

The Secret of Happiness

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[0 : 00] In primary school, I used to enjoy choose your own adventure books.

Someone is a little like that. Two lifestyle alternatives are given and their respective journeys spelt out. We get to choose our journey.

There are young people today who would find it impossible to live without their mobile phones, constantly checking for messages, and when at home, checking Facebook updates every five minutes, and every weekend, hanging out in each other's homes.

There are others here who must be home at 8.30 on Wednesdays to watch Criminal Minds, or 6.30 on Sundays to watch Australian Idol, or my personal favourite when it was on, 9.30 on Mondays to watch Brothers and Sisters.

The question I want to raise is, whose company do you crave? Who could you not live without?

[1 : 18] The Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 poems or songs. It is effectively the hymn book of the Jews upon returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon in 538 BC.

Divided into five books, it opens in Book 1 with Psalm 1, a poem of instruction, not a poem of praise which we might have expected in a hymn book.

Note also that by the phrase, the law of the Lord, the psalmist means the whole of God's written words to his people. So Psalm 1, verse 1.

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers.

But rather, verse 2, their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. The psalms open with the clear instruction that instead of seeking and enjoying the company of the wicked, the happy person finds delight or pleasure in God's words, so much so that they meditate upon them day and night.

[2 : 37] Amber is now eight and a half months old. But before she entered our lives, I could easily watch TV day and night.

In fact, I could be so engrossed with TV that I would delay having a conversation with my husband when he rang home from work. The psalmist speaks of a person so enjoying the words of God that they meditate upon them day and night.

Now this may seem an impossible task to many of us. Indeed, who among us can honestly say that we meditate upon the words of God day and night?

In Joshua 1, verse 8, we find the same phrase. After Moses' death, God instructs Joshua, This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth.

You shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is in it. For then, you shall make your way prosperous, and then, you shall be successful.

[3 : 52] I think the words found in Joshua are helpful. Meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is in it.

Meditating upon the words of God means allowing them to influence everything that we do. We are not necessarily seated physically with the Bible in hand 24-7, but we are consciously aware of how God would have us behave.

I used to take the train into uni, and I always felt that I ought to be reading my Bible as I travelled. Looking back, however, I think God would be just as pleased, possibly more so, if I had instead taken the time to make eye contact with other commuters, acknowledging their presence, and perhaps even speaking with them.

I'm thinking of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew chapter 6, Jesus says, Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

So whenever you give alms, do not sound the trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others.

[5 : 31] And whenever you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly, I tell you, they have received their reward.

But when you fast, put oil on your head, wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others, but by your Father who is in secret.

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. You see, I don't think my motives were all that pure. Yes, there was a part of me that was somewhat embarrassed and fearful that I might be ridiculed by people.

But I think that there was a bigger part of me who thought that people would see me reading the Bible and think I was religious and so spiritual. God wants us to meditate upon His words so that we will be careful to let them influence how we think and live.

The happy person enjoys the company of God rather than the company of those who despise God. God speaks We can learn about God from the world He created but we can more clearly know Him through His word.

[6 : 59] God speaks and what He has spoken has been recorded. God speaks to us today when we read His words recorded in the Bible. Therefore, time spent meditating upon His words is time actually spent in God's presence.

So the psalmist describes a person delighting in the law of the Lord for truly God's company is pleasant and delightful. But should we need more motivation the psalmist continues in verse 3 by painting a picture of a healthy fruitful tree.

They who delight in the law of the Lord are like trees planted by streams of water which yield their fruit in its season and their leaves do not wither.

God's words are like water. They are life-giving and sustaining. I am a person who needs at least two litres of water every day.

If I fail to drink this amount of water in one day my lips have started to crack by the day's end. I have a very bad habit of peeling my lips when they get like this always with the aim to make them smooth again but it doesn't work.

[8 : 21] All I manage to do is make things worse lips bleeding and painful. In desperation I end up slathering my lips with Vaseline which my husband hates.

Vaseline helps with the pain but it doesn't repair my lips. Consciously drinking more water over the following days is the only way to restore the condition of my lips.

What condition are you in? when we fail to spend time reading God's words cracks begin to form.

We might notice increasing levels of anxiety or increasingly strained household relationships. Perhaps people start commenting about an air of arrogance about you or you find yourself complaining more.

the only way to start repairing these cracks is to return to God's words again. Making time to meditate on his words might require switching off the TV or shutting down your computer.

