

The Pursuit of Happiness

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- [0 : 00] Well, let's turn to one of the Psalms, and Nathan's going to be preaching to us this morning on Psalm number one. So please do grab a Bible. We have visitor Bibles at the back and at the side, so please do turn to a Bible if you don't have one with you.
- And we're in Psalm one, halfway through your Bibles. Psalm one.
- 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. And may God bless his word to us this morning. Well, good morning, Tron Church.
- It's wonderful for me to be with you all. If you have your Bibles with you, it'd be great if you could turn with me back to that Psalm that was read for us earlier. Psalm one.
- And if you're using our church Bibles this morning, that's on page 448. So I'll just give everyone a moment to turn to that now.
- What does it mean to be a blessed person? What makes for a truly happy and fulfilled life?
- [2 : 25] Now if you go on to Instagram and look up the word blessed, you'll get Instagram's answer to the question of what makes for a truly blessed individual.
- And you'll find that Instagram answers the question in relation to the material possessions that a person has. So you'll see a lot of pictures of people driving expensive cars.
- In fact, I think I even saw a few of them in the church car park on the way in. And you'll see a lot of images of people going on exotic holidays.
- And you'll discover a lot of photographs of people being served fancy dinners from some of the finest restaurants in the world.
- But here in Psalm one, we get a very different answer to the question of what makes for a blessed person. Now Psalm one marks the beginning of the book of Psalms.
- [3 : 33] Psalm one functions for us as the gateway into the Psalter. Now I don't know about you, but I used to think that the book of Psalms was made up of 150 random songs.
- I used to think that the Psalter was just a collection of poems that had absolutely no connections with one another whatsoever. But the reality is just so very different.

You see, the editor of the Psalter has carefully arranged the Psalms across the book according to a very precise process of reasoning. And so the question that we might want to begin by asking ourselves is this.

Why has our Psalm been placed at the beginning of the book? Why is Psalm one, Psalm one? And the answer to this question is that Psalm one marks the gateway into the Psalter.

Because it deals with the most important issue throughout the book of Psalms. Psalm one teaches us the most fundamental of all truths.

[4 : 52] The basic thing. The first thing that you and I this morning must fully grasp. And that fundamental truth.

That basic thing. Is this. You and I can only live this life. According to one.

Of two different ways. The way that leads to blessing. Or the way that leads to perishing. And so this is in fact the very idea that our Psalmist uses to top and tail.

Psalm one. Look with me there. At the very first word of the Psalm. There in verse one. Blessed. And then look with me there.

At the very last word of the Psalm. There at the end of verse six. Perish. And so the message of Psalm one is crucial.

[5 : 54] For us here this morning. To know very well. Because there are in fact. Only two possible paths for us. Two humanities.

Two destinies. And you and I. Can and will. Only belong. To one. Of these. The way that leads to blessing.

Or the way that leads. To perishing. Now before we. Get into the Psalm itself. Some of us might be thinking that this grand.

Binary claim. Found within the Psalm. Is a little bit. Unreasonable. Unreasonable. Surely some of us can kind of. Hover between.

The two different paths. Without really. Committing to one. Of the other. Well friends. Thinking like that. Is not only. To misunderstand.

[6 : 53] Psalm one. But it's to misunderstand. The gospel. Itself. Because there only is. And only ever has been.

One. Gospel. We see it being taught here. By our. Psalmist friend. This morning. In the Old Testament. And we see that same gospel.

Being taught. By Jesus Christ himself. Later. In the New Testament. Now of course. Jesus himself. May not have used. The exact same words.

That we see here. In Psalm one. But Jesus was clear. Jesus preached. There are only two ways. To live. Two groups of people.

One shall be blessed. And the other shall perish. For example. In his famous. Sermon on the Mount. Jesus taught.

[7 : 50] That humanity is divided. By those who shall enter. The narrow gate. Which leads to life. And those who shall enter. The wider gate.

