

**Praying the Bible**

Psalm 1

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I can't remember his name. But he was certainly in need. A lady in our congregation was good friends with his wife. So she asked if I could visit him to support the family. I found his room in the hospital and had to cross that awkward barrier of explaining who I was and why I was there. But as soon as he heard the lady's name from our congregation, his eyes lit up with familiarity. He was glad to talk. He and his wife had emigrated from Germany. They made a good life for themselves. They were successful by the world's standards. They enjoyed life. But now he was terminal though he didn't use those words.

The lady from our church shared that they didn't believe in any God. So after he and I chatted a little more I asked if I could pray for him. He responded "yes," without hesitation which surprised me. So I prayed for him and his wife. And after the prayer, he informed that he doesn't believe any of that but thanked me for coming. I asked if I could visit again. He said yes. I thought I would share the Gospel with him the next time we visited since he faced death and the afterlife.

Two days later, I got a phone call at church informing me had died the night before. I was shocked and regretted not pursuing the "what's next" question with him during our time together. I wondered if God used anything in the prayer I shared might have worked on his heart.

I continued on with my work over the next weeks. And a lady began attending our church. She sat with the lady from our church. Soon I realized this was that man's wife. She was absolutely shattered. His death turned her world upside down. Their worldview or belief system completely excluded God. But when the reality of death intruded on their successful lives, they had no way to deal with it. Their worldview did not include anything after death. The surviving wife suddenly had to deal with this reality. I don't know where she's at now. I know she came on and off to the church. But I pray she found hope in the Lord.

Everyone has a world view – a lens through which they filter and think about life. Many factors influence our worldview – the people who raised us; the environment we were brought up in; the books we read; the friends we keep; the media and messages we pay attention to; the choices we make about who to listen to and who to ignore. Many

have worldviews that exclude or marginalize God. It seems to work. You can sell it as a viable way to live until the storms of life come.

Where do you get your worldview? Whose counsel do you listen to? Will your worldview hold up when life's storms come along like chronic illness; difficult medical conditions; loss of employment; relational problems and even death?

Well, I'm here today friends to tell you about a worldview that will sustain you no matter what comes in life. As we grow in knowing it and being immersed in it, we gain the strength we need to survive and thrive through whatever life brings. The Bible text we're focusing on today reveals this worldview and how to grow in it.

You might be wondering "what does this have to do with prayer?" After all, we are focusing on and learning about prayer. Well, we are going to learn through this text about a practice that could dramatically impact our prayer lives and walk with God. This practice also helps us grow in this world view. So today we are going to find answers to these questions: What is the worldview that works even through life's storms? What practice helps us grow in this worldview? What is promised to those who engage in this practice? How do we do it? I pray that if you already live by this worldview, you will be encouraged to grow in it. If you don't know this worldview, I pray you will consider it as a viable alternative to the way you currently think. So please find Psalm 1 in your Bibles if you have one. If you don't have a Bible, you can use the one in front of you. Psalm 1 is found there on page 393.

#### Psalm 1 (ESV)

**1** Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

<sup>2</sup>but his delight is in the law of the LORD,

and on his law he meditates day and night.

<sup>3</sup>He is like a tree

planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers.

<sup>4</sup>The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

<sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

<sup>6</sup>for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

The Psalms are the Bible's prayer book. If you want to learn how to pray or you want to pray some already written prayers, turn to the Psalms. But the first Psalm is not a prayer. It is a gateway into the rest of the collection. It contains a wisdom saying that teaches us about our need to decide between two worldviews. The first worldview is found in verse 1. The Psalmist presents this worldview negatively. Yet he describes the people who subscribe to it. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners nor sits in the seat of mockers." So the wicked, sinners and mockers hold this first world view.

Who are they? The wicked were those guilty of violating God's law. The Old Testament refers to communities of wicked who lived in a way that opposed God's moral law. A sinner missed God's mark or fell short of God's standard like an arrow missing a target. The mocker hardened their heart towards God. They hate anyone who is wise and discerning in the Lord's ways. Filled with pride they offer expert criticism and mockery that impresses gullible or easily trusting people. One commentator describes the mocker as one who "wears a perpetual sneer while being incapable of deep loyalty and reverence. They suppose their life mission is to promote corrosion of values by which individuals and society's live." (W McKane – Proverbs).

