



Studies in the Psalms Keys to the Joyful Life

Summary: In order to find the greatest joys in life, delight in God's view of things, admit your failures, and receive forgiveness.

This morning, we turn to the Psalms and discover two keys for living a joyful life, a blessed life - the kind most people want to have. I mean, it's not a dangerous question to ask: would you like to have more joy in your life? That's a pretty easy sell.

Most people are actively searching for joy already, trying to find it and keep it. But there are problems with the search. For instance, sometimes we get bad directions. People recommend things that aren't good for us, or that start off good and go bad over time - so, if you want to find joy, you have to get directions from the right people.

Then there are times when we see someone or something that will bring us joy but it's just out of reach. That's frustrating, eventually demoralizing, and finally embittering - why do those people get to have it and I don't? If you want to find joy you have to make sure you don't wreck your own attempts.

And then third, the sources of our joy are often fragile and vulnerable. Perhaps you've already experienced the loss of something that brought you joy. Circumstances, people, and events can strip us of what once made us so happy. We live in a world where things go wrong and when they do, we need a place to run, someone or something we can trust, we need shelter in the storm.

The Psalms address all of these things and many more, they warn about the threats to our joy, and welcome us to receive and experience joy, according to God's terms. At least twelve times they tell us [blessed is the man who](#)... and then they fill in the blank. These warnings, promises, directions and instructions for the blessed, joy-filled life, will be the focus of our studies over the next several weeks. So turn with me to Psalm 1.

There are 150 psalms in the Bible, found just to left of the middle, and this is how they begin.

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.

Out of 150 songs, this is the one put first. The entire book begins by telling you: here is a key to the joyful life, the blessed life. **Blessed is the man** who ignores what others have to say and delights in the way God says things should be. And the word “man” here is a generic word for all mankind, this isn’t some special promise reserved for biological males, these principles apply to all of us.

In fact, this is basic Christian doctrine, there are few things more fundamental than this. God says there are things we should do and things we should not do, but we often choose to do what we want instead. This was the first, and prototypical sin in the Garden of Eden. God created the world and everything in it, He made it all perfect and good. And He made man and woman, and put them in the garden to enjoy it and rule over it, explore it, and develop it. They had only one negative rule – don’t eat from this one tree.

But Satan came along and tempted Eve – he got her to question God and trust herself. He got her to delight in the ideas of someone else, ideas that clearly contradicted God.

Do you see how this is the very foundation of everything Christians believe? If you want to have joy in life, if you want to be blessed, delight in the way God says things should be and reject all those other voices.

And let’s be clear: there are a LOT of other voices. There’s the voice inside your own head. You talk yourself into and out of a lot of things. We don’t always need someone giving us bad advice, we generate enough of our own.

But this Psalm specifically addresses the voices outside, and the way we can grow increasingly comfortable with and connected to them.

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

Do you see the pattern of growing closer to these people who pull you away from God? If you want to have joy in your life, if you want to be blessed, you have to recognize there are at least two voices competing for your attention. God tells you how to live, what to do, what not to do, what to make of things, how things work, what they were intended for, how they were designed.

God is telling you all the foundational things you need to understand about life in His law, which is another way of saying the Bible. It’s God code book, His source book, some people have said it’s an acronym for Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth, but really bible it’s just Latin for book. A book of everything God wants you to know.

It's one voice, one source of instruction and explanation for life and then everyone and everything else goes in another category and needs to be compared to what God's Word says, including me.

The Psalm says if you want to have a blessed, joy-filled life, you will avoid the instruction, the opinions, the advice, of people who will lead you astray and you will focus primarily on God's instructions.

This is not to say that there is nothing outside of the Bible that has any value, or that we can't learn things that are good and true from other sources. But it's saying the essence of what we learn and receive needs to line up with what God has already revealed.

