

The Way of Blessing

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[0:00] Well, I invite you to open to Psalm 1, the first psalm in the Psalter. And this morning we begin a new series of studies.

! And the study is on this wonderful collection of psalms. We're using a book by a living author, Richard D Phillips, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of America down in Florida. And the book is called Walking with God, Learning Discipleship in the Psalms. Psalm 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.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yield its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does 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.

[1:28] For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Phillips takes us on a tour of 12 Psalms out of the 150 that are in our Bible.

And he draws out many practical lessons aimed at encouraging those who would be better disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so we'll be using this book freely, quoting from it freely.

Again, I won't be referencing every time I'm quoting from it. Assume that what we're sharing is coming from this, as well as from Derek Kidner and Spurgeon and other commentaries on the psalm.

But this will be the backbone of our study. I'd like to just begin by reading from the preface of the book. No book of the Bible, more directly, connects with the life of faith in the book of Psalms.

Here we find recorded a whole range of human emotions and experiences common to the life of faith in a difficult and often hostile world, providing us with a handbook for Christian living that covers every topic in the curriculum.

[2:42] In a time like ours, when false spirituality abounds both within and without the church, the book of Psalms is God's guide to true spirituality. One significant difference between Christians today and the Christians of previous generations is our unfamiliarity with the Psalms.

The problem is not merely that we do not know more than a few Psalms, but more profoundly that we are not intimate with the spirituality that breathes through this most personal book of sacred scripture.

Our estrangement from God's handbook for the heart helps to account for the fact that so few Christians today walk closely with God. Calls it the Psalms, God's handbook for the heart.

One way for believers to improve their walk with the Lord is to commune with him through the Psalms. Here the Lord places his own words into the mouths of believers to help them call out to him.

Here are songs of the heart that God teaches us to sing songs of joy, songs of pain, songs of fear and songs of faith.

[3:52] The Psalms in laying bare the heart of true faith also connect us directly to the heart and song of our Lord Jesus Christ. While many of the Psalms directly prophesy Jesus experience in this world, all of the Psalms are his and are intended both to instruct the Christian's mind and shape his heart.

My own love affair with the Psalms stems from a desire for a more lively prayer life. On the advice of a wise author, I began praying through the Psalms and discovered that by doing so, God himself was helping me to pray.

I have also had the pleasure of witnessing the powerful impact of the Psalms in my wife's experience. Through her own pursuit of the Lord in the Psalms, I have seen her knowledge of God

increase and have heard her speak of the rich communion she has enjoyed with her Savior. If you've never prayed the Psalms, perhaps nothing better could be said in introducing this whole study today than to encourage you to take up the Psalter and to just use God's own word in voicing your praise, your prayers, your feelings, your hearts to God.

Just minutes before his arrest, our Lord Jesus was praying to his father in heaven. And in John 17, three, he defines the eternal life that he gives to those the father has given him.

[5 : 21] And in defining that eternal life that he gives, we have a nutshell of what the Christian life is all about. This is eternal life.

Jesus praise that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ. Christ whom you have sent. In other words, the eternal life, the life that Jesus came from heaven to give us is not just endless existence, eternal life.

How do we know that's not the only thing that he came to give us? Who else has endless existence? The wicked, the damned in hell exist forever.

This eternal life that Jesus has come to give is more than speaking of the duration of life. It is eternal. That is true. But it speaks of the quality of life.

It is knowing God throughout this life and forever and ever. That's what salvation is all about. That's the eternal life.

