



Psalm 1

How to Worship When God Speaks | Psalm 1

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Good morning. My name is Kyle Rodriguez, if we haven't had a chance to meet yet. It is my privilege to open up the Word of God with you this morning.

This summer, we have been looking at the Psalms, a collection of poems and songs near the middle of our Bibles that give expression to how the people of God have worshipped for thousands of years. And we desperately need to learn how to worship, because, as Pastor Ethan pointed out several weeks ago as we began this sermon series: what sets us apart as Christians is not *that* we worship—because everybody worships (either implicitly or explicitly). Everybody naturally places something or someone in the category of God—be it money, or power, or sex, or security, or family, or comfort—and then orients their whole life around that thing.

What separates Christians apart is not that we worship, it is *who* we worship: Christ! We worship the triune God of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who created all things and worked to redeem all things through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And *who* we worship drastically impacts *how* we worship. The life of somebody who worships safety and security does not look the same as the life of somebody who worships sex, and neither of them look like the life of somebody who worships Allah. *Who* we worship will impact *how* we worship. So, if we are going to worship the one true God who is worthy of worship, we need to do some investigating on how.

So, over the last few weeks, we've asked some questions about Christian worship:

- How do we worship when God saves? We offer him praise and adoration.
- How do we worship when we suffer? We cry out in honest lament to him.
- How do we worship when we sin? We come to him in repentant confession.

And this morning, we are asking the question: **How do we worship when God speaks?**

Perhaps, if you've been a part of Union Church for a while, or if you're just moderately observant, you've noticed that the Bible is woven throughout every aspect of our service. I hope

that is abundantly clear as we gather every week, and I wish that was the case in every church that bore the name of Christ, but sadly, it often isn't.

When we begin our service, we begin each week with a call to worship taken directly from the pages of the Bible. When we sing songs, we aim to sing songs that have rich lyrics that either directly quote or clearly reflect Biblical themes and promises, and often you'll see verses pasted at the bottom of the slides to remind us of the Biblical foundations. We read the words of Scripture aloud and then spend the largest chunk of our service unpacking what that Scripture means together. We take communion and quote directly from the words of Jesus. And we end every week with a benediction, a blessing, taken from Numbers 6.

We aim to be Bible people! One of our stated values as a church is that we are "Bible Saturated"—that just like the wick of an oil lamp is constantly soaking in oil that provides constant fuel for the flame, we would be a people that soak in, are saturated in, the Word of God.

And we desire for that, we long for that Bible-Saturated characteristic, because we believe something fundamental about this Bible: That it is the very Word of God! We believe that God—the God who created everything in heaven and earth, the God who exists outside of time and space who is far beyond our capacity to even imagine, the God who sovereignly rules and reigns over every molecule in the galaxy—we believe that God has spoken! He is not a God who hides off in heaven, but one who has revealed himself to his people, who has given them perfect wisdom and instruction, encouragement and conviction, hope for the future and clarity on the past.

It is a book from God, about God, and for God's purposes. It is a compilation of God's words to human beings across thousands of years, in a variety of contexts, using a wide spectrum of literary genres. In everything it teaches, everything it means to communicate to us, it is without error and useful for all faith and godliness. There is nothing like this book, because in this book, God speaks!

And that is why, every time we read from it before a sermon, we say: "This is the Word of the Lord"—to remind ourselves that this is not just a book, it's not a variety of opinions or tales, it is the very Word of God himself. And it's why all of us respond with: "Thanks be to God"—because it is a precious gift to us that the perfect, holy, good, true, and just God has spoken to us! We do not worship the Bible, but it is through the Bible that we can worship God almighty, and for that reason, we are forever grateful for it.

Now, if all of that is true, if it is true that God has spoken to us through his Word, then this dramatically shapes how we worship as his people. So, again, the question we are asking today is the question: How do we worship when God speaks? Or, to phrase it another way, what is the relationship between a Christian and his Bible? What is the relationship between a Church and the Bible? How does the Bible impact how we worship?

And I think, what we are going to see today is this: **Christians worship by submitting to the Word of God.** That is to say: One of the ways that distinguishes Christian worship is by adopting a certain posture toward the Word of God—a submissive, receptive posture, by allowing it to teach us and shape us and correct us. And I think this is especially clear throughout Psalm 1, so we are going to practice this submissive posture by hearing the Lord speak to us in this Psalm. But before we do that, let us pray to the God who has spoken to us and ask him for help.

