



Psalm 1 What Affects My Thinking?

Summary: Am I intertwined with the sinners and scoffers of this world, or meditating on God's Word? These two inputs produce different outputs.

There are 150 Psalms in the Bible. They are songs that have been sung or read by people all over the planet, in numerous languages, under every conceivable circumstance, for nearly 2,500 years because, like all good songs, they touch upon the core issues of life. The things we can all understand.

This morning we're going to look at the very first Psalm – the opening act for the other 149 – and discover that it sets the tone for the rest of the book.

Psalm 1 tells us there are two ways to live, a way that leads to blessing, and a way that leads to perishing. It describes what each of those lives are like, what they involve, and what they produce, and it encourages us to meditate on God's Word as the navigational aid for life – the GPS for our soul.

In other words, Psalm 1 helps us remember that whether we're in a season of lament or a season of praise, life is headed somewhere. It has it's ups and it has it's downs, but it is headed somewhere – the question is where? Are we those who are blessed, or are we those who will perish?

Let's see what we can learn as we read

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

4 The ungodly *are* not so,
But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the ungodly shall 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 ungodly shall perish.

Right away we see these two ways to live – we open with *Blessed is the man* and we end with *But the way of the ungodly shall perish*.

These two ways, two approaches to life, two paths, coexist simultaneously on earth. They are taken by friends and neighbors, by family and co-workers, they're taken by people who play on the same sports teams or participate in the same clubs – two ways of life, headed to two different final destinations.

God wants us to know and understand this. It's foundational to life. As we saw last week, it helps us make sense out of life. We need to know that there are godly and ungodly people, righteous and unrighteous people and they coexist. In fact, at times, they influence each other.

Let's start by talking about the godly. *Blessed is the man* – the original Hebrew here is gender neutral so we could just as easily say the *Blessed is the woman*, or *Blessed are the people* who choose to spend time in God's Word instead of being influenced by the ungodly people in their lives.

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;*

These blessed men and women avoid becoming entangled with people and things that pull them away from God.

Notice the descent pictured here – it begins with the ungodly, that's kind of ambiguous – neither here nor there, just people without God. You know some people like this. They're not monsters, they seem like good people, perhaps even moral people, but *they don't worship God* – they have their own ideas about life, and they offer them to you – it's their counsel. Sinners are the next group, people known by their actions and attitudes. They do, say, and think things that are offensive to God, that are sinful, and that's their reputation.

And finally you have scoffers; these are people who openly mock outsiders. They know there is another way to live and they despise it. All three groups live without honoring God, but they go about it in different ways.

Notice too the downward trend of involvement with them. You start by walking in the counsel of the ungodly, adopting their ideas and attitudes. That's not hard to do in the world, we're all going about our lives, we're all walking across each other's paths, but the man or woman who is blessed avoids becoming linked too tightly with the ungodly, getting

in step or in sync with them, because they're not walking in the same direction long term.

Sooner or later the godly and the ungodly must part ways because they're not headed to the same destination in life. The apostle Paul warns Christians not to become yoked together with an unbeliever because you can't have two oxen who are headed in different directions sharing the same yoke; they're going to pull against each other at some point.

After walking with the ungodly comes standing with the sinners, and finally sitting with the scoffers. You get the picture of someone who is increasingly comfortable with ungodly company, and you get the picture of decreasing productivity – walking, standing, sitting.

That leads right into the illustration we're given of the lives of the blessed and the lives of the perishing. The man or woman who is blessed

Is 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.

Now, this is not a guarantee of financial prosperity – there are plenty of examples of righteous people who have suffered tremendously, even suffering for their faith in God. But there is a God who designed the world and the rules it operates by and when you're seeking Him and meditating on His Word, He's going to guide you into the paths of prosperity and fruitfulness that He designed. You're going to have better quality relationships, you're going to have better physical health, you're going to have better psychological and emotional health, and you're going to live a life of generosity and giving instead of desire and debt – all because you're in relationship with the God who wrote the code that runs the universe. You are anchored in God and in His ways.

And that is going to make your life seem like a tree that has been planted by water – the term here can mean a naturally occurring stream or an irrigation ditch – either way, what the tree needs to survive and thrive is readily available. And notice the subtle wording here – the tree *has been planted* there – it was intentionally placed in this specific location by a master gardener who knew what it would need to thrive.

As the years go by the tree is going to grow, it's going to see good times and bad – notice that – there will be times when, if the tree was not planted by water it's leaves would wither – God is telling us something here. We are going to live through seasons of drought, seasons of scorching heat and wind, but if we are deeply rooted in Him and His Word, we will endure. We will bring forth fruit in its season.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so let me show you this photo I took out the window as we were driving to the airport in Ethiopia a few months ago.



