

*Delighting in God's Word: Psalm 1*

Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church

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At the outset of this new year, I'm leading us through a short sermon series this month on the Word and prayer. Two sermons on the importance of God's Word. Two sermons on the importance of prayer. Last Sunday we started at the very beginning of the Bible and talked about the power of God's Word as seen in His act of creating the entire universe out of nothing. Moving just 2 chapters later in the Bible, we then saw the devastating effects of the serpent twisting God's Word, and Adam and Eve doubting God's Word and then disobeying God's Word.

God's Word is very powerful, and His Word is absolutely true and entirely good. It is full of blessings for us. It doesn't diminish our freedom or put us into bondage. That's what the Devil would like us to think. But it's the exact opposite. God's Word leads us out of bondage, into freedom.

You know, one of the things that was a blessing to me while we were away was sitting in a church service and listening to a live sermon. I, of course, get to be in our worship services each week here at Three Rivers Grace. And I also listen to a lot of recorded sermons. But rarely do I get to attend a worship service and listen to someone else preach. Well, 2 Sundays ago we got to attend the church where my parents are members, First Baptist Church of San Antonio, and Pastor Don was preaching from John 8, where Jesus says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Do you see the connections there? Abide in His Word. That's where you'll find truth—the truth of the Gospel, the truth of Jesus Christ dying for sinners like you and me. And it's that truth that will set you free.

Don't ever believe the lie that God's Word is like a straightjacket, that His instructions are restrictive, that His commands are like shackles that bind us. That's the lie the serpent whispered in Eve's ear. Don't fall for that. The truth of God's Word will set you free!

No, His commands are not burdensome. His commands will not steal our joy. On the contrary, His instructions for us are freeing and joy-giving. Listening to Him and walking in His ways will sustain us in hope.

The picture that comes to my mind is the imagery of Isaiah 40, where it says,

*“Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:30–31, ESV)

Let me ask you: how are you going to get through 2015? I’m not trying to be pessimistic. I’m not anticipating that it’s going to be an especially difficult year for us. I’m simply asking: what’s going to sustain you. What’s going to keep you from being like the young people described in that verse, who fall exhausted? Things may be going really well for you in many respects, and they may continue to go well for you in 2015. But you still feel faint and weary. What’s going to sustain you? What’s going to ground you and give you perspective on everything going on in your life?

And when the trials do come, as they will, what will be the rock under your feet? What will be the strength in your legs? What will be the wind under your wings?

Andrew and Jake and I were praying together Wednesday afternoon. We were praying for various things in the church and thinking of this new year that we’re embarking on. And Andrew was very thoughtful to pray about the as-of-now unknown trials that we may face in this coming year—for us individually, in our families, in our church family. At this point we don’t know what hardships might enter our lives in 2015.

I don’t think Gladys Kocher, at this point last year, knew that she would be in the midst of a battle with cancer. And her life right now, especially now, is a tremendous testimony to the sustaining power of God’s Word.

What are you clinging to? What’s going to get you through? And not just get you through, but cause you to thrive, to soar?

Earlier in that same chapter of Isaiah we read this:

*“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”* (Isaiah 40:8, ESV)

Another text in Isaiah that’s very inspiring is in chapter 55 where we read this promise from God about His word:

*“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10–11, ESV)*

We can count on the promises in God’s Word. We can trust Him. Everything else will crumble, eventually. But God’s Word will stand forever. His promises will never fail.

That’s why, last Sunday, one of my application points was to encourage us to ransack the Bible for hope-giving promises of God. That’s what George Mueller exhorted people to do. That’s what breathed life into his soul each morning. Searching the Scriptures for promises of God that I can hold on to today. Whatever’s going to face me this week, I can bank on Romans 8:28, for example. I know that, whatever will happen at work, whatever happens in my family relationships, whatever others might say about me, whatever happens with my finances or my stuff, I know that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

So I want to start this new year by emphasizing the desperate need we are in to hear from God’s Word, and not just on Sunday mornings. Each of us, individually, needs to be listening to God’s Word regularly, daily.

And as we’re going to look at specifically this morning, it’s not just a matter of discipline and duty, but a matter of delighting in God’s Word. We’ll be spending some time in Psalm 1 looking at that theme. But first I want to put this in the context of our mission statement, which you can read on the front of your worship folder.

