

# The Good Life

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 27 April 2014

Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[ 0 : 00 ] Today we're beginning a new preaching series on the book of Psalms. We're going to do seven weeks, seven Psalms. And there's a few reasons for this. This isn't completely arbitrary. There's a few reasons.

The first is that we finished the book of James two weeks ago, and the book of James ends with an encouragement to pray. Every situation of life, he encourages us to pray.

And so we're going to heed his encouragement. We're going to go to the prayer book of the Bible, the book of Psalms. So that's the first reason. The second thing is that in the book of James, James painted a picture for us where God is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

So God most fundamentally is one who is radically generous and good. So in all the Psalms that we're going to be looking at, we're going to look at Psalms that focus us, center us on the goodness of God.

The goodness of God. And the final thing is, is that last week we looked at Luke chapter 24. And in Luke chapter 24, Jesus told his disciples after he had risen from the grave, behold, the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms were all written about me.

[ 1 : 12 ] They all pointed to me. They were all filled in me. And so what we're going to do is we're going to read the Psalms, not only as prayers that center us on the goodness of God, but as prayers that point us to the very love of God embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that's what we're going to be doing in the next seven weeks. Seven Psalms should be good. So today we begin at the very beginning of the Psalms, Psalm chapter 1.

It'd be good for you to have your Bibles open to Psalm chapter 1. We might navigate a couple other texts along the way. And we start with Psalm 1 because Psalm 1 is the introduction to the whole book of Psalms.

I like the image that St. Jerome used. He was an early church father. He said this. He said Psalm 1 is like the front door to a massive mansion. And the mansion is the Psalter.

It's got 149 different rooms in it. And you can explore all 149, and they will take you into different areas of God's wonderful grace.

[ 2 : 16 ] But the way to get access to all those rooms is only by pushing through the front door. You don't go through the front door, and you don't get into the whole Psalter.

Now, the interesting thing is that this image, when we get to the front door, we realize that Psalm 1 is actually a mural or a picture. The front door has a mural on it.

And what it's a mural of is what the good life is. What the blessed life is. And in particular, it tells us that the good, blessed life is the life that is spent delighting in and meditating upon the Word of God.

And so it's as if to say, if you push through this front door, if you go through this front door, you will enter into a wonderful world, a wonderful life that is blessed with God.

If you enter into this house of prayer, you truly will be a blessed man or woman. And so we stand on the porch looking at the front door.

[ 3 : 19 ] Psalm chapter 1. Now, I want to look at this Psalm in terms of three Ps. I'm learning how to preach, so people tell me that you're supposed to do three points and make them all start with the same letter.

So, three Ps. The picture, the person, and the participants. The picture, the person, and the participants. Psalm 1 is a picture of the good life, which is fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and is shared with all who participate in Him, who take refuge in Him.

So the picture, the person, and the participants. Look at the first verse with me. Blessed is the man or woman. We notice something here.

There's a lot of Psalms, and most of them are songs, and most of them are prayers, but not Psalm 1. Psalm 1 is a blessing. It's a beatitude. Blessed is the man or woman. Happy is the man or woman.

Psalm 1 tries to paint a picture for us of what the good life is. And so from the very beginning, we realize that Psalm 1 is actually addressing one of the most fundamental questions of our human existence.

[ 4 : 33 ] That we all ask ourselves at some one point or another, what is the good life? What does it mean to live a life of human flourishing and happiness?

And if we look throughout history, we realize that this question has dominated the hearts and minds of many, all the way from Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, who spent a lot of time thinking and writing about this, all the way to the present time.

And although people try to ignore it, the question always rises its ugly head and nags us, because it can never go away. It's essential to our humanity. What is the good life?

How do I live a good, human, flourishing life, a happy life? And I discovered this new website this past week called [www.thegoodlife.com](http://www.thegoodlife.com).

