

# Psalm 1 - Wisdom

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[ 0 : 00 ] Folks, great to see you this morning. Happy New Year. It's great to see those who have been away over Christmas and New Year back with us. We've been in Edinburgh for seven years and this was the first time we've ever been here for New Year.

And it was great. We loved it. So, if you have your Bibles, turn to Psalm 1. It's where we're going to be this morning. So turn to Psalm 1. And I'm very excited that we're starting this year looking at Psalm 1.

While you turn there, let me encourage you, whoever you are here today and whatever is going on in your life, and whatever you think about the God that we've been singing about and praying to and worshipping this morning, whoever you are this morning, can I encourage you to tune in to the message of Psalm 1?

Because it's a psalm that has a timely message for us, whoever we are this morning, as we journey into 2019. So, Psalm chapter 1.

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

[ 1 : 19 ] He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither, whenever he does prospers. Not so the wicked.

They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

This is God's word to us this morning. Let's just quickly pray, and then we'll dive straight in. Heavenly Father, we worship you this morning. Thank you so much that you're the God of all grace. And we pray, Father, that as we turn to your words now, that you would help us to understand something more of your greatness.

And Father, you would teach us wonderful things about yourself. So we make these prayers not in our confidence, but we make them confidently in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, to get us to the heart of this psalm this morning, let me just tell you about an experience I had over Christmas and New Year.

Did anyone else watch a pantomime? Oh, yes, you did. Come on. Anyone else watch a pantomime? A few of us. So we, as a family, I sat down with the girls, and we watched this pantomime on CBeebies.

[ 2 : 36 ] Okay? Called Thumbelina. Thumbelina, let me just give you the heart of Thumbelina. She is on a journey of self-discovery to find out who she is.

And by finding out who she is, she finds out where the true source of happiness is. Now, who knew that CBeebies was so postmodern, I tell you. But this is Thumbelina. She's on a journey to find happiness.

And as she journeys through the pantomime, she meets different characters, and the different characters give her advice as to where she can find herself and find true happiness.

So, one of the characters she bumps into is called Mrs. Blue Swallow. And Thumbelina says, Can you help me, Mrs. Blue Swallow? And with it being a pantomime, Mrs. Blue Swallow didn't just speak to Thumbelina.

She sang to Thumbelina. I'm not going to sing it to you because I've got a cold, but it would have sounded great. Okay? But listen to the words of her song. Her advice went like this. Go where you will.

[ 3 : 38 ] Free as a bird. Just follow your heart to find your way in the world. Just close your eyes and dream of places. Perhaps your home is on the way.

This is what Mrs. Blue Swallow said to Thumbelina. Now, two thoughts went through my mind.

Firstly, what a lovely song. