

## Community Group Guide



### the Church at Martinsburg

Psalm 1

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### Scripture Passage

*Have a volunteer read the following scripture passage(s).*

#### Psalm 1

[1] 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; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. [4] The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. [5] Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; [6] for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

### Discussion Questions

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means.*

1. The Bible speaks often about being "blessed". What does it mean to be blessed according Psalm 1? Consider reading Matthew 5:1-12 for further insight into the blessed life.
2. Read Psalm 1. The writer speaks about a righteous person and a wicked person. How does he describe both? As you read the Scripture which do you identify with more?
3. Where is the correct place we find counsel according to verse 2? What is the result of a wise man who takes to the proper counsel according to verse 3?
4. What is the place of meditation in the life of a Christian? What do you meditate (think upon) most regularly? Can you give an example of when the Bible was encouraging to you during the day and during the night?

### Prayer

*As you pray with your group, consider praying for the following things:*

- Any personal requests. Pray for the personal requests that may have been shared in your group.

- A desire to have the Word of Christ dwelling richly in the hearts of your fellow group members (Col. 3:16).

## Weekly Scriptures

*Encourage your group members to consistently read Scripture. The daily Scripture reading plan from the church is be a helpful place to start.*

**Monday** – Psalm 1

**Tuesday** – Psalm 119:35

**Wednesday** – Psalm 119:47

**Thursday** – Psalm 119:92

**Friday** – Psalm 31:7

**Saturday** – Psalm 37:5

## Weekly Update

*Remind your group of some of the important things coming up for the church.*

### Upcoming events:

**Camden Mission Trip:** On August 21-23, our church is sending a mission team to minister with one of our sister churches in Camden, NJ. For more info or to sign up, visit [martinsburgchurch.org/camden](http://martinsburgchurch.org/camden).

There are 3 ways you can be involved with God’s mission in Camden:

- **Pray** that God will open doors for the Gospel for our team and Epiphany Fellowship of Camden.
- **Give** toward our hygiene drive or the cost of a team member’s trip.
- **Go** with our mission team on August 21-23. For more information, check out our informational page at [martinsburgchurch.org/camden](http://martinsburgchurch.org/camden).

## Follow-up

*Midway through this week, send a follow-up email, text, etc. to your group with some or all of the following:*

- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- Encourage individual members of your group with specific passages of scripture that deal with something they might be experiencing.
- Challenge your group members to read through the entire book of Philippians this week.
- A reminder to pray for the requests made during your group time.

## Commentary

*\*This commentary has been taken from the ESV Study Bible*

Psalm 1. The first psalm serves as the gateway into the entire book of Psalms, stressing that those who would worship God genuinely must embrace his Law (or Torah), i.e., his covenant instruction. This psalm takes topics found in wisdom literature such as Proverbs and makes them the subject of song; the purpose is that those who sing the psalm will own its values—namely, they will want more and more to be people who love the Torah, who believe it, who see themselves as the heirs and stewards of its story of redemption and hope, and who seek to carry out its moral requirements. They can delight in the idea of being among the “righteous,” feeling that nothing can compare with such blessedness. By its sustained contrast, the psalm reminds readers that in the end there are really only two ways to live.

Ps. 1:1–2 Contrasting Sources of Values. The truly happy person guides his life by God’s instruction rather than by the advice of those who reject that instruction.

Ps. 1:1 Blessed. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favor. Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in Matt. 5:3–11; cf. also James 1:12. The Latin translation, *beatus*, is the source of the word *beatitude*. The man. A specific, godly individual (Hb. *ha’ish*, “the man”) is held up as an example for others to imitate. Such teaching by use of a concrete example is common in OT wisdom literature. wicked ... sinners ... scoffers. These are people, even within Israel, who refuse to live by the covenant; the godly person refuses to follow the moral orientation of such people’s lifestyle. Some have seen an increasing level of sinfulness in the terms “wicked-sinners-scoffers,” together with an increasing loyalty in the metaphors “walk-stand-sit”; however, it is likely that the terms “wicked” and “sinner” here are equivalent, while a “scoffer” is certainly more committed to evil (see note on Prov. 19:25–20:1).

Ps. 1:2 the law of the Lord. As the ESV footnote indicates, this could be taken as God’s instruction (Hb. *Torah*, which often designates the Law of Moses), particularly as he speaks in his covenant. For this reason no one should ever think that such a person receives his blessedness by deserving it, since the covenant is founded on God’s grace. *Meditates* describes an active pondering, perhaps even muttering to oneself in pursuit of insight. Some suppose *day and night* speaks of the work of professional scholars who spend all their time pondering the words of the law, but in view of the similar instruction in Josh. 1:8, readers should see this as setting the ideal of facing every situation, be it ever so mundane, with a view to pleasing the Lord by knowing and following his Word.

