

Learning the Wisdom of Proper Delight

Shaped by the Psalms / Psalm 1

Introduction:

This week, we are beginning a new series titled “Shaped by the Psalms.” Through this series we will consider six common types of Psalms and how they shape our responses to God. Because all scripture is God breathed and useful to us, the Psalms are particularly valuable because they provide God inspired words for our hearts to pray and sing. I have personally turned to the Psalms often when I don’t know what to pray in various seasons of life, and they have provided great comfort and strength. We open this series with one of the wisdom Psalms, Psalm 1, whose wisdom begins and influences our reading of the Psalter. Some other wisdom Psalms are Psalm 37, 112 and 119. Wisdom Psalms instruct people in how to think and live in light of what we see in the world and know to be true of God. Commonly sharing language with wisdom literature like Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, they praise righteousness, condemn evil, and present a glorious hope that comes from heeding their wisdom. Psalm 1 rightfully stands at the beginning of the Psalter, as heeding its wisdom will lead us appropriately to the place where we can personally connect with the rest of the experiences of the psalmists. Let’s consider together the wisdom of this wonderful Psalm and seek to have its truths shape our lives. We are shown wisdom through two contrasting parts in verses 1-2. The first part shows that,

True and Lasting Happiness Will Never Come from the Ways of the World

Verses 1-2 present wisdom by way of a contrast between the right way to live and the wrong way to live. This contrast begins with a truth that draws our hearts in to listen carefully. Look at the first phrase in verse 1, “Blessed is the man.” The word for blessed is a rich word used twenty-six times throughout the Psalter, running from this opening verse all the way through to the final collection of Psalms of praise at the end. This term is hard to capture in English. Some translate this as “happy is the one,” which isn’t a bad translation, but the term covers more than simple happiness. It refers to being in a state of complete well-being and happiness, in the rich, full sense of happiness. “Blessed” is also plural in the Hebrew, so this is like saying “full and rich happinesses are to the one who...” Church, let this term sing to your heart and cause you to lean in and listen carefully to what comes next. Look again at verse 1, “who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.” The psalmist starts by emphasizing the negative to enforce the coming positive in verse 2. Three phrases form a progressive parallelism, building concepts on top of each other. Derek Kidner suggests these three phrases involve “the realms of thinking, behaving and belonging, in which a person’s fundamental choice of allegiance is made and carried through” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, 64). First, the blessed man doesn’t walk the advice of the wicked, heeding their foolish counsel. Second, he doesn’t stand in the path of sinners, acting like they act. Finally, he doesn’t sit with the scoffer, becoming comfortable in being just like them. Concluding with the seat of a scoffer points to the folly of scoffers constantly mentioned in the proverbs, who, in Proverbs 1:22, “delight in their scoffing,” “seek wisdom in vain” in Proverbs 14:6, are “an abomination to mankind” in Proverbs 24:9, and “set a city aflame” in Proverbs 29:8. This is never a place one wants to end up. Notice the subtle progression into deeper sin. What begins as only heeding counsel like, “Pursue your pleasure...God wants you to be happy,” becomes more habitual and your way of life starts to look no different the world around you, until the eventual point where you become comfortable in your sin and subtly (often inadvertently) scoff at God’s Word. Church, the schemes of the Satan are deceptive. He doesn’t tempt you first with the clear evil but lulls you to sleep through crafty counsel. The wisdom of this psalm is starting off by almost shouting, “don’t fall into the trap of the ways of this world, know ahead of time this will never produce true and lasting happiness.” The second piece of wisdom to hear is that,

True and Lasting Happiness Comes from Proper Delight and Meditation

The positive contrast speaks differently than we might expect. You might expect the psalmist to speak in terms that focus on actionable ways we should live. Yet, notice where the focus of verse 2 falls, “but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.” The focus of verse 2 is on the heart and mind. Similar to Romans 12:2, we are reminded that the way we think shapes our actions. Note, first, how each line speaks of the law of the Lord. The term is “torah” in the original language. This could be speaking of the commandments of God found in the law, the first five books of Moses, or simply the teaching or instruction of God. In one way, I think it involves all three options since the five books of Moses contain the commandments and instruction of the Lord, and also lay the foundation for the rest of the Bible. Therefore, we can faithfully conclude this involves all of God’s Word. Church, all of God’s Word is written for us to hear the teaching, commands, and instruction of God Himself. Next, we should note that the poetic structure of verse 2 communicates in two positive parallel lines that form one whole thought, showing that delight and meditation go hand in hand. We will come back to this point towards the end. For now, pay attention to the focus on the main truth that is shown to us, the happinesses we spoke of earlier belong to the one who both delights in and meditates on the teaching and instruction of God. True and lasting happiness comes from affections for, and time spent dwelling on God’s Word. And notice the emphasis on consistency, this should take place “day and night.” Charles Spurgeon says this man, “takes a text and carries it with him all day long; and in the night-watches, when sleep forsakes his eyelids, he museth upon the Word of God” (Charles H. Spurgeon’s Treasury of David). Note how the emphasis is not on your obedience to the Word at this point. We will discover that is in view, so this doesn’t mean obedience isn’t important, but, in wisdom, this psalm shows the fruit of obedience springs forth from proper delight in and meditation on the Word of God. Verses 3-6 show this by revealing the results of being someone with this proper delight and meditation. The first result is in verse 3, showing us that,

