

## Psalm 1

### The School of Life How Wisdom Leads to the Good Life Part 2

**Introduction:** If it is your first time joining us - Welcome! We have dedicated this year to Biblical Literacy; meaning we as a church are reading the Bible for ourselves to know first hand what it teaches and in order to be shaped by the story of God. In our current series - The school of Life - we have been focusing on the reality of pain and suffering in life and how we can learn to live full lives even in a world of pain and hardship.

This is a question that people have asked since the dawn of time - What is the good life, and how do I obtain it? A hugely important question because it's fairly easy to live your life - But the question is not how do we live, BUT how do we live a life of quality? A life of goodness; a life of flourishing; A life that regardless of what is thrown at us we are able to look over our lives with a sense of contentment, joy, purpose, and meaning?

It might be surprising for some to know that this is the main question or storyline of the Bible - how to live well; how to flourish - It's about the Blessed Life. The idea of Biblical wisdom only being these four or five books - Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon is actually a new idea. The Jews considered the whole Hebrew Bible to be wisdom literature - **"Oh, how I love your law (Torah)! I meditate on it all day long. Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts, therefore I hate every wrong path. - Psalm 119:97-104** When we think of Biblical wisdom we can relegate it to mean "spiritual wisdom" as opposed to practical wisdom, concerned with the soul and not the body, church and not business, catechism and not education, worship and not play - but nothing could be further from the truth. Solomon was the great king who asked God for wisdom to rule his people well - and God granted that to him and he was wise not just as a king or a

spiritual leader but in every sphere of life - it says in 1 Kings 4:32-33 "**He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.**" Solomon was a thriving Human Being!! A Flourishing One!

You see, Biblical wisdom pertains to every aspect of life in this world, because it is YHWH who formed the world in Wisdom.

The purpose of this book - the Bible - is to train us in wisdom, understanding and Knowledge so that we will become wise ones - So that we become truly human - a thriving humanity - who rule well over God's creation, ones who's lives exhibit the flourishing life of God.

The purpose of the Bible is to teach us, trains us so that we can live Godly lives and fulfill the covenant partnership that God created us for - lost at the Fall, but brought back on track by Jesus — so the earth can be filled with God's glory...

Last week we considered the Big Idea of Biblical Wisdom and the great offer from God - The Genesis 1-2 / Proverbs connection and ideal is this - YHWH the Great Gardener and Architect of life - offers each of us an apprenticeship under him, to train us in wisdom, understanding, and knowledge so that our own personal lives will be a kind of mini garden, an Eden, of flourishing and fulness.

As I mentioned last week this is what Psalm 1 envisions - The one who delights in and meditates on Torah - God's Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge - day and night - will be like a flourishing tree planted by the rivers of water - this is the Edenic vision!!

Let's walk through this Psalm this morning and let's stop along the way to reflect and respond.

**1. The Blessing.** The way the Book of Psalms opens is with this pronouncement of Blessing! - O How joyful, how flourishing is the one who... Notice the first thing about the biblical idea of flourishing is not people who are zapped by God - but those who hunger after and seek

God. We often use the term blessed instead of lucky, or graced by God. But flourishing or blessed in the Bible has the idea of someone who has taken what God has given and cultivated it for a life time and has entered into a season of fruitfulness and reaping.

1. **The Psalmist opens up this book in the same way that the Proverbs open up. Proverbs portrays “Lady Wisdom” - She is in the town square where everyone is passing by and she is calling out with an offer of wisdom and blessing to anyone that will hear (Proverbs 1:20-23). And this is the offer.. Who wants the good life, who wants flourishing, who wants fulfillment, who wants fulness of life? Then Listen, attend your ears, tune in.**
2. **The Flourishing One - the blessed man or woman**
  1. **Negatively - what he or she is not like**
    1. **Walks not in the counsel of the wicked.**
    2. **Does not stand in the way of sinners -** He or she does not stand in the way meaning is kind of lost in translation. It means to walk in someone’s shoes or walking in their way...
    3. **Does not sit in the seat of scoffers.**
      1. These three complete phases show three aspects, of departure from God, by portraying conformity to this world at three different levels:
        1. Accepting it’s advice,
        2. Being party to its ways,
        3. Adopting the most fatal of it’s attitudes - the one who scoffs at God. Mock’s God’s wisdom, His ways, His truth, His power, his love and care, and especially his existence.
          1. Listen to the way Psalm 10 describes this character,  
**"For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord  
In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him ; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”**
          2. In our day and age it’s no different - from the new atheist “we can be good without God; religion poisons everything..”
          3. To our secular narrative - total autonomy and freedom to choose what we want apart from any religion or authority; to pursue our goals and dreams, letting nothing and no one stand in our way...

