

# The Happy Christian Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, we come now to our Bible reading. Let's turn to Psalm 1, Psalm 1. And you'll find that on page 448 in the big hardback Bibles, if you have one, page 448.

And just why this psalm should have been chosen by the editor of the book of Psalms to be the first psalm is something that I'll try and say a little bit about when we come to the sermon.

So Psalm number 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.

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 that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

[ 1 : 20 ] Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Well, friends, let's turn up Psalm number 1 again on page 448 in our Bibles.

Psalm number 1. Now, I've chosen this particular psalm for our first Sunday morning of the new year because it brings us back to basics.

It brings us back to various things that are fundamental to leading a happy and productive Christian life. In fact, my title for this morning is The Happy Christian Life.

And just as a car needs to have its wheels realigned from time to time, so it runs properly, so Christian people need to take stock from time to time and check that our thinking and our living is in line with the fundamentals of the Bible.

[ 2 : 38 ] So let's allow Psalm 1 to do a kind of MOT test on the underlying attitudes of our thinking and our living. I've got three points. First, the psalm shows us the two races of humanity.

The two races of humanity. Look with me at the very first word of the psalm and then at the very last word of the psalm. Blessed is the first word.

Perish is the last. Now, those two words sum up the life and the destiny of the two races of humanity. In Psalm 1, those who are blessed are described as the righteous in verse 5 and again in verse 6.

And those who are perishing are described as the wicked four times in the psalm and as sinners twice in the psalm and as scoffers once.

Now, those are the two races of humanity. The righteous, on the one hand, who are blessed, and the wicked, on the other, who are perishing. And that division of the human race into two groups is fundamental, not only to this psalm, but to the whole of the Bible.

[ 3 : 53 ] And until we have got that clear in our minds, we shall not properly understand the gospel. Let me develop this a little bit and I hope it will be helpful. We'll soon return to Psalm 1, but I want to scan the further reaches of the Bible on this theme for a moment.

At one level, of course, the Bible teaches the oneness or the unity of the human race. In the sense that we are all descended from Adam and Eve, we have a single forefather and a single foremother, if there is a word foremother.

The Apostle Paul puts it like this in his famous speech to the leaders of the Athenians in Acts chapter 17. God, he said, made from one man every nation of mankind.

So all human beings have a single and sole origin. That is the one man, Adam. And yet in that very same verse in Acts 17, Paul also recognizes the diversity within humanity.

God made from one man every nation of mankind. So there's one origin and it branches out into many nations. And thus the Bible speaks of Egyptians and Syrians and Romans and Greeks and Ethiopians and Cappadocians and Arabians and Cretans and lots of others that you could name.

[ 5 : 09 ] So in the Bible, humanity is one in origin and many in diverse nations. But at the level of God's accounting, there are only two groups, the righteous and the wicked.

Now, they are described in many different ways in different parts of the Bible. For example, believers and unbelievers, or those who know the Lord and those who don't know the Lord, as the sheep and the goats, so on and so forth.

But there are only two groups. Think of the way that Jesus describes them in the Sermon on the Mount. He pictures the wise man who builds his house on the rock.

That's the person who listens to his teaching and then acts upon it and obeys it. And then there's the foolish man who builds his house upon the sand. And he represents the person who hears the words of Jesus but fails to act upon them.

The first man whose house is built upon the rock survives the storm of the Day of Judgment. But the second man is brought to utter ruin. Jesus also, in the same chapter, in Matthew chapter 7, divides humanity into those who enter by the narrow gate and walk the narrow road that leads to eternal life.

[ 6 : 24 ] And those who choose the wide gate and the broad road that leads to destruction. So there are only two groups within humanity. Those who belong to the Lord, who love him and trust him and obey him.

And those who disobey him and don't belong to him, even though in some cases they may loudly protest that they do. Now this great divide appears right at the beginning of the Bible.

Think of Cain and Abel, the first two sons of Adam and Eve. Abel trusts the Lord and loves the Lord. But Cain kills Abel, his brother, and is banished from the Lord's presence.

Think of the Apostle Paul, writing in his letters to the Romans and the Corinthians. He expresses the issue with great clarity when he says that all humanity belongs either to Adam or to Christ. As in Adam, he says, all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. All of us, he is saying, belong to one or to the other, either to Christ or to Adam.

[ 7 : 26 ] So the issue is never ethnicity or language or color or culture. It's the simple question, do we belong to Christ or not?