[6 : 23] And we need to emphasize then not only what we are saved from, but what we're saved unto.

yes we're saved from sin yes we're saved from hell yes we're saved from the wrath of God and condemnation but we're also saved unto fellowship with our God and that's what Jesus is emphasizing here this God who is invisible we've not seen him that means then that we must commune with him through faith if we're going to have fellowship with this being it's going to tax our faith and that it presents certain difficulties then in fellowship with God because we don't see him and there's so many obstacles to our faith and our flesh resists our fellowship with getting to know this God and so God helps us to fellowship with him and to help bring us into closer relationship with himself God has given us the whole Bible but the book of Psalms especially are a book of writings that take us by the hand and draw us up close and lead us into living communion with himself so Phillips concludes his preface by saying if you desire a closer walk with God to know him better and to relate everything in your life to him day by day then you can do no better than take up the book of Psalms the Bible's own book of personal communion with God so we start with Psalm 1 not just because it's the first Psalm it wasn't put there randomly it stands as an introduction to this whole collection of Psalms indeed Spurgeon calls it the preface Psalm because in the preface of a book you're told what's in the rest of the book what you're going to meet up with in this book and so in this Psalm

Psalm 1 we're told what we can expect to find throughout the rest of these Psalms indeed Spurgeon says that the rest of the Psalms are like a sermon on this Psalm so this is the introductory Psalm and it sets before us a theme that the rest of the Psalms will pick up and develop further that theme is that there is a way of blessedness there is a way of true happiness the entire Psalter starts with a beatitude blessed is the man blessed happy this is good news right up front it's possible to live under the blessing of God to have God's favor and blessing upon you in all you do so this way of true blessedness meets us at the very beginning of the Psalms and I think there's 36 other beatitudes scattered throughout the book of Psalms describing the way of blessedness so Psalm 1 sets the stage and it introduces us to two kinds of people two ways of living and two vastly different results two kinds of people there are only two kinds of people in this world two most basic groupings groupings that are important to God man has his own groupings the haves and the have nots the educated and the uneducated those with social status and those with none and all these classifications of man

God just wipes right out he says there's really only two kinds of people in the world today forever who are they? Psalm 1 who are they?

the righteous and the wicked alright you'll hear different titles given to them different descriptions but those are the two most basic groupings of people you'll meet them all the way through the Psalms and it's important that we rightly identify them and know who they are who are these two people?

[10 : 41] these two men two women the righteous well who are they? they're not perfectly righteous in the way that they live there's no such people on the earth are there?

but these are a real people who though not perfect are nonetheless called righteous and that for two reasons in what two ways are the righteous righteous?

give me one alright they're righteous because of what Jesus did his perfect life his atoning death has been put to their account we call that imputed righteousness Jesus' righteousness has been put to their account in the books of heaven so they're righteous they're counted righteous in heaven in God's eyes as he looks at them for Christ's sake because of the perfect life and atoning death of Christ put to their account they're called righteous and the other?

I don't know if you're trying to draw some sound but clearly the best is the way to be a warrior as well okay that has to do with here on earth doesn't it? not something in heaven but now we're starting to see righteous desires aren't we?

in other words there is an imparted righteousness there is a righteousness that is worked in them by the spirit of God not only is Christ's righteousness put to their account in heaven but Christ's spirit is put into their hearts to make them righteous here on earth they've got new righteous desires that they never had before and as Dave said it's seen then and they're meditating on the law of God and delighting in that law so there's these two aspects of righteousness their record in heaven is righteous for Jesus' sake and their heart their spirit here on earth is righteous and you'll find that right throughout the psalm psalm 32 blessed oh the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord does not count sin but he's counted our sins onto Christ you see that's imputed righteousness and in whose spirit is no guile that means in their hearts there's not a duplicity there's not a falseness about them they're true they live the truth both aspects then of righteousness so

[13 : 11] Psalm 1 we'll fill out the description of these righteous as we dig into it but then there's the wicked and don't be misled by this title what do we think of today when we hear someone called wicked what do we think of what comes to your mind when you say he's a wicked man Osama bin Laden!

Is that not right? Or the likes a wife beater a murderer we're thinking of bad people aren't we?

Really bad people when we hear this word wicked and if that's how you're thinking you're going to be thrown for a curve in reading the Psalms because remember there's only two groups of people in the world today and they're not all righteous or Osama bin Laden's are there?