4. To the post christian narrative - kingdom without the king - Christianity is offensive, dangerous and immoral.
  1. I think for a while now Christians have been seeing “Culture” as neutral and harmless but this is simply not the case - *“To be human is to desire “the kingdom,” some version of the kingdom, which is the aim of our quest. Every one of us is on a kind of Arthurian quest for “the Holy Grail” that hoped for, longed for, dreamed of picture of the good life - the realm of human flourishing - that we pursue without ceasing.....Christian worship, we should recognize, is essentially a counter-formation to those rival liturgies we are often immersed in, cultural practices that covertly capture our loves and longings, mis-calibrating them, orienting us to rival versions of the good life. Your love is a kind of automaticity. That’s why we need to be aware of how it is acquired. Our own environment is one that is formative, and all too often de-formative. - James K.A. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom*
  2. Our culture and it’s narrative of the good life is not neutral it is anti-Christ; It is anti self-sacrifice and denial of self. If this is the constant voice in your life, if this is what and who you listen to, it is going to change your way of thinking, which will change your way of living...which, as this psalm shows, will change your destiny. Whatever you consistently put into your life/mind will take hold of you and will eventually work it’s way out... That’s why the flourishing man or woman, doesn’t give this way any place in their life.

### **3. Meditation**

#### **1. Lets take a few minutes for quiet reflection and prayer -**

1. What is the most consistent voice in your life; who’s counsel do you listen to; who’s life or story are you being formed by?  
Spouse, family, friends, co-workers, political party or cause..
2. **Pray this Prayer - Lord expose for me the ways I listen to wicked counsel or am shaped in my thinking and practice by the ungodly.. help me see how my deepest desires can only be fulfilled in you**
3. **Scripture reading: - “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in**

**me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. -Psalm 139:23-24**

4. **Confession** - Lord we have not loved you as we should. Lord we are often suspicious of you, and your will - we doubt the goodness of it. Lord we have not esteemed your word as we should. Please Forgive us. May we, by the power of your Spirit at work in us, be able to say with Job - **“I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.” Amen.**
5. **Pray aloud together** - **“Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

#### **4. The Blessed one - what he or she does do**

1. **“His (or her) delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”**
2. The flourishing man or woman is constantly thinking about God - his character and person first (Exodus 34) Then the law - the wisdom, understanding, and knowledge - that flows from God’s character. Remember, Scripture - God’s wisdom, understanding and knowledge, is what formed the Garden of Eden - This (God’s word) is the greatest counsel from the greatest source and as you take it in, it begins to shape you, the way you think, speak, and live. -You’ve probably heard it said, *“You are not what you think you are; but what you think, You are!”*
3. If this is the constant voice in your life, if this is what and who you listen to, it is going to change your way of thinking, which will change your way of living...which will change your destiny Whatever you consistently put into your life/mind will take hold of you and will eventually work it’s way out...
  1. We Need Counter Formation! We need Spiritual formation as Jesus followers requires a lot of re-habituating precisely because we build up so many disordered habits over a lifetime..
  4. Psalm 1 as well as Romans 12:1-2 show that this counter formation, this transformation comes only by the renewal of your

mind through God's word - his wisdom, his understanding, his knowledge. This is one reason why we always encourage - personal reading and study through scripture - this is why we give a high priority to the teaching of Scripture here at Refuge. According to the Psalmist - The flourishing ones are those who delight in the law.. The word Law is the Hebrew word Torah - which ends up being the Bible's shorthand for scripture. The root word of Torah is Yarah which means to throw... Eugene Peterson in his book Answering God - says that the word Yarah has with it the idea of a javelin being thrown or an arrow being shot. So then if the Law of God is like a javelin or an arrow being shot, the target is our hearts. The idea is that God's word (Scripture) is not just another piece of advice to take or leave; it isn't just one of many truths or one version of the good life, among many - it is the Truth of the universe being created and meant for mankind's flourishing - being aimed directly at your heart.. it isn't just something to learn about, facts, peoples, places things... it is God's truth that is to be contemplated, meditated on, assimilated into our lives and incarnated into every area of our daily living... It is God's offer of true living and fulness

5. The Psalmist isn't talking about a rigid and strict discipline, or a burden...He describes it as delight, a joy to be in it, to receive it, that he goes twice a day, at least, to sit under it's teaching and while he isn't listening or reading, he is thinking on it, working it out in his mind and into his heart.
6. He delights in God's instruction or literally his "Torah." When reading the OT we must remember this principle -t he Law, or instruction of the Lord was given to the people of Israel only after he had already delivered them from slavery to oppression in Egypt.. Exodus Chapter 20 (the Chapter which explicitly lays out the Ten Commandments) begins with these words, **"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery....you shall have..."** God's Torah is first a record of his faithful love before it is instruction to be obeyed. His instruction, is heard, obeyed, and loved, only in light of his goodness and love that he has clearly proved to his people. This fact, that God moved first, this knowledge of his mighty deeds and love empowered and sustained God's people in their worship and service no matter what their circumstances.