You can see two trees. One is full of green leaves, it's obviously thriving, and this is near the end of the dry season, it hasn't seen much rain lately. In front of it you can see another tree that is bone dry and barren. Erosion has washed away the soil and completely exposed the roots killing the tree.

Take a look at this picture and tell me – do you think it matters where you're planted and what your roots are drawing from?

And here's something to consider: a tree doesn't simply soak up the water it needs, it produces something with that water – something new, something unlike either the water or the tree: it produces fruit or flowers – [in it's season](#).



That's an important clause – because it takes time to bear fruit and we can get impatient. We want to see fruit in our own lives right now, or we want to see fruit in the lives of the people we're ministering to or counseling, we want to see fruit in the lives of our children, and we want to see it now. But you can't make fruit appear. If you're in a hurry the best you can do is go down to the store, buy some fruit and staple it to the tree – you can try it, but it's not a sustainable solution.

If you want real fruit, you need to wait for it to be produced in season. And if you stay connected to God, if you stay rooted in Him and in His Word, it will happen.

But consider this: the tree doesn't produce fruit for itself; it produces for others. The tree doesn't eat it's own fruit. When you are rooted deeply in God and His Word He will use your life to produce things that are sweet and refreshing to others and that produce the gospel seeds that will one day become new trees producing even more fruit. In the fruit is the seed for future trees.

A tree absorbs water through it's roots and produces fruit, but a man or woman who is blessed absorbs God's instruction day and night and produces actions and attitudes of righteousness.

He or she delights in God's Word because it tells us about God, about ourselves, about the world we live in, and, because it deals with the reality of our lives. It talks about the good stuff and the hard stuff, the times of joy and the dark nights of the soul. It brings the light of understanding into every shadowy corner of our lives. God's Word gives us an absolute, clear, standard and direction for this life. We don't have to wonder.

There's a lot of instability in the world, but God's Word is sure. So, the man or woman who is blessed in this life and the life to come

[Delight\[s\] in the law of the LORD,](#)

And in His law he meditates day and night.

We might say they chew on it, actively ponder it, mull it over, focus on it and try to understand, to think out all the implications – what is this saying and what does that mean and how does it fit in my life?

The Hebrew word here for meditate means to mumble to yourself. Orthodox Jews pray and read Scripture out loud, not silently, because it's the idea of having God's Word in your mouth, on your tongue - to speak the Word of God just as He spoke Creation into being. So, to meditate here is literally to speak the Scripture to yourself in a low voice, something like a mumble or muttering.

Mindfulness or meditation is a fad in the culture today especially with popular apps like Headspace which was developed by a man with a soothing British accent who is also an ordained Tibetan Buddhist monk trying to bring meditation to the masses. The problem is, the idea of Eastern meditation or mindfulness is all about emptying yourself, pulling away from yourself and your problems. Christian meditation or mindfulness is the opposite – it's not about pulling away, it's about pulling God and His truth into our lives, specifically by focusing on Scripture.

But how, exactly, do I do that?

You read Scripture – it could be a big chunk or something small - and then you ask yourself: how does God want me to change in light of this? Or how does He want me to stay the same, stay the course, keep going? The whole point is to stay actively connected to the presence of God in your life. To start and end, and as much as possible, to fill your life with the awareness of God.

This goes all the way back to the earliest days of Israel's history. When God established the pattern of worship for the nation after they left Egypt it included having the priests offer sacrifices every morning and evening. The Psalms speak in other places about crying out to God in the morning, in the evening, and at night. They even speak about times when you're so restless you can't sleep and you cry out to God in the middle of the night.

For thousands of years, morning and evening have been times of prayer for the faithful. It's a pattern in my own life and I want to strongly commend it to you.

I want to encourage you to make prayer a part of your morning and evening routine. Let it be the last thing you do before falling asleep and the first thing you do in the morning.

My personal pattern is to pray, every morning, before my feet hit the floor – “Father, would you please give me the strength that I need to face whatever happens today. I know your Spirit lives inside me, but would you also come upon me and give me strength. I don't want to face this day without You.”

And then, I get up. While the coffee is brewing I read a short devotional and do some pushups to help wake up. Once it's brewed I pour my cup and sit down and begin to read Scripture and pray about my day, the issues I'm aware of, the things I'm burdened for, and the things coming up that day. After that, if I have time, I always have a book I'm working through on some spiritual subject.

In the evening Madeleine will often read to us from a devotional and then we'll pray a short prayer and go sleep.