Which leads to death. Death. And then later on. In his earthly ministry. Jesus taught. That one day. He personally. Would separate.

All of humanity. Into the sheep. Who shall inherit life. And the goats. Who shall inherit death. Jesus was clear.

Jesus was clear. Our psalmist is clear. There are only two ways to live. There is only one. Gospel. All right.

Well let's turn now. To Psalm 1 itself. Let's look together. At that first potential path. For us here this morning. The way that leads. To blessing. In verses 1 to 3.

[8 : 49] Now here in our psalmist's opening section. He begins his song. By giving us a description. Of what the blessed man.

Is actually like. The person who leads. The truly happy. Life. And so the psalmist begins his poem.

In verse 1. With the words. Blessed is the man. Who. Now it's interesting isn't it. That he begins his poem.

With a description of this man. By firstly assigning him. With a negative quality. And that negative quality. Is that there are certain things.

That the blessed man. Has learned to say. No to. The happy person. Is initially defined for us. By the things that he shunned.

[9 : 46] And so the psalmist cites for us. Here in verse 1. Three different clauses. Three no's. No. No.

No. He writes in verse 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. And so the psalmist gives us.

These three different clauses. To say to us. That the truly. Blessed person. Has learned to reject. Evil. In all of its forms.

Immorality. In its totality. Is totally shunned. By the truly. Blessed. Individual. And what's more.

[10 : 43] The psalmist wants us to see. That each of these. Three different. Kinds of evil. Are all offered. To the blessed man. By the unrighteous people. All around him.

Or as the psalmist himself. Calls them. In verse 1 again. He gives them three names. The wicked. Sinners. And scoffers.

So therefore. The blessed man. Of someone. Is a person. Who has learned to say. No. To peer pressure. To stand out. From the crowd.

To refuse. To just. Go along. With what everyone else is doing. To be his own man. He has now cultivated. The moral fiber.

That is necessary. For him. To be truly. Counter cultural. And so. To really. Hit that point.

[11 : 42] Home for us. The psalmist cites. For us. Here in verse 1. Three distinct. Sources of evil. That the blessed man. Has learned. To shun.

The first of which. Is that the blessed man. Has learned not to walk in the. Counsel. Of the wicked.

Now that word. Counsel. Counsel. Literally means. Advice. And it refers to our mode. Of thinking. To how we formulate. Our plans. To the mindset.

That we all bring to the table. And then secondly. The blessed man. Has learned. Not to stand in the. Way. Of sinners.

So if the word. Counsel. Refers to our mode. Of thinking. Then the word. Way. Refers to our mode. Of behavior. To our actual.

[12 : 41] Conduct. And then thirdly. The blessed man. Has learned. Not to sit in the. Seat. Of scoffers. Now the idea here.

Is that where we sit down. Is also where we settle down. Where we feel. Our most comfortable. And so therefore. The place where we. The place where we settle down.

In a sense. Is the place where we truly. Belong. And so to settle down. Amongst the scoffers. To sit in their seat.

Is to truly. Belong. Amongst them. So the message. Of verse one. Is that the blessed.

Person. Has learned to say. No. No. No. To peer pressure. Now the position.

[13 : 37] That our. Blessed man. Finds himself in. Is a position. That you and I. Are bound to find ourselves. In eventually. And I'm sure.

Most of us. Have done. Already. We too. Have to learn. To say. No. To the. Counsel. The ways. And the seat. Of the unrighteous. People.

All around us. If we are to ever. Truly become. Blessed. People. Perhaps. You're here today.

As someone. Who works in law. Business. Or finance. Someone. Who deals with money. And one day. Your employer. Approaches you. And says. We've got this new role.

In the company. That's just opened up. And you'd be. Absolutely. Perfect. For it. You'll make a much. Bigger salary. Than the one you have.