So if you don't like what I say here, go there, and you'll find exactly the opposite of what I'm about to say here. And you'll have a lot of options to choose from, too. But one thing that I found very interesting this last week on this website is they did this five-minute video where they asked 29 working professionals this question.

[ 5 : 48 ] What does it mean for you to live the good life? What does it mean for you to live the good life? And then this five-minute video is a bunch of clips of their different answers, and I want to give you a smattering of them here.

The first person, very telling, he said this. The good life. It means to get to decide what is good. And if you are living someone else's life, then you're making a huge mistake.

The next person, for me, it's peacefulness. I just want to lay my head down at night and feel peace. Another person was a little bit lighter.

She said celebration, irreverence, a sense of not taking things too seriously. Another person said living with passion, doing whatever I do with great zeal.

And then another person, and I must commend their honesty here because I think this is true probably for a lot of us, said the good life is ease, abundance, amusement.

[ 6 : 48 ] Next person said the good life is connection, contribution, service. Next person said the good life is getting to do the things that make you happy. And then the next person, and this is true to our culture as well, staying true to myself, living my authentic life, making the work that I want to make in the way that makes me feel good.

And so, and then one more person said, you are living the good life when you feel good. And I was like, no, that's a good insight. When you're at peace with the past, you're optimistic about the future, and you're happy in the present, this person said.

And so we can see that there is a rising to the surface. People are starting to wrestle with this question anew in our culture. But right away, at the very same time, when people try to answer it, we realize that there is mass confusion.

There is a marketplace of competing voices. And we live in that marketplace, and it's bewildering, it's confusing. What indeed is the good life that's easy to get lost? And so we need Psalm 1 now more than ever to tell us what is the good life.

We need clarity. And Psalm 1 does just that. It gives us a picture of both what the good life is and what it is not. And interestingly, it starts with what it is not.

[ 8 : 12 ] So let's look at verse 1. Blessed is the man or woman who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

Notice three lines in a row. The psalm is using layered poetry to describe to us what the path of sin looks like. And this layered poetry shows us that the path of sin is really comprehensive.

Look at it again with me. The counsel of the wicked. This refers to the realm of speaking, advice, thinking, believing. And the way of sinners.

This refers to the realm of living or behaving or decision-making. Then the seat of scoffers. This refers to the realm of fellowship, of belonging.

And notice also how the layered poetry seems to increase in intensity. There's this movement from walking to standing to sitting.

[ 9 : 18 ] It's as if the person depicted here is slowing down as they become more and more comfortable with sin. And isn't that how it works? Isn't that true?

Sin is such a slippery slope. It starts so small, it seems, and yet it so easily takes over. It's as if there's one moment that you're feeling the lure of lust tugging at your heartstrings.

And you just click, one click of the computer, and boom, you're led into a world of unrighteousness and shame. You're sensing the power of anger burning deep within your soul.

And you decide, I'm going to open my mouth for just one word and one comment. And boom, you're led into a world of cutting words and broken relationships. You're experiencing the pressure of deceit and greed weighing heavy on your mind.

And you decide, just this one time, I'll listen to my boss's request to fudge some numbers on this work report. And boom, before you know it, you're led into a world of fraud and lies.

[ 10 : 23 ] Sin is kind of like quicksand. We put one foot in thinking it won't harm us at all, but before we know it, our whole body is being consumed as it sucks us in and pulls us down into the realm of its power and destruction.

And the psalmist doesn't want us to go down that path. He says it will destroy our humanity. We will not flourish. Look at verse 4. He says sin will hollow us out so much that we will be light and insubstantial like chaff blown away in the wind.

And then verse 6. He says sin will suck the God-given life out of us until ultimately there's nothing left and we perish in judgment. Therefore, Psalm 1 begins by saying, Luckily, the psalmist doesn't leave us there.

Doesn't leave us with a negative picture. The psalmist goes on in verse 2. What is the good life? Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord, says verse 2.

