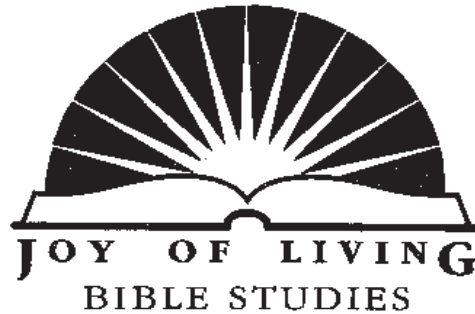


Psalms of Faith (Revised) Lesson 2



Psalms 1: A Song of Foundations

Psalms 1 to 41 make up the first book of psalms that parallels the first book of the Pentateuch, Genesis. This first book of psalms records the beginnings of life and the basic needs of the human heart. Psalm 1 is a description of the wicked and the righteous. It describes both the God-centered life and the self-centered life.

When the psalm talks about the wicked, it is not referring to murderers, rapists, or drug dealers, the kind of people we usually think of as wicked. We often think of some notorious person, such as a gangster or hoodlum, as being wicked. But the psalmist does not mean that.

The term really means the ungodly, the one who has little or no time for God in their life, someone who has ruled God out of their affairs and their thinking. God is the greatest Being in the universe, the One who makes sense out of life, the One around whom all of

life revolves. To eliminate such a Being from one's thinking is to be wicked, or to be ungodly. But in contrast, the God-centered life and the results that come from godliness are set before us. That is the simplest division of the psalm: two balanced parts.

The God-Centered Life

Look at what is said about the God-centered life. The psalmist cries out:

*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 mock-
ers,
but whose delight is in the law of
the LORD,
and who meditates on his law
day and night.*

(Psalm 1:1-2)

That is a description of a life centered in God. Quite appropriately it

begins with the word *blessed*. *Blessed* is one of those code words that only Christians use—it really means *happy*. Here, then, we have the secret of happiness.

You may recognize that word as the way the Lord Jesus began the greatest sermon ever spoken before people, the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5-7). It begins with what are often called the Beatitudes (which means “the Blessings”). These Beatitudes are the secret of blessing or happiness. So here in Psalm 1 the psalmist is giving us the clue to happiness. “Oh, the blessedness,” he says, “oh, the happiness of the person who lives like this.”

Walking, Standing, Sitting

Then he gives us a description of this person’s life, both negatively—actions they don’t take—and positively—actions they do take. First is the negative: “who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers.” He gathers up in three key words the varied aspects of life: who walks...who stands...who sits.

Notice also the progress of evil. He speaks of the wicked, of sinners, and of mockers. The psalmist is pointing

out to us that the ungodly are characterized by a totally different way of life, which progresses from bad to worse.

To walk is a reference to the decisions that must be made all day long. We all know how it is. We take steps throughout each day, making decisions about all kinds of matters. Walking is taking a series of steps.

To stand is a picture of the commitments we make to various causes. We give ourselves to certain things, we take our stand upon certain important matters.

To sit is a picture of the settled attitude of the heart, the continuous disposition of a person’s life.

Now, says the psalmist, the person who has found the secret of happiness can be recognized by the fact that they do not walk in step with the wicked, i.e., they do not make decisions as do the ungodly. They have rejected the philosophy of the ungodly. What is that philosophy? Perhaps it can be put into three simple propositions: “Me first;” “Get it now;” “Nothing bad will happen.” That is the mindset of the ungodly, the wicked. The person who has learned the secret of happiness rejects that.

They do not make their decisions on that basis.

Second, they do not stand in the way that sinners take. This word *sinners* is most interesting in the Hebrew. It is a word that means “to make a loud noise” or “to cause a tumult.” It is the idea of provoking a riot, of creating a disturbance, making trouble. The psalmist says you can recognize the godly person in that they do not make trouble. They do not provoke riots; they are not at work causing disturbances; they are obedient to the laws of life and of the land. They do not “stand in the way” (do not identify with) those who live to cause trouble. They have rejected all that.

Third, they do not sit in the company of mockers, of those who blame everyone but themselves for what is wrong. We all know how easily that kind of attitude comes to our hearts. If anything goes wrong, somebody else is always at fault, right? Parents blame the children, the children blame the parents, and they both blame the schools. The schools blame the parents and the government. One nation blames another nation. Everyone is blaming everyone else. That is the philosophy of the world, is it not? These are the

mockers, the cynics, who cast a baleful eye at life in general and blame others for their problems.

A Positive Description

The godly person has rejected that attitude. On the contrary, their life is characterized by positive things. They are selfless in their motivations, obedient in their actions, obedient to law, and they do not adopt the role of the critic but are cheerful and acceptant of whatever comes as coming from the hand of God. I love this description of a Christian, “A Christian is one who is completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble.” This is exactly what the psalmist describes. It is an unusual life. I think most of us, hearing this, say to ourselves, “Do I meet that description?”

But that is the negative side. Now look at the positive side. “but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night” (Psalm 1:2). Here is the reason why this person is able to reject the world’s philosophy. They have learned to delight in the law of the Lord. Now “the law of the Lord” is, in the Psalms, another name for the Scriptures. It means more than the Law of Moses; it includes the whole revelation of God.

This godly person has learned that in the book of God they are given a completely different view of life than what they get from the world.

In the book they are told the truth about life. They have learned to delight in this book, which tells them the truth and shows them a whole new way of life.

Discovering Truth and Appropriating Power

If Psalm 1:1 were the only description of the godly person, one might infer that this person thinks too much of themselves; that they do not act like others because they think they are better than the others are. But the second verse makes clear that this is not the reason why the godly person lives the way they do. Rather, it is because they have discovered the truth about themselves out of the law of God.

One Sunday morning a minister read the following verses to his congregation. "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swin-

dlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Then he said to the congregation, "Now that is a description of the Christians in Corinth and the life they once had led. I would like to ask if there are any here who have had this kind of a background. How many in this congregation have done some of the things listed here?" He read the list again. One by one, all over the congregation people began to stand to their feet until more than half the congregation was standing.

A young man was visiting the church for the first time that morning. He had recently become a Christian and had attended several churches looking for a fellowship where he could feel at home. He took one look at this great crowd and said, "These are my kind of people."

Yes, "that is what some of you were. But you [are] washed, you [are] sanctified [made clean], you [are] justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." That is what the person described in the first Psalm

discovers when they read the law of God. They learn not only that God demands a certain perfection, but also how that perfection is made possible through the Redeemer whom God will send, whose life they learn to share. By faith, they learn to appropriate the strength of that coming Lord.

They meditate on the law day and night. That does not mean they go around thinking about Scriptures and repeating them over and over all day long. That is a mechanical understanding of this verse. Rather, this person has received a wonderful new life made possible by God and available for any situation. They keep appropriating it all day and all night, whenever they need it.

They do not attempt to mobilize their human resources or to find some kind of encouragement from outsiders and therefore to depend upon external circumstances for peace and rest; rather, they learn to draw only upon the strength of God. This is the secret of the godly life. This is the only way any of us can learn to be selfless, obedient, and cheerful under every circumstance.

A Deep-Rooted Life

Now the psalmist goes on to give us the evaluation of this kind of life,

*That person is like a tree planted
by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not with-
er—*

whatever they do prospers.
(Psalm 1:3)

Many years ago when I was first beginning my ministry, we held a youth conference in the Sierra Nevada mountains. There a young man came to me and took me aside. We stood together underneath a great Douglas fir and he said, "Pastor, I don't know what is the matter with me. I want to be a good Christian, and I try hard, but somehow I just never seem to make it. I'm always doing the wrong thing. I just can't live like a Christian."

I said to him, "Well, there may be several reasons for that, but let me ask you this: What about your private life with the Lord? How well do you know the Lord? How much do you delight in reading His Word and then spending time talking to Him? Because, after all, it's not the time spent in reading the Word that's important, but it's the time

spent in enjoying the presence of God that strengthens you.”

He hung his head and said, “Well, I admit I don’t do very much of that.”

Just then this very phrase from the Psalms flashed into my mind, “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water.” I stepped back and said to him, “Look at this tree we’re under. What does it remind you of? What are the qualities this tree suggests to you?”

He looked at the great Douglas fir, towering into the heavens above, and said, “Well, the first thing is, it’s strong.”

I said, “Yes. Anything else?”

“Well,” he said, “it’s beautiful.”

Finding Beauty and Strength

I said, “Exactly! Beauty and strength. Those are the two things you admire about this tree. And those are exactly the two things you want in your own life, aren’t they? Beauty and strength?”

He said, “Right.”

“Well,” I said, “tell me this: What makes this tree beautiful and strong? Where does it get its beauty and its strength?”

He stopped for a moment and looked at the tree, then he said, “Well, from the roots, I guess.”

I asked him, “Can you see the roots?”

“No,” he said, “you can’t.” Then he said, “I get it! That is the hidden part of life, but it is the secret of this tree’s beauty and strength, isn’t it?”

That is what this psalmist is saying. The person who is godly has learned, in the hidden inner parts of their life, to draw upon the grace and glory and strength of God. Their roots run deep into rich and moist soil, and this is what makes them beautiful and strong. They are like a tree planted by streams of water.

Bearing Fruit

And they are fruitful. The tree “yields its fruit in season.” That is probably a reference to the fruit of the Spirit, which is described in the New Testament. It is the fruit of the character of God, which is always the same in either the Old or the New Testament: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23).

“Whose leaf does not wither.” That means they are always a vital, an exciting kind of person. They are never dull, never dreary, never boring—they are an exciting, vital person because they are in touch with a vital God. Fi-

nally, all that they do prospers; they are effective. What they put their hand to, they accomplish because they are not doing it in their own strength but in the strength of another, a hidden Other, from whose resources they are continuously drawing.

That, you see, is the godly life. The person who learns to live that way is a happy person. It does not make any difference what their outward circumstances may be, because happiness does not consist in the abundance of things that they possess, as Jesus tells us (see Luke 12:15ff). This person is happy because they have learned the true secret of happiness: “whatever they do prospers.” That is God’s promise.

The Ungodly Life

Now, more briefly, in contrast to this the psalmist describes the person who has no time for God.

Not so the wicked!

They are like chaff

that the wind blows away.

(Psalm 1:4)

It takes two verses to describe the secret of the godly life; it only takes two words to describe the life of the un-

godly: “not so.” Everything that is said about the godly is “not so” for the ungodly. They believe in the philosophy of the world, the counsel of the ungodly. (Me first; Get it now; Nothing bad will happen.) They are involved in small or large acts of rebellion. They violate the fundamental laws of life, yet they blame everyone else for their troubles. The ungodly are *not so*, not like the godly, but “are like chaff that the wind blows away.”

A Worthless Existence

I do not think city folks understand chaff. In Montana every fall we had harvesters who came around with a threshing rig. The bundles of wheat would be thrown into this machine. The straw would be blown out onto the stack and the wheat would come dribbling out to be poured into trucks or wagons and taken away to the granary. But floating around in the air everywhere was chaff. It was the “awfullest stuff” you ever saw. It stuck to the skin wherever you were sweating—on the back of your neck and down your shirt. It created frightful itching. It was universally regarded as totally worthless.

Clear back in the psalmist’s day, 1,000 years before Christ, the only thing they could think of to do with chaff

was to let the wind blow it away. And still, 2,000 years after Christ, the only thing we can do with chaff is to blow it away. The threshing rig tries to blow it up onto the straw stack and get it out of the way, for it has no value at all.

And that is God's evaluation of the life that has no room for Him. It is like chaff. Oh, it may be very impressive in the eyes of the world. Such a person may have a beautiful home, drive several big cars, have many luxuries, and be regarded as a big wheel. But in God's evaluation, their life is worthless and they're only going around in circles. They have never fulfilled a single purpose for which God put them in this world. Their life is so much wasted time as far as God is concerned. It is worthless, like the chaff that the wind blows away.

No Standing Before God

As a result, there are two things said of them: "*Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment.*" That means the daily judgment of God, the evaluation that God constantly makes of our lives. This person has no standing in that at all. Everything they do is so much wasted labor. Nor will they be "*in the assembly of the righteous*" (Psalm

1:5). That is a reference to the final judgment. When all the redeemed are gathered together, this person will be absent. They may even have been religious. I rather think they were. But Jesus said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:22-23). I *never* knew you. This person will not stand in the assembly of the righteous because they have never put God at the center of their life.

A Contrast of Good and Evil

Then the psalm concludes with a tremendous word of explanation. Why does all this happen in this way? Why is it that, though outwardly a person's life may be very impressive, inwardly it is nothing but a hollow shell, empty and worthless? The answer is, "*For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous*" (Psalm 1:6a). The Lord knows that way, He is watching over that person, guiding them, guarding them, and keeping them. "But the way of the wicked leads to destruction" (Psalm 1:6b). That means it will dribble out into noth-

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ing. "Their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness," says Proverbs 20:20, a tremendous phrase.

This has never been demonstrated more strikingly than in the days of the New Testament. There came a time when the apostle Paul stood as a prisoner before Nero. Nero was at that time a most dissolute, vain, cruel, inhuman, implacable monster. He is regarded now by historians as one of the most vile and contemptible rulers ever to sit upon a throne. He even commanded that the body of his own mother be ripped apart that he might see the womb that had borne him. He once saw a handsome young man in his court and he ordered him castrated and then sexually abused him the rest of his life. Yet Nero's name was known all over the empire. He was Caesar. The whole of the Roman world bowed to his will. The life of that mighty empire revolved around this man, Nero.

Then there stood before him this obscure little Jew, Paul the apostle, from a despised Roman province. No one knew him. He had scarcely been heard of except in a few isolated places where he had caused certain troubles. He was a prisoner in chains, standing before this mighty emperor. Yet, as it

has been often pointed out, today we name our sons Paul, and our dogs, Nero. "For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction."