There's a whole lot of other people in the world that the Bible calls wicked that we probably wouldn't first think of as being wicked in other words the wicked are all those who are not righteous all those who have not trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and had his righteousness put to their account all those who are not born again by the spirit of God and do not have a new heart and a new spirit put within them that loves righteousness so if they're not righteous in the book of Psalms they're the wicked they may be outwardly moral they might be trying to keep the ten commandments they might be trying to live by the golden rule they might be very religious from that end of the spectrum right over to some serial killer you have the wicked the wicked so remember just two categories all those who go to hell as Psalm 1 will show at the end are the wicked all those not going to heaven are called the wicked so we have in Psalm 1 then the righteous and the wicked the two kinds of people that you'll meet in the

Psalms that you meet in your world you have them in your home your family relations your neighborhood your workplace just two kinds of people and God is teaching us right up front how to look at mankind we need to see all men as God sees them as he looks down upon his world this morning he's not looking at the church and the unchurched he's not looking at the outward respectable and the unrespectable he's looking at the righteous and the wicked and so we need to do the same next time you go to your boy or girl's ball game you're sitting there in the bleachers and you're looking around everyone around you is either righteous or wicked go to the store the supermarket and there's all the people filing in and out every single one righteous or wicked it's a very simplifying psalm and just as there are only two kinds of people so there are just two ways to live and this psalm begins with the beatitude blessed is the man who and then he sets forth the way of blessedness this man walks in the way of blessedness the way to true happiness the way to live under

God's favor and this is like a road map and it points out the way this is the way walk in it don't miss the kind of heart the kind heart of God in pointing us to the blessed way that's something the very first psalm saying oh there's a happy way walk in it walk in it what a kind God but we soon learn that the way of blessedness is not the only way that there is there's another way that people seek happiness another way that people live their lives it's the way of sinners verse one so we've got

God's way and man's way we've got the righteous path and the wicked path and that's not only the psalmist that's the prophets as well Isaiah 53 6 we all like sheep have gone astray we've turned each one to his own way so we've strayed from God's way and we've gone our way there's just two ways

[17:49] God's way and our way now we have each turned to his own way there's tailor made ways of sin that we've each turned to I have my own way and these are the sins I like and that fit my personality and and that's my way and you've got your own and yours yours are a little different than mine we each have our own way but what they all have in common is is that we've rejected God's way and we've all gone our own way it's it's all this way of sin the way of the wicked just to two ways now where else in the Bible do we find two ways set before us Matthew 25 Matthew 7 I'm thinking of the sermon on the mount how does the sermon on the mount begin Jesus goes up in the mountain gathers his disciples to him and began teaching them saying blessed all right there's a there's a beatitude isn't there and toward the end of the sermon there is the statement of our

Lord Jesus that enter through the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the road or the way that leads to destruction and many enter through it but small is the gate and narrow the way that leads to life and only a few find it so here we have Jesus with a beatitude eight of them and then with these two ways set before us and the more we get to know the Bible the Old Testament I should say the better we know our Old Testaments and especially the Psalms the more we will appreciate just how biblical Jesus sermons were Jesus preached the Bible and his Bible was the Old Testament so when he's standing there in that first sermon that we have from his lips in Matthew 5-7 it's beatitude it starts out much like Psalm 1 Psalm 1 starts with a negative blessed is the man who does not walk this way instead he walks this way so right away we're hit with the fact there's another way than the blessed way there's always this negative and positive word from God is that not true of the Ten Commandments thou shalt not thou shalt the negative the positive if you would be blessed you must say no to this way and you must walk in this way well that that must follow because there is only two ways and they're opposites so yes you must have the negative right along with the positive so first the broad way of the wicked that leads to destruction is set before us blessed is the man who does not walk and now hears the way of the wicked he does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers according to Jesus there are many on this road but you won't find a blessed man here he rejects it he avoids it he refuses to walk on it but the wicked are here and there's a downward progression on this road from bad to worse some have made much of the words walk stand sit to show that progression but there surely is a progression downward first it's it's walking in the counsel of the wicked it's accepting the wicked's advice and then there's standing in the way of sinners being party to their ways walking with them in wickedness and then there is sitting in the seat of mockers and scoffing at true religion and making fun of