And on his law he meditates day and night. Now what the psalmist does here is really interesting. Notice how the path of sin from verse 1 is replaced in verse 2 with a path of delight.

[ 11 : 49 ] Notice how the path of sin is replaced with a path of delight.

And this is really indicative for us because the opposite of sin is not joyless duty. The opposite of sin is a new and greater delight. It's delight in the law of the Lord.

And we see in line 2 that this delight takes the form of constant meditation. Day and night. Going back to the word of God for more and more and more and more.

Because that's what delight does. Delight draws us back to the source of our delight. As many of you know, it's a beautiful time of year, is it not?

I mean, cherry blossom trees blooming and they're drooping leaves. And then you have all these daffodils. And on my balcony there's lots of tulips, which is awesome.

[ 12 : 45 ] Tulips coming up. And my wife tells me it's particularly hard to go on walks with me at this time of year. It's a bit like walking a dog. Because I stop about every 30 feet in order to smell something on the ground.

Whether it's like some sort of flowers or something hanging from the sky, whatever it is. And she tells me that I'm very predictable. I stop at the same places every time when we go on these walks.

So she laughs at me. But I say, Seuss, it's just so beautiful. It's just so good. It's so delightful. And that's exactly how it is with the word of God.

The word of God intoxicates us with divine grace. Our delight in God's grace keeps drawing us back for more and more and more. So the more we meditate, the more we delight.

And the more we delight, the more we meditate. And then we start to experience what verse 2 is telling us. That the good life is the scripture's saturated life.

[ 13 : 48 ] It's the life lived in the good book. Now, I'm not unaware that many people find this picture of the good life quite disappointing.

Maybe some of you. There's a couple reasons for this. There's a few. First is, a lot of people don't like the word law. You know that word that's in there twice? Word law.

They don't like that. Aren't laws those things that restrict human freedom? That unnecessarily limit our choices? That cause us to do the things that we don't want to do and tell us not to do the things that we want to do and ultimately lead to a joyless, heartless, lifeless life?

But it's good. It's important to remember something here. A fundamental biblical truth is that the lawgiver is always the creator and the redeemer.

The lawgiver is always the creator and the redeemer. And this means two things. As the creator, God knows how he has designed us and how we're supposed to work and how we're supposed to flourish.

[ 14 : 55 ] So when he gives us laws, it's not like he's trying to make an Apple program run on a PC and it just doesn't work. He's telling us how we're meant to live to flourish.

And he knows best because he created us. So God never tells us to do what will not lead to our flourishing. The next thing is that God is the redeemer.

His laws are not just given to us and then he goes, have fun. Try to figure it out. Hope you can do that on your own. No, no, no, no, no. God always gives his law in the context of his redeeming grace, his saving grace, his forgiving grace.

And then he always gives us the law and it's accompanied with his empowering grace so that we can walk in it and the life of flourishing. And when it's seen this way, in the comments by Bruce Waltke, an Old Testament scholar, ring very true.

Listen to what he says. He says, I don't like this picture of the good life because they don't like the word meditate.

[ 16 : 23 ] Well, that sounds like an airy, fairy, mystical wonderland. I don't know where to find it, but it's hard to get to and I don't really want to be there anyways. Let me tell you what meditate is.

It's not that. Meditate is not an airy, fairy, mystical land. But meditate is not just a matter of reading and knowing or comprehending or being able to teach and articulate either.

It's something much deeper than that. Meditate is actually mulling over something or preaching something to yourself, having something on your lips.

As long as it takes until it imprints itself on your mind and on your heart and on your affections and on your will and transforms the way that you live in the world.

So, to use the language of Thomas Cramner from our nice book of Common Prayer, meditation means inwardly digesting the word of God until we are gripped by the gospel of grace in the very core of who we are.

[ 17 : 26 ] I have a friend who epitomizes this in many ways for me. He's a funny guy. I love him. He always wears shirts with pockets in the front.