If you’re newer to Three Rivers Grace, you may wonder why we teach and preach the way we do. Why are the sermons and lessons here *so* focused on Scripture? Why do we spend so much time working our way through books of the Bible? Why do we memorize Bible verses? Why are we so intentional about teaching the children core biblical truths?

Well, all of this, I hope you can see, rests on some very firm convictions about God and His Word. Our mission statement summarizes these convictions.

“We exist to delight in the beauty of God’s greatness, to proclaim the truth of God’s Word, and to ignite a joyful passion for

the Gospel of Jesus Christ among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world.”

Back in 2007 the elders presented this mission statement for our church, and I preached a sermon series on it in January of that year. And I’ve tried to reiterate these themes again and again over the years. So let me do so again now, in summary form—very briefly.

First of all, “we exist to delight in the beauty of God’s greatness.” There are many places in the Bible that show God’s desire to glorify His own Name. God is God-centered. He does everything He does for His own glory. He created us for His glory. He delivered His people, the Israelites, from Egypt for His own glory. He sent His Son into the world in order that we might glorify Him for His mercy. And Christ is coming back to receive glory. God is on a mission to make His greatness known. And therefore the purpose of your life and mine, and the purpose of this church, is to glorify God. We want to delight in the beauty of God’s greatness, which is how we glorify God. By God’s grace, we recognize how awesome He is, and we acknowledge that there is nothing better than God. There is nothing more satisfying than God. There is no one more worthy of our devotion than God. And when we love Him like this, when we are amazed and awed by Him, then our lives will be like a spotlight shining on His greatness.

The doxology at the end of Romans 11 highlights the wonder of God’s plans, God’s independence, and God’s glory. And in that passage Paul is rejoicing over these truths about God. This is GOOD news! God is awesome. His riches and wisdom and knowledge are deep, and his judgments are unsearchable and His ways are inscrutable. None of us can counsel Him or give to Him that we might be repaid. Everything, EVERYTHING, is from Him and through Him and to Him. And therefore He gets all the glory. He gets all the credit, and the honor, and the praise. And we want to be a church that delights in these truths.

David Wells, in his book *God in the Wasteland*, says, “In too many quarters today, evangelicals are inadvertently advertising the fact that God rests only lightly upon the church” (*God in the Wasteland*, 224). In other words there is a lack of God-centeredness or at least a minimizing of that truth. There is a rejection of the truth that God is completely sovereign. There is an absence of talk about sin and judgment and God’s righteous wrath against sin. Jesus Christ is not lifted up as the only way for hell-deserving sinners to be reconciled to a holy God. These are weighty realities, and not to be taken lightly. As Wells writes,

there is commonly found among evangelicals “a spirituality that is light, bouncy, simple, fun, engaging, and uplifting.” And in contrast to that I’m not saying we should be depressed, mean, and condemning. But there should be a weightiness to what we do here. There should be a gravity to the happiness we have in God. We should recognize that our pursuit of joy in the beauty of God’s greatness is the most important and significant pursuit of our lives. To know God and love Him is ultimate. We want to be God-centered in our personal lives and in the life of our church.

This God-centered purpose must necessarily include a focus on God’s Word, the Bible. Because it’s in the Bible that God has revealed to us these weighty realities of His sovereignty and holiness, and our depravity (our sinfulness). It’s in the Bible that we read about Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life in this world and then died a sacrificial death in order to forgive sinners, and then He rose again on the third day.

That’s why in this church our desire to increasingly delight in the beauty of God’s greatness goes hand-in-hand with our practice of focusing on the truth of God’s Word. God-centered. Bible-focused. If we are to know God, if we are to be a God-centered church and fulfill the purposes God has for us, we **MUST** be dedicated to God’s Word as our ultimate authority and guide.

As we delight in God’s beauty and proclaim His Word, the inevitable overflow will be a joyful passion for the Gospel and a desire to draw others into this joy. That’s the remainder of the mission statement—“to ignite a joyful passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ among all the peoples of Pittsburgh and the world.” You could summarize it in three words—worship, Word, witness. Delighting in the beauty of God’s greatness is worship. Our worship is based on the truth of God’s Word. And then our Word-centered worship, if it is real worship, will spill over in witness to the world. This is what we’re about as a church—worship, Word, witness.

