roots so I can remain steady in a dry season?
4. Am I trying to produce fruit for Jesus, or am I abiding in Jesus so His life produces fruit through me?
5. What kind of fruit is God calling me to bear in this season?

This Week’s Practice

Read Psalm 1 each day. Choose one verse to meditate on, then ask: *Lord, where are You planting me, and what do You want to grow in me?*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You are the righteous Tree, the true Vine, and the One who plants us in Yourself. Root me deeply in Your life, teach me to abide in Your Word and love, and bear fruit through me that blesses others and honors the Father. Amen.

PLANTED BY THE RIVER

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Several weeks ago we learned about the sacrifices that God truly desires from His people.

That we consider the poor among us not as a ministry project, but simply as our own flesh.

We saw that Abundant Life Church is a table where people, those with much and those with much less, become family sharing the Bread of life together.

The scriptures tell us that everyone who believes is a son or daughter of God by our position in Christ.

Each of us, however, is on an individual journey with Jesus as we walk through our lives on earth led by His Spirit.

Today we are going to explore the first Psalm.

We don't know who wrote it, but it is an introduction, in many ways, to the entire Bible.

Before we knew Jesus, before we made that decision for Christ, we had a choice to make.

Will we choose evil or good? Darkness or Light? Chaos or order. Obedience to the Lord for His glory or rebellion against God for our own.

Even now, in Christ, as His children, we have a choice of which road we will walk.

We will make the choice day by day to obey, or to dismiss the prompting of His Spirit.

Every one of us, this morning, is already on a road.

That is the first thing Psalm 1 wants you to know before it tells you anything else.

The Bible's very first psalm does not begin with a doctrine.

It does not begin with a command.

It begins with a beatitude.

It begins with a blessing pronounced on a man who is walking, and standing, and sitting in a particular way — and a warning pronounced on everyone who is not.

Listen to how it opens.

Psalm 1:1

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.

Three verbs. Walking. Standing. Sitting. Do you see the picture?

This is not three separate sins. This is one descent, in three stages.

First, you walk alongside the counsel of the wicked, you're just listening, keeping company, considering their point of view.

Then you stop and stand in the path of sinners. Now you've stopped moving;

you're settling into their way as a kind of home base. Hanging out in the well-worn paths of those who are miserable and love company.

And finally, you sit down in the seat of the scornful — you are not merely near rebellion against God, you are enthroned in it. You have become one of them.

You have made yourself comfortable there.

That is how every compromise in your life and mine has ever worked.

It begins with a walk. A friendship. A habit of listening to a certain kind of voice, reading a certain kind of thing, indulging in a certain provocative blog, entertaining a certain kind of company.

And if it is not resisted, walking then becomes standing, and standing becomes sitting, and one day you discover you have built a permanent residence in the very seat the psalm warns you against.

And before we go one step further, I want you to feel the weight of something: this psalm was placed first in the entire Psalter — the prayer book of God's people — on purpose.

Whoever arranged these one hundred and fifty psalms wanted the very first thing you read, before you ever got to a single prayer of anguish or a single song of praise, to be this: there are two ways to live, and only one of them ends in blessing.

Now look at what the blessed man is described as doing, positively, in verse 2:

Psalm 1:2

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Now I want to point out here that the word that is used for law is not just the law of Moses, but it is the entirety of the scriptures.

The Hebrew word is Torah... and it literally means “teaching”, “instruction” or “direction”.

Simply put Torah is what God wants you to know.

What does this verse say Torah is to the blessed man?

Two things.

His delight — not duty, not obligation, but delight, the way you delight in something you love.

And meditation — Unlike modern western concepts of meditation which often imply emptying the mind or quiet silent contemplation, biblical meditation is an active vocal practice.

The Hebrew word for meditation here is “hagah” which literally means to murmur, mutter or speak softly to oneself.

To “hagah” is a kind of quiet, repeated chewing-over of the Word, turning it over and over until everything nutritious has been drawn out of it.

I encourage you to be honest with yourself in the face of this Psalm...

Can you say honestly that you “delight in God’s Word and that you meditate on it every moment, day and night”?

Not “I try to”, or “I’m working on it”... but can you really say, this is simply true of me, that my delight is in God’s Word and I meditate on it constantly?

If I am honest, I can’t say that and I suspect that you can’t either.

The next verse describes what a person’s life should look like when they do that.

Psalm 1:3

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.

Every season, fruit.

Every season — not just the easy ones, not just spring and summer, but the hard seasons too — fruit.

Their leaf never withers. Not once.

Not in the drought, not in the long winter, not in the years when everything in your life seems to be dying around you.

I want to be very honest with you about something.

When I read that description — fruit in every season, a leaf that never withers, no failure, no compromise, total and uninterrupted delight in God's law...