Prayer

Father, we cannot read these words without asking ourselves the question: Have we discovered the secret of happiness? Are we allowing this marvelous provision for producing the likeness of God (godliness) to be at work in us? Or does a great deal of our life still consist of ungodliness so that we are like the chaff the wind drives away? Are great areas of our life worthless and wasted because we are living on the principles and precepts of the world around us?

Lord, thank you for having come to teach us the way of godliness, and to show us how Your life can be manifest in us. We pray that You will help us to lay hold more fully of this life, that our lives, in the Day of Judgment, will find value; that we will stand in the congregation of the righteous; that we may live the remaining years of our life, under Your eye, in Your loving care. This we ask in Your name, Amen.

3. In Scripture names often describe the character of the one named. In Exodus 34:5-7, how does God describe His name and character?

4. In Psalm 9:10 what will those who know God's name do, and why?

5. a. What does Philippians 2:9-11 tell us about Jesus' name?

b. Challenge: In Revelation 5:9-10, why is Jesus worthy to receive praise?

6. Personal: Write several reasons you have to praise God. Try writing your praise in a prayer to your Savior.

Third Day: Review Psalm 8, concentrating on verse 2.

1. In Psalm 8:2a who has God ordained praise to come from?

2. In Matthew 21:14-16 Jesus quotes Psalm 8. What are the circumstances?

3. Why has God ordained praise from the lips of children, according to Psalm 8:2b?

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4. a. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26. How does Paul describe the background of most believers?
- b. Read 1 Corinthians 1:27-29. Why did God choose the foolish and weak things of the world?
5. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 what has Christ Jesus become for us?
6. Personal: Read Matthew 18:4 with 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 4:7. Is there some natural or spiritual gift you have been given that you tend to be prideful about? Will you choose to repent of that pride right now? Give God thanks for the gifts He has given you.

Fourth Day: Review Psalm 8, concentrating on verse 3.

1. According to Psalm 8:3, what did God create?

2. How were the heavens and earth formed?

Genesis 1:1

Jeremiah 10:12

Revelation 4:11

3. Challenge: Read the following verses to discover how God created each aspect of the world.

Genesis 1:3

Genesis 1:6

Genesis 1:9

Genesis 1:11

Genesis 1:14

Genesis 1:20

Genesis 1:24

4. a. Read John 1:1. Who was in the beginning?

b. In John 1:3 what was made through the Word?

c. Read John 1:14. Who is the Word?

5. Read Colossians 1:13-17. Write verse 15-17, inserting the name of Jesus, whom Paul is writing about.

6. Personal: Re-read Colossians 1:13-14. Today we have focused on God's mighty power in creating the entire universe, and yet He loves each one of us so much that he sent His Son Jesus to save us from our sins. What does this knowledge mean to you?

Fifth Day: Review Psalm 8, concentrating on verse 4.

1. Realizing God's great glory and majesty, what question comes to David's mind in Psalm 8:4?

2. a. In Genesis 1:20,24 we saw God speak and living creatures were created (see Fourth Day, Question 3). What is different about the creation of Adam, the first man, in Genesis 2:7?

b. Whose breath did Adam receive? (Genesis 2:7)

c. Read Genesis 1:27. In whose image was mankind made?

3. In Genesis 2:16-17 what warning does God give to Adam?

4. a. Challenge: Read Genesis 3, the account of the Fall of humanity. Describe what happened to creation in Genesis 3:17-19 because of Adam's and Eve's disobedience.

b. Read Genesis 3:22-23. Why did God expel Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden?

5. In Romans 5:12 what entered the world through Adam?

6. Personal: In John 3:16 we see how special we are to God. He did not want to leave us under the power of sin and death. Do you realize how special you are to God? Write John 3:16, inserting your name in the verse.

Sixth Day: Review Psalm 8, concentrating on verses 5-9.

1. According to Psalm 8:6-8, what has God made mankind ruler over?

2. a. Challenge: Read Hebrews 2:6-11. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 8:4-6 in Hebrews 2:6-7. In Hebrews 2:8, are all things currently subject to mankind?

b. In Hebrews 2:9 why was Jesus crowned with glory and honor?

c. In Hebrews 2:11 what does Jesus call those who believe?

3. Read Romans 8:16. What does the Holy Spirit testify?

4. a. According to Romans 8:19, what is all of creation waiting for?

b. Read 1 John 3:2. Who will we be like when God's plan is fulfilled?

5. Read Romans 8:20-21. What is the hope for creation?

6. a. Read Revelation 21:3-5, a glorious picture of the future when Jesus returns.
Where will God dwell? (verse 3)

b. What changes will take place? (verse 4)

c. What will be made new? (verse 5)

7. Personal: Read John 1:12. Have you received Jesus Christ as your Savior?
Why not do it now and become a child of God? If you have done this, write a prayer of thanksgiving for the wonderful future God has planned for you.