All right, let's come back now to Psalm 1. The editor of the book of Psalms is saying to his readers, let's begin the Psalter, begin this book of Psalms with clarity.

Do we want to be blessed and called righteous or would we prefer to live the life of those who perish in the end? Only two groups within humanity.

So the editor of the book of Psalms and the author of this Psalm is saying, make sure that you belong to the right group. And as the Psalm unfolds, the writer describes to us first the characteristics of the blessed person who is counted as righteous in the Lord's sight.

And then second, the characteristics of the wicked whose way finally is to perish and to come to ruin. So there's the first thing, two races within the human race.

[ 8 : 29 ] Now, my second point is to notice the description of the blessed person. And I want to take this section in three subsections. So first of all, a blessed person, the one counted as righteous, first develops a lifelong no in the center of his life.

No, spelled N-O. This is what verse one is teaching. Let me read it again. Blessed is the man who says no, who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

Now, it's a remarkable fact there that the first description of the godly person is a negative quality. The blessed man or woman, the godly person, is the one who is learning ever more deeply as life goes on to say no.

In fact, there are three no's really in the one verse. No to the counsel of the wicked. No to the way of sinners. No to the seat of scoffers. Young man, let me offer you some advice and counsel.

No, thank you. Young man, come and walk along this particular road with me. It's a lovely road. It's a delightful path of life. No, thank you.

[ 9 : 46 ] Young man, come and sit here with us. We have a soft and comfortable seat, ready prepared for you, in our very friendly circle. No, thank you, says the godly person.

So this young man or young woman is learning discernment. He's beginning to see that all that glitters is not gold. And he is developing backbone.

Because he's learning to resist the pressures that are put upon him by other people. And those other people are very likely to be his own peers. I recently read about a very elderly woman who

was asked, what was the best thing about getting to 104 years old?

And she replied, no peer pressure. Now look again at these three words here in verse 1.

Counsel. Now the word counsel, as you know, literally means advice. But surely this is advice that expresses people's thinking and planning. There is a whole world of thought and ambition in ungodly people, which the believer learns to say no to.

[10:58] Then there's the word way. The way of sinners. This is about the actual conduct. It's about the way a person uses their time, their energy, and their abilities.

And then there's the word seat. And that suggests the place where you settle down into a comfortable niche. It's about the company you keep. It's about the people that you enjoy being with. The people that you feel at home with. The believer then develops this ability to say no. Let me give you one or two examples. I'm thinking perhaps here of a young man.

Come with the boys for a long weekend away in Spain. We'll take a great load of cash in our back pockets. And boy, we will have a good time. No thank you, says the believer.

Well, how about this? I've worked out just how to start up a business which is going to make a great deal of money. Now, it involves a bit of technique and a bit of know-how. Clever use of the internet.

[11:57] One or two things that perhaps the revenue and customs might call dodgy. But, you know, it's almost, almost entirely foolproof. You're a bright lad. Come and join us. Make some money. No thank you.

Well, how about this? You appreciate pretty girls, don't you? I've come across a great website. No thank you. No. So, verse 1 is about the thoughts that threaten to mold us.

It's about the conduct that we're tempted to adopt. And it's about the company that we are inclined to keep. No, no, no, says the blessed and godly person.

Now, of course, that requires backbone. It requires being prepared to be different. It requires being prepared to be counter-cultural. So, a person who cannot bear to stand out from the crowd will never grow to be a mature follower of Christ.

But that word, no, is one of the basic ingredients of the happy and blessed Christian life. Secondly, we're looking at verse 2 now.

[13:03] The blessed person develops a lifelong yes also. Look at verse 2. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

But, begins the verse. That means by contrast with the counsel of the wicked, the way of sinners, and the seat of scoffers, by contrast with all that, the blessed person delights in the law of the Lord and meditates upon it day and night.

So, if the happy Christian says no, no, no, to the invitations of ungodliness, he or she says yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, to the law of the Lord.

Now, that word translated law here is the Hebrew word Torah. And the word Torah is normally used by the Jews to describe the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses or the law of Moses.

But when you think of it, those first five books of the Bible contain a great deal more than just legislation, what we would call laws. There's history there, a lot of history.

[14:07] There's poetry. There's prophecy. There's preaching. Think of Deuteronomy. That's really a series of long sermons. So, we'd misunderstand verse 2 in our psalm if we simply thought that it referred to the thou shalt and the thou shalt not of the Bible.

Torah means the whole of God's instruction, the whole of God's doctrine about his plan and purpose and covenant. Torah is the fundamental instruction about who God is and what it means for us to belong to him.