Christians adopting their very attitudes so there's the progression thinking behaving sitting and then belonging sitting with the scoffers belonging with them and that's the progression downward I thought of that black hole we saw last week in space that funnel that drain just sucks everything in that's the power of sin and the wicked gets sucked into it but it all starts by walking in the counsel of the wicked Derek Kidner says the mind is the key to the whole man whatever really shapes a man's thinking shapes his life and so the way of the wicked starts with accepting the advice of the wicked she was a fair and flourishing professing Christian deeply involved in her local church wouldn't think of missing her daily devotions time in the word of God in prayer directing her children in God's ways and she began to hang out with co-workers at work and she began drinking with them then she was coming home drunk then she was physically involved with another man and now there's no appetite for the word of

God and it all began by walking in the counsel of the wicked the counsel of the wicked listening to the ideas of the world gazing on its way growing friendly toward its way of thinking its view of happiness its way of getting pleasure before Eve ever took one step into the way of sinners she first began listening to the devil taking the advice of the wicked listening as he held out the promise of pleasure you want fulfillment Eve God's not going to give it to you he's restricting you from it this is the way to self fulfillment increased knowledge wisdom you want to be like God here it is advancement it was only when she began thinking like the devil that she took her first step into the way of sin so the lesson of the very first psalm says be very careful and we saw this last week in our preaching didn't we from the importance of the mind we need to be very careful of what we let come

into our minds what is the advice and the counsel of the wicked what are the ways that the counsel of the wicked come into your head your heart how does it how does it hit you where does it come from where are the channels eyes television you overhear people talking at work and when they're talking they're sharing the ideas of the wicked your own thoughts thoughts that's right there's a part of you that's wicked called your flesh your sinful nature we

[25 : 31] Raj yeah most of the media are you going to get the counsel of the wicked or the counsel of God all right the counsel of the wicked it's a it's a given isn't it and yet that's what surrounds us that's the air we breathe most of the popular music you're going to get the counsel of the wicked or the counsel of God counsel of the wicked blessed is a man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked instead he walks in the counsel of God now here's the positive word you see he doesn't walk in that way that counsel instead he walks in this counsel verse 2 but his delight is in the law of the

Lord and on his law he meditates day and night just as the way of sin this way begins with the counsel of the wicked entering the mind so the way of blessing the way of the righteous begins with the law of God entering the mind again it's what captures the mind determines the life and the way that we live and so now here's the how would you know if somebody delights in the law of God how would you know that if somebody delights in the word of

God what would you see talking about it all right I dare say that you talk about what you delight in don't you some of your grandparents you talk a lot about your grandkids because you delight in them so we talk about the law of God if we delight in what else do we do we live it yeah we live this way because we love it we pray make me to go in the way of your decrees because there I find delight Psalm 119 15 all right yes that's right that's the negative side give me more of the positive though what would you see you'd see him turning away from the advice of the wicked that's right if he delights in this counsel he'll despise the other good what are some more things that describe a man who's delighting he recommends it to others talks about it but recommends it to others this is too easy it's right there in the page what does he do day and night he he thinks a lot about it you think a lot about what you delight in we talked about it last

Sunday didn't we about the chickens coming home to roost where does your mind come home to roost what's precious to it what's its treasure well you can know the way of the righteous and and their mind because they meditate on this law day and night they can't get enough of it you see that's the idea and their mind runs to it and it's not oh I have to have my devotions today it's it's his delight his delight it's a clear sign of the new birth when a man delights in God's law!

