



Today we begin a new 9-week teaching series called, The Songs of Summer, a study on Psalms 1–9. Most Christians today consider the Psalms to be the very heart of the Old Testament and they are right. The Psalms are a collection of 150 poems and songs written by a handful of authors. Many of them were used in public worship services. And just like lyrics to a great song, they put words and emotions to everyday real life. They have the power to make us rejoice, cry, and draw us closer to the living God. Psalm 1–2, which we are looking at today and next Sunday, are considered an introduction to the entire Psalter.

I also want to mention a book for this series we are offering for sale at the Resource Centers at all our campuses. It's called, *God's Prayer Book, The Power and Pleasure of Praying the Psalms* by Ben Patterson, the campus pastor at Westmont College in Santa Barbara. Trust me, this is a fantastic book that I highly recommend. I'm currently using it in my morning devotions and it's been just what I've needed for my prayer life.

**Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.**

**That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water,**

**which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.**

Not so the wicked!

**They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.**

**Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,**

**nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction**

(Psalm 1:1–6)

Comedian Louis C.K. who's in the hit TV show, *Parks and Recreation* did a comedy routine several years ago that starts with the line, "Everything's amazing right now, but nobody's happy."

It struck a chord with people because the video went viral with over 4 million views. He's right, "Everything's amazing right now, but nobody's happy." Have you noticed that about people lately? Everything is amazing right now, but there is a relentless pursuit of happiness and few seem to find it.

I read an unbelievable story this week about New York City that illustrates this point. In New York City there are eight million cats and eleven million dogs. Because New York City is mostly all concrete and steel, when you have a pet and it dies, you can't go out in the backyard and bury it. The city authorities decided that for \$50 they would dispose of your deceased pet for you.

One industrious lady saw an opportunity to make some money. She placed an ad in the newspaper that said, "When your pet dies, I will come and take care of the carcass for you for \$25." Apparently the lady would go to the local Salvation Army and buy an old suitcase for two dollars. Then when someone would call about his or her pet, she would go to the home and put the deceased pet in the suitcase. She would then take a ride on the subway, where there are thieves. She would set the suitcase down and act like she wasn't watching it. A thief would eventually come by and steal her suitcase. She'd look up and say quietly, "Wait. Stop. Thief." The people who stole those suitcases got a real surprise when they got home!

Many of us are just like those New York thieves. We're chasing after happiness, and we grab what we think will give us happiness; however, when we get it, it doesn't quite deliver. According to *Psychology Today*, in 2008, 4,000 books were published on happiness alone, up from 50 books in 2000. I believe God wants us to be happy, I really do. But God's version of happiness often looks much different from ours. How is it that some people can still find joy through seasons most would call "unhappy?" If God wants us to be happy, how do we find it? Psalm 1 is going to shed some much needed light on the pursuit of happiness.

The Way of the Godly

Psalm 1 paints a picture for us of two paths—one path is the way of the godly and leads to happiness; the other path is the way of the world and leads to destruction. Psalm 1 begins with the word *blessed*, "**Blessed is the one.**" *Blessed* is used 26 times in the Psalms and can be translated as fortunate or happy. It's also plural, so like Duck Commander's Phil Robertson, "Happy, happy, happy" is the person who follows the way of the godly. This way,

this path, includes several things. First, happy is the person who stays away from evil.

The godly stay away from evil

The godly does not **walk** in step with the wicked. That means the godly don't listen to or seek the advice of certain people. The wicked are not just people locked up in prison who've done heinous crimes. Wicked people are really anyone who has no place for God in their lives. The wicked want nothing to do with him. Their philosophy on life is defined by phrases like, "Me first," "Get it now," "Nothing bad will happen," "There is no right or wrong" and "Truth is relative." The wicked follow the way of the world, not the way of God.

The blessed person also does not **stand** in the way sinners take. To stand with sinners has to do with our actions and habits. The godly don't settle into the habits and lifestyle of those who don't live for God. That means making tough decisions with whom you associate and spend time with. It might mean saying no to things you would benefit from. You might even lose friends, a job, or a promotion because of your desire to stay away from evil. I remember in college pulling out of a spring break trip to Miami because I knew it wasn't a good idea for me to be there. I'd be walking and standing on the wrong path.