And for us, surely we can take verse 2 as applying to the whole of Scripture that we have, the whole rich variety of the 66 books of the Bible, Old and New Testaments.

Now, friends, let's notice the two key words in verse 2. Delight and meditates. Now, it's those two words that show us what verse 2 is all about.

It is so much more than a verse that is giving formal assent to the idea that the Bible is true or that the Bible is God's word. If you were the dullest and dreariest person in the whole world, you could say, I believe that the Bible is true.

[15:21] And you'd be telling the truth. But you wouldn't be saying that you delight in it or that you have the least intention of meditating upon it day and night. I believe, I believe in the existence of Mount Vesuvius.

I really do. But I have no intention of studying it or visiting it or walking up it. I'm not really interested in it. I believe in it. But I'm not at all delighted by it.

I'm rather afraid of it. Now, verse 2 is not about a dull, formal belief in the truth of God's Torah. It's about the blessed man or blessed woman delighting in it and having the scriptures so constantly in their bloodstream that they are preoccupied, preoccupied with the scriptures.

They're thinking about the Bible at all sorts of moments, morning, noon, and night. Now, isn't it true that so many Christians, too many Christians, are half starved and half unhappy because they've never learned to delight in the word of the Lord and to become preoccupied with it?

They give it formal assent. Oh, yes, I believe that the Bible is true. I believe that the Bible is the word of God. But they don't delight in it any more than I delight in Mount Vesuvius.

[16:42] But who wants to be a lean and hungry and half starving Christian when it's within our reach to be well nourished and full of joy? I can still remember being a very new Christian at the age of 16 or 17.

And in those days, there were senior figures. I suppose people are a bit like me now. But there were senior figures who would breathe down my neck. Edward, are you reading your Bible regularly?

That sort of thing. And I found Bible reading a chore, really, a kind of burdensome chore.

I used to use the Bible reading schemes brought out by Scripture Union. And I would sit down just for a few minutes and rush through my passage for the day and then quickly read the Scripture Union notes and then say amen.

And I would feel that my burden was lifted for the day. Now, our verse, too, is a very, very different thing. There's a whole different way of thinking here about the Bible. The blessed person delights in the law of the Lord.

Let me pass on two very simple ideas which have helped me to learn how to delight in the Bible.

The first is to think of reading the Bible in much the same way as you think about sitting down to a good meal when you're hungry.

[17:50] Just think back a few days to Christmas Day. Did you have a good Christmas dinner? Give me a smile if the answer is yes. Ha ha.

Good. I think possibly I enjoy Christmas dinner more than any other meal in the year. It's a terrific meal, isn't it? It's a celebration day of the Lord's birth and so on.

Christmas dinner often starts a little bit late, maybe 2 o'clock in the afternoon because, well, there's church in the morning. Then you've got to get back and peel all those sprouts and parsnips and all the rest of it.

But eventually you sit down, perhaps about 2 o'clock, and there are your family and friends, and you hungrily tuck into the mighty bird with all the trimmings, not to mention, of course, the Christmas pudding and rum sauce.

And you just about get to 2.59, you've had your last mouthful of Christmas pudding, and you switch on the radio to listen to Her Majesty addressing the nation. Now, it's an occasion, Christmas dinner, which combines delight and nourishment.

[18:49] Nourishment. Now, our verse 2 here says nothing about nourishment. It's about delight. But the Bible does speak of nourishment in other places. Think of Jesus quoting from the book of Deuteronomy when he was battling with the devil.

He says to the devil, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Now, if that is true, and of course it is true, our life is sustained by the regular input of two elements, bread, physical food, and the word of God.

So Jesus never denies our need of physical nourishment. He's affirming it. We need our daily bread. In fact, he teaches us in the Lord's Prayer to pray, Give us this day our daily bread.

But he is saying, and Deuteronomy is saying, that bread alone is not enough to sustain human life as human life is meant to be lived. The words of God sustain the life and the health of our souls and our hearts and our minds, just as bread and meat and vegetables sustain the health of our bodies.

Now, under normal circumstances, it would never occur to you to go through 24 hours without eating, would it? Without eating two or three decent meals. Because you know that you need your food if your body is not to become weak and malfunctioning.

[20:10] And in the same way, our hearts and minds need the stimulus, the teaching, the encouragement, the correction, and the daily training of the words of God. Our life and health physically depend upon bread for the body and Bible spiritually for the soul.

