

It Pays to Live God's Way

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[0 : 0 0] Well, have a think, but I think, and I suppose there are things in life that we really prefer not to have to do. And yet, we do it because we know it's worth it, that it will pay off in the end.

Take going to the dentist, for example. Just getting your teeth clean is unpleasant enough. But what if there's something else to fix and it requires needles to do it?

But we know that in spite of the pain, it will be worth it. I think we do. Because otherwise, it will come back to haunt us, wouldn't it?

And the problem will be worse than if we had fixed it at first. Or what about taking the car for its service? It's always supposed to be a routine service. But I've never had one of those before.

There's always something else to fix. And it's never cheap. But still, I cough up the money. I console myself after that because I say to myself, it's worth it.

[1 : 0 3] Because the thought of breaking down in the middle of nowhere at some God-forsaken hour, that's worth it. Now, whether that would ever eventuate, I don't know. But it's consoling to know that your car has been fixed.

And if we're honest, we might feel the same way about the Christian life sometimes as well. There are times, aren't there, where it's really hard work trying to live God's way.

Now, you may be just a new Christian, frustrated because you can't seem to overcome your failings. Or you may have been a Christian for a long time. And yet, you're just tired. Because you've put in so much time and energy, perhaps serving at church, reaching out to others.

And, you know, there doesn't seem to be much to show for it. And so you catch yourself asking, is it really worth it? Does it pay to live God's way? Especially when everyone else, and you look around, seem to be doing something different.

And they seem to be doing really well, all of it. Well, I'm sure the people of Israel asked themselves the same questions. Particularly as they returned from exile. Particularly as they were still living under a superpower such as Persia.

[2 : 1 6] And also surrounded by enemies in Palestine. And with God seemingly silent or inactive, they may have asked, is it still worth following the Lord?

Is it worth following this God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Or should we throw our lot in with the other nations around us? Well, if they read this psalm, they would have the answer for them, wouldn't they?

Because the answer is a clear yes. Yes, it's worth it. Yes, it does pay to live God's way. And the answer is right there at the start, in verse 1. It's almost like an executive summary.

Praise the Lord. Blessed are those who fear the Lord, who find great delight in His commands. There is blessing, it says, in living God's way, in fearing Him, in keeping His commands.

And what the rest of the psalm does is show that this is true. And before we look at the details, though, what I want to do is ponder verse 1 for a moment. What does it mean?

[3 : 18] What is it to fear the Lord? What does that mean? Well, many of you will know that to fear the Lord isn't about being frightened or scared of Him. It's not primarily an emotion.

Rather, to fear the Lord is to give God the honor that's due to Him, to revere Him because of who He is. It's about having a proper attitude to God, one of submission, recognizing His authority.

But it's more than that, isn't it? Because attitude must translate into action. And so the verse continues, that those who fear the Lord find great delight in His commands.

That is, they will keep His commands. They will live God's way. But in fact, if we look at it, it's actually more than that, isn't it? Because the verse says that they are to find great delight in His commands.

It may sound strange, but what the psalm is asking for is fearful delight or delightful fear. That is, a right relationship with God involves both joy and fear or awe.

[4 : 22] They're not to obey God out of resentment or do it grudgingly. They're to do it with joy and gladness. It's sort of what we do when we follow a good leader, isn't it?

It may be your boss or it may just be the captain of your basketball team. But if he or she is a good leader, what happens? We'll gladly follow them, wouldn't we? They'll inspire us to go that extra mile for them.

We'll stretch ourselves to meet their demands, even if they are challenging. Because we respect them. We honor them. And we delight in following their instructions.

And so it is with God, who after all is the perfect leader. And so our fear of Him is done joyfully and with great delight. And so what falls in the rest of the psalm are the rewards for doing just that.

So first in verses 2 and 3, they will be blessed in the land. And not just them, but their children after them as well. So look with me in verses 2 and 3. It says, their children will be mighty in the land.

[5 : 25] The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in their houses. And their righteousness endures forever. Now for a people that's just been dispossessed from their land and just returning, this is a wonderful assurance, isn't it?

Because not only is their well-being secured, the promise is that so will their children's and the generations after them. Now what we need to appreciate is that this isn't a new promise at all.

Rather, it's a reminder of what God had already promised them back at the time of the Exodus. So I'm going to ask Jeff, with his deep and commanding voice, to read a couple of verses from Deuteronomy.

But turn with me, keep your finger in Psalm 102. Turn with me to page 182, Deuteronomy chapter 5, verse 28 and 29. Here Moses is recounting what God said to them at Mount Sinai when they gathered to hear his voice.