So the first worldview mentioned in this Psalm is the "Rebellion against God" worldview. The wicked rebels against God's moral law. The sinner misses God's mark. The mocker actively opposes God's way and values. Anyone who is not a Christian holds this worldview. It includes those who actively and consciously oppose God. It also include good moral people, like the man I visited in the hospital, who construct their lives completely apart from God. They still sin in that they fail to give God glory for all of His blessings. They fail to confess Him as Lord over their lives.

The Psalmist warns against putting ourselves in situations where we can be influenced and shaped by the "rebellion against God" worldview. So we do not walk in the counsel of the wicked. God walked in the garden of Eden

and wanted a close relationship with Adam and Eve. When you walk with someone you naturally talk with them. But this Psalmist warns against even walking with the wicked so that we don't learn their ways or their pattern of living.

Nor do we stand in the way of sinners. If you stand and talk with someone, you give them time to share their views. Your standing communicates a willingness to listen, engage and maybe be impressed by their views. .

Nor does the blessed man sit in the seat of scoffers or mockers. If you sit down with someone, you've entered another level of commitment to communicate. You've stopped your walking. You've can't just step away from standing. You sit with them. Sitting implies a commitment to interact with and possibly be influenced by them. This begs the question for all of us – who do we walk with and listen to? Who do we stand around with and talk to? Who do we sit down with? And of course, we need to do that with people who don't believe for the purpose of influencing them for Christ. But if we are getting pulled away from Christ by them we need to heed this warning.

But we still haven't answered the first question. "What worldview works through life's storms?" Is it the "Rebellion against God" worldview? In verses 4, 5 and 6, the Psalmist shows what happens to people with this worldview. Verse 4 – *The wicked are not so but are like chaff that the wind blows away.* Chaff is the outer covering of a seed. A farmer wants to get rid of the chaff during harvest. So ancient farmers would make a pile of freshly harvested crop seeds, they would take a shovel and throw the seed up into the wind. The seed would fall back down to the floor. The chaff would blow away. That does not sound like someone whose worldview survives life's storms.

Verse 5 – Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment. Judgment is the ultimate storm we will face. Those who have lived their lives with the "Rebellion against God" worldview will not stand on Judgment Day. They will be found guilty and swept away. Verse 6 – The way of the wicked will perish. This does not only mean that the wicked will die, but they will face this dreadful eternity upon death and the coming judgment.

**What is the worldview that works even through life's storms? It's the "God-centered worldview."** Notice the person who lives this way experiences blessing and happiness. *Blessed* is the man or woman who does not walk, stand or sit with those opposed to God. The truly happy person guides his or her life by God's instruction rather than by the advice of those who reject that instruction.

**What practice helps us grow in this worldview?** Verse 2 – “But his (or her) delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he (or she) meditates day and night.” The law of the Lord contrasts with the counsel of the wicked. Instead of walking in the counsel of the wicked, we delight in the law of the Lord or God’s Word.

But how do we grow in God’s Word to gain a God-centered worldview? “And on his law he meditates day and night. So **Meditation on God’s Word**” helps us grow in a God centered-worldview. Meditate describes an active pondering and muttering to oneself in pursuit of insight. It refers to the fact that in ancient times, people memorized Scripture. There is no better way to meditate on a verse and draw out its meaning than to memorize it and repeat it. Remember, this is God’s Word. So when we memorize it, we repeat God’s word to ourselves and God speaks to us over and over again.

We might immediately object and say, “Well, I’m not that good at memorizing so I can’t do this.” That may very well be. But that doesn’t mean we can’t overcome the challenges in this area. Some of you play video games. If you do, I suspect there are some games you no longer play. Why not? Most likely it’s because you’ve played them so many times, you memorized the scenario. You know when the bad guys are going to jump out. You know the mission. So if you can memorize a video game you can memorize a Bible verse. If I were to mention some popular song, many of you could shout out a line of that song. Why? You’ve memorized it somewhere through repeatedly listening to that song. So if you can memorize a song lyric, you can memorize Scripture.

Part of our problem, in thinking deeply about Scriptures, is the hyperactivity of our society. We are used to having something moving or flashing before us to keep our attention. So the idea of slow reflection, thinking deeply and constantly on one verse or thought is completely foreign to us. Yet, if we want to converse with God we must meditate on His Word. Yet you still may not be convinced that this is really something worth considering.