Prayer of Illumination

1. Regularly submitting to the Word of God guards against loving the World.

So, as we work through this Psalm, I think we are going to see three reasons why submitting to the Word of God aids us in our worship. And the first is this: **Regularly submitting to the Word of God guards against loving the World.**

From the very beginning of this Psalm, a clear contrast is painted: the way of the World versus the way of the Lord; the way of the wicked versus the way of the righteous. This is a common dichotomy that is portrayed in Scripture, if you were with us during our series in the book of Revelation earlier this summer, you'll remember that this dichotomy was a huge theme throughout that book.

And really, it's a theme all through the Bible: It's contrasted in the Old Testament as the people of God are contrasted with all the nations around them, constantly tempted to act and worship like them. In the New Testament, Jesus tells his followers that they cannot serve two masters, be it God and money, God and sex, God and anything the world will offer. Jesus's apostle, John, takes this same theme later in the New Testament and says this:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”

But the problem, friends, is that we are constantly slipping into love of the World. On one hand, that's simply because sin has corrupted us so that we look to anything but God to fill our need for satisfaction. But on the other hand, the World is also actively discipling us, catechizing us, teaching us, every day, moment by moment, to love it.

That shows up in how often we use our phones, for example. The average American spends nearly two-and-a-half hours a day on social media,¹ checks their phone every four minutes,² and spends more than seven hours of their day³ looking at a screen. Of course we're being actively taught to love the World!

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>

² <https://www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction/>

³ <https://www.comparitech.com/tv-streaming/screen-time-statistics/>

But phones, screens, and technology aren't what cause us to love the World. They just make it easier to access the World at any time, no matter where we are, feeding every desire we might have on a whim.

Take away the phones, though, and the World will still find ways to draw us in. Spend every minute thinking about work, and you'll be taught to worship work. Spend every minute reading comic books, romance novels, or historical fiction, and you'll be disciplined to love comic books, romance novels, or historical fiction. Spend two hours a day cleaning your house and you'll learn to make an idol of your home's cleanliness.

And it's not that any of those things are inherently bad. But we are not naturally good at receiving good gifts from God and looking beyond the Gift to him in worship! It might start out that way, thanking God for your beautiful home, but soon you start feeling pride in your nice house and obsessing over making it perfect and showing it off. We excel at worshipping Creation instead of the Creator, loving the Gifts instead of the Giver.

But, submitting to the Word of God helps us to guard against that natural love of the World. Just these first two verses of this Psalm helps us to see how it helps us guard against it:

First, **we recognize that the Word, not the world, is our highest authority.**

You'll notice in this first verse, as the Psalmist paints the negative picture of a worldly person, there's a progression that happens.

A person who loves the world first walks in the counsel of the wicked: they look to the World for advice and counsel.

But then they "stand" in the way of sinners—what was once looking to the world for counsel and gingerly walking its path becomes rooted and natural—no longer does this person have to ask the World for advice, but the World's desires have become their desires.

And then they "sit" in the seat of scoffers. You see, in the ancient world, the place of authority, of authoritative speaking and teaching, was a seat. Priests and teachers wouldn't get up on a stage to teach, but sit as their audience gathered around them. So, the worldly person in this Psalms has become a person who is teaching, discipling others to love the World, to scoff at the things of God.

The natural progression of human nature is to be influenced by the world, to have the World's values naturally engrained in us, and then ultimately, to actually teach others to love the World.

But where does it all begin? At taking counsel from the world. At putting the World as our highest authority for what is right and good and lovely and beneficial.

Our first step, in guarding against that, is to recognize that the Word of God is our highest authority, not the World. And that means, brothers and sisters, that our ethical standards come not from Facebook and Twitter, but from the Word of God. It means the definition of real beauty

and understanding our own identity doesn't come from Instagram, but from the Word of God. It means we don't seek out jobs or hobbies that make us feel as if we have purpose in this world, but we go to the Word of God and submit ourselves to His purpose.

And it means that the Word is our authority in **all** that it says. We don't have the authority to cut out or ignore the pieces that we don't like. Now, there are parts of the Word that are hard, that are difficult—but if it is truly authoritative, we have to recognize that part of the way we submit to it is doing the work?

We submit ourselves to the Word because it is our highest authority.

Second, **we delight in the Word, rather than the World, as our fullest joy.**

The godly, blessed person, the Psalmist says, “delights” in the law of the Lord. And that “law of the Lord” phrase is really best understood as “all of the inspired Word of God to his people”, not merely the sections of our Bible we would describe as “laws” or commands.

This is painting the picture of a woman who finds immense comfort in reading the stories of Jesus and imagining what it would be like to look into his eyes and hear him say, “Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well” (Matthew 9). This is the picture of a man who does not settle for the twisted dopamine hits that occur when he argues about politics on social media, but would rather sit and submit himself to the Word of God, thinking deeply about what it meant for Jesus to humble himself by coming to earth and how he too can consider others more significant than himself (Philippians 2). This is the elderly Christian who has lived a long, hard life, who has lost many of his family and friends to sickness and death, whose bones are tired and weak, and he sits down and reads that one day, the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised—and then it will come to pass: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” O death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?” And he weeps. And he hopes.