Jeremiah said when your words came I ate them and they were my joy and my heart's delight one reason they are our joy is because it's there in them that we take we have communion with Christ it's the Bible is our trysting place where we meet with the lover of our soul and we have a good talk we enjoy fellowship he speaks to us we speak to him we meditate on it that's more than read it isn't it ruminate it cow chewing the cud thinking it over getting every bit of nutrient out of that word that we can find now somebody said it that hearing the counsel of the wicked is inevitable in this world that we live in you can't wear ear plugs on your job and so you've got to hear the counsel of the wicked that goes the

[30 : 26] Lord Jesus Christ came into contact with the counsel of the wicked you can't completely avoid it but here's the question what do we choose when we can choose when the choice is ours which counsel do we gravitate to and what does it say of our delight in the law of the Lord when we can watch television by the hours and not even crack the book it's a rebuke to our hearts psalm 1 rebukes us doesn't it it's telling us the way to blessedness it's saying John wake up that's not the way to blessedness cheap thrills perhaps short lived pleasures here's the way to blessedness here's the way to happiness and so the Lord Jesus meditated on God's word he really is the perfect blessed man isn't he he meditated on

God's law day and night you bump into Jesus and you get scripture don't you the devil tempts him there in the wilderness he brought his wicked counsel just like he did to Eve offering him the kingdoms of the world offering him immediate satisfaction of his hunger pangs how did Jesus meet the counsel of the wicked it is written it is written it is written every time this guy is a this man is a man walking in the counsel of God he he is delighting in scripture so that even when he bumps into the counsel of the wicked just like you and I do he immediately responds to it with scripture do you do that okay you are watching tv and something happens that's contrary to the law of God do you respond with scripture in your mind that is evil that is wrong is that the way you respond or do you

just sit and enjoy it and just not even think about the law of

God Jesus responds to the counsel of the wicked with scripture and it's the Bible that exposes the lie of the way of the wicked give me understanding David says and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart because if I have a right understanding I'll see that the way of the wicked is not the true way of happiness this is and the Bible exposes the lie of the counsel of the wicked and so the blessed man is a Bible man he's a man of one book preeminently it's this book then that leads us in the narrow way of life life eternal life so there's two people righteous wicked there's two ways the way of the

the way of the wicked the way of the blessed man the way of sinners and there's two different results and the Psalms are ever reminding us that these ways lead somewhere they don't just wind on forever they have consequences they have results and so the Psalms are ever pointing us beyond the immediate decision to think about consequences we need that don't we your young people need that think about consequences the Psalms are wonderful at this all the wisdom literature and the results of these two ways are as different as the two ways themselves and the two people on them first it sets out the way of the righteous and God speaks in picture language agricultural language common scenes in agricultural Palestine and he paints these pictures first the blessed man then the wicked man the blessed the way of the righteous verse 3 he is like a tree planted by the streams of water that yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither whatever he does prosper now many consider such a statement to be unrealistic absolutely untrue to real life you've got to be dreaming you can't have your feet on this earth to believe what Psalm 1 verse 3 just said about the righteous that it's this way of prosperity liberal scholar

Walter Brueggemann complains that many godly people are not blessed as verse 3 says they are only the very sheltered innocent and unperceptive could embrace such a naive affirmation as that made in Psalm 1 the simple affirmation of Psalm 1 is not adequate to lived experience end quote in other words it doesn't match the nasty facts of life obeying God does not necessarily lead to blessing he says there are many who trust God who are let down how do you answer that Psalm 1 3 is just dreamy language it doesn't belong to the real world ok the wrong definition of the word prosper Raj did you have something ok the old covenant a lot of the blessings were tied to their physical natural blessings if Israel obeyed they lived in the promised land

[36:01] God would send the early and latter rains and their crops would flourish and their sheep would have little cat little sheep and everything would you can tell I wasn't born on the farm go ahead and laugh everything they touched would prosper the bread they baked everything would flourish physically and if they strayed from God God brought marauding bands in stole their crops ruined their vineyards and cut down their fig trees a blight a curse on all their blessings the old covenant had far more that was earthly and physical to it in the new covenant what was predominantly earthly and physical is now spiritual everything that he does prospers prospers the psalms don't promise a problem free life but they do promise a blessed life a blessed a happy life it doesn't say the righteous will be free from troubles and if any book makes that clear it's this book the book of