Sit down with your Bible as you sit down to your Christmas dinner. Pick up your knife and fork, as it were, and go for it with joy. Otherwise, you'll be a poor and starving creature.

I wonder if you ever get sent in the post, appeals for money from organizations which rescue neglected animals. Do you know those ones? There's a photograph there of a horse or a dog which is still alive, but it's so thin that you wonder how it manages to stand up and your heart bleeds for it. Now, Christians can become like that. They're trying to live on bread alone. And their hearts and souls are starved of the nourishment that they need.

And it means that they lack security and stability and joy. So there's my first little tip. Think of the Bible as our food. It is our food. Now, my second tip is to remember that the Bible, as we read it, it cements and deepens our love for the Lord himself.

[ 21 : 29 ] It's never an end in itself. We don't just read the Bible so as to understand the Bible better. It leads us to the Lord and it brings the Lord to us. So as we read our Bibles, as we think carefully about them, we are truly meeting with the Lord.

Let me draw a parallel. Just imagine yourself spending some time with somebody you love and value greatly. Maybe somebody you haven't seen for a while, a close friend or a relative. Let's say you have the opportunity to spend an hour together. Now, what do you do during that hour? You talk, don't you? You talk. Thousands of words are exchanged during that hour. You're listening to the friend that you love. You're listening to thousands of words that express the contents of your friend's mind and heart. Those words, as they come at you, are your friend's self-disclosure.

It's the words that bring your friend's thinking into your own thinking. Your friend's words, if you like, bring your friend to you. Now, God's words are like that to us.

[ 22 : 32 ] They're not separate from him. They are him, if I can put it like that. They are him expressing his mind and heart and concerns and longings to us. And as we listen to his words, we're listening to him.

As we listen to his words, it creates a kind of conversation between him and us. And we reply, really, Lord? Is that so? You don't say.

That is wonderful. That is astonishing. That's shocking. That's thought-provoking. Now, our response to what he says to us is going to be very varied and detailed.

Just as our response to the conversation of a good friend is full of variety and detail. But your friend's words are your friend coming to you, revealing himself to you.

And in the same way, God's words are God himself coming to you, disclosing himself to you, and pressing upon you the contents of his mind. So these two things, food that nourishes and the conversation which cements our love for him and his love for us.

[ 23 : 40 ] If we can grasp these two ideas, we shall quickly learn how to delight in the law of the Lord and to make it our meditation, our preoccupation, morning, evening, and night.

Don't be put off by the word meditation, by the way. When you see meditation, especially if you've lived through the 1960s and 70s, you may be thinking of some kind of religious technique whereby you have to cross your legs into some impossible position.

You know, and your belly button goes up to the ceiling as you try to sort of practice some kind of technique. It's not that at all. It simply means thinking about these things carefully. So where are we up to?

The blessed and happy Christian develops a lifelong no, no, no, no in verse 1. A lifelong yes in verse 2. Now thirdly, in verse 3, the happy Christian is marked by stability and fruitfulness.

Verse 3, he's like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. Now this verse 3 gives us a lovely picture of the Christian life at its best.

[ 24 : 51 ] And I think we can detect five separate elements in it. First, this tree has stability. Why? Because it is planted.

Do you know how sometimes you see a little tiny tree, a sapling, trying to grow in a place where it hasn't been planted and the place is eminently unsuitable? Maybe in the mortar of an old wall. You'll see them up in walls, won't you? Even around here. Or maybe 10 foot above ground in the crotch of a bigger tree where a little bit of soil has settled. Now those trees have not been planted and they have no good future, do they?

They have a precarious and short existence. But this tree here in verse 3 has been purposefully planted. The hole has been properly dug. The bone meal and the manure have been put in.

And the tree is properly staked and tied. Stability. Second, this tree has vitality. It's planted beside streams of water.

[ 25 : 51 ] So the soil never dries out. The tree therefore can keep growing without hindrance. Third, this tree has fruitfulness. It yields its fruit at fruiting time.

Fourth, this tree has durability. Its leaf does not wither. In England in 1976, we had a terrible drought.

It kept raining in Scotland, I think, but in England we had a terrible drought. There were big, big trees dying all over the place. But this tree here, it has durability. Its leaf does not wither.

And fifth, this tree enjoys prosperity. The writer says in all that he does, he prospers. Now we'd be wrong to think of that prosperity primarily in financial terms.

It might include that, but that's not the primary idea. The idea is this is a life that does well. It makes a real impact for good. It's a useful life that makes a significant contribution to the church and to the world.