So here's the problem. We live at time when everyone has a little global microphone in their pocket or purse and they all want to talk to you about their issue. We live in an attention-based economy. Every news agency, every advertiser, every politician, the next big social media influencer, even your friends, want your attention and they want to tell you what you should like, what you should think, what should be important to you, they all want to tell you how to live.

And so does God. So, which will you listen to? This is a critical decision you have to make each day. If you want to be blessed, if you want to find joy, you must choose to delight in God's Word, His Ways, *delight* in Him, and reject anything and anyone that does not line up. Now, reject can be a harsh term. I'm not saying you need to cut off all contact because we do have to live in this world. But I am saying, you might need to turn down, or tune out certain voices.

Right now, some of the loudest voices in your life are trying to shape your opinions on gender, marriage, family, race, equality, fear, and politics. It's pretty easy to know what the voices are saying in our schools, in our institutions, in our corporate advertising departments. We have graduated an army of communications and marketing majors over the past few decades and they are hard at work getting the message out. I don't doubt you're hearing things; I'm just standing here as a man sent by God to ask you – does what you're hearing line up with what God says is true?

That whole scene with the serpent and the tree and the man and woman deciding what to do, that's not some ancient creation myth, that's still playing out today in your life, in the lives of your kids and grandkids and neighbors, it's playing out in this church. Take any issue you want, God has said one thing about it, the world often says something else – what side are you going to choose?

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And in His law he meditates day and night.

My friends, this is the essence of life and faith. How do you know what you know? Where do you get your values and agenda from?

Do you [delight in the law of the Lord](#), do you delight in the way God says things should be in your life, in your home, in your job, in your relationships? God has guidance to give. He has a direction you should go. And, His ways will bring you [blessing](#), they will bring you joy – there are rewards built into the system.

So let's talk about this for a minute. Notice first of all the key to the blessed life is to [delight](#) in what you know, not just to know it. Some of you grew up in a Christian home, or you've gone to a bunch of Bible studies. You know God's word. You know what He says. But do you [delight](#) in it? You could pass a theological quiz, but you would fail a joy inspection because you haven't embraced God's instructions.

You hear a lot of other voices, you feel a lot of other things, you're pinned down between what you know God says and some other option – you're right there at the base of the tree in the garden of Eden, between the serpent and the Scriptures, trying to sort things out. The Spirit of God is convicting you and the world is calling you. Which one will you listen to? Where will you find your [delight](#)?

I want to encourage you, if you want to find joy in life, if you want to have a life that God calls blessed, *prioritize time with Him*. Value time in corporate worship, time in Bible Study, time in personal devotion. Instead of filling your car or your home with the news and Netflix, why not fill them with worship and teaching? Set time limits on your scrolling and browsing online and spend time daily in God's Word – the Psalmist says joy and blessing are found by the person who considers, meditates, chews on God's Word twice a day, [morning and evening](#).

- You say, I don't have time for that. Why not?
- You say, I don't know what that means or how to do it. Why not?
- You say, I don't know where to start. Why not?

Have you asked? Do you seek? Do you [desire](#)? God is telling you – here is a key to joy in your life. Will you take it?

Spiritual fitness is much like physical fitness, you're not going to be in good shape if you eat whatever you want all week and then hit the gym a few times a month. Choose to be in fellowship with God and with His people, choose to meditate on the Word and *you will be blessed*. If you need some practical tips or recommended resources for doing that, pick up the application and discussion guide on your way out, or find this message on our website or in the app and scroll to the bottom of the notes and you can find them there.

Or reach out to someone and ask for help and direction, I know your staff and ministry leaders would be happy to help you find ways to take in more of God's Word.

Let's look at our next key. Turn with me to Psalm 32. I hope to return to this in a few weeks and look at the entire Psalm, but for now we're just focused on collecting our keys to joy. And we find the next key right here in verses one and two:

Psalm 32:1 Blessed *is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.*

2 Blessed *is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

So, for those taking notes, the second key to living a joyful, or blessed, life is: Admit your failures and receive forgiveness.

