

Psalms For All Seasons: Pure Happiness

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[0 : 0 0] So welcome here for this Sunday, July 16th. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here. Welcome to each of you this morning, and you've probably not missed hearing me say this every week, but whether you're joining us in person, which all of you are, or whether someone is tuning in on the phone line or listening to our podcast or other ways of connecting, people do that through various channels during the week.

I want to thank my friend Paul Hay. He's not Hopalong Hay anymore, fortunately. I want to thank him for preaching the past two weeks while I was away, while we were away. And I know that you have been blessed by him sharing what God had placed on his heart.

So while we were away, I was saying, I told you this before we left, but I officiated a vow renewal ceremony on July 1st, and then I preached for and led a family worship service at a very tiny church.

How tiny? I would say one section of the front here would be the sanctuary of that church. So if I were over here, that was about the size of the church.

And so it was fun. And there was an aisle right down the middle. So I was partly thinking we would maybe adopt that approach here and just shut down everything except one section.

[1 : 2 3] So let's cram one section full. But yeah, so that was a really different experience. And we were in the mountains, and we, on the way there, on the way home, we drove through many storms, so that was fun.

I'm a storm person. I'm not a sunny, cloudless sky kind of person. What does that say about my personality? Who knows? But as we were driving home, as you all know, I love puns.

I love wordplay and language and things like that. And Michelle shared a pun with me on the way home, and it relates to storms and things like that. But where do bad rainbows go?

Anyone? Well, they go to prism. It's a light sentence, and it gives them time to reflect. You're welcome.

Yes, I'm back. So let's move into a new series this week. So as I noted in the newsletter this week, if you saw that, we're looking at the book of Psalms.

[2 : 2 4] And the book of Psalms is one of the most relatable books in the Bible, because it relates to, it deals with, the entire range of human emotion. From joy and thanksgiving, we read in the Psalms, to lament and hopelessness and even anger at God.

The book of Psalms gives us guidance for connecting with God in all kinds of circumstances, or in all seasons. And this morning, we're starting this new sermon series called Psalms for all seasons that will carry us through July and August.

Psalms is a book for all seasons because it speaks to every area and every season of our lives. Not literally summer, spring, fall, and winter, but in some ways, yes.

But the seasons of our lives, the things that we're going through, the circumstances that we are facing. It's a collection of praise and anguish, of joy and sadness, of triumph and defeat.

And it's written by many different authors in many different situations and seasons. In many ways, it is one of the most unique, if not the most unique book in the Bible.

[3 : 37] So to begin our series, we're going to start at the very beginning. And I've said this before, which is a very good place to start, in the words of Sound of Music. So a foundation is laid out for righteous living at the very beginning of Psalms, having a consistent and blessed life that includes the daily reading of Scripture.

So turn with me in your Bible. There's Bibles in the pew in front of you. Turn on your Bible app if you brought your Bible with you, or you can just listen. Psalm 1, verses 1 to 6, where we read, How happy is the one, and don't be thrown off if your translation says blessed, because many do.

How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway of sinners, or sit in the company of mockers. Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

He's like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

The wicked are not like this. Instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

[5 : 01] For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the ways of the wicked leads to ruin. This opening psalm's promise is, if you want to be happier, read this book.

If you want to be a person who bears fruit in this season, in any season, read this book. And as I mentioned, many translations use the word blessed, but some use the word happy.

They reflect the idea that true happiness and God's blessing comes in following the guidelines that are laid out for us in the rest of the passage.

The Bible is a book for all seasons, because if you read it regularly, this section of Psalms suggests that you'll be like a tree that is planted next to divinely flowing streams.

By remaining connected to God's truth in his word, you'll never lack the life-giving water that enables you to flourish and bear fruit.

[6 : 11] A few weeks ago, we talked about Jesus identifying himself as the vine and us as the branches, and we are intended to bear fruit. Have you ever noticed you often leave church, I hope you do, leave church feeling happier, feeling more settled than when you came?

Is that true for you? It is for me, even though I'm the stress ball that is up here every Sunday morning. So what's happening there? What is that? What is it work in that situation?

What makes the church environment such a unique one? Well, there's a few things to consider here. In church, you spend time in worship.

You take the focus off of me, my worries, my concerns, and turn the focus to God, recognizing who he is, what he has done, who we are in light of who he is, and what it means to be his children.

