

# What does satisfy?

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[ 0 : 00 ] 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, and yields 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. 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, and the way of the wicked will perish. Well would you please, Psalm 1, open, please, in front of you.

Pierre Barrow spends about an hour a week on my sitting room floor when he, his mother and I, reading the Bible together. And I've had long enough to observe that what he does is he spends a long time getting his cars or his trains exactly as he wants them to be. And he keeps going until they are just right. In about six years time he'll be doing exactly the same with a cricket ball when he's trying to get it exactly straight. Five years after that he'll be standing in front of a mirror, and he'll be looking at his hairstyle to get it exactly just right. And two years after that he'll be trying to work out how to make the clutch work in a car. That is if we have clutches or cars, we'll get to that point. He gets it just right. Now we've looked this morning at how we don't get it right by chasing after the things of this world. And Psalm 1 is the psalm that tells us how to get it just right. How to find contentment in the life that we're given on this earth.

So to that end I would like you please to turn to your neighbour for just two minutes and I'd like to tell you, ask you to give your honest opinion of two words that I'm going to give to you and how they make you feel. And the two words are quiet time. Two minutes.

Turn to your neighbour. I'm not going to ask you to articulate what you just said, but I can imagine there was a full range of feelings in response to those two words. But you'll see where we're going. So Psalm 1. In this book of 150 songs, which are written with Psalm 2, as you probably know, together as the opening section of the book of Psalms, written for God's people living in a godless world at constant risk of giving up on him. And although it was written at least a thousand years before Jesus' birth, this psalm is written with Jesus in mind. He used the psalms to explain himself at the end of Luke's Gospel. And Psalm 1, you may notice, is not a prayer. It is a statement, an opening statement. And there are two themes and they're written on your handout if you want to see where I'm going. So let's take the first. Happiness for the one who delights in God's word. Happiness for the one who delights in God's word. Now, verse 1 reads blessed. That really means happy or slightly sharper to be envied. So to be envied is the person who. And instead of envying the world around us, as in Psalm 49, the person in Psalm 1 is the one to be envied. Well, what does the envied person not do? Because that's how the psalm begins. Three things the envied person does not do, all in verse 1.

[ 3 : 44 ] She doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, meaning she doesn't walk alongside those who ignore God deep down. Those who are antagonistic towards God. Those who have no time for God or his son.

Wicked here is a relational word. So it's not a sort of an ethical word. It means wicked in relation to God. So the wicked person in the Bible is the one who ignores God, has no relationship with God. Secondly, nor does she stand in the way of sinners. Note the progression from walking to standing. The influence that people have on us is greater the more we hang out with them, isn't it? So she doesn't allow herself and her thinking to be taken in by those who are not in right relationship with God. Sinners, as the Bible calls them. The secular humanists. The atheists. The outwardly religious.

Thirdly, nor, verse 1, does she sit, progressing on, sitting in the seat of scoffers. So here is the epitome of the one who ignores God. Not content with not believing God's word themselves, they

then turn to scoffing God and his people. And in the Western world, we are surrounded, aren't we, by scoffers in our families, in our workplaces, schools, universities, the media, social media. As we grow older, we absorb our culture's values more. So you hear, don't you, the person who says, I used to believe that stuff in the Bible, but now I've moved on. There's the scoffer. Happy or to be envied is the woman who chooses not to sit in that place scoffing. Not meaning that we are not to associate with these people. After all, we're surrounded by them on every side. But don't let their thinking take you in.

That's the line of approach. Instead, verse 2, what is she to do? Her delight, verse 2, is in the law of the Lord, the Old Testament when this was written, but now the whole Bible, the word of God. Note, verse 2, it's delight, not duty in the law of the Lord. I wonder which of those resonates more when we consider the words quiet time. Delight or duty. So delight is not an intellectual delight. It isn't just the law, but note the law of the Lord. It's inseparable from the Lord himself. So when Ruth Butler says to me, I'm doing this at this time on a router, it's Ruth speaking. I can't separate what she says from her. It's her. So the law of the Lord is a delight in him as well as his word. Only the Lord God is qualified to give advice on how we can be satisfied in his world after all. So the question is, will we choose to delight in his word or will we choose to delight in other people and their words? In last Sunday's sermon, we heard at one point that Christians over the ages have found the answer to delighting in the word of God to be setting aside a regular daily time. That's where the term quiet time comes from, from those of you who are baffled. A time and a place each day in which to open the Bible alone with him. Quiet time. In our family, emptying the dishwasher, laying the table, washing up, these are some of the duties that have to be done on a daily basis to constant groans and disagreement over whose turn it is. Whereas sitting down together and watching a film or playing a board game or eating a rare meal that everybody actually all likes all at once, they are a delight, unless it's monopoly, which is a disaster. They happen regularly too. So do we approach the word of God with that delight or with that sense of duty? If I delight in the word of God, verse 2 says that I will meditate on it. Now meditation is not in the 21st century use of it. So meditation defined helpfully very recently in the times as a goal of becoming indifferent to everything passing through your mind. So that's today's definition of meditation. I empty my mind, as Buddhists do, and indeed in some churches there's an element of that that goes on, emptying the mind. Meditation, very helpfully, is the same word as Psalm 2 verse 1 plot. Do you see that there? Psalm 2 verse 1, the people's plot in vain. So it is an active, vocal word where, far from emptying our mind, we fill our mind with the word of God. We first fix our mind on it, secondly we incline our heart to it, and thirdly we then cry out in response to it. That's not me, that's John Owen, a reformer who came up with those three, but I've found them very helpful. Fix our mind on it, incline the heart to it, cry out. Tim Keller in his excellent book on prayer, which we've got here in the little bookstore, says that muttering is a close meaning of that word meditation. So muttering out loud. So verse 2, on his law, he mutters day and night. So she makes time, at least daily, to plot with the word of God. But looking at verse 2 does make us uneasy, doesn't it? It does make me a bit uneasy looking at verse 2. Doesn't that sound rather intense, even if we've been Christian for many years? How are we doing as we read Psalm 2 to ourselves? In my gap year after school, I went off to Israel in a sort of early form of modern slavery, where I worked on a kibbutz from half past five every morning for ten weeks, picking grapefruits. And the thing about Israeli grapefruit plantations, particularly where ours was, a mile from