These devotionals, the ones we use in the morning and evening are short – typically a single page and I'll recommend three to you. These are all Christian classics – you can buy a hardcopy, which I recommend, or you could find them in an app or published for free online which I don't recommend because, if it all possible, you don't want to have your phone or tablet in your hand at that point in the day – you want to lay the foundation of God's Word in your heart *before* going online in the morning, or your want to be done with it in the evening and let God's Word be last thing on your mind as your head hits the pillow. Reading these on a phone or device can be a distraction for you, so I recommend paper.

The top three I recommend, in order, are 1. Morning and Evening by Charles Spurgeon; 2. My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers, and 3. Daily Light for the Daily Path by Samuel Bagster. In our house, Morning and Evening can be found on our coffee table in the living room, My Utmost for His Highest and Daily Light can be found on Madeleine's nightstand. And they've been there for years. I recommend all three because they're anchored in Scripture and give you a nugget to chew on.

I do not recommend a very popular devotional by a woman who tells you what she feels like Jesus is Calling out to her each day. That's speculation, it's very popular, but it's all her ideas. I'm encouraging you to fill your heart and mind first thing and last thing with Scripture, to

delight ... in the law of the LORD,
And in His law ... meditate day and night.

3 [And you] 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.

4 The ungodly *are* not so,
But *are* like the chaff which the wind drives away.

Now I find it interesting that the ungodly are defined in the negative compared to the godly – they are *not productive*. They are defined by the *absence* of what the godly person has.

That's doubly interesting to me because the godly often feel like they're missing out on what the ungodly seem to enjoy. Yet according to God those who are perishing are weightless and worthless, withering away from the inside out until all that is left is chaff.



Chaff is a thin, dry skin that you find wrapped around the husk of the grain. It has little to no nutritional value or use so, as part of harvesting grains like wheat or sorghum, you beat the kernel to loosen the chaff and then sift the grain or toss it into the air to let the wind blow the chaff away.

When John the Baptist announced Jesus was coming he said Jesus would thresh the wheat, gather the grain, and burn up the chaff. Each of us fit in one of those two categories, we're either grain that is being gathered up by Jesus, drawn to Him, responding to Him, or we're chaff that is perishing, waiting for the flames. There are only two ways to live, as Psalm 1 clearly tells us – a way that is blessed, and a way that is not.

**5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.**

If you have never received Jesus Christ by faith and trusted in Him and Him alone for salvation, eternal life, and righteous standing in God's eyes, you have no ability to stand in the eternal judgment. You cannot face a wholly righteous God on your own. You cannot defend yourself in His court.

There are certainly many good people who live very helpful, kind, and charitable lives – even better than some Christians. If you and I had to judge them, we would say they are good people. But we're not the judges – God is. And His standards are different than yours and mine. They are higher, more precise, more stringent. They are actually impossible for us to meet, but that is why He sent Christ to be our salvation – to do for us what we could never do for ourselves.

All those good, nice, people need to do is confess that they are not perfect, ask God to forgive their sins and trust in Christ for salvation.

Unfortunately, many of them have no desire to do that – they don't see a need for a Savior. And that's the problem.

Those who enjoy the counsel of the ungodly, the path of sinners, and the seat of the scornful are eventually cut off from the congregation of the righteous – often by their own choice and at the protest of those in the congregation. The righteous call out, but those who are perishing will not hear, they choose their path, and they eventually mock and scorn.

All of this happens under the watchful eyes of God.

6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,

But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

An honest reading of Scripture produces the undeniable certainty that there are two ways to live – a way that acknowledges and honors God and a way that ignores and resists Him. He is both the source of the blessing and the cause of the perishing.

We live between these paths and must regularly choose them. So, which one are you on?

Are you someone who delights in God's Law, in His instructions, in His way of life, or are you walking with the ungodly, standing with the sinners, or sitting with the scoffers?

Would you describe your life as truly blessed, as really happy?

Would you say that you are really fruitful?

To the one who is walking in the counsel of the ungodly, following the ideas and trends of the people around them,

Jesus says:

John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

To the one who stands with sinners He says

John 15:5 "I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

To those who find themselves sitting with scoffers, Jesus says

Matthew 28:19 "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age."

There are two paths to follow in life and God is calling you to delight in the one that calls you to get up and go, to spiritually accelerate, to receive God's blessings for you and to be a source of blessing to others.

God is leading us toward increased activity in life, increased value to our fellow men and women, He is giving us a way to live, He is giving us purpose and meaning. He is leading us up and out of a world that is walking, standing, sitting, withering, and perishing. The question is: will you follow?

Let's pray.