Proper Delight and Meditation Leads to Steady Fruitfulness

I have been praying all week that we can see the truth of verse 3 because it changed my life years ago when I first saw it. Look at verse 3 with me, “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.” This one with proper delight in and meditation on God’s Word is likened to a tree planted by streams of water. Those from the valley of California can understand the imagery, because you know what it is like for a fruit tree, or grape vine to not have sufficient water. Yet, when a tree is planted by streams of water, its roots are always connected to that valuable source of vitality. The psalmist then describes 3 things that comes from that connection. First, fruit is produced in season. Pay attention to that phrasing. What does it mean for fruit to be produced in season? Think of the growth cycle of a grapevine. Now, I am stepping out on a limb here because I only had time to look this up and couldn’t speak personally to a grower. So, if you are a grower, bear with me if I butcher this. The growth cycle typically involves five or seven stages depending on how you divide them up, dormancy, bud break, flowering, fruit set, veraison [veer-eye-son], and harvest. The grapevine goes through each stage to get to the point of harvest, but fruit only comes at harvest. Climate, weather, and grape variety can cause variations in the duration of them but the overall, the grape moves through a relatively quite but steady growth cycle. The grape is harvested and consumed in season. That is the imagery here, fruit is ready when its needed. The fruit is the fruit of righteousness, right living and proper responses to circumstances. Think about what this is saying. Proper delight and meditation on God’s Word produces what we need, when we need it. Consider this in relationship to the fruit of the Spirit. Love for the church, joy in life, peace in hardships, patience with difficult people, kindness toward others, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control comes when need to the one who delights in and meditates on God’s word. You don’t wait to go to the Word when you meet a particular season of life, you delight in and meditate on God’s Word to be prepared to produce fruit in any season. Second, the psalmist says it’s leaf won’t wither. When a tree doesn’t have enough water, living under the intensity of the sun, its leaf withers and wilts. When I arrived at GracePoint, I was given a plant for my office.

I warned the person that plant would likely die because I would forget to water it. It actually was doing pretty well until mid summer, shortly after Pastor Steve retired. It didn't take long to realize he was the one keeping it alive. I saw firsthand what a withered leaf looked like. What does it look like for our leaf to wither? Jeremiah 17:7-8 echoes the truths of this Psalm with some additional clarity, saying, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." Do you not want to fear when the trial hits you? Or not become anxious in those moments when you feel overwhelmed by long seasons of difficult? Anchor your trust in the Lord through delight in and meditation on His Word, day and night, and your leaf won't wither. Proper delight and meditation can keep us from crumbling under life's trials. Finally, verse 3 tells us this person prospers in all he does. We have to be careful here. While God can and does cause His people to materially prosper, the context and poetic structure of this passage points to a different kind of prosperity. Note first how it comes at the end of producing the fruit of righteousness and not wilting under trials. Church, if that is said of you, then you are a very prosperous person. Internal joy and peace in difficult times, and a life lived that honors God is great prosperity. Second, note how another contrast set up in verse 4, further defining this prosperity through the second result of proper delight and meditation, that,

Proper Delight and Meditation Leads to Everlasting Security

Psalm concludes by contrasting the wicked and righteous to help us see the lack of true and lasting happiness for those who forsake the greatest joy imaginable, God Himself. Notice the strength and imagery of verse 4, "The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away." The wicked are not like a tree planted with roots connected to water, but like dry straw fragments that the wind easily drives away. They do not yield fruit in season, their leaf does wither, and they are not prosperous. The imagery of chaff is often related to the final and future the judgment of God for sin throughout the prophets which connects to the conclusion in verses 5-6. Look there with me, "Therefore the wicked will 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 wicked will perish." Two main points are made through parallel lines. First, that the wicked and sinners will not be standing with God's people in eternity, but suffer under the weight of God's judgement, while the assembly of God's people enjoy His glory. Second, in verse 6, the reason for this is because the Lord knows the path of the righteous but the path of the wicked leads to destruction. To know, in the Hebrew is more than just knowledge of facts about something. It involves an intimate and personal care. The righteous are known by the Lord, He knows their ways and they kept secure and loved. The conclusion in verses 5-6 reveals that the ultimate prosperity of verse 3 is standing in the judgment and receiving the glory given to the saints forever. Do you see the results of proper delight and meditation? They are designed to spur your hearts towards seeking to delight in and meditate on God's Word. Now, before we concluded, I want to consider the important connection between delight and meditation and offer some practical ways to increase both in our lives. First, consider,

