

Main Idea: In order to experience the blessing of God in 2020, we need to be in the Book. That was last week’s message from Nehemiah 8. But we also need for the Book to be in us. That’s this week’s message from Psalm 1, which shows us what happens when the Book is in us. According to Psalm 1, there are two kinds of people, with two outcomes, and one critical choice. There are three movements to this psalm.

- I. We meet the blessed person (1-3).
 - A. He is known for what he doesn’t do (1).
 1. You can tell by where he walks that he has distinct values.
 2. You can tell by where he stands that he has a distinct lifestyle.
 3. You can tell by where he sits that he keeps a distinct company.
 - B. He is known for what he does (2).
 1. He is in the Book.
 2. He makes sure the Book is in him.
 - C. He is known for what he experiences (3).
 1. He is like a fruitful tree.
 2. He prospers in whatever he does.
- II. We meet the wicked (4-5).
 - A. They are not in the Book, and the Book isn’t in them.
 - B. They are as unstable as chaff.
 - C. They will not stand in the judgment.
- III. We meet the Lord (6).
 - A. He knows the righteous.
 - B. He says the wicked will perish.

Implications: Meditate on the Book in 2020.

1. Delight in the Book daily.
2. Ruminant on the Book day and night.
3. When the fruit comes, give glory to the Author of the Book.

I want you to experience the maximum blessing of God in 2020. For that to happen we need to be in the Book. That was last week’s message from Nehemiah 8. But we also need for the Book to be in us. That’s this week’s message from Psalm 1.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1

Last week I set up the platform to resemble what you might see if you went to the place where I have my daily time with God in the basement of our house. There’s a desk there, and on it there’s the Book, two other books, and some paper and a pencil.

I gave you the 7-minute challenge last time. Begin each day in 2020 with at least seven minutes in the Book. Pray for one minute, asking the Lord to open your eyes to the treasures in His Word. Then read for five minutes, preferably working your way through a book in the Bible. And then afterwards, pray for one minute asking the Lord for help to implement what you have read, for His glory. Can you go more than seven minutes? Absolutely, and as you get into the wonderful daily habit of reading God’s Word, I’m confident you will, and your joy will increase.

But today I want to elaborate on the challenge. There’s something else we ought to do with the Book besides read it, and it’s vital for maximum joy. It’s the activity of *meditating* on the Book.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see a message preached at WBC 3/21/93.

Later in the message I'll talk about some practical things you can that help me meditate on the Scriptures. But before we get to the *how-to*, let's address the *why* by turning our attention to Psalm 1.

I love the Psalms. In the Psalms, God has given us a Worship Manual, a "how to" book on the subject of praise. Did you know that the Psalms were designed to be sung? By individuals in personal worship, and by the congregation in public worship.

God gave the Psalms to the Israelites. Many different human authors contributed: Moses, Asaph, Solomon, Ethan, the sons of Korah, and of course, David. 73 psalms are ascribed to that great shepherd-king David. The Psalms are poetic literature, filled with beautiful imagery, expressing the heart-felt cries of individuals devoted to God.

When God gave Israel the Law, He showed His people how to live. The Psalms personalize the Law. In the Psalms we see real people doing what the psalmist encourages us to do in Psalm 1. Meditate on the Law. We can relate to the Psalms, for they reveal the reflections of real people in real situations, as they seek to delight in God's Law in their lives.

The Psalms show us how to experience the presence of God in our daily lives. God is real. And He wants us to enjoy a personal, vibrant relationship with Him. The Psalms show us how.

I want to encourage you to spend time in the Psalms in 2020, and specifically, to do what you see the writers of the psalms doing in your daily walk.

I want to experience God's fullest blessing in 2020. I want it personally, for my family, and for you. That's what this message is all about. That's what Psalm 1 is all about. The blessing of God.

Notice those first words again, "Blessed is the man." What does it take to experience God's blessing? According to Psalm 1, the blessing is connected to this Book. If we want to experience the blessing of God in 2020, we need to be in the Book. That was last week's message from Nehemiah 8. But we also need for the Book to be in us. That's this week's message from Psalm 1, which shows us what happens when the Book is in us.

There are three movements in Psalm 1. According to Psalm 1, there are two kinds of people, with two outcomes, and one critical choice.

I. We meet the blessed person (1-3).

Verse 1, "Blessed is the man". What does "blessed" mean? It means "happy", but more than the short-lived happiness associated with the word today. It means fulfilled, complete, satisfied. Jesus uses the word in Matthew 5:3ff, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who mourn." And so forth.