You spend time with God's people, people who are like-minded most of the time, who are open and soft and caring and seeking God's will for their own lives, so you resonate with those people just naturally.

[7 : 27] That's the way God planned it to be. And you also, we also spend time in God's word, which is critical. Engaging with scripture has the potential to make you happier and more resilient.

Does anybody want that? Does that sound like something we should seek after? There was a time not that long, so many of you know, I can be an anxious person, I can be an overthinker, I can be a worrier, I see the big picture and all the pieces that fall under the big picture, that's the way my brain works.

But I find when I stop and read scripture or stop and shut my brain down and just listen to God's voice, everything just calms down.

I'm centered in the eye of the storm again. The storm is outside. And so we're beginning this series by exploring Psalm 1 together and it's referred to by many people as the Psalm of Happiness.

Because as I said, it suggests and gives us some clear guidelines for how to make this happen. And you may remember when Steve Roadhouse, the executive director of Gull Lake, was here with us in the spring, he briefly walked through part of Psalm 1 with us.

[8 : 46] So some of this will be familiar. Although I'm looking at it differently. In this Psalm, the psalmist touches on the secret to happiness. He says, happy people do three things.

They walk, they stand, and they sit. And it's a progression that we can see happening. And happy people avoid three things as well.

Happy people, we read in this passage, don't walk in the way that wicked people do. Happy people don't stand in the pathway of sinners. And happy people don't sit in the company of mockers.

So walking, standing, and sitting. Walking. Walking is taking a series of steps. Duh, right? Pastor Kent, duh. Walking is also, though, about making decisions throughout your day.

So, what happy people do and don't do. Walking. Walking relates to the decisions that we make throughout our day. We are walking, we are progressing throughout our day.

[9 : 58] Walking is about where you live, where you live mentally, where you live emotionally, where you live relationally. It's a progression throughout your day, throughout your life.

And after you walk, literally walk, anywhere, you usually get to the place where you're going, right? That makes sense. And when you do, you stop walking and you stand there.

So standing relates to the commitments that we make in various ways of thinking. You're walking through your decision-making process and you come to a point where you're ready to make a commitment.

So the kind of thinking that you adopt relates to standing. The way you choose to see your life, your perspective after walking becomes established, becomes more clear.

So you make your decisions, that's walking. Your decisions shape you as a person, that's standing as you become more formed. And generally, once you've stood somewhere long enough, you eventually, if you're like me, sit down.

[11 : 08] And the dark side of sitting down is perhaps becoming set in your ways. Can you see that as well? It can be coming to a reasonable conclusion and stopping, but it can also be coming frozen in your thinking.

Frozen or somehow paralyzed in moving forward. So one way of looking at sitting is to see it as the attitude of your heart.

So let me read Psalm 1, verse 1, to you again. How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway of sinners or sit in the company of mockers?

See what the psalmist is saying there? These are the natural things that we do. Here are the bad ways that we can be doing them, the negative ways that they can be impacting our lives.

So a happy person doesn't make decisions that are influenced by the wicked is what is suggested here. Under the influence of people whose thinking or attitudes may be contrary or even opposed to God.

[12 : 21] A happy person doesn't align with causes or priorities that line up with people who do things that contradict God or even oppose God.

Can you see that as well? Our alignment, our thinking, our perspectives, when they are not attuned with God are attuned to something else. A happy person also doesn't allow their ideas to be influenced by people who mock what God represents or mock God himself.

Does that make sense to you? Do you have a friend group or people that you know who are not Christians don't believe in God? And that's totally fine.

The challenge or the risk is when those negative perspectives tend to begin to influence you away from God's voice, away from God's plan and perspective for your life.

So what should a happy person do according to Psalm 1? That's good information that you probably want to leave with today. Psalm 1 verse 2 fortunately spells it out for us.

[13 : 35] After introducing the concept it says instead his delight the person who is seeking happiness his delight is in the Lord's instruction and he meditates on it day and night.

So here's your three points. A happy person does three simple things. Things that all of us can do which is the good news. First we can delight in God's words.

So we like God's words we take pleasure in them we look forward to hearing God's words in church reading God's words at home learning how to live by them they should shape us.

Happy people delight in God's words. Second we can think about God's words deeply. So when you read scripture is it just words on a page that goes into your brain and checks off your journaling box for the day I've read some scripture I'm good or do you take it in deeply?