[14 : 30] Now. And you'll have so much. More. Holiday time. Now. We may ask you to. Shed the truth. Just a little bit.

And we may request. That you do some. Legally. Dodgy things. Every now and then. But you'll be so much.

Better off. In this new role. So take my counsel. Take my advice. Take the new job. A Sam one man.

Or a Sam one woman. Has learned in this scenario. To say. No thank you. You can give that job. To somebody else. Or perhaps.

You're here today. As someone who. Works in an office space. Like an administrator. Or a teacher. Or somebody in civil service. And one day.

[15 : 26] The head of your. Department. Comes in and says. Good news everyone. It's LGBT. History month. And we've been given. These rainbow colored.

Straps. For you all. To wear. To work. And whilst your employer. Is saying this. You know. That anyone. Who does not wear. The straps.

Will be excluded. From the. Inner circle. In your workplace. You won't get to sit. In their seat. Friends.

A Sam one man. Or a Sam one woman. Has learned. In this scenario. To say. No thank you. I won't be wearing that. I won't be standing.

In your ways. So the big point. Here in verse one. Is that the blessed person. Has learned to say. No.

[16 : 22] To peer pressure. No. To evil. No. That's his negative. That's his negative. Quality. And so now. At this point.

We might be thinking. Goodness me. Being a blessed person. Sounds really difficult. How can anyone. Cultivate the sheer strength needed.

To constantly be saying. No. To his peers. Well there in. Verse two. We see that our. Psalmist. Also assigns.

A second. Positive quality. To our blessed man. He has already learned. To shun peer pressure. To say no.

To the council. The way. And the seat. Of the unrighteous people. All around him. And then here in verse two. We learn where the blessed man.

- [17 : 17] Gets his inner strength from. The backbone that he needs. To stand out from the crowd. And that backbone.
- Comes from the fact. That in verse two. His delight. Is in the law. Of the Lord. Now that word.
- Law. Refers to the Lord's teaching. And instruction. For our lives. And so the psalmist. Is saying. That the blessed man. Is able to.
- Find it in himself. To resist the temptation. To conform. To the. World around him. Because he delights.
- In the Lord's teaching. And instruction. For his life. Now notice. The. The. The lighting. In the Lord's law.
- [18 : 15] Is not the same thing. As simply. Studying. God's law. You know. When I was in. High school. Right. I had to study a book.
- It was called. How to pass. Higher mathematics. Politics. And I did genuinely. Study that book. As hard as I could. I spent a lot of time in it.
- And I read it from cover to cover. Now. You definitely. Wouldn't have thought that. If you saw the grades. That I got. But even though.
- I did study that book. As hard as I could. I took no delight. In it. Whatsoever. I took no pleasure. In reading that book.
- It was an immense. Burden. That I just couldn't wait. To be finally lifted. From me. But Sam. One's blessed man.
- [19 : 14] Doesn't simply. Study. God's law. Like he's getting ready. To sit my maths exam. It's not a burden. Or a chore. For him to learn.
- God's teaching. And instruction. For his life. Because it's what he delights in. In fact. We read in verse 2 again.
- That God's law. Is so pleasurable. For him. That he. Meditates. On his law. Day. And night. Now I think.
- What the psalmist. Is getting at here. Is that it's totally. Natural for us. To spend. A great deal. Of our. Thinking time. As we're going. About our day. Just meditating.
- On the things. That we love. Because we delight. In these things. It's not a burden. Or a chore. For us to. Meditate upon them. But rather.
- [20 : 11] It's what we find ourselves. Just doing. Naturally. For example. You might be here today. As someone who. Finds himself.
- Just naturally. Thinking about. A given sport. Like rugby. Or football. Just as you're going. About your day. From morning. Till night.
- It. Because it's what you delight in. Or for those of you. Here today. Who are married. Think about.
- When you first started. Dating your spouse. It's totally natural. Isn't it? For newly formed. Couples. To spend a great deal. Of their.
- Thinking time. Just meditating. On one another. As they're going about their day. From morning till night. Because that special someone.
- [21 : 06] Is who you delight in. Now if we here at the Tron Church. Want to become a church full of. Blessed people. A church full of.
- Psalm one men. And Psalm one women. Then we need to cultivate. A love. For God's law. A delight. In both his teaching.