**What is promised to those who engage in this practice?** To those who delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on His word day and night? **1 – Stability.** “He is like a tree planted by streams of water”. Unlike chaff that blows away, the person who meditates on God’s word is like a well-rooted tree that cannot be blown away. This is an image of someone who can keep going even during hard and dry times. The streams of water represent God’s Word. We need to have our hearts and souls in God during dry times. We push down our roots into His Word through

meditating on it. Tim Keller writes “Meditation is what gives you stability, peace and courage in times of great difficulty. It helps you stay rooted in divine water when all other sources of moisture – joy, hope and strength – dry up.”<sup>1</sup>

This tree also yields its fruit in season, according to verse 3. This does not mean we are always full of joy and happiness. There are seasons of great delight like springtime blossoms. There are season and wisdom and maturing – like summertime harvest. There are seasons of dying and finishing – like autumn leaves. There are seasons of spiritual winter when we don’t feel close to God though our roots may be firmly in his truth. Yet meditating leads to an appropriate fruit yielded in season. God sustains us through those seasons as we recall His promises and truth. Meditating on God’s Word gives stability.

What else is promised to those who meditate on God’s Word day and night? **Substance and Character.** Chaff can’t produce anything. Trees produce fruit. Why the difference? Trees are a growing living organism. Chaff is dead. Here the fruit is character. Keller writes *Persons who meditate become people of substance who have thought things out and have deep convictions, who can explain difficult concepts in simple language, and who have good reasons behind everything they do. Many people do not meditate. They skim everything, picking and choosing on impulse, having no thought out reasons for their behavior. Following whims, they live shallow lives. The people who meditate can resist pressure – but those who don’t mediate on God’s Word go along with the throng, chafflike, wherever it is going.*<sup>2</sup> Meditation bears fruit which in the Bible means character like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Meditation on God’s Word also promises **blessedness.** Verse 1 begins with this. Blessed is the man or woman who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day or night. Blessing means peace and well being in every dimension even when life is hard. We can experience such blessing anytime. I’ve told you this story before but I want to share it again because it reveals whether or not this worldview works in the starkest moments of life.

When my Dad was dying, it was terrible. It was June of 2005 just when we began talking with the Search Committee from this church. In fact, the night before he died, I had a phone interview with the search committee. When complete I went back to the hospital to spend time with him. I hated seeing him suffer like that. Yet it was

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God*, New York, NY, Dutton, 2014, 147.

<sup>2</sup> Keller, 147.

amazing to see God change my heart in those days. When I first arrived to see him my prayer was “God, please heal him and save him.” After a couple of days, my prayer changed to “God please take Him.” The morning he died, I will remember coming to the hospital and entering his room. He was still warm but gone. It was sorrowful yet blessed. How could that be? Well the Lord really impressed upon me that my Dad was in His presence. Dad is no longer hindered by this broken down body and the troubles of this world. We mourned our loss yet rejoiced in what he gained. Even in that dark moment we experienced God’s blessing. God’s Word and teaching about heaven comforted us greatly.

A God-centered worldview helps see us through storms. This works because it’s actually God who sees us through them. The practice of meditating on God’s Word helps us grow in this world view. Such meditation produces stability, character, substance and blessedness in our lives.

**How do we do it?** The first step is to “**Fix our mind on God’s Word.**” Biblical meditation does not empty the mind of rational thought. It’s not mantra meditation where you seek to suppress your thoughts. Instead you engage your thoughts and focus them onto a portion of God’s Word. You can do this through memorizing a verse – or writing a verse down on a three by five card – or by sending yourself a text with the verse on it that maybe you resend to yourself several times a day. Then as you think about and repeat this verse, you might ask questions about it. “Am I living in light of this? Am I taking this seriously? When I forget this, how does that affect me and my relationships?”

On Thursday I was in Psalm 106. Verse 43-45 state “Many times he delivered them; but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin. Yet he took note of their distress when he heard of their cry for their sake he remembered his covenant and out of his great love he relented.” The Psalmist reviews Israel’s history in Psalm 106. At this point he summarizes Israel’s consistent rebellion. Yet God showed them mercy. I was compelled to stop and circle how God interacted with his rebellious people in verses 44-45. Look at it again this time with each action of God highlighted. “Yet he **TOOK NOTE** of their distress when he **HEARD** their cry; for their sake he **REMEMBERED** his covenant and out of his **GREAT LOVE** he **RELENTED**. Now say you’re going through a hard time where you’re wondering about God’s concern and compassion for you. But then you spend some time in Psalm 106 and meditate on verses 44 and 45. You begin to see a God who takes note of your distress and hears your cries and remembers the covenant between you and shows you great love and relents when you sin against Him. By the end of some time thinking about this, might your heart and outlook be changed? Mine certainly was after a few moments of dwelling on these truths.