[ 9 : 46 ] the Lebanese border with Katusha rockets flying over, was that the farmers not only had all that going on, but also in the Middle East, heat. So for those grapefruit trees to grow any fruit, they had to have immediate water supply. And as you all know, the Israelis are good at that, and they plant every tree by an irrigation pipe. Have a look at verse 3. He or she is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. So the tree takes in water and it produces something new, which is fruit in season. As a result, the water is as essential for the tree to produce fruit as the word of God is essential to our lives producing the fruit of righteousness.

Disconnect the water supply, you get no grapefruit. Have a constant supply of water versus three, and it yields its fruit in its season. And its leaf does not wither. So even in hard times, even in drought, it can still keep on going, producing its fruit. It's a reliable tree.

If some of us despair of our fruitlessness as Christians, well, Psalm 2 says, really are our roots daily in the Bible. Because it is the reading of the Bible, the delighting in the word of God, that leads to

fruitfulness. In all that this blessed person does, he or she prospers.

Now, not material prosperity. That, as I hope we know, is the prosperity gospel that has swept through the churches. I was amazed to read this week that three out of four of the largest mega churches in the states now preach a prosperity gospel. That one in five Americans follow the prosperity gospel. So it has swept the world, really. The idea that if I become a Christian, the Lord will supply me with good health, good school places, the right grade for my children, a well-paid job, and so on. Here, this is speaking of the prospering of whatever the person does in response to the word of God. So she is reliable in the church family. You can depend on her.

She is out there engaging with non-Christians, with the gospel. She opens her home to others. She serves the gospel. Note verse 6a, just jumping to the bottom, that the Lord knows the way of the righteous. Righteous speaking of his people. Not that he sort of knows of us. This is related to the relational. He knows all about us. He knows where we are today. He knows who we are. He knows what we are doing with the lives that he has given us. He intends the righteous to be like this tree pictured in Psalm 1, to live satisfied lives, to say to us at the end, well done when we meet him, as we will in the new creation. Well, as you look at Psalm 1 verses 1 to 3, I wonder who it reminds us of. It describes Jesus very accurately. The only man who's ever fully lived like this is sitting there in verses 1 to 3. But as his followers, we can ask to have that same delight in his word and that same desire to meditate on it, to fix the mind, incline the heart, and cry out.

[13:19] But the question is, why don't we? And isn't it because we don't fully believe that delighting in the word of God does provide us with satisfaction? Part of us thinks that it is found elsewhere.

So part of us goes back a bit to Psalm 49. And we don't accept the psalmist's sense of danger in putting our relationship with God after our career, our family, our money, our sport.

This psalm says the opposite. It says put our relationship with God before other things, other people, other projects, other plans. So first, happiness is for the one who delights in God's word. There lies satisfaction. But secondly, the other half of the psalm, destruction for the one who doesn't. Verse 4 literally begins, not so, not so. It's repeated twice. Not so, not so, the wicked, like chaff that the wind drives away. That's those who ignore God, who have no time for him in their busy lives. They face destruction. That's what happens to the chaff when wheat is harvested. Now, chaff, for the non-agricultural amongst, is the worthless outer husk of the piece of wheat that you have, you know, an ear of wheat, lots of bits of wheat. They all have this funny, dry, stubby stuff on them. And until that is separated, the wheat can't be milled, it can't be cooked. It's really hopeless. And wonderfully, this barn was built for precisely this crisis.

So take off the 20th century doors and glass from both sides of the area. And this barn, I think, probably faces east-west, but I don't know. It's meant to. That's the way it's meant to work.