The blessed person is obviously, as the word indicates, the person who has God's *blessing* on his/her life. The word "blessed" is found 26 times in the Psalms:

2:12 "Blessed are all they who put their trust in Him."

32:1-2 "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered..."

33:12 "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord..."

34:8 "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him."

The Hebrew word is actually plural. "Blessings upon the man." Which brings us to the question, "What man? What kind of person experiences God's blessings?" David identifies this person for us in three ways in verses 1-3.

A. He is known for what he doesn't do (1). "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

Verse 1 reveals what is NOT true of the blessed individual. There are three parallel phrases, revealing three things a blessed person does not do.

1. *You can tell by where he walks that he has distinct values. He does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.* "Counsel" has to do with thinking. The blessed person does not think like ungodly people. He operates with a different set of values. What determines those values? We'll see in verse 2.

2. *You can tell by where he stands that he has a distinct lifestyle. He does not stand in the way of sinners.* "Way" has to do with behavior and lifestyle. Remember from Jesus' teaching how many "ways" there are in life from which to choose? Only two. Matthew 7:13 "Broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many go..." Matthew 7:14 "Hard is the way which leads unto life, and few find it."

So, there are only two ways in life. One pleases God. The other doesn't. The blessed man chooses the way that pleases God. He chooses the distinct lifestyle. He doesn't live the way the majority live.

This isn't saying that the blessed person isolates himself from sinners. That's impossible. Nor is it a call to live like a hermit. The blessed man separates himself, not from sinners, but from THE WAY OF sinners. Distinct values produce a distinct, God-pleasing lifestyle.

3. *You can tell by where he sits that he keeps a distinct company. He does not sit in the seat of the scornful.* "Sitting in the seat" has to do with a person's associations, who he spends time with and specifically, who he's comfortable with. The blessed person doesn't make himself comfortable in the presence of mockers. ESV says, 'scoffers.' It comes from a word that in the verb form means "to brag, speak boastfully, deride, encourage scorn, to put on airs." The scoffer is the person who mocks at God and righteousness and sin. It's just a joke to him, subject matter for a good laugh.

You know who the scoffer is. You see him every day. He's in the lunchroom. He's in your classroom. You can't avoid him. But you can refuse to sit with him. And you must. The blessing of God is on the line.

The blessed person doesn't take his cues in life from this kind of person. He keeps a distinct company, and mockers are not in that company. It's not that he's too good for such company. It's that he knows he's prone to be just like them if he hangs around them, and this he chooses not to do.

Pray for them, yes. Show them kindness, yes. Have hearts that are tender towards them, yes. But sit with them and become like them? No. The blessed man watches the company he keeps; actual company, as in real people; and virtual company, as in which entertainers and athletes and artists he spends time with.

Did you notice the downward progression in verse 1? Walking leads to standing which results in sitting. These three phrases show three steps a person takes in moving

God and the blessing of God out of his life. It starts with his value system, and moves to his lifestyle, and results in the company he keeps.

Surgeon remarked, "When men are living in sin they go from bad to worse."

By way of application, look again at the phrase, "nor sits in the seat of the scornful (AV)." In Hebrew society, the "seat" was often a place of prestige. Leaders would "sit" in the city gate. But that's not what drives the blessed person. He's not after prestige. It's not his goal to "sit with the movers and shakers" in this world. He doesn't have to read their latest book, or stay up with their latest blogpost, in order to know how he's going to live.

Which brings us to the positive in verse 2.

B. He is known for what he does (2). "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night."

Notice the strong contrast. BUT. The reason blessed people don't do certain things is because they have something else in mind, something that produces a far superior result.²

And what's that? Leviticus. Seriously? Yes. And Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy too. That's what verse 2 says, "But his delight is in the *law* of the LORD."

The word *law* is the Hebrew word "Torah." Sometimes the word refers to the Ten Commandments which God gave to Israel through Moses at Sinai. At other times, the Torah refers to the first five books of the OT, which were actually the covenant stipulations God gave to His chosen people that He rescued from bondage. In its most general sense Torah means simply "instruction." In His kindness God has given to the world an instruction manual.

This is who I am. This is who you are. This is how life works, how you can experience maximum joy in it, and beyond it.

It's found in the Book, specifically the first five books. When Psalm 1 was written, this instruction was primarily the Pentateuch. But for us three thousand years later, God's instruction includes all 66 books of the Bible.

What does a blessed person do with God's instruction? In essence, two things.