Look, the fact of the matter is, we're all going to give in to temptation at times. We're all going to give in to the other voices instead of delighting in God's ways. We're going to blow it. We're going to fall short. None one makes it through this world with their innocence intact.

But what do you do about it? What do you do when you fail? What do you do when your conscience convicts you or a shame storm erupts and pelts you with wind and rain and falling debris, knocking out power and causing chaos in your life?

Well, you need to see two things in these two verses. First, you did it, and second, God forgives.

First, you did it. Notice there is no blessing for the man, or woman, or teen or young adult, boy or girl, there is not blessing for the one who never messed up, the one was perfect, the one who got a perfect score on the game of life. Instead, there is a blessing for the one [whose transgression is forgiven](#).

To transgress is to cross over a line. You can hear the connection with transit, transportation, it's moving. God set a boundary and you crossed it.

Maybe you did it in ignorance. You're driving downtown and find a spot. You thought you could park there, but you were wrong, and came back and found a ticket on your dashboard. You transgressed the law and now you're guilty – whether you meant to or not.

Or sometimes we know we're wrong and we do it anyway because we think it will be alright this time. Maybe you tried to turn in a late assignment, you thought you had a good excuse, and your teacher said no. We've all had the experience of doing something wrong and being held to the letter of the law. But, God says it is possible, whether we break His laws on purpose or on accident, to be forgiven – and that is a blessing, it leads to joy.

It is also a blessing to have our [sin covered](#). Now, sin is a word you hear more often than [transgression](#), but it means something different. Sin, narrowly defined, simply means, to miss the mark. Transgression is doing something you weren't supposed to do, sin is more

like not measuring up to what you were supposed to do. It's the gap between your attempts and performance and God's expectations.

You want to be a good sister. You want to be patient. You want to be helpful and kind. But you never feel like it's enough. You never feel like you're doing a good job. You want to be a better dad, a better husband, but you feel like you keep falling short. You didn't live up to your own expectations, or to God's, you look out or you look back and you see things you regret. Now what? You either try harder or you give up depending on your personality.

But maybe the answer is to talk it out with the God who made you, ask Him to cover your gaps, and be blessed. Blessed is the one whose sin, whose shortcomings, whose misses - whether by an inch or a mile - are covered. Ask God to cover you. And note:

Psalm 32:2 *Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,*

Alright, those are big words, but you're big people, so let's talk about them. **Iniquity** literally means something that is twisted. It describes what happens to your inner character - the kind of person you are - the kind of person who would have the kind of desires that would lead to transgressions.

So when God does not **impute iniquity**, it means he doesn't hold your guilt, shame, or perversity against you. God doesn't want to slap a label on you permanently and say, "O, you're one of those." He offers to help you out of it no matter what you've done or been snagged by in the past.

Here's the big thing you need to know: all of these - transgression, sin, and iniquity - can be forgiven, covered, and cleansed *if* you will let God call them out and agree with Him. Bring them to Him. Talk with Him about them. Meditate day and night on what He has to say about them and about you.

Psalm 32:1 *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.*

2 *Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

Don't try to deny your faults, don't try to hide them. Don't try to deceive yourself, or God, or anyone else. You blew it, or you weren't good enough. OK, face it. And bring it to God.

Notice the two parts of each phrase here - first you did it and second God forgave it. You transgressed, and God forgives. You sinned and God covered. You had iniquity and God did not impute it, or count it against you.

My friends you must know, absolutely must know and understand and hopefully believe, that you can be forgiven. God does not hate you and will not hold things against you. There is no burden you are carrying, no shame you are feeling, no inadequacy that guilt you that

cannot be forgiven by God *if* you are not deceitful, if you will just bring it out into the open with God who sees what's in the shadows anyway.