But meditation must not solely be an exercise of the mind. It must also involve our hearts. So the second step is to **“Incline your heart towards God.”** To incline means to lean or slope or slant towards someone or something. Our hearts can be far from God or cold towards God or hard towards Him. But when we incline them towards God, it means we turn to Him in a warm and relational way.

It is vital to include this in our deep thinking on God’s Word because lots of people do intense thinking in areas with no heart love towards God. People think deeply doing math equations or in the research lab or ponder some deep philosophical question. But we need to not only think deeply about God’s Word but turn our hearts toward Him.

Colossians 3:16 is a great verse summarizing this. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Keller writes “When Paul talks about the Word of God dwelling richly within us, he talks of something more than gaining information. He talks about a deep and penetrating concentration that enables the Bible’s message to have a transforming power.”<sup>3</sup>

Meditation is like the tree’s roots taking in water. Trees don’t just dip their roots in water so they can feel water running over them. They take water in and make it part of themselves. We must not only think about the truths of God’s Word. We must take them in to the point that they move our hearts to some response. Keller also points out that the word “meditate” can also be translated as “to muse.” That word muse relates to the word music. When we put words to music, they can go right to our hearts. When we meditate, we work the truth down until it affects the heart.”<sup>4</sup>

Meditation is spiritually tasting Scripture – delighting in it, sensing the sweetness of the teaching, feeling the conviction of what it tells us about ourselves, and thanking God and praising Him for what it shows us about him. It is spiritually digesting the Scripture – applying it, thinking out how it affects us, guides us in the most practical way. It is drawing strength from the Scripture, letting it give you hope, using it to remember how loved you are.”<sup>5</sup>

There’s one more stage in meditation. **Enjoy or Cry out to God.** If we sensed God’s presence and the realities of salvation, we stop, savor and enjoy them. If we discover some new trait of God or are reminded of His great care, we rejoice. If we are cut to the heart by some conviction or the depth of our sin, we cry out for forgiveness and mercy. If

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<sup>3</sup> Keller, 150.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy and Kathy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus*, New York, NY, Viking, 2015, 179.

<sup>5</sup> Keller, *Prayer*, 151.



we can't concentrate or feel far from God, we cry out in our weakness for Him to renew us. Remember the one who meditates on God's Word day and night is like a tree. Trees don't grow over night. It takes time and sustained connection to the water below.

Now there's one final piece I want to offer you that I think is wise counsel. If we meditate and think deeply about God & His Law long enough we can be in danger of falling into despair. After all, who doesn't come up short when pondering God's commands? Who isn't struck with their own unholiness in the presence of the Holy God? Who might not experience some deflation if we compare our lives to Jesus' life?

Yet to address this possibility, Keller counsels us to meditate on God's incarnate Word – God in flesh – Jesus Himself. He meditated deeply on Scripture. He bled Scripture so that at His weakest moment during the temptation, He responds only with Scripture. But Jesus is not only a good example. Jesus is our hope. He is our salvation. So we can meditate on the righteousness we have before God because of Jesus' death. God sees us dressed in Christ's righteousness. Romans 5:17 declares "For if because of one man's trespass death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." We can meditate on this, Keller says, until our hearts are hot with assurance. Look at him loving you; dying for you; rejoicing in you and singing over you. Look at all that and he will be a delight to you. Then the law will be a delight to you and you will be like a tree planted by streams of water. You'll bear your fruit in season and no matter what happens, your leaf will not wither."<sup>6</sup>

The worldview of that man I visited in the hospital that day and his wife could not cope with the storm of sudden death. But a worldview centered on God can cope with any storm. I pray today that if you're in the midst of a storm and you've walked with God, you will continue to draw deeply from the water of His Word to sustain you through this time. If your life is storm free right now, please take the opportunity to sink your roots down deep into His Word so that your God-centered worldview will be strengthened when the next storm comes. If you're worldview has failed you in the midst of life's storm, I want you to invite you to come to front following the service where there are people who would be happy to introduce you to Christ and beginning a life journey with Him into eternity.

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<sup>6</sup> Keller, 164.