There's a progression we see in verse 1; it's a gradual descent into evil. From walking, to standing, to finally **sitting** in the company of mockers. To sit means you've moved in. You've made their habits and lifestyle your own. You find yourself doing the same things they do. Worst of all you're mocking God. Let me be clear, this doesn't mean we should stay away from people who do not know God! Jesus spent time with many notorious sinners of his day and so should we. The difference has to do with influence. Jesus had great influence over those he chose to spend time with. They weren't pulling him down; he was pulling them up. I have several dear friends who are not bad people, but they don't want anything to do with God. I pray for them and look for ways to show Christ to them. We are called to be salt and light to those who are far from God, but we need to be careful and wise. Salt can lose its saltiness and light can dim.

As a new Christian I remember this progression well. I came to faith at 17 years old and I had a group of friends who loved to party. We'd go out on the weekends and because my faith had very little roots I was easily persuaded to do things I would regret later. It would start very casually, an invitation to a party, then just one beer, then just one kiss, and before I knew it I went from walking, to standing, to sitting with sinners. At one point I finally had to disassociate with many of my friends because I just was not strong enough to avoid temptation. I needed time for God to mature and strengthen me. After some time I was able to re-engage with my friends.

That's how it is with evil. It has a subtle way of overtaking us. You might be here this morning wondering how you ever got in the situation you're in. As you look back it was one small decision after another and before you know it you've gone from walking, standing, to sitting in the company of the wicked. Think about your own life. What do you listen to? Whom do you admire and want to be like? Who do you spend your time with? Are they good and godly influences? Or like rust on an old car, are those people and things slowly eroding your spiritual life and stealing your happiness? You want to be happy? Stay away from evil.

The godly are being formed by God's Word

What the Psalm says next might surprise us. Instead of a strategy to avoid evil in our lives, we get a call to delight and chew on the Word of God, "*Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.*" To delight in someone means to find great pleasure in their company. It's being completely absorbed by their beauty and captivated by their presence. The happy person delights and is completely mesmerized by the Word of God. For the psalmist, the Law meant the Ten Commandments and the first five books of the Bible. For us Christians, the whole Bible is God's revelation and the key to unlocking his specific guidance for our lives and the choices we make. Our delight, and source of joy, is the divinely inspired Word of God. You can grow up hearing sermons and Sunday school lessons all your life and never be captivated by the Word of God. As a preacher, I fight hard to maintain my personal time in God's Word apart from sermons I'm preaching. It's not easy. But there's nothing more important than your relationship with God and it must be formed on the foundation of God's Word.

The happy delight in the Word and meditate on it day and night. The word *meditate* unfortunately has been hijacked by the New Age movement. Christians love studying the Bible, hearing it preached and even memorizing it, but we leave the meditation stuff to those who do yoga (which I love, by the way). The word *meditation* is the same word used to describe a young lion growling over its prey, licking its lips in anticipation of a deeply satisfying meal. We are to be immersed, completely soaked and chewing constantly on the Word of God. Like a cow chewing its cud we meditate on that which will fill us, make us strong and completely satisfy us.

What does meditation really look like for our busy lives on the Peninsula? Meditation is not only for the mystics, it's for everyday folks like you and me. It's to be done "day and night." That means it's an activity of daily life. To meditate is to chew on and think about the Word of God. While I'm driving, while I'm working, while I'm cleaning out the garage. In all of life's situations, happy is the one who is chewing on God's Word. That means reading the Word daily and repeatedly. It's saying God's Word out loud. Sometimes it's focusing on just one verse or one word all day

long. It's using God's Word to inform your prayer life. It's memorizing God's Word and getting it into your heart. It's constantly thinking about what I learned on Sunday or in your own time with God. It's allowing the Word to inform how I respond to any situation that day. Like a juicy skirt steak sitting in spices all day long, we marinate in the Word of God. We do this because whatever shapes a person's thinking shapes their life. Want to be happy? Mediate on the Word of God.