I do not see myself in that mirror.

I feel convicted. And if you look honestly, so do you.

There has been a winter in your life where the leaf withered.

There has been a season where you bore no fruit at all, or worse, fruit you're ashamed of.

Psalm 1 does not flatter us. It holds up a standard, and it lets the standard do its necessary work of showing us exactly where we stand.

This is not unique to Psalm 1.

Centuries later the apostle Paul would reach back into this very book of Psalms and write, in Romans chapter 3: **Romans 3:10–11**

There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.

Paul is not inventing a new doctrine. He is reading the Psalms the way they were meant to be read — as a mirror that exposes us before it ever comforts us.

Let me make this concrete, because it is easy to nod along to a description like this and never actually feel it.

Think of an orchard you have seen — maybe one you have tended yourself.

In a good year, every tree in it looks roughly the same: green, full, healthy.

But take that same orchard through a drought, a hard winter, a season of disease moving through the rows, and suddenly you see which trees had healthy roots and which ones didn't.

The trees with shallow roots are the first to brown at the edges, the first to drop their leaves early, the first to die.

The tree with roots reaching down to a hidden water table keeps its leaves green long after everything around it has gone brittle.

Psalm 1 is asking us a drought question, not a springtime question.

Not, 'do you look fine on an ordinary Sunday morning,' but, 'what happens to your faith in the driest, hardest season of your life?'

Now the psalm turns, in verse 4, to the other road.

Psalm 1:4

The ungodly are not so but are like the chaff which the wind drives away.

Chaff is the worthless husk that is separated from the grain on the threshing floor — weightless, rootless, with no substance of its own.

It doesn't even need to be thrown away. The wind simply takes it, because there was never anything in it to hold it down.

That is a sobering picture of a life built on anything other than God's Word — not necessarily a dramatically wicked life, just a rootless one.

A life with no real root system, drawing on no real water source, kept upright for a while by circumstance, by health, by good fortune, until the wind comes — and the wind always comes — and there is nothing underneath to hold the person in place.

And then the psalm ends in a courtroom:

Psalm 1:5-6

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.

Two roads, and only one of them survives contact with the judgment of God.

So here is where Psalm 1 leaves us, if we stop reading right here, if this is the whole story: a standard we cannot keep, and a judgment we cannot survive.

Fruit in every season — we have not borne it.

A leaf that never withers — ours has withered, more than once.

And a courtroom in which only the perfectly righteous may stand.

If Psalm 1 is the last word, then every one of us, on our own merits, is chaff.

That is not me being harsh with you this morning. That is simply what this psalm says, read honestly, on its own terms, before the gospel ever enters the picture.

But Psalm 1 is not the last word. It is the first word of a book that ends, fifteen hundred years of revelation later, with the cross and the empty tomb.

And when the New Testament writers went looking for someone who actually fulfilled Psalm 1

— someone whose delight in the Father’s will never wavered, who never walked in the counsel of the ungodly, who never sat in the seat of the scornful even while the scornful mocked Him from the very foot of His own cross — they found exactly one Man. Jesus.

Hebrews tells us He **was “tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).**

Peter tells us He **“committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth” (1 Peter 2:22).**

Jesus Himself could say what none of us can say: “I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8).

He did not approximate the blessed man of Psalm 1.

He was the blessed man of Psalm 1

— the only human being in the history of the world of whom it could be said, without exception, without a single withered season, that His delight was in the law of the Lord.

And here is where it gets wonderful.

Jesus does not merely fulfill Psalm 1 and leave the rest of us admiring Him from a distance, the way you might admire a painting you could never paint yourself.

He says this, in John chapter 15: **“I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5).**

Do you hear what He is doing? He is taking the very image of Psalm 1 — the tree planted by the water, bearing fruit, never withering — and He is saying, I am that tree.

And if you are joined to Me, grafted into Me, then My root system becomes your root system. My water becomes your water.

The fruit you could never produce on your own, you will bear, not because you have become someone else, but because you are now connected to Me.

This is the whole reason the Messiah had to come not simply as a teacher pointing at the tree and telling us to go grow one.

We had already tried. We had already failed.

He had to come to be the tree Himself — and then, by His Spirit, plant us in Himself, so that what was once an impossible standard becomes, in Him, a promised reality.

That is the gospel hidden in the very first psalm of the Bible.

And notice what this means for the courtroom scene at the end of verse 5 — “the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment.”

On our own record, none of us could stand there either.

But Paul tells us that God has taken the very righteousness of Christ — the unbroken, unwithering, all-season fruitfulness of the one true Tree

— and credited it to the account of everyone who trusts in Him:

2 Corinthians 5:21

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”.

