

“A Blessed Life”

Psalm 1

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Well, I hope you had a wonderful Christmas! There is nothing like spending extended time with those you love. I trust you had a great day yesterday, and am REALLY glad that you have chosen to worship with us on this last weekend of 2021.

Illus. Holy Land – One year from today many of us will be getting on a plane, Lord willing and heading to the Holy Land. (**SHOW PROMO SLIDE**) I really want to encourage you to consider going on the trip if at all able...we'll have some information meetings coming up about it, but there's just nothing like spending the New Year watching the fireworks go off over the city of Jerusalem.

And speaking of the new year, I know that for many 2022 can't get here soon enough!

But before going there, I do want to tell you, Church what a blessing this past year has been for me and my family. We LOVED spending our first Christmas here in Houston and I just want to say thank you again for how you have loved and received us.

A couple of weeks ago, my wife leaned up to me in worship and just whispered, “I love our church.” And that really is our heart! We love you and are so looking forward to beginning our second year with you.

We've accomplished a lot in 2021. I won't go into much detail, but when you look at it, it's just amazing all that God has done.

- We made some incredible hires...brought some amazing team members on – like Durell and John Wills and Jeff Young. – to name a few.
- We were able to celebrate our 50th year as a church...that was certainly a highlight...seeing so many people come back and just give thanks together to God for these last 50 years as a church.
- We casted the vision for our Residency Program which starts in Jan...we'll have 3 seminary students starting with us in January and already up to 12 signed up to start between May and September. The goal is to have 20 residents working here on our team while they are getting their seminary education. (6 Spanish in Jan.)
- We had our first CF Connect gathering in Nov. This is a ministry designed to help pastors in need, connect them to our church and connect pastors to one another to help churches...we had our first gathering back in November (**SHOW PIC**) – spent a day at the Lanier Library which are incredible partners in ministry and we are working hand in hand with them via the residency program and CF Connect.

- We were by a miracle of God able to get out of debt this year and launched our FORWARD giving campaign that raised right at 9 million dollars. We will be bringing you some pictures of what we're going to be doing soon!
- We just came off of Christmas Spectacular where we saw over 1100 decisions for Christ.
- And get this church, today with the baptisms going on at all of our campuses we should be right at 650 baptisms on the year. It will be the highest number of baptism in our history...and keep in mind this is right in the middle of Covid for the most part!

God has been so good to us and I am praying for more of the same in 2022. He has "BLESSED" us. And this is what I want to talk about in the message today.

I want to talk about what I'm calling: **A Blessed Life.**

This is what Psalm chapter one is all about. I want to read it all and then we'll come back and look at it in detail.

Psalm 1:1-6 – "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 that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴The 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, but the way of the wicked will perish."

I know with the turning of a calendar page this will begin resolution time for many of us, right? For some it's going to mean getting in shape and attempting to drop a few pounds. For others it will be about dropping a bad habit or trying something new – I'm going to do my very best to learn Spanish this year! Wish me luck.

We all look for ways this time of the year to try and improve our lives...to do things that will seemingly make us more successful and happy in life.

And that's actually what the term "blessed" means here in (v. 1).

"Bless-ed"! It could read, "oh, the happiness of the man" or "how very blessed...how extremely fulfilled is the man". There is a certain intensity to this word...it's in its plural form.

A popular modern day paraphrase – me being from Louisiana, this helps me out. Phil from Duck Dynasty would say "happy, happy, happy" is the man. If you are looking for:

- happiness to the uttermost...
- true satisfaction and fulfillment in life...

If you are looking to have “A Blessed Life” in 2022, the psalmist here is going to tell us how we can attain it!

And to make this message today as simple as possible, I’m going to give two very short statements that encapsulate the entirety of the Psalm for us.

Here’s the first statement. If you want “A Blessed Life” then we need to: **Avoid Sin**

Now, one of my pet peeves as a pastor is to be an angry preacher! I don’t want to be known as the legalistic preacher - always telling people what they’re against! I really believe the world needs to know what we as believers are for!

However, if I am to preach this text with a clear conscience, I have to preach what it says! And it’s VERY clear here that we are to be against sin...that we are to avoid sin!

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”

Biblical wisdom has as much to do with what we say “no” to...and what we avoid as it does with what we say “yes” to...what we embrace!

Now, it sounds easy to say, doesn’t it? “Avoid sin!” But we know in our day and time that’s not the easiest thing in the world to do! In fact, it sometimes seems like sin is chasing us down doesn’t it?

Well, that’s because it is! It’s no secret, we have an Enemy that is constantly bombarding us and tempting us to sin. Combine that with the fact that we have a sin nature that loves sin and even craves sin. So, avoiding sin sounds good, but how on earth are we supposed to do it?

Well, we can’t avoid it all together, but we can put ourselves in a position to avoid it to the best of our ability.

It’s like Luther said – “we can’t stop a bird from landing on our head, but we can stop it from building a nest there!”