This is what He does. This is why He sent His Son. God is on a rescue mission and He wants to restore, renew, and recover you. Yes, you are guilty, yes you did it, or you didn't do enough, but God forgives, He covers, He cleanses anyone who will confess.

The Bible says you're not alone when you blow it.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

God was the original diversity and inclusion officer – He wants to save all kinds of people, cause we're all equally messed up. You might have a slightly different flavor of sin and transgression that I do, you might be tempted by different things than I am, prone to different things than I am – but we're all guilty. We all fall short. And God is willing to save us all, forgive us all, cleanse us all. You're not the only one who is messed up, and you can be fixed!

God says,

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says the LORD,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.

It doesn't matter what you've done, what you've been through, it doesn't matter how long it has been, God has this bar of salvation soap that will get the stains out of your soul and change your life. Yes, you're stained. Yes, you did it, or didn't do it. Yes, you blew it or fell short. No one doubts that. But don't doubt the fact that God can cleanse you either.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You confess your wrongs or your shortcomings, you say what you did or didn't do. You don't deny it or minimize it or explain it, you don't allow deceit to enter in, you face it, and then you ask for forgiveness and let that forgiveness wash the past away. Let God declare you clean. Let Him cover you and cleanse you, let Him restore you and renew you.

The burden is gone and now there is blessing. Now there is joy. Now there is peace between the offender and the offended.

We're collecting a set of keys in the Psalms. Keys to the joyful life, the blessed life. The life you can have when you shut out other voices and delight in the way God says things should be, when you admit your failures and receive forgiveness.

It's all on the table for you, it's all included in this one great, big, comprehensive gospel offer made possible when you trust in Christ. I hope you have done that, or that you will do that today. If you have any questions about what that means, or need prayer or counsel for anything in your life, please just let us know – we're happy to help each other in whatever way we can, because God is helping us.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Studies in the Psalms Keys to the Joyful Life

Summary: In order to find the greatest joys in life delight in the way God says things should be, admit your failures and receive forgiveness, and trust God while enjoying His goodness.

- What are the things, and who are people that are most likely to sabotage your joy?
- Where are you most prone to search for joy, for something to reset your life when you want to escape? A favorite restaurant? A hike? Shopping? Sports?
- Why and how would meditating on God's Word instead of listening to other voices bring you joy?
 - Are you more prone to hear the voices of others, or your own voice instead of meditating on God's Word?
 - What is one area where your thinking has been transformed by the gospel or the instruction in God's Word?
 - What is one area where you are actively struggling and fighting right now to choose God's ways over your ways or the world's opinions?
 - Where do the voices of the world tend to enter your life more often? Through friends, co-workers, media, entertainment?
- Pastor Jeff said the choice to listen to God or listen to others is fundamental to the Christian life, that we reenact the scene in the garden every day.
 - How do you react that?
- What is the difference between knowing God's Word and delighting in it?
 - What are the things that stoke your delight? What are the things that curb it?
- Do you think it's harder to avoid transgression (crossing the line) or sin (missing the mark)?
 - Which is harder for you to forgive personally?
- Why are we prone to be deceitful and try to cover our wrongs?
- What wrongs do you think are hardest for people to confess?
- Do you remember a time when you were blessed to receive forgiveness?
- A list of recommended devotionals and other tools to help you meditate day and night can be found on the next page:

- Morning and Evening by Charles Spurgeon
- My Utmost For His Highest by Oswald Chambers
- Daily Bible reading plans in the YouVersion Bible App
- Chronological Bible in a Year reading plan
- There are 31 chapters in Proverbs, trying reading the chapter that corresponds with today's date
- Compile a stack of 3x5 notecards with verses to review while you brush your teeth.
- The City Gates Church has a YouTube channel including a playlist of our favorite worship songs
- For those with younger kids – or the young at heart, we highly recommend Seeds Family Worship – Scripture songs put to catchy music, available on YouTube, iTunes, Spotify, etc.