1. *He is in the Book.* "His delight is in the law of the LORD." He delights in the Book God has given to mankind. It's His Word, not the counsel of the ungodly, that shapes his life.

Is the Bible your delight and mine? If it is, we will be in it. Again, that was last week's message. Bring out the Book! Personally, every day. As a congregation, every time we're able to meet. We show we delight in the Book by being in the Book.

But the blessed person does something else. In fact, you can be in the Book and totally lost. Like the Pharisees. They had the Book. They were in the Book. And they "children of the devil," according to Jesus (John 8:44). "You diligently study the Scriptures," He told them in John 5:39-40, "because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

² People may say to us, "Oh, you can't do that, can you? You're a *Christian*." But it's not so much a matter of can't, but *won't*. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 6:12, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient."

As important as being in the Book is, the blessed person does something else with this Book.

2. *He makes sure the Book is in him.* Notice the rest of verse 2, “and on his law he meditates day and night.” What does it mean to “meditate”? Don’t think near-eastern meditation. This isn’t saying to relinquish the control of your mind. In fact, it’s just the opposite. It’s the same word used in Psalm 2:1, there translated “plot” or “imagine.” It means literally “to growl, mutter, read in an undertone.” Which is what you do with the Book. You read it out loud, slowly, out loud, over and over, so that eventually, it’s in you, memorized.

But then it goes a step further. To meditate means “to mull over, to contemplate.” When we meditate on the Book, we aggressively use our minds to think about and digest and implement what it says. We do what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

How often? Day and night. Continually. The blessed person is constantly working on intake. He’s in the Book, yes, but that’s because he wants the Book in him.

Again, this Book is the instruction manual for life. You want to know how to have God’s kind of marriage, or friendship, or how to deal with your fears and anxieties? It’s all here in the Book. But it won’t help you if you don’t know what it says. And it won’t help you all the time if it’s not with you all the time.

This is where meditation enters. We need to internalize the Book. This is precisely what the LORD told Joshua after he got a huge job promotion. Right after Moses died, this is what the LORD told Joshua in Joshua 1:8, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

Joshua, you have the Torah, but you need it *in you*. That will be the key to your success. Day and night mull over the Book. Think about it. Ponder what it says, and how you’re going to put it into practice.

This is what the blessed person does. He meditates on the Torah day and night. That’s the charge of Psalm 1. And that’s what we see put into practice in the other 149 psalms. Let’s look at an example. Look at Psalm 34. The heading indicates that David is in trouble, the time he pretended to be insane to escape. He says this in Psalm 34:19-20, “A righteous man may have many *troubles*, but the LORD delivers him from them all; he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.”

What happens to a righteous person? He has many troubles. How did David know that? From his experience, yes, but he also knew it because he saw example after example of this reality in the Torah. He’s thinking about Abraham. Did Abraham have any trouble in his life? Many troubles! So did Jacob, and Joseph, and Moses. And as David meditates on these people he sees in the Torah, he makes two conclusions. One, a righteous man may have many troubles. That’s inescapable. But so is this. Two, the Lord delivers him from them all.

In Psalm 86, the psalmist (the heading says it’s David) once again is thinking about *trouble* and applies what he learns from the Torah to his own situation. “You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. ⁶ Hear my prayer, O LORD; listen to my cry for mercy. ⁷ In the day of *my trouble* I will call to you, for you will

answer me (Psalm 86:5–7).” How does he know the Lord will help him with his trouble? Where did he learn that lesson? From meditating on the Book and the experiences of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and others.

But it’s not just people God gives to us in the Torah. It’s also an answer to the sin problem. Read Leviticus and Numbers and what do you see? Offerings. Sacrifices. A place called the tabernacle where sinners can have their sins covered if they will come to Him through the death of an appropriate sacrifice.

You are forgiving and good, says David in Psalm 86. That’s why I can call on you in the day of my trouble, not because I’m worthy but because You have made the way. He learned that by meditating on the Book.

Centuries later we see Nahum the prophet doing the same thing. He says in Nahum 1:7, “The LORD is good, a refuge in times of *trouble*. He cares for those who trust in him.” How does Nahum know that the Lord is good, a refuge in trouble? He knows that because He’s been meditating on the Book.

We see this in the New Testament too. In Romans 4 Paul is making the point that we sinners are saved by faith, not works. But genuine faith isn’t just past tense for the people God saves. It’s how we live. And how does Paul prove the point? By pointing us to Exhibit A in the Torah, father Abraham himself. Verses 20-21, “Yet he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

Abraham had many troubles in life, but learned to give God glory by choosing to live by the promises of God rather than his feelings. And so will we. That’s a lesson we learn by meditating on the Book.