Psalms because there you get to hear a man in trouble and he's crying out with his complaint to God there are there are! of complaint that's laments that's their very title because there's so many of them we see that the blessed way is a way of troubles but it's still a way of blessedness the blessedness promised here is more wonderful than just health wealth and prosperity it's spiritual fruitfulness that's the picture that's used isn't it he is like a tree that stays fresh and green not even a leaf withers right through the dry season it's bearing its luscious fruit there you are over in Palestine that desert like climate where nothing grows without water if it does somehow spring up it shrivels during the dry season and yet here we see this tree and it's always green and its leaf is never withering and we turn aside and we say what's the cause of it and it's not hard to see it's been planted by the streams of water so its roots go down deep into the moist soil by the stream and it draws its nourishment in drought as well as in rainy season and so its leaf never withers and it's always bearing fruit in season

I've got some cottonwood trees in my backyard they must be 80 100 foot high they're right along the stream they're eating every day every minute drawing moisture you see growing solid and strong not everything in my garden is as healthy as those cottonwood trees but the source you see is ever constant that's what the righteous are like they're like this tree planted by the rivers of water and they're drawing strength from God and the stream the conduit from which from which God's

strength and health and spiritual vitality come is the word of God it's the law of God whereby we meet with God and we draw upon his power these streams of scripture and that's why the righteous are flourishing because they're meditating day and night in this life-giving word and so that's how the blessed life is energized he gives an example from life

I think of the story of Art Matthews and his family who were the last missionaries to escape from China after the communist takeover they lived in a single room with only a stool for furniture all contacts with the outside friends and financial support was cut off with only a small stove for heat they often shivered and their food was reduced to a daily meal of rice cooked over burning manure that Art had gathered in the streets all through this trial they trusted God they spoke to him in prayer and strengthened themselves by his word after they escaped they told their story and the title of green leaf in drought time and it was their testimony of the fact that God's people do not wither in the most barren circumstances of life but persevere in the joy of their fellowship with him blessed is the man who trusts in the

Lord Jeremiah said he will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream it does not fear when he comes its leaves are always green and whatever he does prospers well then the wicked not so the wicked here's this contrast they're like chaff that the wind blows away it's the stubble there's nothing weighty about it here you've got the picture of a tree solid fruitful life and then you've got chaff it's dead it's light it's not abiding it's blowing away that's the wicked like the chaff psalms say don't judge things too quickly it gives us a look into the future Jesus Christ himself John the Baptist said his winnowing fork is in his hand to clear the threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire and so verse five shows us again the contrast therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous they won't stand they won't have a leg to stand on in the day of judgment they don't have the righteousness of

[42:00] Christ they don't have any works of righteousness in their lives that prove that Christ lived in them and produced his life in them they don't have any leg to stand on they will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous there's that happy assembly of the righteous and they're not allowed in and there's an irony to it it's what is only right because on earth they didn't enjoy the assemblies of the righteous so in heaven they shall have no place Balaam said let me die the death of the righteous and may my end be like theirs but he didn't live the life of the righteous and yet he wanted to die the death of the righteous no no the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous and the final contrast for the Lord for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous but the way of the wicked will perish he watches over with deep affection and pleasure and interest and care the way us to have almighty

God watching over us giving us his son and if he's given us his son he'll give us everything else we need to get us home to glory the way of blessedness is the way of the Lord watching over us in our way but the way of the wicked will perish two people two ways two results you'll meet them all the way through the book of Psalms good news of the way of blessedness when we were the wicked well it's that Jesus Christ walked the way of blessedness kept the law perfectly and took our curse upon himself and gave us his blessings God made him who had no sin to be sin for us that we might in him become the righteousness of God so in Christ we walk this blessed way may this study in the!

this delighting in the way of blessedness and delighting in the Lord and his word where we have fellowship with him we're dismissed