Ps. 1:3–4 Contrasting Fruitfulness.

Here are two similes, based on agriculture in ancient Palestine, describing the effects of the two kinds of people.

Ps. 1:3 The first image is that of a tree in a dry climate, which nevertheless thrives because of its constant supply of water. A tree bears fruit, not for itself, but for others; thus, when the faithful prospers, it is not for himself, nor is the prospering even necessarily material, but he succeeds in bringing benefit to others. See Jer. 17:8 for the same image.

Ps. 1:4 wicked. See v. 1. chaff. This is the husks and straw removed by threshing, and it is lighter than the edible kernels; when a farmer tosses threshed wheat into the air, the wind drives away the chaff. Those who reject God's covenant are like chaff in that they bring no benefit to anyone (cf. 35:5).

Ps. 1:5–6 Contrasting Outcomes of Their Lives. These two verses lead readers to reflect on where these two kinds of life are headed, showing that God will make the contrast last forever.

Ps. 1:5 Therefore indicates that these verses are the conclusion of the psalm. judgment. This could be any particular judgment that falls on the wicked in this life, but it is more likely the final judgment, which allows some to enter the congregation of the righteous, while excluding others (Eccles. 12:14).

Ps. 1:6 Knows must be something stronger than simply “knows about,” since God knows about the wicked and their deepest secrets (cf. 94:8–11). Some have argued that the word means “cares for,” but it is better to take this as “knows with affection and approval, i.e., prefers” (cf. Gen. 18:19; Amos 3:2). will perish. That is, end in destruction.

### Recommended Reading

*The following is a sermon excerpt from John Piper's sermon titled "Meditate on the Word of the Lord Day and Night" taken from the Desiring God website.*

### **Meditate on the Word of the Lord Day and Night**

If this is Prayer Week, why do we begin with a message on Psalm 1 that doesn't mention prayer, and focus our attention on the Word of God and not prayer? The central point of this psalm is made in verse 2: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." The person who delights in God's law so much that he meditates on it day and night is delivered from the ways of the wicked and sinners and scoffers, and is made fruitful and durable and prosperous. That's the point. Delighting in the law of God is the central issue. So why begin Prayer Week with this psalm and this focus on delighting in the law of God?

Well, where is this psalm? It is the beginning of the book of Psalms. And what are the psalms? Many of them are prayers. In fact, the Psalter is the prayer book of the Bible. Millions of Christians go to the Psalms to find words for the cry of their hearts in the worst of times and the best of times. So I begin Prayer Week with Psalm 1 because the Bible begins its prayer book with Psalm 1.

But why does it? And why should we? The reason is that in the Christian life -in the life of God's people - prayer and the Word are connected in such a way that if you disconnect them, both die. Let me sum up the connection between prayer and the Word in three ways. The Word of God inspires prayer, it informs prayer and it incarnates prayer. Just a word of explanation on each of these.

### Connection Between the Word and Prayer

The Word of God inspires prayer. This means that the Word commands us to pray, and makes promises to us of what God will do if we pray, and tells us stories of great men and women of prayer. James 5:16-18 does all three. First, "Pray for one another so that you may be healed." There's a command from the Word. Second, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." There is the encouraging promise. Third, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months." There's a story to inspire us. So the Word inspires prayer by telling us to do it (like a doctor telling us what's good for us) and promising us good things if we will do it, and telling us stories to encourage us in our weakness.

Second, the Word of God informs prayer. This means that the Word tells us what to pray and becomes itself the content of our prayer. When you know the mind of God in his Word, you pray the mind of God in your prayers. For example, in Acts 4:24-26, the early church prayed like this: "They lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them [see Exodus 20:11], who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David your servant, said [quoting Psalm 2], 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ.'" This is the way powerful saints have prayed throughout history. O may the Lord fill our prayers with the great purposes and promises of God that we learn from his Word. The Word informs prayer.

Third, the Word incarnates prayer. This means that prayers are often invisible and concealed in the soul and in the closet and in the church. But their effect is to be in the open in the lives of other people and among the nations. How does that happen? God usually advances his purposes in world evangelization and personal transformation and cultural reformation by direct encounters with the truth of his Word. The Word incarnates our prayers. Prayers become effective through the truth getting into people's ears and minds and hearts.