The godly are like a strong fruit-bearing tree

The Psalm gives us a real life example of what the life of the blessed look like. The godly are like a strong fruit-bearing tree planted by streams of water. It's helpful to know, the Psalms were collected and written during the Babylonian exile. Babylon (modern day Iraq) was a flat and barren place. Since only a single river flowed through the country, the Babylonians cut several miles of irrigation canals that were used to grow crops. Trees were transplanted near the banks of the canals and could survive the brutal sun because their roots had a constant source of water. Like these trees, the Christian has a constant source of water—the Holy Spirit. Remember what we learned in John 7? Jesus said, *“Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”* By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive...” (verses 38–39). As we mediate on God's Word, the Holy Spirit refreshes and strengthens our lives.

A result of being planted by a stream of water, the tree also bears fruit in season. When we are rooted in Christ and in his Word we begin to develop his character in us. Galatians 5:22–23 describes the fruit we bear, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...”* I want you to notice this fruit comes “in season.” That means we are all in process. By God's grace we are growing in these areas, but we haven't arrived yet. In season means there is a process of preparing the soil, planting the seeds, watering, resting and finally harvesting the fruit.

In the book, *The Good and Beautiful God* James Smith writes about God's process of maturity: “A student asked the President of his school whether he could take a shorter course than the one prescribed. ‘Oh yes,’ replied the President, ‘but then it depends on what you want to be. When God wants to make an oak, He takes a hundred years, but when He wants to make a squash, he takes six months. Spiritual growth, in addition to being slow, is not uniform. Some years we may experience tremendous growth, and some we see very little change. An oak tree has only a couple of months of actual growth each year in terms of measurable expansion. The rest of the year, the other ten months, are spent solidifying that growth.” In season means we need to be patient with God's process in our lives.

For those of us who are parents, this is a great image to pray over your children. Pray God would make your son or daughter like a strong tree planted where their roots can absorb what is good for their lives. Pray God would make them fruitful for the work of his Kingdom by using their unique gifts and talents he has given them.

So there it is, the way of the godly. The path of happiness. The godly stay away from evil. They are being formed by God's Word and they are like fruit-bearing trees planted by streams of water. However, there's another path, another direction to head and that is the way of the world.

The Way of the World

The wicked are like chaff

In contrast to a well watered tree, the wicked are like chaff that the wind blows away. Unlike the secure and stable beauty of the fruit tree, the life of the wicked are like the husks of wheat and fragments of straw that are blown into the air after the wheat has been threshed. Chaff is worthless. It has no fruit or value. It has no roots, no life. Like those who have no room for God in their lives, they are easily blown away by the winds of the world. When adversity strikes, they are blown away. When the Enemy, the ruler of the air hits, they are blown away. Like a ship on the open sea caught in a violent storm with a broken engine, the wicked are tossed by the wind and tide, unknowingly heading towards the jagged rocks that guard the coast.

The wicked will not be with the righteous on the day of judgement

Since the wicked have no root system verse 5 says they are unable to stand in the judgment or in the assembly of the righteous. I know this is very hard for us to come to grips with. But Jesus himself taught about these two paths. *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”* (Matt. 7:13–14). If we choose to live without Jesus in this life, we will live apart from him forever. No one will escape God's judgement. In the end, we get what we want—eternity in God's presence or eternity away from him.

The Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the world leads to destruction

The final verse of this Psalm explains why the wicked will not be with the righteous on the day of judgment, *“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”* Some translations say the Lord “knows the way of the righteous.” I love that. God knows you intimately because he created you. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are in relationship with him. He knows you. He is with you. He is for

you. He watches over you. But, the path of the wicked is the path of rejection and eventually destruction.

This means God knows the way of those who choose his Son. Only those who believe and receive Jesus will be standing in the assembly of the righteous. It's not based on anything we have done, but on all Jesus did for us and in our place. That may be a really hard thing for some of you to swallow this morning, but that is exactly what the Scriptures teach. For all of us who have chosen the way of the godly and placed our faith in Christ, this is a word of great encouragement and joy. He knows you and he's watching over you!

I started this sermon talking about happiness because, "Everything's amazing right now, but nobody's happy." I think the reason why so many people are unhappy today is because their goal in life is the pursuit of happiness, not God. Psalm 1

calls us to seek God first and we'll be blessed, we'll be happy. If you seek God what you will gain is happiness. Being blessed, being happy, is actually a gift from God. We can't manufacture it on our own. But we sure try! British theologian C.S. Lewis described happiness 50 years ago in terms that make even more sense today: "A car is made to run on petrol [gasoline], and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. He himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

CPC—seek God, not happiness.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.