When the day of judgment comes and the chaff is finally separated from the grain forever, the question will not be, ‘did your leaf ever wither?’

— because it did, and so did mine.

The question will be, ‘are you found in Him, the Tree who never withered at all?’

That is not a loophole in God’s justice.

That is the very center of it — a real penalty, fully paid, by a real Substitute, so that real sinners might be reckoned, genuinely and legally, as righteous in Him.

Now, somebody here this morning might hear all of that and think: so then none of it matters anymore — the delighting, the meditating, the fruit-bearing — since Christ has already done it for me.

Friends, that is not what the gospel teaches, and it is not what this psalm, rightly understood in light of Christ, teaches either.

Go back to the picture one more time.

The tree of Psalm 1 does not produce its own water. It does not dig its own well.

It is planted — someone else placed it there, deliberately, near a source it did not create and does not control.

And yet the tree still does the work of a tree. It still sends down roots. It still draws up water. It still, in its own proper way, bears fruit.

The water is a gift; the fruit-bearing takes application.

That is exactly the pattern of the Christian life that Psalm One exemplifies.

From the very beginning, in the garden, God placed the man in Eden “to tend and keep it” (Genesis 2:15).

We were never meant to be passive.

Work, cultivation, partnership with God in His world — that was the original design, long before sin ever entered the picture.

Sin did not erase that calling.

It corrupted the one called, so that the ground itself began to resist the laborer’s hand (Genesis 3:17–19).

The tragedy of the fall was never that God stopped wanting us to work alongside Him.

The tragedy is that we became the kind of people who wanted to do it on our own and could not do it without ruining it.

And that is precisely what Christ repairs.

Paul will later write to the church at Philippi,

Philippians 2:12b–13

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Read that sentence slowly.

Work out your own salvation — that is real, genuine, human effort, asked of you.

For it is God who works in you — that effort is sustained, the entire time, by a power that is not your own.

Both halves of that scripture are true at once. Neither cancels out the other.

So hear me this morning: meditating on God's Word, delighting in His ways, bearing fruit in every season of your life — none of that becomes unnecessary because Christ fulfilled Psalm 1.

It becomes possible, for the first time, because Christ fulfilled Psalm 1.

You are not asked to grow your own water supply and then produce fruit from it by sheer determination.

You aren't asked to be planted — That is the gift of God...

You are asked to stay rooted in Christ, by delighting in His Word, being sensitive and obedient to His Spirit

and bearing fruit, in cooperation with Him, season after season, leaf unwithering, because the root has finally found its true and everlasting water.

Let me make this practical for you...

What does it look like, this week, to be a tree planted by the river rather than a tree trying to manufacture its own rain in a desert place? It looks like opening the Word not as one more task on a list to clear your conscience, but as a branch returning to its root source -

expecting, actually expecting, that something real will be drawn up into you simply by staying near the River.

It looks like bringing your prayers honestly before God in the dry seasons — the seasons of grief, of weariness, of doubt — instead of pretending the leaf hasn't browned at all.

The tree does not pretend it is summer in the middle of winter.

It simply keeps its roots where they have always been and trusts the water that it cannot see is still reaching it underground.

And it looks like this: when fruit does appear in your life —

When you show kindness that you don't have to manufacture for someone in need you hardly know,

When you respond in patience that surprises you for an annoying co-worker or family member,

When you produce persevering faithfulness in a hard marriage or a hard job or a hard season of parenting —

Then you do not pat yourself on the back as though you grew the fruit from your own strength,

and you do not despair as though it must not be real because you didn't earn it through your own willpower and determination.

You simply recognize the sap moving, the Vine doing in you what you could never do alone, and you give Him the glory that fruit was always meant to give back to the source that grew it.

So let me bring this home and ask you the only question that finally matters this morning.

Psalm 1 began with a walk that became a stand that became a seat.

Where are you sitting right now?

Have you, almost without noticing it, settled into the seat of the scornful — cynical about the things of God, comfortable in a kind of low-grade contempt you'd never call by its real name?

Or have you found yourself, by grace and not by your own striving, planted — rooted, watered, held — in Christ, the only Man who ever truly bore the fruit this psalm describes?

If this morning you know that your own leaf has withered more times than you can count,

that the fruit of your life has too often been chaff and not grain...

hear the good news the rest of the Bible has been waiting to tell you since this very first page.

There is a Tree planted by the river of the water of life, and His name is Jesus, and He is not holding His fruitfulness over your head as a further accusation.

He is holding it out to you as a gift, an invitation to be grafted in, to let His roots become your roots, so that on the day of judgment, when the chaff is finally blown away forever, you will be found standing — not because you never withered, but because you were never your own tree to begin with.

You were His, planted in Him, kept by Him, all along.

Let's pray.