So let's hear from Jeff. Do you see those same words there? If the people would incline their hearts to fear me, fear the Lord, keep all my commands, then it will go well for them and for their children forever.

[6 : 36] And if you read the rest of Deuteronomy, what it paints is a big, beautiful picture of what this entails. Living in flourishing cities that they did not build, wells they did not dig, olives and vineyards that they did not plant.

God says he will water the land himself with rain, and he will keep their enemies at bay. It will literally be a land flowing with milk and honey, a land of abundance.

And so if you flip back to Psalm 112 again, verses 2 and 3 simply summarizes those blessings. But great as these blessings sound, they're merely a shadow of what actually God intends for us now as Christians.

For the land God promised them then was a symbol of God dwelling with them. The real blessing wasn't the land, but it was actually living in God's presence.

It was something that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden before they rebelled. And as Christians, we enjoy that presence now without having to be physically in a piece of land.

[7 : 47] Rather, that blessing is now found, as many of you will know, in Christ by believing in him. And so the blessings we enjoy now are no longer about material riches or wealth, but they're actually more glorious and more eternal than that.

Now, Paul talks about that in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3 to 14. And that's our second reading tonight. And Christ is going to come up now and do that. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment, when the times reach their fulfillment, to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[9 : 23] In him, we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, may be for the praise of his glory.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are in God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

There's a wonderful list of God's blessing for us, isn't it? In Christ, all these hours, chosen by God before the creation of the world, having forgiveness of sin, knowing God's will for us, being part of God's purpose for this world.

And all this while we wait for our full redemption when we will be, when Christ comes again, our share in Christ's inheritance, for which the Holy Spirit is given now as a deposit, as a guarantee.

All we may want in life is just to be comfortable, but actually, we're actually made for something much greater, isn't it? There's more to life than just a good job or a nice home, because God is preparing us for eternity.

[11 : 05] And even now, God is using us to fulfill his purpose on earth. So our blessings are much greater, much bigger, than just peace in the land, material wealth, children that are mighty in this land.

But none of these blessings, these spiritual blessings, mean that we lead a trouble-free life. And often we equate that, the world does, doesn't it? Blessing equals life without trouble.

But that's not what God has promised. Even in this Psalm, even for the people of Israel. So yes, there may be a promise of wealth and riches, but if we read on in the Psalm, we soon find that, that doesn't mean a trouble-free life.

So if you're back at Psalm 112 again, 607, see how there are references to times of trial and trouble. So verse 4 talks about the upright being in the midst of darkness.

Verse 7, of encountering bad news in life. And later on, of enemies and foes. So the point here is that adversity may come, even with blessing.

[12 : 14] But what God promises is that he will be at hand, and that they will find security. That's the second reward, in times of adversity. So see in verse 4, even in darkness, light will dawn for them.

They won't be left to flounder in the darkness. Instead, God will be their light to give, to guide them. And because God's help is at hand, verse 6, the righteous will not be shaken, will never be shaken.

But their hearts are steadfast, verse 7, and secure, verse 8. And all they need to do then is, verse 7, trust in him. How do they do that?

By continuing to keep his commands, even in the midst of adversity. And so fearing the Lord, verse 1, means they don't have to fear bad news, verse 7.

Or verse 8, fear anything, for that matter. Now many of you will know that our family went to Paris recently, and when we were there, we had a chance to go right up to the top of the Eiffel Tower.

[13 : 15] It was a clear, but windy day, and my daughters were, you know, all excited, taking photos, of this fantastic view, and I've got a camera, their camera. But here I was, as I saw them doing, I was absolutely freaked out.

And do you know why? Because they were holding their cameras like that, over the railings. And I was just terrified, that they would drop it. And then 300 feet, or 300 meters below, have a big accident.

Not, I wasn't worried for the camera, I was worried for the people down there. But my fear immediately subsided, when I told them to put their hands into the strap. Then I knew that the camera would be secure, right?

I had to promise to give it back to her in one piece. But that's the same thing with trusting God, isn't it? When we fasten ourselves to someone secure, someone unshakable, then our fears subside, don't they?

When our focus is on the Lord, and we fear Him, then all the other fears melt away. And the bigger the fear, the more we need to trust, and hold on to Him.

[14 : 27] Hold on to what is, who is secure. And so when trials come in our lives, whether it's illness, or financial stress, or challenging relationships, whatever they are, then we need to remember this second promise, or reward, that God is at hand, with help, we can trust on, so that we will be secure, in times of trouble.