These are faithful, blessed Christians who delight in the Word not because they just love reading, but because it is by the Word that they get God! It is here, as they read with faith granted by the Holy Spirit dwelling within them, that his strength, his comfort, his justice, his grace, his promises, his love are communicated to them more clearly and consistently than anywhere else! This is real joy!

But here's the deal, friends. We're never going to cultivate that sense of delight in our hearts if we don't spend time in the Word!

That's the third thing here this Psalm teaches us about guarding against worldliness: **we have to spend time in the Word, rather than the World, as our first priority.**

“On his law [the blessed man] meditates day and night.”

And that's not hyperbole!

“⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deut. 6:6-7)

⁸ This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Josh. 1:8)

Friends, we will never cultivate a love for the Word without reading it regularly. If you wait until the Bible is fascinating, if you wait until you “feel” the delight in the Word to get into it, you never will! You’ll never do it. You’ve got to open it up, even if it’s uncomfortable, and begin building patterns of submission to the Word, saying to the Lord, You are my highest priority, not the World—and the way I spend my time, the things that occupy my brain the most, are going to reflect that priority.

Oh, brothers and sisters, let us be Bible people, let us submit to the Word as our authority, our joy, and our priority, because it is the only protection against loving the World.

2. Submitting to the Word of God leads to our lasting flourishing.

That was a lot on just the first two verses of our text, but the next two points are more brief, as they really rest on the foundation of that first one.

The second reason we submit to the Word of God is that it leads to our lasting flourishing.

Look at the Word-saturated man in verse 3.

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

I was born in Yuma, Arizona. If you’ve never been to Yuma—and I don’t blame you if you haven’t—it is in the middle of the desert. It’s right in the corner of Arizona, where California, Arizona, and Mexico meet. The Mexican border was an 8-minute drive from my house. California was a nine-minute drive. And outside the City of Yuma, there is basically nothing for miles—it is a completely different reality than the Midwest.

But in the middle of the desert, in the middle of the dull, drab browns, there was one place where you’d find green: by the river. By the river there were reeds and green brush and naturally growing trees.

Look at this picture, this is the first picture that pops up if you search for Yuma on Google Maps. And it’s a perfect picture of what I’m talking about. Here, at the river, the greenery is flourishing, but outside of the city, the further you go from the water, you get the rough,

brown, rocky mountains. No green to be seen. And that's true for miles and miles and miles outside of Yuma.

And I think one of the reasons that God created places like Yuma is to give us a visual picture of the life-giving power of the Word of God.

The man submissive to the Word of God, who delights in it and meditates upon it daily—he is like a tree planted by the streams of living water. His roots have sunk down deep as he feasts on the water. In contrast to the tumbleweeds of the desert that blow away at every desert wind, he is stable and secure.

For this man, the Word has actually done something. It has fueled him. The Word of God has seeped into the very fibers of this person's being—and so this man even produces fruit! As Charles Spurgeon said, this isn't a tree that produces untimely figs, which are never full-flavored. This is a man who has allowed the Word to teach him, and thus, he produces his fruit in exactly the right time: "patience in time of suffering, faith in the day of trial, and holy joy in the hour of prosperity."⁴

And in everything he does, this person prospers. Even in times of suffering. When storms come, the wind may batter the tree, limbs may be broken, hail may bruise its bark, but the roots hold. Even drought is an opportunity for prospering, for this tree, for it causes the roots to sink deeper into the ground to find that living water. So to, for the Christian who is rooted deep in the Word of God, who presses deeper into Christ when all the trials of the World come crashing in at once.

But for the Worldly, such stability escapes them. The Psalmist compares them to chaff—the dry, brittle casing around grain that blows away when you toss the grain in the air. It is rootless, weightless, and useless. It is even lighter, even more prone to being blown by the wind, than the meager desert tumbleweed.

This is what John was saying back in 1 John when he said do not love the world. That passage we heard from earlier goes on to say: "**...the world is passing away, along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**"

Though the prosperity that the World offers may seem meaningful, may seem deep and rich, may seem to satisfy us, it is a lie.

If you put all your longings for security in money—you'll be blown away by the wind when the stock market crashes, when your home is robbed, when your job is lost. If you put all your longings for purpose and meaning into your work, you'll be blown away by the wind when you make a mistake that leads to termination, when you suffer an accident and can no longer do the work you've done for 15 years.

⁴ Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Treasury of David*. Vol. 1. Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1983, p. 2.