7. **How much more for us?** - Don't we know something so infinitely greater than God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt? Yes we do, we know of the redemption that God worked through his Son Jesus of Nazareth, where God gave his most precious gift, his one of a kind Son, for our lives, to deliver us from slavery to meaninglessness, to sin, to death, and to the devil. Jesus delivered us and set us free at the Cross. Tim Keller says, *"Christians have their attitude toward God changed from one of duty to free, loving self-giving because of what Jesus did for us on the cross."* - Tim Keller, *The Songs of Jesus*
8. If we really thought about who God is and what he has done for us in Jesus, our response would be that we want to love him in return, we want to please him, We want to hear and obey his word. It's a pleasure not a duty.

## 5. Meditation #2

1. **Take a moment and think upon the Grace of God displayed for us in the Cross -**
2. **Reflect** - Think about who you were when God called you, by his grace, into his salvation... think about who you are even now, your struggles, your inconsistencies and your failures and in spite of all that - God, your Father wants fulness for you - he wants richness of life
  1. Take a moment and imagine what your life would look like - in all it's fulness - a flourishing - Total peace, driving hope, overflowing love, kindness all around - without shame, without fear, without anger, without brokenness without frustration and regret.... This is what God our Father wants for our lives... to be healed and whole.
3. **Scripture Reading Romans 5:6-8 - "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**
4. **Listen** - **"Do you believe that the God of Jesus loves you beyond worthiness and unworthiness, beyond fidelity and infidelity - that he loves you in the morning sun and the evening rain- that he loves you when your intellect denies it, your emotions refuse it, your whole being rejects it. Do you believe that God loves**

without condition or reservation and loves you this moment as you are and not as you should be?” - Brennan Manning

5. Confession - “Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I Love! Here’s my heart Lord, take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above!”
6. Thanksgiving - “Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name. Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!” - Psalm 103:1-5 (NLT)

## 6. The Result of Torah/Biblical meditation-

1. “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.”
2. Regardless of life’s varied experience the tree always shows signs of life and bears fruit in the correct seasons of life.
  1. Here is flourishing in Biblical terms: Rooted. Never moved no matter the situation, Fruitful in all the right places and seasons. Never lacking, never drying up. Always prospering. Fulfilled and at peace in every sense of the word. Regardless of life’s varied experience the tree always shows signs of life and bears fruit in the correct seasons of life.
3. Therefore - To know how to meditate on and delight in God’s word, the Bible, is the secret to a relationship with God and to life itself - to flourishing, and the good life.
  1. It is through meditation and prayer that we assimilate the truth of God to our daily lives, which is how God makes us more like him - when we hear the word and obey (one word in Hebrew- “Shema”) - that’s when it begins to change us. Meditation and prayer is how we get God’s truth from our heads to our hearts.
    1. In Philippians 4:8-9 Paul says, “**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned**

**and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”**

2. Paul says, to think. This is a greek accounting word that means “to reckon” or to “count up.” Paul is saying if you want peace think deeply and seriously about the core doctrines of the Bible.
3. Peace comes from a disciplined thinking out of the implications of God’s word and promises.
4. Think on who God is, what he has done for you, who you are in Christ, what is in store for God’s people...What that means then for your life now - think about what God offers you in the person of the Holy Spirit - Power and presence...Think on His father love, his grace, his power... his plan! That’s where we get stability, that’s how we get peace and blessing to face whatever life on this crazy planet may throw at us.

**Closing Prayer** - Great Gardener you offer to train us in your wisdom, understanding and knowledge so that our lives will be these mini gardens, these microcosms of Eden. Lord - we have rebelled and failed again and again to believe you, to obey you — we have sown unfaithfulness, unrighteousness and injustice. We have tried to forge our own paths to the good life - we have tried to build Eden with worldly wisdom and virtues - Forgive us, O LORD, and restore us again - bring us back to your wisdom, under your discipleship - may your words be cherished by us - so that we might be what you created, and purchased us by your blood to be - A new and flourishing humanity in covenant partnership with you. In the Name of Jesus our Savior and King we pray - Amen.