Now let's move on. The third promise that God gives, in verses 8 and 9, is that if we remain faithful, and live God's way, until life's end, then victory will be ours, and we will find honor at the end.

Our lives may not be trouble free, but we will be vindicated in the end, provided we don't give up. Which is always something, we're tempted to do, aren't we? Whenever trouble comes. I know myself, that when I'm up against it, it's always harder, to remain gracious, and compassionate, generous, and just.

It's just much easier, isn't it, to revert, to self-preservation, rather than, to live God's way. But the psalm, encourages us, to stick at it, to remain faithful to him.

Verse 5, Good will come to those, who are generous, and lend freely, who conduct their affairs, with justice. For in the end, verse 8, they will look, in triumph, on their foes.

[15 : 49] Even as they continue, to be generous, scattering their gifts, to the poor, their horn, will be lifted high, in honor. That is a sign, of their exaltation. You see, God sees everything, and he will remember, those who are faithful, to him.

Twice in the psalm, the phrase is repeated, their righteousness, endures forever. And then in verse 6, it says, they will be remembered, forever, remembered by God. Nothing will escape, the Lord's attention.

Even when others, may not reward us, for our goodness. Even when God forbids, the pastor, doesn't notice. Don't lose heart, because God sees, and God will reward you, for being, faithful to him.

It may not be, pleasant at the time, just like going to the dentist, but it will be worth it, in the end. God will lift, us up, in honor. Lift us up, if not now, then in the end, definitely.

Now the psalm, then ends in verse 10, with a glimpse, of the alternative. It gives us, the fate of the wicked. It says, the wicked will see, and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth, and waste away.

[16 : 55] The longings of the wicked, will come to nothing. Now what this is describing, I think is the end, at the end of time. When the wicked, see the righteous, being exalted, they will be vexed, or frustrated.

They will be gnashing, their teeth, because they've longed, for this very thing, in life. And what they've longed for, is now actually being enjoyed, by those who fear God. In fact, those who fear God, may have been the very people, that they've tormented, in their life.

But now the tables are turned. Those that were lowly in life, are exalted. And the wicked, who seemed victorious, at one time, they are defeated. And that's what will happen, in the end.

Many, you know, there will come a day, when many, we think in this life, are successful. Will end up, actually gnashing their teeth, in defeat. Conversely, those who are downtrodden, because of their faith, in Jesus, will end up, being revealed, to be truly blessed.

So let's keep going on, in our faith. Because it will be worth it, in the end. But let me highlight, one more thing, as we finish up.

[18 : 08] And that is to show you, where our ultimate reward lies. So that's our final point. A reward, that is in some ways, better even, than the blessing in the land, the security, and the victory, in the end. In fact, all of them, are summed up, in this ultimate reward, I think.

And we'll discover this, by comparing, our psalm from last week, Psalm 111, and our psalm today. That's my little cryptic note, in the newsletter, to get you to read both together.

But what I'm going to do, is to get you to just pair up, between the two of you, or three of you, at your seats. Turn to the next person, next to you, and see if you can spot, common words or phrases, between Psalm 111, and Psalm 112.

So they may be, exactly the same words, or they may be similar, in sort of, in their root. See how many, you can jot down. And I'll give you a couple of minutes, to do that. Okay, how have we gone?

It's quite a few, isn't it? Alright, why don't we just, just shout them out to me. Anyone? Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, good. Okay, any others?

[19 : 16] Righteousness endures forever. Righteousness endures forever. So that's verse 3 of 111, and then twice, verse 3 and verse 9, 112. Good. Yep, so that's verse 4 of 111, and then verse 4 again, of the next Psalm.

Provides for those, okay, which verse was that? Verse 5, and then in verse 12, 112. Yep, okay, any more?

So you get, verse 2, upright, and verse 4, upright, in verse, in chapter, Psalm 112, and then, verse 8, of 111, upright as well, referring to the Lord.

Gracious and compassionate. Yeah, gracious and compassionate. Yep, I think, Annette mentioned that. And then, although these are not exact words, verse 7 of 111 is just, God is just, and then, in verse 5, the righteous conduct their affairs with justice.

Okay, and even, even the whole idea of providing food, and then, in the next, in the next Psalm, the generosity of the people, of the righteous, those who freely scatter their gifts.

[20 : 49] There's a correspondence in similarity in actions there. I wonder whether you can see what's happening here. It's, it's, it's not hard, is it? that the words in the Psalm 111, which describes God's character, are actually the very ones that are used to describe the righteous, in Psalm 112.