[ 26 : 56 ] Now we've all met Christians who have lives like that, haven't we? Lives marked by stability, vitality, fruitfulness, durability, and prosperity. And doesn't that picture in verse 3 make you say, that's exactly the kind of life that I want to live.

There is something beautiful and desirable about that kind of life. The tree of verse 3. How then can our lives become like this tree of verse 3 or become more like it?

The answer is not hard to find. In the original Hebrew here, verse 3 apparently begins with the word and. Now for some reason, our Bible translation leaves out the word and, thus obscuring the connection between verse 2, sorry, between verse 3 and the two verses that come before it.

But as soon as you put the and back in there at the beginning of verse 3, you can see exactly what the psalmist is saying. He is saying the blessed person is the one who says no to ungodliness and yes to the words of the Lord, and the consequence will be that he is like the tree of verse 3.

In other words, to become a verse 3 person, we have to learn first how to live as a verse 1 person and as a verse 2 person. We shan't enjoy the blessings of verse 3 until we have developed the backbone required by verse 1 and the desire for God's words described in verse 2.

[ 28 : 23 ] In other words, the Christian life comes as an integrated package with various pieces that belong together. But once the principles of verse 1 and verse 2 become established in our lives, that picture of verse 3 will inevitably begin to emerge in our character and our conduct.

Well now let's look thirdly at the second group within the human race who are described in verse 4. The wicked, says the psalmist, the wicked are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind drives away.

Now verse 4 is a short and bleak statement. The wicked are not so. In other words, the wicked have never cultivated a big no in their hearts.

They've never developed the moral courage to say no to the counsel of the wicked. They've lapped up the counsel of the wicked. It has become their own counsel. And they've never learned to avoid the way, the lifestyle of sinners, because it has become their lifestyle.

And they've never shunned the comfortable seat of those who scoff at the power and reality of God. In fact, it's the very place where they sit. It's the place where they feel most at home.

[ 29 : 40 ] And they've never learned to delight in the law of the Lord. They may perhaps possess a Bible, but if you look at their Bible, it's in pristine condition, because it's unread.

And as for the stable, vital, productive, enduring, and prosperous life of verse 3, their lives are the opposite. They're unstable. They're dreary. They're fruitless. They have no power to stay the course.

The wicked, verse 4 is saying, are none of the above. They are not so. Their life is a sad denial of verse 1 and of verse 2 and of verse 3.

What are they like then? How can they be described? Well, our psalmist takes us to the local farm, to the threshing floor in summertime. And he draws a picture for us there, which is as unhappy as the picture of verse 3 is happy.

In verse 4, he pictures the farmer on the threshing floor amidst his sheaves of corn, which have just been cut and brought into the barn. Now, the threshing area, under those conditions of agriculture, would typically be a shed with a roof over the top, but no walls up at the side.

[ 30 : 55 ] In other words, designed to keep out the rain, but not the wind. So the farmer takes his big winnowing fork or his shovel or whatever it is. He tosses the sheaves up in the air, and he

whacks them as they come down, and he tosses them up again so that the wind can blow through. The heavy, good grain lands back on the floor, and it forms a growing heap. But the chaff, that's the outer husks which are useless, are so light, so insubstantial, that the wind driving through the shed blows them away, and they're seen no more.

And when you think about that agricultural metaphor, it's enough to make you weep, isn't it? These lives are so lightweight, so insubstantial in the sight of God, that there is nothing there.

Who, then, are these people, the ones described as wicked sinners? Is the psalmist talking about murderers and terrorists and people who force young girls into prostitution?

Is it that sort of person? Not at all. The Bible's estimate of human wickedness is quite different from the estimates of wickedness that we find in our newspapers. In the Bible, the heart of wickedness is simply to say no to God, to do what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, to disobey him and then to run and hide from him.

[ 32 : 21 ] Think of Jesus' teaching. What is the first and greatest commandment, according to Jesus? The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

And if that is true, doesn't it follow that the greatest sin, the greatest wickedness, is to ignore him and treat him as if he had no sovereign rights over our lives? The heart of wickedness is to substitute oneself for God, to give oneself all the rights of sovereignty and control, and to banish God beyond the perimeters of one's life.

Until he became a Christian, C.S. Lewis regarded God as the great interferer, with a capital I, the great interferer.

Don't you come interfering into my life. That's the characteristic cry of the wicked human heart. I'm going to be my own leader, my own sovereign. I'm going to be my own decision maker.