The Important Connection Between Delight and Meditation

Earlier, we noted how the parallel lines in verse 2 are completing one whole thought. Look at verse 2 again, "but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." The first line is the basis and the second line is the consequence. Delight leads to meditation. Here's the problem. Delight in God's Word is not something we can produce on our own. The natural tendency of our sinful hearts is to deny God's goodness and spurn His Word. We need something to transform our hearts for us to delight in His word. That comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The scriptures tell us that Christ died to secure the new covenant of God, which entails a change at the core of our being. When we place our trust in Jesus, God breathes new life into our hearts, giving us a desire and delight in Him that we would not have without His Spirit.

So, the first step to find true and lasting happiness is trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus to give you affections for God. Then, as that delight for God's Word is birthed in your heart, it leads you to meditate on God's Word. Here's the question, though. What if you have placed your trust in Jesus but you don't have delight for His Word? How can you increase that delight? The answer comes again from the connection of these parallel lines. As you consistently meditate on God's Word, delight in His Word will increase.

Therefore, if you are in Christ, your lack of delight comes from your lack of meditation on His Word. This leads an important question. What is Biblical Meditation? The Hebrew for "meditates" literally means "to mutter or speak." When done to ourselves, it is meditation. So, meditating on God's Word, day and night, at its most basic meaning, is speaking the Word of God to yourself all day long. Because we need to know it to speak it to ourselves, meditation involves reading and deeply thinking on the words and instructions of God presented to us through the pages of Scripture for understanding, application, and even prayer. Here are three simple and practical ways I have found to increase delight in and meditation on God's word. First,

1. Purposefully Read the Word

Don't set the bar at just reading the Bible. Seek to read it with purpose. As I have told our Monday evening class, good Bible study starts with good Bible reading. Listen to the difference from Psalm 23:1-3. Often, we read like this "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." What if we did this instead, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Sometimes it can help to read it out loud as though you are reading it to someone else and can't provide explanation. You can meditate on scripture by reading purposefully, which will lead to greater delight. Second,

2. Take time to Think on What You Read Throughout the Day

Don't finish once you are done reading, memorize some of what you read, or come up with a summary of what you read. Then, take moments when you would do something else like reading the news, or checking instagram or facebook, and think over on what you read in God's word instead. What would this look like? Maybe you read Psalm 1:1 and you take your lunch time to think about whether you have been entertaining ungodly counsel. Or you read Psalm 1:3 and think throughout the day on the fruit of the Spirit you would like to see in your life and how that could come from meditating more on God's Word. It seems so simple but how many times do we read something and then fail to think about it throughout the day? You can meditate on God's Word by thinking on what you read throughout your day and your delight in it will increase. Finally,

3. Pray Through What You Read

Psalm 1 opens the great prayer book of the Bible, calling us to meditate on God's Word before teaching us ways to pray. Taking what you read and turning it into prayer, helps you think more deeply on the truth and delight in it. Maybe you read a simple statement like I did this week from Psalm 18:30, saying, "This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him." You could pray something like, "God your ways are perfect and I have seen your word prove true time and time again. I know I can find help and security from any danger I face in you. Help me to run to you in my time of need." Praying the Word is one of my favorite ways to meditate on it, and this practice has increased my delight in it.

Conclusion:

Church, as the worship team is coming to lead us in an extended response to the word through song, let's lean into God's grace and ask how we should respond. Maybe He is calling you to meditate on His Word in this time. Perhaps He is calling you to see the danger of the counsel of the wicked you have been heeding, or turn from the sin you have been participating in to avoid becoming comfortable in it. Maybe He is calling

you to trust that true and lasting happiness is found in delighting in and meditating on His Word and calling you to seek to study it more. Whatever it may be, respond to His Spirit today. We will reflect through two songs and then see a baptism in a moment. You are encouraged to come and kneel before the Lord in humility, remain seated as long as you need, or stand and sing whenever you are ready. We also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you if that is what you need. You can find them worshipping on the front rows or at the bottom of the stairs in the back.

Will you pray with me as we move into this time of response?