He always has pockets in the front. It's like his thing. But the interesting thing is he always wears black or blue or something and there's always these neon colors kind of startlingly popping out of his pocket.

And I always ask him, what is that? I mean, every time he takes out a set of flashcards, he has three by five neon cards and they're just scripture verses written on them.

And he memorizes them everywhere he goes. So, he goes for a walk. He's memorizing scripture. He's waiting in line. He's memorizing scripture. He's driving. He memorizes scripture.

I told him not to do that anymore. You're safe. Don't worry. But so I asked him, I said, what does it mean to meditate upon God's word? Because I want to know.

[ 18 : 24 ] I mean, you're soaking in this stuff and you delight in it. And he said, he just told me two things. He said, Jordan, make your own note cards because you've got to memorize it. You've got to memorize it.

You've got to get it imprinted in you, hidden in your heart. And the second thing he said is that every morning when you wake up, you open that good book. And you read and you reread and you reread and you reread until something, some aspect of God's glorious character, some aspect of his grace grips you at the very core of your being.

And you don't close it until it dies. That's what meditating is. It's getting into it so deep that it gets into you. Now, some of you still are thinking, well, this sounds kind of boring.

This doesn't sound very fun. To meditate on the law, to delight in the law. And we think, wow, that sounds a bit dry.

But I want to submit to you that one of the problems that we have is we think it's boring because we forget the three most important words in verse 2. We forget those three little words, of the Lord.

[ 19 : 39 ] And it's when we forget those words that then we come to the Bible and we think it's some lifeless ink on a page. It's when we forget those words that we come to the Bible and we think it's some set of rules for living or a moralistic story or a manual of propositional truths.

It's when we come to the Bible like that that we think it's our job to master it and have all the right answers and dissect it and control it. But the Bible is not like that.

The Bible is the word of the Lord. It's God working in and through it. And what this means is not only is the Bible true, but it's personal and it's powerful and it's active and it's transformative.

And all the great saints of history have attested to this. St. Augustine, an early church father, said this about Scripture. Scripture is the face of God for now. So, brothers and sisters, when you open the good book, God is personally revealing his face to you.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, put it this way. The Bible is alive. It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me. It has hands. It lays hold of me.

[ 20 : 49 ] And so, brothers and sisters, when you open the good book, it is God pursuing you and laying hold of you. The late John Stott put it this way. He said the Bible is a living word to a living people from the living God.

So, when we open the Bible, it's the living God speaking to us. And finally, King David himself puts it this way in Psalm 19.

Turn to Psalm 19 with me. Psalm 19, verses 7 to 11. It says this, The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.

Does your soul need reviving this morning? The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. Do you need wisdom in life right now? The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandments of the Lord are pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

[ 21 : 55 ] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold. And sweeter also than honey in the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned.

And in keeping them, there is great reward. So, brothers and sisters, when you open the good book, it is God reaching out his hands to transform you. Therefore, when we read verse 2 and see that this is the good life, we should not be surprised.

And we should not be surprised with the image that comes in verse 3. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither.

And in all he does, he prospers. The person who plants themselves in the word of the Lord is stable and steadfast. And their roots go deep down into the living waters of God's life.

They are filled with his Holy Spirit. And they bear fruit in due season, when the opportunity is right, so that they can be a source of life and blessing to other people. And their leaves do not wither, even with the changing seasons of life, even when the scorching heat of the summer seems to oppress you.

[ 23 : 08 ] Yet, they're still surging with life and prosper in their way. And so, what is the good life? Our passage gives us a picture that says, it is the life of flourishing that comes from sinking deep roots into the word of God.

That's the picture. Now the person. We're left to the question, though. Who is this person of Psalm 1?

Who is the blessed man of Psalm 1? I mean, who has ever lived this life in all of its blessed perfection? Rejecting the path of sin and delighting in the law of the Lord all the days of his life.