And instruction. For our lives. So that listening. To what God has to say to us. And then responding to him. In obedience. Is no longer just a chore.

For us. It's no longer something. That we have to just. Grit our teeth. And just force ourselves to do. But instead.

It's the most natural thing. In the world for us. To listen to the Lord. And obey him. It's both our highest. Pleasure. And our highest.

[22 : 04] Joy. So therefore. We need to get to a point. Where attending the church services. Here on a Sunday. Is no longer a matter.

Of just sheer. Willpower. Because the opportunity. To hear and respond. To God's law. To his teaching and instruction.

For our lives. Is what we delight in. We need to get to a point. Where attending our weekly. Growth group studies. Is never something.

That we just. Force ourselves to do. Because it's what we find. Our true. Pleasure in. Yes. The blessed person. Is a happy person.

Because he delights. In following. The Lord's law. Okay. So now we've seen. That our blessed man. Has a. Negative quality.

[23 : 01] In verse one. And he has a. Positive quality. In verse two. And so now. Because he has. Cultivated. Both of these traits.

We read in verse three. But he is like a tree. Planted by streams of water. That yields its fruit in its season.

And its leaf. Does not wither. And all that he does. He prospers. Now I think the first thing to note.

Is just what an attractive picture this is. Of the blessed man's life. It's almost as if the psalmist. Wanted to say to his readers. Don't you want a life like this?

Go on. Look at how good this is. And it's an attractive picture. Because it has a lot of. Desirable qualities. Doesn't it? This is a tree that is.

[23 : 59] Stable. Because we read at the beginning. Of verse three. That it is. Planted. This is a tree that is. Productive. Because we read in the middle of verse three.

That it yields its fruit in its season. And its leaf does not wither. And so this is a tree that is. Prosperous. Because we read in the end of verse three.

And all that he does. He prospers. Now of course. It's not right to think of that prosperity. In economic terms. To do with money.

But the point here is that. This is a life that does well. It makes a real contribution. To both the church. And the world. And if we here this morning.

Can learn to say. No. To peer pressure. And to delight. In the Lord's teaching. And instruction. For our lives. Then we too can have.

[24 : 57] The blessed life. Depicted here. In verse three. And if that isn't enough.

Incentive. For us to. Go away and cultivate. Both of the blessed man's. Qualities. As positive and negative. Then maybe this will be.

You see. Our psalmist does not end his song. At the end of verse three. Does he? But instead. He contrasts. The way that leads to blessing. In verses one to three.

With the only available. Alternative life. To it. The way that leads. To perishing. In verses four to six.

Now friends. Before we get in. To verses four to six. I know that these issues. Are not pleasant. For us to think about. But it's important.