Now, the passage we’re going to turn our attention to now is really a foundation for both the first and second lines of that mission statement. Delighting in the beauty of God’s greatness and proclaiming the truth of God’s Word. I’ve entitled the sermon this morning, “Delighting in God’s Word.” And that’s what we see in Psalm 1. We see an individual who delights in the law of the Lord, the instruction of the Lord, the Word of the Lord. That delight gives him a solid grounding and sets him on a prosperous path, which is in stark contrast to those who do not delight in God’s Word, and who therefore have no grounding and are headed to destruction.

Let's just look for a few minutes at this contrast in Psalm 1. First we'll look at the description of those who disregard God's Word. And then we'll look at the description of this blessed man who delights in God's Word.

### **Disregarding God's Word**

Notice, first of all, in verse 1, the description of those who oppose God's Word and would even seek to drag others down into their disobedience. Do you see the progression in verse 1? These are the things the blessed man avoids. First, he avoids *walking* in the counsel of the wicked. Second, he avoids *standing* in the way of sinners. And third, he avoids *sitting* in the seat of scoffers. There's a progression toward that final state of scoffer. And there's a stubbornness about that condition. At first it may be walking, and then standing / lingering there, but finally it's sitting down, as if to say, "This is where I'm staying."

Sin wraps its tentacles around a person, latches its shackles onto the wrists and ankles. The iron doors of the prison cell close with an echoing clang.

Verse 4 begins a description of the wicked which is in stark contrast to the blessed. Verse 4 is very emphatic. "The wicked are not so." The blessed person who delights in God's Word, who is like a rooted and fruitful tree . . . The wicked are not so. Those who disregard God's Word are exactly the opposite. They are not rooted. They are not fruitful.

This is the misery of a wasted life. The wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away (verse 4). Chaff is the light-weight husks around the grain. Through the threshing and winnowing process, the heavier grain is separated from the chaff. The grain can then be used, and the chaff just blows away in the wind. That's the wasted life, the life of fleeting pleasures, fleeting significance. It won't last. There's no staying power.

And in the end there will be complete destruction. God's judgment will come, and those who have disregarded and disobeyed His word will not stand. They will be leveled by the righteous judgment of God. There will be a final separating on that last day between those who have disregarded God's Word and those who have delighted in God's Word. The chaff will burn up. The wicked will perish.

Let this be a warning today. It's not OK to go on through life ignoring the Word of God. It's not OK to disregard His Word, to scoff at it, to ridicule it, to disobey it. Not only are you wasting

your life now, you are also on a path that leads to utter destruction and eternal misery. So please, friend, turn from that path. Wake up from your spiritual slumber. Stand up from that seat of scoffing and move away from it.

My prayer today is that you would have a new desire enter your heart, a desire to behold the greatness of God and a desire to know Him through His Word.

Next, let's consider what that looks like. What characterizes the person's life who delights in God's Word?

### **Delighting in God's Word**

We've already noted how the blessed person avoids walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the way of sinners, sitting in the seat of scoffers. There's a discernment there, to keep a distance from influences that would lead astray. We have to realize how fickle our emotions can be. We need to acknowledge that hanging around certain people, places, media, is going to have an impact on us. The blessed person is careful to avoid those influences that have a tearing down effect. Not that we have to remove ourselves from society. But we do need to be mindful of what we're allowing to influence us.

The description in verse 1 is stated negatively. This is what the blessed person does NOT do. Verse 2, then, is stated positively. Instead of being influenced by the wicked, the sinners, the scoffers, this individual is riveted on the Word of God. His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. The word for law is Torah, and that can refer very generally to instruction. So I think we can easily apply this to all of Scripture, which is instructive to us in so many ways.

This person delights in God's Word. And what's the evidence of that? He *meditates* on it day and night. What is meditating? It's thinking about something. Thinking about it a lot. Thinking about it in a focused way.

So we could each ask ourselves, What are the things I think about a lot? What are the things I think about throughout the day? What are the things I think about at night as I'm drifting off to sleep? What are the things I think about in the middle of the night when I'm awakened and can't get back to sleep right away? What are the things I think about early in the morning when I first wake up?

The blessed person who delights in God's Word thinks about the promises and instructions of Scripture, both day and

night. Throughout the day, late at night, early in the morning, there are Bible verses running through the mind and heart. This is why memorizing Scripture is so important. It's hard to really meditate on something that's just a vague, general idea. How do you meditate on God's love? Well, you start to search for verses that say specific things about God's love. Like Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." You can meditate on that.

So the blessed person is careful to avoid certain harmful things and is passionate about pursuing another thing, namely, the Word of God.

