



Empowering People to Change the World

**Introduction to Psalms and Psalm 1
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Road Declaration

Psalms: The Heart of God

- An invitation to make this a “summer in the Psalms.”
- If you read just two Psalms a day, you can finish all 150 Psalms this summer.
- Two parts this morning: a brief introduction; and then we will explore **Psalm 1**.

Introduction to the Psalms: Four Aspects

1. Psalms are a sanctuary of the heart.

- The Psalms are in the middle, the heart of your Bible, because the Psalms are the center and heart of God’s heart.
- You want to know God’s heart? Read, study, and meditate in the Psalms.
- We discover the essence of our heart by learning the essence of God’s heart.

Martin Luther, the great Bible Reformer said, “In the Psalms we looked into the heart of all the saints, and we seem to gaze into fair pleasure gardens—into heaven itself—where blooms in sweet, refreshing, gladdening flowers of holy and happy thoughts about God and all His benefits.”

John Calvin said of the Psalms, “I have been wont to call this book not inappropriately, an anatomy of all parts of the soul.”

2. Psalms are the hymnbook and prayer book of God.

N.T. Wright: “To recognize that the Psalms call us to pray and sing at the intersections of the times--of our time and God's time, of the then, and the now, and the not yet--is to understand how those emotions are to be held within the rhythm of a life lived in God's presence.”

- David, the “man after God’s heart,” has written God’s heart to us through the poetry, the beauty of God’s heart in songs and prayers, and the central point of the Psalms.
- The Psalms, or Psalter, is the hymnbook and prayer book of God—poems written to be sung and prayed—Psalms 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, etc.
- Indeed, David saw that his greatest triumph and contribution to God and the nation of Israel was not being a warrior or king, but as the “*sweet psalmist of Israel.*” (**2 Samuel 23:1**)
- The Psalms capture our imagination like music does.
 - The Psalms were sung in the Temple on Mt. Zion.
 - The Psalms were sung as the pilgrims ascended the hill to Zion.
 - The Psalms were sung in every Israelite’s home.
 - The Psalms are the most sacred of hymnals in all the world.
 - Publishers produce pocket-sized New Testaments that also include the Psalms.

3. Psalms express emotional vulnerability about real-life issues.

- There's a reason **Psalm 51** is the best known of the Penitential Psalms and is one of the best loved psalms of all—it is the Psalm of David when Nathan, the prophet, rebuked David for his murder of Uriah and affair with Bathsheba.
 - It speaks to the deep pain we feel inside us when we sin, the power of living in truth, and then it shows us the mercy and forgiveness of God.
 - His is the love of a Father who sees his child's stricken face — washes the tears away — and then reaches inside to create in us "a clean heart;" to breathe "a new and right spirit" within us.”

- Arguably, there is no other book of the Bible that is most real about the struggles of life.
- David and the other psalmists are very vulnerable about the life battles with which they are involved.
- The Psalms capture real-life experiences more than any other book in the Bible because they speak of circumstances and situations that are not unlike what we have experienced in our own lives—the heading of many Psalms read like something we might go through.
 - **Psalm 3** - Have you ever fled from an enemy? Have you ever felt like your enemy was a member(s) of your own family?
 - **Psalm 18** - What about your deliverance?
- In one Psalm, David is full of joy and rapture over God’s goodness and love, and in the next, he is angry and mournful.
- It is interesting that in almost every Psalm, it may start with anger, frustration, and fear; however, the conclusion is praise and worship.

4. Psalms are about the purpose of being human.

- The central point of the Psalms is about what it means to be a human being on the earth—take dominion!
 - If you want to understand with your heart your purpose on this earth, read, sing, and meditate in the Psalms.
 - **Psalm 8:4-6**

N.T. Wright, in his masterful book, *The Case for the Psalms*, writes: “The Psalms, all of them...mean what they mean within the larger worldview that all of Scripture articulates. It goes something like this: God created humans in the beginning to be His vice rulers over the world. That is part, at least, of what it means that humans were made in God’s image. The image is like an angled mirror, reflecting God’s wise and caring love into the world, bringing order and fruitfulness to the garden where humans are placed.”

- It's **Genesis 1:27-28**.
- Triple theme: Taking dominion over the earth! Loving God, loving creation, and leading people out of slavery.

Let's dive into the First Psalm...

Psalm 1: God's Pathway to Prosperity

Verses 1-6

- This Psalm is like the opening to *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, in which he frames the destiny of two cities, "It was the best of times and the worst of times."
 - David is framing out the essence of the Psalms by presenting to us the choice of two lives you can live—one life is the life of joy, happiness, and prosperity for the godly person; and the other—the life of the ungodly.
 - Two kinds of people—two kinds of lives.
 - The Psalms are presenting the choice—God's pathway to prosperity or the ungodly way.
 - Verse 6

Verse 1

- David is speaking of the pathway to joy and happiness.
- "Blessed" is the beginning of all the Psalms, the pathway into the prosperous life.
- **Psalm 1** is a promise of what God will do in your life if you will read, study, and meditate in the Psalms.