Illus. Football Bowl season – I liken it to a football coach. A coach’s job is to put his team...his players in a position to win...that’s what his job is!

I think there are two primary influencers that have the strongest effect on us as it relates to avoiding sin. We see them both in this verse and if we handle them in the right way, we can put ourselves in a position to win spiritually and have a happy, blessed life.

And listen, this goes both ways. These influencers in our life can help us avoid sin – be happy/blessed... OR help us fall into sin – be unhappy and miserable. Two influencers:

- 1. Our Friends**
- 2. Our Time**

Show me who your friends are, and how you spend your time and I can pretty much gauge how happy/satisfied/fulfilled in life you will be in life.

The wisdom in this Psalm teaches the truth of **1 Cor. 15:33** – **“Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals.”**

Prov. 13:20 – **“Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companions of fools will suffer harm.”**

The unhappy man hangs out and is friends with the ungodly man:

- this is who he listens to...
- gets his counsel from...
- and it's who he spends the majority of his time with!

Did you notice the downward progression of (v. 1)? This man goes from walking with the ungodly and just listening to them...to standing amongst them – in the way with them...to sitting with them!

It's been said that sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want to pay. And it's true!

We listen to those we spend time with...and these two things – who are friends are and how we spend our time will determine to a large degree how blessed our life will be!

See, what we learn in this psalm is blessing and happiness doesn't come from:

- How much we have...
- What the world thinks of us...
- It doesn't come from the mountains we climb...
- The accomplishments we achieve...

We know this is true, don't we? I mean we can look at the world around us, some of which have all of these things and they are the most miserable people on the planet. Some of us know this from personal experience! We've achieved it all and still not sensed that inner fulfillment that can only come from having a personal relationship with God and walking in his way.

Listen: Mark this...highlight this: True blessedness...true happiness comes from being rightly related to God AND avoiding ANYTHING in our life that is against or in opposition to God!

So, who are you hanging around and how are you spending your time?

I'm NOT telling you, you can't be friends with people who don't know Jesus – we know Jesus was a “friend of sinners” – but he didn't endorse their behavior, take their advice or participate in what they were doing.

As one person I read stated it: “Don’t listen to...linger around...or laugh with those that are opposed to God!”

You won’t like what it produces in your life! I assure you it won’t lead to a blessed life! I have marked in my Bible outside the margins of these verses this equation:

$$\begin{array}{c} \textbf{The Company You Keep} \\ + \\ \textbf{The Counsel You Heed} \\ = \\ \textbf{The Character You Produce} \end{array}$$

It does! And if we want godly character we better guard your associations and take note of how we are spending our time!

Illus. Be careful little eyes what you see! (ears what you hear, tongue what you say, hands what you do, feet where you go – there’s a Father up above looking down in tender love...)

Avoid sin. But, look...it’s not just what we avoid that counts! Happiness/blessedness is also determined by what we pursue. So, while we avoid sin – that’s v. 1.

We are also to: **Pursue God**

Psalms 1:2 – “but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

Show me a humble man who is walking with the Lord...pursuing God and an intimate relationship with him and I will show you a happy and blessed man.

There is a sharp contrast being developed here. The blessed life is marked by what one avoids as well as what one pursues.

While we say “no” to sin, we say “yes” to God...to his word. The psalmist here says, “Delight” in it...take joy in it! We should interpret the law of the Lord here as synonymous with all of scripture.

There is such incredible joy in reading, thinking on, contemplating...the psalmist uses the word “meditation” here...such joy in God’s Word.

We meet God in his word! It’s in his word that we discover the person of Jesus Christ. Nothing in life greater than God’s word!

illus. Meeting with a new believer – first verse we are memorizing.

Rom. 10:17 – “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Listen to how David describes God's word in **Psalm 19:7-11** – **“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”**

We are told delight in the law of the Lord...to meditate on it! There will be no meditating where there is no delight!

Martin Luther wrote in his lectures on the Psalms, volume ten: **“one does not meditate on the law of the Lord unless his delight was first fixed in it. For what we want and love, on that we reflect inwardly and diligently.”**

Illus. Dating Debbie – Think of it like this. When I was dating Debbie...when we first started talking, we would be emailing each other...and to use these terms, I “delighted” in knowing Debbie. And so, when I read her emails or after getting off the phone with her, what did I do? I would “meditate”...I would think about...I would recall...I would ponder everything she just said and what we had just talked about.

Meditation took place, because delight was present! Now, very quickly, let me get real practical here and I'm going to give you four ways to encourage this delighting in God's word.

Illus. Essential 100 – sign up to start the new year ([show link](#))

1. Pray for it.

I want to urge you to begin to pray and ask God for not only a desire for his word, but to truly delight in his word. I'll be the first to tell you that this “delight” is NOT something you can just conjure up! That's why I am telling you to pray for it.

For some, the first thing you need to do is be honest with the Lord and say, “You know what, God? I don't delight in your word...and to be really honest, most days I don't even desire it! But, I want to! Help me!” And he will!