We need roots! And putting your roots into the World is like trying to plant something in the desert sand. It may seem like it's holding for a moment, but eventually the sand shifts—it's blown away, either all at once, or over time.

You can sink your roots into the Word of God, because the Word is where we learn the Character of God, the promises of God, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And the Character of God does not change, the promises of God do not fail, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not wither. If your security is found there, if your meaning is found there, if your hope is found there, it will last—no matter how much your external circumstances might change.

Submitting to the Word of God leads to lasting flourishing.

3. Submitting to the Word of God prepares us for eternal blessing.

And one of the reasons the flourishing is lasting—is because it goes beyond this mortal life.

And so, as we move into the final verses of this Psalm, we see that **submitting to the Word of God prepares us for eternal freedom.**

*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.

Here, the Psalmist makes an explicit connection between our lives now and an eternal future.

Loving the World and seeking counsel from it, being weightless and rootless, as you drift from one worldly wisdom to another, has eternal effect. If you love the World, if you have stood in the way of sinners, you will not be able to stand in the judgment. You will not be able to dwell among the righteous, among those who have loved God and his Word.

Spurgeon wrote of this passage: “A fish could sooner live in a tree than the wicked live in paradise.”

In other words, if you love the World and pattern your life after the World—you will “fit” in the world to come. The actions we take here and now, the patterns of thought we mold our minds to, the attitudes and characteristics that we take on—they are preparing us for something. And if you are primarily preparing yourself, acclimating yourself to live in and live like this World, you will not fit in the World to come. The World to come is one in which God is the center, in which he is the joy of our life, the source and substance perfect blessing forever. If you are training yourself right now not to love God, but to love sin, worldly wisdom, and shallow pleasures—then you will be sorely disappointed in the World to come, for there will be none of that there.

But for the righteous, for those who have submitted themselves to the Word of God, who have sought the presence of God and the knowledge of God and the instruction of God—they will find what they have been looking for.

For they will be completely and utterly known by him—because it is him who has been working to prepare them for that day. It is God who is shaping you, Christian, right now. Who is preparing you for that world. Who is drawing you in by his Word, as you read it with his Spirit empowering you, revealing more and more of himself to you.

On that day, he will look to you and say: “I have known you, daughter. For I have known your way, each and every day, watching you draw near to me. Enter into the joy of your master.”

Only submitting to the Word of God can prepare us for that day.

GOSPEL FOUNDATION

And yet, the reality is that none of us can do that on our own. In fact, if we try, we’ll only dig ourselves deeper into a pit of selfishness and pride.

That’s why Paul says in Romans 3:20—“**By works of the Law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**”

See, Psalm 1 lays out this beautiful picture of how following the law of God leads to perfect flourishing and eternal blessedness. But Paul—and the entire history of the human race—says we can’t do it! We can’t follow the law and achieve its accomplishments on our own. Paul goes on to say that “All of have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God.” All have walked in the counsel of the wicked. All have stood in the way of sinners.

There is one person, who has ever perfectly embodied Psalm 1, and his name is Jesus.

He is one whose delight was in the Law of the Lord—who meditated on it day and night and could quote it back to Satan without hesitation. He is the one who was always fed by the Word of life, whose fruit was always ripe as he responded to each situation with perfect wisdom. He is the one whose works were perfectly prosperous, as even his darkest moments of suffering, insult, and death were effective to accomplish his purposes. He is the only one, who could stand in the judgment, who is perfectly fit for the world to come, who is known fully by his Father.

And what I find fascinating, is even the Psalms point to that reality.

See, scholars and commentators will unanimously tell you that Psalms 1 and 2 go together. They are the twin doorposts through which you enter into the rest of the Psalms. And while Psalm 1 points to the responsibility of God’s people to submit to His word, Psalm 2 points forward to the Anointed Son, the one true King that is to come.

Vain are the plots and efforts of the world, Psalm 2 says, if they are not done in view of the Savior.

Psalm 1 begins by saying: “Blessed” is the one who rejects the World, and submits to the Word. Psalm 2 ends by saying “Blessed are all who take refuge in the Son.”

Friends, the Son has accomplished Psalm 1. And he has offered you a way to submit to the Word, but it only comes by taking refuge in him, by trusting in his Works as your only hope in life and death. You can only submit to the Word of God by first taking refuge in Christ—and you can’t really take refuge in Christ if you do not submit to his Word.

So, brothers and sisters, let us be Bible people—not out of our own strength and effort to please God—but because we have taken refuge under the wings of the King, and he will guide us to all righteousness.

[1] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/433871/daily-social-media-usage-worldwide/>

[2] <https://www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction/>

[3] <https://www.comparitech.com/tv-streaming/screen-time-statistics/>

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