People don't just start believing on Jesus because you pray for them. They need to hear about Jesus. "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). "Pray for us that the Word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as it did also with you" (2 Thessalonians 3:1). Prayer empowers the Word and the Word incarnates prayer. Saints don't just become more holy because someone prays that they will. They need to see the truth: "Sanctify them in the truth. Thy Word is truth" (John 17:17). Cultural slavery to injustice and greed and dishonesty and sexual immorality does not just change because we pray for it. The agent of reformation is the truth: "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32). Prayer must be incarnated in declarations and demonstrations of the truth.

That's probably enough to explain why we begin Prayer Week with a text on the Word of God. The Word inspires, informs and incarnates prayer. They go together, because Word and Spirit go together. Word without Spirit is intellectualism. Spirit without Word is emotionalism at best, and probably syncretism. But the Word and the Spirit are kept together when we depend on the Spirit for help in all our dealing with the Word, and express that dependence in prayer.

### The Blessing of Delighting in God's Word

Now let's consider Psalm 1 and focus on delighting in and meditating on the Word of God. First, let's think about the blessing that comes from delighting in and meditating on the Word day and night. The Psalm begins, "How blessed is the man. . ." So you are drawn in right away: do you want blessing in your life? The word means "happy" in the rich, full sense of happiness rooted in moral and mental and physical wellbeing.

But now who is this happy person? The one who does not do something and the one who does do something. The happy person does not "walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!" (verse 1). But what does the happy person do? Verse 2: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night." So, instead of finding his pleasures in the words or the ways or the fellowship of the wicked, the one who is truly happy finds pleasure in meditating on the Word and the ways of God. ("Law," Torah, = instruction: God's Words about God's ways.)

Now the point of the psalm is to say that when you experience the Word of God like that - as so delightful and so satisfying that it captures your mind and heart day and night and weans you away from the counsel and path and seat of the world -when you experience the Word like that, you are blessed. You are happy.

### The Person Who Delights in the Word of God

Then, in verse 3, it gives us three illustrations of that happiness. The first one is that the person who delights in the Word of God and meditates on it day and night will be "like

a tree firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season." The second one is that the person who delights in the Word of God and meditates on it day and night will be like a tree whose "leaf does not wither." And the third is that the person who delights in the Word of God and meditates on it day and night "will prosper in all that he does."

Let's think about each of these for a moment.

### 1. Fruitful

If you delight in the Word of God and meditate on it day and night you will yield your fruit in season. You will be a fruitful person. O for more fruitful people! You know them. They are refreshing and nourishing to be around. You go away from them fed. You go away strengthened. You go away with your taste for spiritual things awakened. Their mouth is a fountain of life. Their words are healing and convicting and encouraging and deepening and enlightening. Being around them is like a meal. This is the effect of delighting in the Word of God and meditating on it day and night. You will yield fruit in season.

### 2. Durable

The second illustration of your blessing if you delight in the Word of God and meditate on it day and night is that your leaf does not wither. The point here is that the hot winds are blowing and the rain is not falling and all the other trees that are not planted by streams are withering and dying, but in spite of all the heat and drought, your leaf remains green, because delighting in the Word of God and meditating on it day and night is like being planted by a stream. The happiness of this person is durable. It is deep. It does not depend on which way the wind is blowing or whether the rain is falling. It gets its life from an absolutely changeless source: God in his Word.

The person who delights in the Word of God and meditates on it day and night speaks like the prophet in Habakkuk 3:17-18: "Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

(A Thought on Y2K)

This might be a place to say a word about the Y2K scare. Do you want a prophetic word about Y2K? I have two prophetic words about Y2K. First, the greatest need on January 1, 2000, will not be basements stocked with food and water and generators, but hearts stocked with the Word of God. You will be fruitful, you will flourish, you will be life-giving not by seeking the very things the world seeks (Matthew 6:32), but by delighting in the Word of God and meditating on it day and night. What the world will need and does need from the church is the Word of God that fits us to say, "Who will

separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:35-37).

The other prophetic word about Y2K is this: Nothing is going to happen on January 1, 2000, nothing, that is as bad as what is already happening to persecuted and starving Christians in Sudan. Or to the staggering number of orphans in Malawi and other AIDS-devastated countries of Africa. Or to survivors in Honduras and Nicaragua. Or to lonely, dying old people in dozens of skilled care centers around the Twin Cities who have outlived their families. There is something that smells of hypocrisy in the talk about stockpiling supplies in our homes to "minister" to others in the coming Y2K crisis when there are more places to minister this very day that are worse crises than anything that is going to happen a year from now. Y2K will happen to someone every day in 1999 - many of them within your reach.\* Delight yourself in the Word of God, meditate on it day and night, and then take the fruit of your life and go minister to the lost and the hungry and the thirsty that are already so many. Then you won't even notice when Y2K happens.