Does it nourish you? We're talking a bit about meditation here. Now don't panic when I use that word. Sometimes that's a loaded word. So for a Hindu to meditate means to think about nothing.

[15 : 03] Clear your mind clear your do you think that's what I'm suggesting? No. For a Hebrew to meditate means to think deeply about God's word.

Meditation for a Hebrew for a Christian relates to one goal one focus only to meditate on God's word to think deeply about it.

So instead of just skimming over a passage as I suggested happy people ask questions like why did God say this? why is Paul indicating that this is important in one of his letters?

Why is there a book in the canon of scripture that asks a question that I should be thinking about? What does God mean by this?

In general for me? And what am I supposed to do about it? because scripture and engaging with scripture should not be a passive process.

[16 : 11] Third people who are happy we can think about God's words day and night. Third slide. Thank you ma'am.

One of the best ways to start your day is guess what? To read a chapter of the Bible. Bible. That's why you hear pastors and Christian leaders and all sorts of people say start your day with devotions because it's the very best place to start in the word of God.

One of the best ways to end your day, one of the most peaceful ways, one of the most I don't want to say sleep inducing because it will put you to sleep but it will bring you peace because it will bring you focus and reground you is you guessed it, read a chapter of the Bible because friends, scripture is essential food.

The American Bible Society released a report based on a national survey they did during the middle of the pandemic and here is what they found. All people experience hurt.

It's probably not a surprise. In the midst of these difficulties though, the Bible and church seem to make a critical difference for people. When people turn to the Bible, this study says, they are better able to cope, they experience higher levels of hope and flourishing, and they are better able to forgive.

[17 : 48] Isn't that interesting? Those who rely on scripture at greater than average levels also experience the highest levels of hope in their lives.

Scripture engagement is significantly related to evidence of forgiveness, this study said. The American Bible Society said the more scripturally engaged someone is, the more likely they are able to forgive others.

Our character is shaped and formed literally by the word of God, or the absence of its work in our lives. So the ability to forgive, interestingly, is directly connected to being happier.

Is that a surprise to you? Verse 3, in this passage from this morning, explains why the scripture engaged person is happier. It says, he is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers. So trees are trees no matter where you find them. The trees around here, since we came home, are very lush and green.

[19 : 13] The trees in the Lethbridge Coaldale area are having an extremely hot summer. The grass is yellow. The trees are struggling a little bit.

But trees are trees no matter where you find them. They need a source of water. So we were grateful whenever it rained down there because the trees and the grass desperately need it.

But what this passage is saying to us is that trees that are planted by streams are constantly being watered and nourished. There's a connection to the feed, the nourishment and the flourishing of the organism.

So what's the secret? Well, the psalm is saying people that stay connected to God's truth, stay connected to God's wisdom and his words are happier because we're constantly receiving healthy nourishment.

And that helps us to prosper. There's a direct connection there. So it may not surprise you, the most important organ in your body is your brain because it does all your thinking, but it also keeps systems operating.

[20 : 34] So this may be new information for you, it was new for me, but pound for pound in relation to other organs in your body, your brain consumes far more calories than any other organ.

It's doing a lot of work. It's constantly working and constantly needs to be fed and nourished. So this is interesting.

The human brain generally makes up roughly 2% of your overall body mass. 2%. But it consumes 20% of your calories.

It consumes a fifth of the chocolate bar you ate. Hopefully. But feeding your brain on the Bible every morning and every evening is like planting a tree right next to a stream.

It ensures constant nourishment. And when you're constantly giving your brain the right nourishment, it's going to make better decisions which make you prosper.