I'm going to be the arbiter of my own conscience. Raspberries to the Bible. I'm going to make up my own rules. Let me read you some lines from a famous 19th century poem, which has been much admired.

[ 33 : 33 ] It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul. Much admired by godless people.

But those thoughts are wicked. That is the essence of human wickedness. I am the captain of my soul. The Christian gladly says, You, Lord Jesus, are the captain of my soul.

This verse 4 is a very sad verse. Those who turn away from the Lord are like chaff that the wind drives away. When I was a parish minister down in England, I used to take a lot of funerals.

And many a time I would find myself taking the funeral of a person who I knew had wanted to have nothing to do with the Lord. And so often as we got to the end of the funeral service, to the point where the body was to be disposed of, either the coffin would be lowered into the ground, or if it was a cremation service, it would be taken behind to go to the ovens.

And I would be filled at that point with a poignant sense that here was a life that amounted to nothing. This man might have lived 70 or 80 years.

[ 34 : 47 ] He might have held down a job. He might have raised a family. But he was chaff in the Bible's estimate, blown away by the wind, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, dying under the wrath of God with no chance to repent.

What is the final end, then, of those who reject the Lord? Verse 5 tells us, there are two places where they cannot and will not stand or endure.

The first is that they will not stand in the judgment. On the day of judgment, when Jesus, who is the judge appointed by God the Father, when he calls all the people who have ever lived in the history of the world, to present themselves before him, those who have not acknowledged the Lord will not be able to stand, not be able to endure.

They'll be unable to look the judge in the eye because they will know then that their stubborn refusal of him has sealed their destiny and he will banish them to the hellish existence from which there is no possibility of return.

And second, in verse 5, they will not be able to stand in the congregation of the righteous. In other words, they will have no place in the sweet and lovely fellowship of those who love the Lord and who love each other.

[ 36 : 10 ] And then finally, let's notice the two ways which are described and contrasted in verse 6. First, there's the way of the righteous, that is the life, the conduct, the work, the consequences of

the life of those who are seen as righteous in the sight of God.

Verse 6 tells us that the Lord knows their way. He knows. His loving and watchful eye is upon their every thought and their every action.

He is the good shepherd who knows each one of his sheep by name. Remember David's words in Psalm 139, O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down. You know when I rise up. Now, isn't that a most encouraging thing for us as a new year begins and we see the next 360 odd days stretching ahead of us?

The Lord knows the ways of each of his people. There is no place, therefore, that we might find ourselves in in the course of 2015 that the Lord God doesn't already know about.

[ 37 : 22 ] Think of the kinds of things that some of us might have to face this year. Financial setback, a difficult medical diagnosis, the miscarriage of a baby, the loss of a job, a bad accident, the discovery that somebody we love deeply is misbehaving badly.

The Lord knows our way. Nothing is outside his knowledge or outside his sovereign permission. It's good to know that.

But as for the way of the wicked, the end of the psalm, verse 6 simply says it will perish. It has set itself against God and therefore it has turned its back on all his blessings.

Nothing is sadder than that. Chaff, blown away by the wind. Why then did the editor of the book of Psalms put this psalm as Psalm 1?

Well, surely it comes first because it deals with first order matters. The psalmist is saying, he's reminding us, there are two ways and two ways only to live. There are two races of humanity, the blessed and the righteous whose way is known by the Lord and the wicked who will not stand in the judgment.

[ 38 : 40 ] Which group, the psalmist is saying, do you want to belong to? Do you want to be like a tree that is stable and vital and fruitful and enduring and prosperous? Or would you prefer to be like chaff blown away by the wind?

Choose life, not death. Choose blessing and not perishing. Choose the firm resistance, the backbone of verse 1 and the delight of verse 2 and the beauty of verse 3.

And if any person here this morning has not yet made this crucial choice, choose life and blessing today.

Turn to the Lord Jesus because he is the point of entry and he is the only point of entry into all the blessings that are promised in this glorious psalm.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Our gracious God, you have done for us wonderful things that we don't deserve at all.

[ 39 : 43 ] We confess to you again that all of us began our lives with our hearts set against you. We're all sinners by nature, but in your mercy and love you brought your son, you sent your son, the Lord Jesus, to be our rescuer.

and for so many of us you have put it into our hearts to love him and to bow the knee before him and to place our lives at his disposal.

We thank you so much and thank you for the promises of forgiveness and eternal life which come to us through him. So please strengthen us. Please bless any here who have not turned in their hearts to Christ and bring them, we pray.

Give them the grace and the courage to submit to him today. And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.