That is, the righteous in Psalm 112, are being compared to God, in Psalm 111. And so, what happens is that, when we keep God's commands, we become like God.

We become His agents on this earth, reflecting His character, in a small way, I mean, we're not God, but we respect, reflect God, in a, in His character, and in His nature.

So, when we show compassion to others, we actually do it on God's behalf. When we're generous, it is God's generosity, that we're showing. And we do exactly what Jesus, Himself did, when He was on, on earth, doing the Father's will.

That was His main aim on earth, to do what God wanted of Him, to represent God, to us on earth. And if you think about it, I mean, you just stop and think about it, this is such an awesome privilege, isn't it?

[22 : 06] As us humans, God would entrust to us, to do His work, to represent Him, to reflect His character. Now, most of you, I'm sure, would be familiar with movies like, Karate Kid, where there's a master, and a disciple, I've got a slide, I think, and Yoda, and Luke Skywalker, is another example, in Star Wars.

And always, in these stories, the aim of the disciple, is to be like the master. And often, the master, is very guarded, isn't he? His secrets, are precious to him. And he wouldn't want, to give it up easily.

Rather, he only impart his wisdom, to the right disciple, when he's finally convinced, that he will carry on, his legacy, or whatever. Well, God actually, has no such reluctance, does he?

Because, what we find is that, his wisdom, is actually freely, infused, into his words, into his commands. His character, his will, they're not guarded, like it was a secret. No, it's all there, in his word.

And if we want, his wisdom, then all we need to do, is delight in his word. And often, I think that, if God is going to help us, or we're afraid, or we need wisdom, then, how God does it, is that he would, intervene supernaturally.

[23 : 24] You know, like, maybe there's a, still small voice, or something, or a voice from heaven. You know, that's how he would do it, to assure us, or to give us guidance. Now, I'm pretty sure, that God could do that, if he wished.

But, actually, he doesn't need to. Why? Because it's all, here in his word. That's his normal way, of working, that God uses his spirit, God uses his word, God, by his spirit, uses his word, to impart his wisdom, to us.

And so, if we are fearful, if we need a wisdom, then delighting, in his commands, is the way, to get it. To find security, to find wisdom. As we, keep his commands, what God does with that, is to shape us, so that our character, as we keep following him, becomes like God's character.

That our wisdom, becomes like God's wisdom. And so, all those rewards, that we've looked at, in the psalm, they all actually come, as we keep God's commands.

the more we delight, in his word, and practice what it says, the more we become like God, the more we take on his character, the more we see, the world through his eyes. That's what wisdom, is all about, isn't it?

[24 : 41] Seeing the world, through God's eyes, and seeing ourselves, as God has created us. And so, that's why, I think the last verse, of Psalm 111, works like a hinge, with the first verse, of Psalm 112.

So, you see how Psalm 111 ends? The fear of the Lord, is the beginning of wisdom. And then you go to the next, verse, blessed are those, who fear the Lord, who finds great delight, in his commands.

What it's saying, is that we become wise, as we keep his commands. As we fear the Lord, we become like God. And we, more importantly, we become like his son, Jesus.

Graciousness, compassion, generosity, these are qualities, that Jesus has in abundance. These are the very qualities, of God. And so, if you ask me, what the ultimate reward is, for following, and living God's way, it's actually this, becoming like Jesus.

That's the ultimate reward. That's the best gift, that God, can actually bestow on us. Because that's what, he's created us to be. We are made, in his image, so that we can be conformed, to the image, of his son.

[25 : 51] And nothing delights God, more than to do just that, to make us like Jesus. Because when that happens, Jesus gets the glory. So friends, does it pay to live God's way?

Does it pay to trust God, in Christ? Yes. Yes. Of course it does. Even though, there may be adversity, even though, we might not know, until the very end, our vindication.

Yes, it's worth it. And even now, God is working by his spirit, to shape us, by his word. So friends, let's persevere with it, even to the very end, because it's worth it.

It pays to live God's way. Let's pray. Father, we thank you, that you've revealed yourself, in your word. And you've given us, your commands, so that we can keep it.

And as we keep it, we're shaped, to be like your son, Jesus. That as we follow him, we become like him. That we take on his character, and you give us your wisdom.

[26 : 55] And that, is true blessing. Help us to see, that that is true blessing, in life. Whatever adversity, there may be, that comes along the way. We ask this, so that, your spirit, might empower us, and strengthen us, to do this.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.