What’s the best thing you can do to prepare for the trials that are coming in 2020? Saturate your soul with the Book.

This is what the blessed person does, my friend. Is it easy to meditate on the Book? No. It takes time and effort. You have to stop doing other things (turn off the social media and television). You have to say no quite frankly to what at other times may be very important activities (like talking to your spouse, or playing with your kids, or returning emails for work) to engage in this activity. To meditate on the Book, you intentionally stop other activities, so that your mental energies are focused exclusively on the Book and its Author.

Is it worth the effort? Oh yes! This brings us to the third mark of the blessed.

C. He is known for what he experiences (3). “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”

What’s true of the blessed person? The psalmist says the person who meditates on the Book experiences two things.

1. *He is like a fruitful tree.*
2. *He prospers in whatever he does.*

This is a captivating word picture, isn’t it? This is the life we were meant to live. Picture a tree, yes, but not a wild tree. It’s been planted. See the work of God in this. “I am the true vine,” said Jesus, “and my Father is the gardener (John 15:1).”

And where is the tree planted? By streams of water. Why there? Because this is a desert region. All around this tree things are dying of thirst. But this tree won't die. Its leaf does not wither. Why not? Because it has a root system that's nourished by the nearby streams of water.

Consequently, this tree yields fruit. Beautiful, luscious, life-sustaining, Gardener-glorifying fruit. Not all the time. In season, says the psalmist. This is how the blessed life works. There are seasons, and while it may seem at times like nothing's happening, just wait. The fruit will come.

And then, lest we miss the point that the psalmist is talking about people, not trees, he leaves the word picture at the end of verse 3, and simply says, "Whatever he does prospers."

Oh, my friend, this is God's offer. He says we can be fruitful and prosperous. Like a vivacious, productive tree, He says. By how does it happen? It depends on what we do with the Book. Be in it, yes, but more importantly, it must be in us. Which is another way of saying *He* must be in us.

What happens if we aren't? This brings us to second movement in the psalm.

II. We meet the wicked (4-5).

Verse 4, "Not so the wicked!" Notice the Psalmist doesn't explicitly tell us what makes a person wicked. But the "not so" indicates the difference has to do with the Book. We've just seen what the blessed person does with the Book. *Not so the wicked.*

Not so in terms of meditating. Not so in terms of the outcome.³

Think carefully about this? What makes a person "wicked"? Please know that a person can be sitting in a church and be wicked. A person can be standing behind a pulpit and be wicked.

Unfortunately, we tend to equate wickedness with external activities, like doing drugs or sleeping around and so forth. And while those are wicked actions, they are merely symptoms of a greater, root problem. The wicked are those who aren't right with God. Period. That's the problem. They're not loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, as Jesus said we're to do. They are...*un-godly*.

How do you spot a wicked person? According to this text, there are three identifiers.

A. They are not in the Book, and the Book isn't in them. "Not so the wicked." They don't delight in God's Word, and certainly don't meditate on it. They're thinking about other things. Consequently...

B. They are as unstable as chaff. Far from being like a fruitful tree, verse 4 says, "They are like chaff that the wind blows away."

Do you know what chaff is? Picture a wheat harvest. See the workers winnowing the grain. See them throwing the wheat plant up in the air, the grain falling to the ground, and the chaff blowing away.

That's chaff. It's the part of the plant that the farmer burns. Rootless, weightless, useless. Unstable, subject to every wind that blows.

³ Note: The LXX has lit., "Not so the ungodly, not so." Double negative

And that's what the wicked are like. Friends, if we're not in the Book and the Book isn't in us, we are...*wicked*. That's the word the Bible uses. We're trying to live life by ignoring the Owner's Manual. And that never goes well.

A wicked person is unstable. He's a lightweight. It shows up in his relationships, and particularly in his response to hardship. When a storm hits the tree, and storms do hit the tree, for the Lord doesn't offer us a suffering-free life, there's still fruit, for there's a deep root system. But not so for the chaff, which just blows away.

E.g.—

And as serious as that is, there's a more critical problem facing the wicked.

C. They will not stand in the judgment. That's what verse 5 says, "Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous." Every human being will face the judgment of God one day (Heb 9:27). But only those who have been saved by God through faith in Jesus Christ shall stand. The wicked shall not stand, not in the judgment, nor in the assembly of the righteous.