I mean, who's done it? Who's truly lived it? And so, we seek to survey the vast lands of history in order to find somebody. We go back and we look at Martin Luther King Jr.

Or we look at C.S. Lewis. Or maybe we go back to the Reformers and we look at Calvin and Martin Luther. Or maybe we push all the way back to the Apostles and we look at St. Paul or St. Peter.

[ 24 : 12 ] And we discover that no one has done it. And so we decide, well, let's go to the vast lands of biblical history. Let's go to the Old Testament. And we go to Abraham, God's chosen covenant partner.

And we see that even he lied to Pharaoh about his wife because he did not trust the Lord. And then we go to Moses, God's chosen leader. And we see that even Moses struck the rock out of anger because he did not listen to the Lord.

And then we go to King David and we say, surely King David, he was a man after God's own heart. And then we see that he slept with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah because he did not fear the Lord.

So we're forced to look elsewhere. Our eyes have to gaze at the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Our eyes are drawn to Christ and him alone.

And we realize that when he was baptized in the Holy Spirit and then led out into the wilderness and Satan tried to give him advice, offer him, tempt him, and give him all the power and goods of the world, he said no.

[ 25 : 18 ] He rejected the way of scoffers and sinners and instead delighted in the law of the Lord. And then we fast forward in Jesus' life until we get to the Garden of Gethsemane where he is once again tempted to go off the course, deny the will of the Lord because he knows the cross lies before him.

And what does he decide to do? He kneels and he prays, Father, take this from me, but not my will, yours be done. And we see that Jesus, as he's walking the road to Calvary, there are people advising him from one side to not do it.

This isn't your destiny. There are people from the other side that are mocking him. Truly, this can't be the king of the Jews. And yet he still stays the course and he walks the road to Calvary because he knows the scriptures.

He knows that the Christ must suffer and the Christ must die for the sins of the whole world. And he knows that when he hangs on that tree that is the curse of death, he will make it into a tree of life for the healing of all the nations.

And that what he will do will bring about the salvation of the world. Oh, how Jesus Christ is the truly blessed man of Psalm 1.

[ 26 : 31 ] It's Jesus Christ. But the question still remains. That's great. We've answered the question, what is the good life?

We've answered the question, who's lived the good life? What does this have to do with me? How do I share in the good life? How does it touch my life personally?

And for that answer, we have to go to the end of Psalm 2. Look at the end of Psalm 2. Now, it's good for you to know that originally, Psalm 1 and 2 probably formed one psalm.

So they're one psalm together as the introduction to the psalms. And this makes sense in light of the fact when you look at the beginning of Psalm 1 and the end of Psalm 2, they both have to do with blessing.

Look at Psalm 1.1. Blessed is the man. That's Jesus Christ. He's the blessed man. And look at the end of Psalm 2. Psalm 2.12. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

[ 27 : 32 ] We're blessed as we take refuge in him. My friends, that's the great testimony of the scriptures. Those two verses are almost the gospel in a nutshell.

Blessed is the man, Jesus Christ. And then blessed are all who take refuge in him. And that's why the Apostle Paul in the beginning of his book to the Ephesians can say, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why? Because he has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. We're in Christ. So his blessings become ours.

His life becomes ours. And that's why Paul can say in Galatians chapter 2, verse 20, I have been crucified with Christ and no longer live. But it is Christ who lives in me.

In the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. And that's why Paul can say in Colossians chapter 3, For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

[ 28 : 35 ] When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Oh, blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Blessed are those who get to share in his relationship with the Father, knowing intimacy like they've never known before. Blessed are all those who get to receive Jesus' holy and life-giving spirit, knowing living waters flowing through their soul like they've never known it before.

blessed are all who delight in the law of the Lord with Jesus and are led in paths of righteousness like they've never known before. Blessed are all who take refuge in the cross of Christ and know forgiveness like they've never known before.

Blessed are those who take refuge in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and know hope like they've never known before. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.