- [26 : 00] For us to remember. That verses four to six. Of Psalm one. Are in our Bibles. For our benefit. Because God does not want.
- A single person. To perish. And so passages. Like this one. Are preserved. Within our Bibles. As a loving warning. For us.
- So that we can reap them. And avoid going down. That dreadful path. That only ends. In utter. Destruction.
- And so now with. That in mind. Let's look together. At that second. Possible path. For us this morning. The way that leads. To perishing.
- In verses four. To six. Now we have already seen. That the blessed man. Leads the happy life.
- [26 : 58] Described in verses. One to three. But then our psalmist. Sings those. Stark lyrics. At the beginning of verse four. The wicked.
- Are not. So. That the wicked. That the wicked. Are not. That the wicked. Are not. That the wicked. Are not. Beautiful tree. That is stable.
- Productive. And prosperous. Within our psalmist. Sings those. Solemn lyrics. At the end. Of verse four. That the wicked.
- Are like. Chaff. That the wind. Drives. Away. Now chaff.
- Isn't good for anything. Is it? Certainly not stable. It's not productive. It's not prosperous. It's not anything. It's dead material. And it can only be.
- [27 : 54] Blown away. In a gust of wind. I noticed that our psalmist. Needed five sentences. In verse three.
- To describe that great big. Beautiful tree. That depicts the blessed man's life. But then our psalmist. Only needs. One line.
- In verse four. To describe the wicked man's. Chaff life. Because after all. There just isn't much to say. About chaff.
- Is there? So there is a very solemn warning. For us here this morning. You see that little phrase.
- Used at the beginning of verse four. The wicked. Is not merely used here. To refer only to people who are. More obviously. Evil.
- [28 : 51] People like Adolf Hitler. And Joseph Stalin. But instead. It refers to all people. Who do not share the blessed man's love.
- For the Lord. And so the lives of such people. No matter how good they were. In the end. Were just like chaff. Like dust. And it's just so sobering to think. Isn't it? That this is true of people.
- For whom. By normal standards. Have actually led a pretty good life. You might think of a man.
- Who. Had a good education growing up. Went off to university. And got a first class degree. Maybe even. Started his own business. And made a lot of money for himself.
- [29 : 46] Got married. And had a. Big family. Perhaps he was even quite a. Charitable person. And quite a pleasant man. To be around. And then he dies.
- At the ripe old age. Of 93. Friends. Sam once says. That if such a person dies. Without the blessed man's love.
- For the Lord. Then in the end. His life was just like chaff. Like dust. Good for nothing. Unfruitful. And ready to just be. Blown away. In a gust of wind. And so you might ask.

What is to become. Of such a life. And the answer to this question. Is in verses 5. And 6. Now here.

[30 : 47] Psalm 1 points us ahead. To the final destiny. Of both the wicked man. And the blessed man. And we can see that in verse 5.

The wicked. Will not stand. In the. Judgment. Now that word. Judgment.

Of course. Refers to the final. Judgment. When Jesus Christ himself. Shall return to judge. All of humanity.

At the end of history. And on that final day. He shall divide. The whole world. Into these two groups. Of people.

The blessed. And the wicked. And Psalm 1 tells us. In verse 5. That the wicked.

[31 : 44] Will not stand. In that final judgment. But rather. At the end of verse 6. We read. But the way.

Of the wicked. Will. Perish. Now again. Friends. I know that these things. Are not pleasant.

For us to think about. I don't enjoy. Thinking about these things. At all. But thank God. That he does not. Wish this fate. Upon. Anyone. And in this life.

There is always hope. That we might turn away. In repentance. From the way. That leads to perishing. And become truly. Blessed.

People. And that. Tron Church. Takes us back. To the question. That we started with. What does it mean.

[32 : 43] To be a blessed. Person. Well look with me again. At verse 5. A blessed. Person.

As a person. Who belongs to. The congregation. Of the righteous. Whose ways. In verse 6. Are known.

By the Lord. The group of people. Who shall. Stand. In that final judgment. And who shall not.

Perish. But have everlasting. Life. Amen.

Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Father. We thank you.

[33 : 42] For the amazing grace. That you have shown. Towards us. We confess. That from the moment. Each of us. Were conceived. Our hearts.

Were bent. To rebel. Against you. But you. In an act. Of extraordinary. Kindness. Changed our hearts. So that we would. Submit to your son. As our loving king.

We pray now. For anyone here. This morning. Who has not quite taken. That final step. Of bending the knee. To Christ. We ask.

That you'll grant them. The courage. To take that step. Today. And grant them. The reassurance. Of knowing. That they don't have to.

Go through this alone. But that there is. A church family. Right here. At the ready. To embrace them. Support them.

[34 : 39] And love them. Amen.