### 3. Prospering (Really?)

3. But now that leads to the question raised by the third illustration of blessing and happiness in verse 3. "And in whatever he does, he prospers." Really? What does this mean? Does it mean that, if you delight in the Word of God and meditate enough, your business will make a big profit and your health will always be good and there will be no food shortages or car accidents or violence against your house?

Well, there are some reasons to believe that such a person will have some of those blessings. For example, when you delight in God's Word instead of walking in the counsel of the wicked and standing in the way of sinners and sitting in the seat of scoffers, you will be doing the kinds of things that God approves of, and he is likely to bless what he approves. And when you are delighting in the Word of God, you are trusting it, and we know God works for those who trust him and wait for him (Isaiah 64:4; 2 Chronicles 16:9).

But there are reasons to believe that God does not always spare his most faithful people. There are many passages of Scripture that tell us "many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19; cf. Acts 14:22). Psalm 73 expresses the reality that often the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. The answer of that Psalm and this one is: Behold what becomes of them in the end (Psalm 73:17).

Psalm 1 says, "The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (verses 4-5). When this Psalm ponders the value of being wicked or of delighting in the Word of God, it measures the value finally by what happens at the

judgment. There may be some prosperity in this life for the wicked, but in the end they will be swept away like chaff, but those who have delighted in the Word of God will go on flourishing because God sets his eye and favor on them. He "knows" their way.

So the blessing, the happiness, referred to in verse 1 is a life that is nourishing and fruitful for others, a life that is deeply durable in the face of drought and a life whose "labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58), but succeeds in God's good purposes into eternity. That's the blessing of delighting in the Word of God and meditating on it day and night.

### What Is Meditation?

Now what does this meditation involve? The word "meditation" in Hebrew means basically to speak or to mutter. When this is done in the heart it is called musing or meditation. So meditating on the Word of God day and night means to speak to yourself the Word of God day and night and to speak to yourself about it.

Here is where I plead with you to get involved in the Fighter Verse memory program or some other pattern of Bible memorization. Unless you memorize Scripture you will not meditate on it day and night. But O the benefits and delights of knowing communion with God hour by hour in his Word. If you have ever wondered, What is hour-by-hour walking in fellowship with the living God? the answer is: it is his speaking to you by his Word through your memory and meditation and illumination and application and your speaking to him words of thanks and praise and admiration and desire and seeking for help and guidance and understanding. The Word is the basis for your hearing him and for his hearing you. The depth and solidity and certainty of your walk with God and your communion with God will rise and fall with whether God's own written Word is the warp and woof of the fabric of your fellowship.

Let me just give you an example of how this works in my own life. As I was coming to the end of the year and reading the final pages of the Old Testament in the Minor Prophets, I was moved by Micah 7:18. It is the foundation of a favorite hymn of mine, "Who Is a Pardoning God Like Thee?" by Samuel Davies. So I memorized it and carried it around on the front burner of my mind for several days. It says, "Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love."

One of the insights that I discovered and tasted with tremendous pleasure was that God does choose to be angry, but his anger is limited. Why? Because he "delights in steadfast love." This means that anger is not God's favorite emotion. He "delights" in love. This has huge implications - practical ones -about my life and my own anger and love as I rest in him. And theological ones, as I ponder the levels of willing in God: willing to be angry in his holiness at sin, and yet not delighting to be angry the way he

delights to show steadfast love. I was fed by this text for several days before I moved on to another front-burner text.

So I urge you to memorize Scripture, and meditate on it day and night. It will change your life in many good ways.

What if Meditation and Prayer are Drudgery?

Finally, we must ask about this delight. The deepest mark of this happy person in Psalm 1 is that he delights in the Word of God (verse 2). Bible reading and Bible memory and meditation are not a burden to him, but a pleasure. This is what we want. What a sadness when Bible reading is just a drudgery. Something is wrong.

What shall we do? Well, we will say more next week, but let's close considering this. We struggle with Bible reading and memory and meditation because we don't find pleasure in it. We have other things we want to get to more. TV or breakfast or work or newspaper or computer. Our hearts incline to other things and do not incline to the Word. And so it is not a delight.

Did the psalmists ever struggle with this? Yes they did. Take heart. We all do. How shall this be changed? This is Prayer Week, and so the answer we will stress is that it is changed through prayer. This is what I will focus on next week. We must pray for God's enabling to help us delight in his Word. This will be clear from the way the psalmists pray. I hope you will come back and hear the help that the psalmists give us not only to pray without ceasing, but to do it with delight.