Start by praying and asking God for sincere desire to know him and to delight in his word.

This is what Psalm 119 is all about...it's the longest chapter in the bible and to my count out of the 176 verses, 174 of them have to do with knowing God's word, keeping God's word and delighting in God's word!

2 Peter 2:2 – **“Like newborn infants long for the pure spiritual milk (Word of God), that by it you may grow up into salvation.”**

How sad is the rebuke found in **Heb. 5:12-14** - **“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”**

Begin today praying and asking God to give you a heart that desires and delights in his word. We don't want to stay infants craving milk, instead we want to desire the meat of God's Word!

2. Ponder it.

This is what the word meditate means! It actually carries with it the idea of murmuring. This is what happens when you memorize something. You murmur it over and over again!

Illus. Song can't get out of your head

This is what it means to ponder God's Word. I want to encourage you to take it...read it...and when a verse comes off the page and into your heart, STOP right there!

Read it...write it down (get you a journal – personal testimony)...think about it all day...reflect on what it means to you...what it says about God.

Chew on it like a cow chewing a cud. Over and over and over again...this is pondering God's word.

It's not easy...it takes time! And in our day where activity and busyness is seen as the norm, slowing down to ponder the truths found in God's word will be going against our nature and the stream of culture. However, it's vital that we do so.

Listen to what **Alistair Begg** and **Sinclair Ferguson** write in their book, *Name Above All Names* regarding meditating on God's word:

“Being able to think long and lovingly about the Lord Jesus is a dying art. The disciplines required to reflect on him for a prolonged period of time and to be captivated by him have been relegated to a secondary place in the contemporary Christian life. Action, rather than meditation, is the order of the day. Sadly, too often that action is not suffused with the grace and power of Christ.”

Grace and power...delighting in God comes from slowing down...taking the necessary time...and meditating upon...pondering the truths of God's word.

3. Personalize it.

By this, I mean to of course ask the Holy Spirit to apply whatever you are reading to your own life. Ask what is the text you are reading teaching about yourself and where is it leading you to change and repent.

But, even more so than that, when I say personalize the text, personalize it in the sense of asking yourself this question, “What does this text teach me about Jesus?”

This book is about a person and as you learn to delight in the person of Jesus, you will delight in his word.

4. Practice it.

This is where it becomes yours! And this is where the rubber hits the road. This is where faith becomes sight! We read God’s Word and then put it into practice.

You do this and watch how God honors obedience...how God honors your faith. I can guarantee you, you will begin to delight in God’s law.

“Happy is the man...blessed is the man who delights in God’s Word.” He meditates on it day and night...continually...he mulls over it...ponders it...thinks about it.

Go back to the friends and time question. What’s true for avoiding sin is the same for pursuing God. Your friends can help you in this.

Illus. Dad advice in college – “show me who your friends are and I’ll show you who you are!”

I pray every day for my girls to choose wisely their friends...because the saying is true. Show me who your friends are and I’ll show you who you are. This isn’t just wisdom for kids, it’s a good word for us adults too!

Get some friends that are running with Jesus and I guarantee you will want to run with Jesus too!

Illus. Life Groups – this is why LIFE GROUPS are so important!

So, how are you spending your time? Are you are filling your mind with God’s word or that which is opposite of the things of God (social media – hours...there’s no way!)

If you want to be happy and blessed it starts with avoiding sin and pursuing God...and the pursuit of God begins with a commitment to learning and knowing his Word.

Now, to end this psalm, we are given two images that stand in stark contrast to one another.

You know a picture really is worth a thousand words...much of Hebrew poetry is very picturesque. It’s meant to draw our attention and give us a deeper understanding of what the psalmist may be trying to communicate...we call it imagery in the scripture.

Well, that’s how this psalm ends...with some incredible imagery. The blessed man...the happy man is one who avoids sin and pursues God. And look at what his life is like.

Psalm 1:3 – “He is like a tree (stable) planted by streams of water (living) that yields its fruit in its season (productive), and its leaf does not wither (consistent). In all that he does, he prospers (grows).”

Jeremiah 17:7-8 – uses this same imagery – “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes (Notice: bad weather comes! Not exempt!), for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

So, this is the result and the reward of being in a relationship with God and living in a way that is pleasing and honoring to him. Our life will be fruitful, vibrant, alive – Blessed!

OR does this describe you?

Psalm 1:4-6 – “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, but the way of the wicked will perish.”

I told you incredible imagery...again, a picture is worth a thousand words and so let me give you these verses in a picture

Show Image One – (tree)

Show Image Two – (chaff)

I love this psalm! I love that we see two different ways to live...two different results of that living!

It's a stark difference – one is a life of avoid sin and pursuing God, the other of avoiding God and pursuing sin.

The choice is yours. If you want a happy and blessed life in 2022, it only happens by giving your life to Jesus and pursuing him all of your days.

Let's pray together.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.