1. You will prosper if you are not influenced by ungodly people.

- We can see a progression, or regression here, of the pathway that can derail God's plan for your life.
- The influence one holds will determine your future.

Your future will be determined by who has the most influence over your life.

- First, don't take counsel from ungodly, unbiblical people—don't start listening to people who don't follow God and His Word.
- Second, don't stand in fellowship with the ungodly.
- Third, if you listen to them, you will start hanging out with them, and you will be sitting in their presence.

Verse 2

2. You will prosper if you delight in the Law of the Lord.

C.S. Lewis: "One's delight in the Law is a delight in having touched firmness; like the pedestrian's delight in feeling the hard road beneath his feet after a false short cut has long entangled him in muddy fields."

- The meaning of the Law is the Scriptures. God's Law is found in the Scriptures.
- This is a person who delights—loves God, loves His Word, loves His ways.
- In contrast to getting counsel from ungodly people, God's prosperity plan means we get our counsel from God, and God's counsel comes primarily from His Word.
- Ex. I have known many Christians who get more counsel from the people at work, than from God's Word; and their life turns out to be a disaster.
- Truth has firmness. The Word is True. The promises of God are found here!

- “Meditates” is the Hebrew word, *hagah*, which is the same word for gnawing on a bone.

Sometimes one of my labs, Sage, has come home with a prize: a deer leg bone! I was sitting out by my fire pit at Hebron Woods, our property in Black Forest, working on a sermon, and she plopped down with this massive bone, almost bigger than she is, and commenced to go through the routine every dog owner knows: shaking it, staring at it, slinging it up in the air, then dragging it to a quiet, solitary place and just chewing. From that point, her pleasure was purely solitary—she licked it, worried over it, but finally settled into just gnawing it—then all you heard were these low, rumbling, growling sounds.

The word “gnaw” or “growl” is the same word for “meditate.” Isaiah says this, “*As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey,*” (Isaiah 31:4); the Hebrew word for “growl” is *hagah*, and is usually translated “meditate.”

Hagah is a word that our Hebrew ancestors used frequently—but “meditate” is too tame a word for the true meaning. Meditate seems to fit the more cerebral practice of thinking on something in a quiet garden or study.

Isaiah’s lion imagery is a growling lion crouched over a lamb. It’s Sage devouring a deer bone—they attack, they chew, they swallow, they get the meat down into their bloodstream—the bone, the lamb, becomes them. This kind of chewing and swallowing is metabolizing the protein, the vitamins, and the enzymes into their system.

Verse 3

- David wrote 79 of the 150 Psalms, and the Psalms often pick up the outdoorsman that David was—indeed all the writers of the Psalms are steeped in the beauty of God’s creation.
- David must have loved the mountains and streams...

Metaphors of the mountains, streams, rivers, and the heavens above—with sunrises and sunsets—adorn the Psalms.

- The bonding of God’s beauty through creation is conjured up at the turn of each page, reminding us of how God has painted the canvas of our earth with the character that He desires that we experience in our daily life.
- **Psalm 50:1-4**
- In **Psalm 1**, we will experience this, as in most Psalms.

The person who wants to experience God’s prosperity path is like a massive tree planted by and daily drinking from the rivers of God.

- Ex. We were in Buena Vista last weekend, and we took a hike that started with us crossing the Arkansas River and working our way up a steep mountainside where it was arid, hot, and the only things you saw were scrub oak, rocks, and cacti. But then the trail went down again to the river. We then walked along the river with rich vegetation, flowers, bees, and butterflies.
- Meditate on this. Take a moment and close your eyes and see the vegetation beside a Colorado stream! That can be you.
- “*Whatever he does shall prosper.*” That means that if you will not take counsel from ungodly people and will not let them have influence over you, but you will meditate in God’s Word, the Bible, no matter what you choose to do with your life, you will be prosperous.

Verses 4-5

- Like the chaff, which is the light husk that comes off the grain when it is ground or like the husk of garlic when you roll it or peel it, just blows away—that’s the life of the ungodly.

Like “Higher Criticism” in the 60’s and “Postmodernism” in the 90’s, “Progressive Christianity,” or “Wokeism,” is the newest fad that

reinterprets Scripture and downgrades Christianity to fit the cultural milieu of the time.

- All of them have one thing in common. They veer off the authority and power of God's Word and look to culture as their power and authority.
- It will eventually die out. The pastors will eventually lose any influence and go the way of the chaff.
- You give up on the Truth and authority coming from God, then you will begin to find "new truth" and "new authority" from ungodly sources and you will veer off God's path for your life.

Verse 6

- So, Charles Dickens wrote of *A Tale of Two Cities*; the Psalms are a "pathway to two types of people."
- Which way will you choose? Righteousness, which leads to happiness and prosperity; or the way of the ungodly, which is sin, scorn, and judgement.
- Join us for a "Summer in the Psalms"
 - Choose to be a "Psalm 1 man," "Psalm 1 woman."
 - Choose to be awakened, not woke.
 - Choose to delight in the Psalms.