The wheat would be brought in and dumped on this floor in sacks. On a windy day, the farmer would open the big wooden doors that there would have been here, and the wind would blow through and separate the wheat from the chaff. The chaff flies straight out of the door. It's lightweight.

[15:31] It is worthless. It has no further purpose. The wheat stays on the floor of the barn. That is what is going to happen to the secular humanists, to the media scoffers and bloggers, to the liberal artists and authors whose works we are tempted to admire, even some of the big-name pastors and teachers. Now, we need to be convinced of this as we sing this psalm, that what they face is destruction, and that we are very unwise to listen to them. If they haven't delighted in the word of God, they will be as insubstantial as chaff on the judgment day. Verse 5, Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

You've probably had this experience of trying to drive through London from A to B with your sat-nav switched on, and as you blindly follow the route it tells you, you come to a road which you simply aren't allowed to drive down after all. And we find to our amazement that we are barred access. We are not allowed up there. So it will be that sinners, in verse 5, will not be allowed in the congregation of the righteous. They will not be there in amongst God's people.

Verse 6b, their way will perish. Now, since this is the opening psalm of the whole book, we need to be very fixed and clear about that. Fixing our mind on it, inclining our heart to it, crying out in response to it. Because in life, as we all know, there are plenty of things that superficially look very attractive, that make us feel satisfied at the time. They make us feel good about ourselves.

Maybe it's the job I've been offered, the size of clothes I can fit into, the speed at which I can run, the achievements of my nieces or nephews or children or grandchildren, or the holiday that I can't wait for, the property that I'm about to rent or buy. Especially when all our contemporaries are chasing after these things on social media and beyond. We need verse 4 to 6, don't we, to remind us of the reality of what happens to those who chase after these things. Second point, destruction for the one who does not delight in God's word. So where does the Lord Jesus fit into this psalm? You see, he not only modelled verse 1 to 3, but he experienced verses 4 to 6. Have a look. You see verse 4? He became like the chaff in verse 4. He did not stand in the judgment, verse 5. He faced the judgment in our place for all our rebellion and all our past failure, even though he lived a perfect life and was cut off from the congregation of the righteous. So if I have fully grasped that, I will delight in the Lord Jesus and his word, not as a duty, because I don't deserve that for him to die for me, but a delight. Let me ask, are we delighting in his word when we read it and when we hear it preached and taught in our growth groups? Are our lives structured in such a way that God's recipe for our satisfaction, which is delighting in his word, is even possible? Do we have access to God's word daily, access to the water that every fruit tree needs if it is to produce its fruit in season? [19:15] And if we do, what do we do with it when we are reading it and hearing it? Do we meditate on it? Do we mutter on it? Do we cry out to God in response to it? Or do we merely read it?

Seated here far away from the bustle of London, can we see that our lives can so easily be crammed full of other voices, other interests, other commitments, so that our roots, if I may run with the tree analogy, are stifled?

I've learned pretty recently, I'm very slow to learn, that if I leave my phone switched off until I've had a quiet time, my mind is far more receptive because I haven't already had the onslaught of the day coming in. If I make the quiet time the first thing I do, when I was younger, in my little prayer triplet, we used to say the first thing after we've got back from dropping them off to school. If I make it the first thing I do, then it's much more likely to happen.

Some of us here are at small baby stage and all we can manage is five minutes a day in God's word. But if in three or five years' time we're still on five minutes a day in God's word, is that delighting in him and his word? Some here, I know, get up before their children in order to have a quiet time. Some get to work early in order to have a quiet time there. Some take time at lunch at work to have a quiet time then. We have to find out, don't we, what works for us? We're all different. But some of us oscillate between reading the Bible daily and then not at all, rather like the child in Sunday Club who told me recently that she had her own Bible reading notes and had read them until four months ago. So some of us are like that, aren't we? We know what we should be doing and then there are great areas of famine. If we grasp from Psalm 1 that Jesus has spared us from the judgment of the wicked, that we are free to live under the blessings of Psalm 1, then we won't respond today with must try harder. That is a works response, isn't it? Be good, don't be wicked, try harder.

[21:32] Psalm 1, if understood rightly, should generate wonder for our King Jesus and gratitude for every spiritual blessing that we have in him already. And then a spirit-given desire to walk his righteous way and not to walk or stand or sit in the way of sinners. How do we do it? By delighting in his word.

As we all grow older, it's a question worth asking, isn't it? What direction are our lives heading at the moment? What's the direction of your life? It will depend on what we are delighting in now.

Let me pray. Our Father, we thank you for your very clear Psalm 1. We thank you for the vivid picture of the tree with its roots planted in water, yielding its fruit in season. Our Father, we long to be like that tree.

And therefore we pray that where we do not delight in your word, you would renew that delight in us today. That you would give us a longing to believe you when you say, blessed is the man.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.