And then we come to this beautiful description in verse 3 that this person is like a rooted and fruitful tree. "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."

Years ago when I served as Minister of Students at a church in Kentucky, I would quote this verse often in talking about the vision for our student ministry. It was our hope to teach the Word of God and disciple young people in such a way that boys and girls and young men and young women would become like trees planted in the fertile soil of God's Word, soaking up that refreshing water and then producing much spiritual fruit. Even in the harsh climate of our culture, in the midst of a spiritual famine, that their leaves would not wither, but be sustained by the life-giving power of God's Word.

And that's my hope for Three Rivers Grace. Let's be trees, firmly planted, nourished by the stream beneath us, and therefore bearing much good fruit.

The next line is shocking in its unqualified assertion that "in all that he does, he prospers." That's a verse that could easily be taken out of context. Does this mean financial prosperity? Does this mean popularity? Does this mean every relationship is going to be harmonious? Does this mean everything at work is going to go great? Does this mean I'm always going to enjoy good health?

No, it doesn't. Trials will come. Not everything is going to work out the way we would like. But the person who is meditating on God's Word and delighting in God's Word is going to have the roots to prosper even in the midst of harsh winds and devastating famine.



Charles Spurgeon writes, “As there is a curse wrapped up in the wicked man's mercies, so there is a blessing concealed in the righteous man's crosses, losses, and sorrows. The trials of the saint are a divine husbandry [that’s an agricultural term – he’s saying that the trials of the saint are God’s way of cultivating the saint], by which he grows and brings forth abundant fruit.”<sup>1</sup>

So there can be prosperity (real, lasting prosperity), even when there’s not financial prosperity, even when there’s not success in the workplace, even when relationships are strained, even when health is failing.

And the final thing to recognize here about those who delight in God’s Word is that these are the ones who will make up the congregation of the righteous (verse 5) and whose way is known by the Lord (verse 6), meaning the Lord knows them in a special, covenantal way. In contrast to the wicked who will perish, the righteous will receive eternal blessing.

We’ve seen this stark contrast, then, between those who disregard God’s Word and those who delight in God’s Word.

I want to close with a question that may be lingering in your mind. As we’ve been considering this description of the blessed individual, you might be saying to yourself, as I’ve said to myself, Who is that person? Because it sure doesn’t sound like me, a lot of the time. Delighting in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.

This is surely an opportunity for confession and repentance, to say to God, “I don’t delight in your Word as I ought.” Like the man who said to Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24)

That would be an accurate acknowledgment to make before God. I don’t delight in Your Word as I ought, because I don’t trust You as I ought. And so I need You to continue working on me. I’m prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, O take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above.<sup>2</sup> That would be a good way for each of us to pray for ourselves. I do delight in Your Word, O God. But, oh, how I need to delight in Your Word so much more than I do right now.

Another very important thing to realize as we consider this Psalm is that only Jesus delights in the Word of God fully and perfectly. Indeed, we could read Psalm 1 as a description of Jesus Christ. He is the blessed man who avoids every sin, who delights

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<sup>1</sup> Treasury of David, Psalm 1.

<sup>2</sup> From the hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” by Robert Robinson

to do His Father's will, who communes with the Father day and night, who is like a solid tree firmly rooted and bearing unspeakably great fruit, who prospers in all that He does and who triumphs in the end.

Therefore, we don't look to our own will power to muster up a greater delight in God's Word. We look to Jesus Christ, the Perfect One who hung on the cross in our place. It's His sacrificial work that makes the new birth possible. We are born again, the eyes of our hearts are opened, to see the beauty of God's greatness. And that's the beginning of delighting in God's Word. If you're not yet born again, I pray God will work that miracle in your life today. I pray that you will no longer be blind to the greatest and most satisfying news in all the universe! Look to Him in faith today!

If you are born again, if you do have this desire for God, if you do have a delight in His Word (but also recognize that you need to have a greater delight in His Word), I encourage you to pray like this. The acronym is I.O.U.S. And there's a phrase from the Psalms for each of these letters. I picked this up from John Piper 15 years ago when I was an apprentice at Bethlehem Baptist. Pastor John encouraged the church to pray like this, as we're seeking greater delight in God.

"Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!"  
(Psalm 119:36, ESV)

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." (Psalm 119:18, ESV)

"unite my heart to fear your name." (Psalm 86:11, ESV)

"Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." (Psalm 90:14, ESV)