- [21 : 39] So when you're feeding something, it's just like how you feed your body. If you're eating chips and pop and junk, you will grow horizontally potentially.
- But will you grow stronger? Will you have more energy? No, not necessarily because you're nourishing from the wrong source. So proper nourishment coming from God's word ensures that we will prosper according to God's will.
- So what have we learned together this morning from Psalm 1? If we want to be happier, read the Bible. This is not a pastor guilt sermon by the way.
- It's an encouragement sermon. Read the Bible. Delight in the Bible. Read it day and night.
- First thing in your morning, use it to nourish your day. Last thing at night, use it as a beautiful cap, a beautiful summary.
- [22 : 48] And most importantly of all, obey it. As we've read in this Psalm together this morning, in this passage, happy is the person who does this.
- And whatever he or she does prospers. book of book of Psalms opens. It's really, many, many Bible scholars refer to it as the Genesis chapter 1 of the Psalms.
- It's very similar. If you look at Genesis chapter 1 and Psalms 1, you'll see some interesting comparisons. The compilers of the Psalms thought long and hard about the first song in this song book.
- Because that's what Psalms is. It's a book of songs. They wanted everyone to know right from the beginning the secret to happiness in God.
- And they wanted everyone to also know the secret of sadness, the secret of hopelessness. They're both spelled out right there for us.
- [23 : 59] Psalm 1, 4 to 5 says, The wicked are not like this. Instead, they are like the chaff that the wind blows away.
- Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. Chaff on the screen. So, remember, city kid, I knew what chaff is in theory.
- So, and you may know this, but chaff is the papery part of the wheat and the stock of the wheat that is essentially worthless. It's the wrapping paper around the grain that protects it from the elements, sometimes from predators and things like that.
- But once the wheat is ready to eat, once it's harvested and processed, the chaff isn't needed anymore. So, the farmer throws it up in the air and lets the wind take it away.
- It is blown away. So, what the psalmist is saying here is that unhappy people aren't happy because they don't have an anchor of truth in their lives.
- [25 : 11] people are maybe this applies to you or someone you know, but they take advice from online searches. Facebook. How often are you in a group of people, sometimes granted it's a certain demographic, but often you'll be sitting with someone and someone will say, what is such and such?
- Someone will say, Google it. Right? That's become a common term, a common phrase. But the risk there is that you're absorbing potentially other people's opinions, other people's knowledge, other people's suggestions, and not God's infallible truth.
- People who live by anything as their source of truth, other than God's truth, this passage tells us, will not sit in the room where the righteous assemble before God in heaven.
- unhappy people also don't have a happy group to lift them up. Ideally, as Christians, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we lift each other up.
- We should be about encouraging one another. But people who don't have this community, who don't have this fellowship, this connection that God intended to be nourishment, struggle.

[26 : 34] Psalm 1 verse 6, the final line of this psalm says, for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

Really, what we have there is a contrast between happy and unhappy people. Unhappy people don't have the Lord watching over them.

They are on their own. You might argue, well, to not have God watching over me actually means I'm independent. I can do what I want. The people that I know that tend to live their lives that way aren't happy.

I think this is one of the most compelling reasons to become a Christian. As parents, we want to help our children. And as our heavenly father, God wants to help you.

He absolutely does. help us. But he will not force his help on you. He invites us to ask for help.

[27 : 40] In the book of Revelation, God says, listen, I'm right here at the door to your life. I'm knocking on it. If you'll open it, I'll come into your life and live with you and you with me.

He then begins doing that in what Psalm 1 describes, the way it's described there. He begins watching over you when you ask him to.

He guides you. He calls your attention to things that might harm you. He does that through the power of the Holy Spirit living within you when you seek Jesus as Lord.

Do you ever hear that still small voice? whispering to you like a voice inside your head? The Holy Spirit talks to you directly. And God talks to you clearly through the words that he's written in the Bible.

You will hear God's voice if you read his words. So imagine with me for a minute. Imagine if every person in our city read the Bible on a regular basis.

[28 : 56] we'd be a happier city wouldn't we? We watched the news the other night. Heard of another stabbing. And the best thing we could come up with was at least they didn't have a gun.

We could be a city planted by streams of water. We could be a city for all seasons. people imagine if every person in our country read the Bible regularly.

We'd be happier country wouldn't we? A country for all seasons. Or imagine if you read the Bible regularly and you can say in your head I do and that's good.

you will be a man or woman for all seasons by doing that. By staying connected to that source. So I have a challenge to issue to all of us today myself included.

And I may ask for people in the coming weeks to share what they have or not. So be prepared. I want everyone while we're in this series to read at least one psalm a day.

[30 : 18] I'm not going to judge you on the length that you choose. Ask yourself read the psalm every day. Pick a new one.

Keep notes. Ask yourself intentionally after you've read it what is God trying to say to me here? To us as a church family here?

Will you commit to doing that? No show of hands. I will. My friends Psalm 1 gives us a vision for a healthier, happier, and more productive life.

A life lived according to God's word and his will for your life. The psalms speak to every season of our lives. And my hope is that you will hear God speaking directly to you and your circumstances as we continue in this series together.

May you be blessed by the word of God and the psalms. Amen.