[9 : 38] Like the tree planted by streams of water whose roots spread out beneath the ground, it is what we do in secret without fanfare. that sustains us and is obvious to all.

Saturating oneself in the words of God results in a life that is productive because it is lived as God intended it. In fact, the psalmist exclaims, in all that they do, they prosper.

It appears self-serving then to saturate yourself in God's words. However, God actually wants us to prosper. In fact, when God sent us his son Jesus, Jesus himself stated his purpose in John 10.

10. Unlike the thief who comes only to steal, kill and destroy, I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

With God then, we can thrive. just like trees planted by streams of water. Many here would be able to attest that since knowing God, their lives have been fruitful.

[10 : 59] I certainly can. In fact, why not ask someone after the service about how their lives are flourishing at present. Bring me a cup of white tea, no sugar, and I happily will.

But when we look around at all that is happening in the world, we see that perhaps the picture painted by the psalmist is a little too perfect.

Even the writer of a later psalm, Psalm 73 states, for I was envious of the arrogant, I saw the prosperity of the wicked, for they have no pain, their bodies are sound and sleek, they are not in trouble like others are, they are not plagued like other people, therefore the people turn and praise them and find no fault in them, and they say, how can God know?

Is their knowledge in the most high? Such are the wicked, always at ease, they increase in riches. It is this reality, the good dying young, the prosperity of the unrighteous, which tempts us to follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers.

however, someone tells us verse 4, the wicked are not like the tree, but are like chaff that the wind dries away.

[12 : 44] Unlike the image of a healthy, fruitful tree, the wicked are like the useless, worthless, unwanted husks of grain that are driven away when their time of usefulness is over.

Chaff has no lasting value. In fact, verse 5 tells us of their demise. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

Although the lives of sinners are appealing now, perhaps with power, popularity, and plenty of money, these do not hold sway before the judge, and they will not be left standing on judgment day.

For whether we believe it or not, there will come a day of judgment. God's judgment. When we read on in God's words, we learn whom he has appointed judge.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount, teaching with such authority that people were amazed. He was crucified by Pilate, buried, and three days later, rose again.

[14 : 12] Death could not destroy him, for truly he is God's son, and has been appointed by God to judge all people. Referring to himself as the son of man in Matthew 25, verse 31, Jesus told his disciples, when the son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.

All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand, and the goats at his left.

Now, church, please listen carefully to the rest of the story. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, Come, you that are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you gave me clothing.

I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry, and gave you food, or thirsty, and gave you something to drink?

[15 : 45] And when was it we saw you a stranger, and welcomed you, or naked, and gave you clothing? And when was it we saw you sick, or in prison, and visited you? And the king will answer them, truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.

Then he will say to those at his left hand, you that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

Then they also will answer, Lord, when was it we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you, then he will answer them, truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.

And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. when we pick up the hymn book of the people of God, we are reminded at the outset that there are two ways to live this life, one wicked, the other righteous.

the way of the righteous is not lived for self-promotion, rather the focus is on God. The righteous delight in the words of God, they meditate upon them, allowing them to saturate every part of their lives.

[17 : 44] when we let the word of the Lord saturate our lives, to challenge our thinking and our lifestyles, we become the people God created us to be, people who reflect his character and his priorities.

We flourish in this life and we have no fear in the judgment to come. The way of the wicked, however, is opposed to God and his words.

They neither acknowledge him nor his words. Their present life is lived without regard for God and their final destiny will be spent without him.

Why does this happen? Verse 6 tells us, For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

God cannot be mocked. He is active even though we may not think much about him as we go about our daily lives.

[18 : 55] He may seem very distant from this world and all that happens, but he is in actual fact near us all, much closer than some might actually like.

God watches everything that happens in this life and determines what will happen in the life to come. What you do today determines your future.

The righteous person chooses not to emulate the wicked and the wicked will not be able to stand in the company of the righteous. Even if they wanted to, they could not.

I began by asking, whose company do you crave? Who could you not live without?

The wicked choose to live without regard to or for God. That choice leads to death. There is another choice.

[20 : 02] You could take delight in the word of God, find in it words of value, words worth thinking about and understanding and then allow them to impact you.

The happy person does this not to be labelled righteous, but because God's word reveals himself. The happy person craves God's company.

Ultimately, these words are life giving. without these, we are not able to live as God intended. Happy both in this life and the one to come.

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