In his classic, *The Treasury of David*, Spurgeon wrote, "Sinners cannot live in heaven. They would be out of their element. Sooner could a fish live upon a tree than the wicked in Paradise. Heaven would be an intolerable hell to an impenitent man, even if he could be allowed to enter; but such a privilege shall never be granted to the man who perseveres in his iniquities."

Four hundred years later Jeremiah the prophet did what the psalmist is exhorting us to do. He was meditating on the Book, on this very psalm in fact. Listen to what he wrote in Jeremiah 17:5-8: "This is what the Lord says: 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.⁶ He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.⁷ 'But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.⁸ He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.'"

Jeremiah shared those words with people he loved very much, his own countrymen, most of whom were not right with God. Judgement was coming, so he made it as clear as he could. Which do you want to be, dear friend, cursed or blessed, a bush in the wasteland or a fruitful tree by the water? If you keep trusting in man, you'll never leave the parched places. But if you will put your trust in the Lord, and specifically in what He says in the Book, you'll never fail to bear fruit, no matter what.

We meet the blessed person. We meet the wicked. In the final movement...

III. We meet the Lord (6).

Verse 6, "For the LORD watches over [ESV 'knows'] the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." Lest we miss the point of the psalm, we see the contrast one final time, from the LORD's perspective.

A. He knows the righteous. He knows them. There's a deep relationship between the Lord and the righteous. He created that relationship, by His grace, for their benefit. He's offered Himself to them, and they've responded to His offer, by faith.

We see it happen to Abraham in Genesis 17, and to Joseph in Genesis 39, and to Moses in Exodus 3. How did these sinners (for like all men, they were sinners) become righteous? They weren't righteous, until God pursued them, by His grace, and spoke to them. And they believed Him. "Abraham believed the Lord, and He credited it to Him as righteousness (Gen 15:6)."

But the Lord doesn't just save people. Those He saves He *knows*, says the ESV.⁴ He *watches over* the way of the righteous. They are never out of His sight, secure in His care.⁵ He is personally involved in blessing the life of the person who delights in Him and in His Word. This is what the Book says. As well as this.

B. He says the wicked will perish. Actually, it's more specific than that. "The way of the wicked will perish."

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it is the way of death," says Proverbs 14:12."

"Enter through the narrow gate," says Jesus in Matthew 7:13. "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."

We never hear this in the news. But listen to God. Sure, sin is pleasurable, for a season. But there are severe consequences for taking the wrong way in life. The way of the wicked shall *perish*.

Which would you rather be this year, my friend, a fruitful, growing tree, or blowing chaff? The key is the Book. It's not that this Book saves you. It doesn't. Which is why there will be people in hell who had PhDs in biblical studies. What this Book does, to borrow from 2 Timothy 3:15, is make you "wise unto salvation."

It shows us what our problem is—we are sinners under the just wrath of God.

It shows where we are heading—away from God, to eternal condemnation.

It shows us what God in His grace has provided for us—forgiveness and the gift of eternal life through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And it shows us what we must now do—repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Saved from your sin, saved from Satan's stronghold, saved from yourself and your bent towards self-destruction. Saved...to become like a tree planted by a river.

You have God's Word on this. He says so in the Book.

Implications: Meditate on the Book in 2020.

I encourage you to do three things this year.

1. *Delight in the Book daily.* That was last week's challenge. Bring out the Book, but not as a duty. Delight in it and the Person it reveals.

2. *Ruminates on the Book day and night.* Here are two practical suggestions, two things I try and do. One, sing at least one hymn during your daily devotional time. By doing that you will be ruminating on the message of the Book.

Two, when you're reading and a verse stands out and encourages or challenges you, write it down on a piece of paper. Then read over it slowly. Then put a tune to it (e.g.—I did that this week with Psalm 34:19, to the tune of Amazing Grace), and sing it a

⁴ The Hebrew sheds light here. The sense is, "The Lord is knowing the way of the righteous." True, the Lord knows everything, everybody, including the ungodly. But He knows the "way of the righteous."

⁵ Job 23:10 "He knows the way that I take..."

few times. Then sing it again the next day, and the next. Before long, you'll have it hidden in your heart. Then you'll be able to do what Psalm 1 says, and meditate on it day *and night*. So when you wake up at 3 am and can't get back to sleep, don't count sheep. Ruminates on the Book.

3. *When the fruit comes, give glory to the Author of the Book.* And the fruit will come, for you're now like a tree planted by the water. And you have His word on it.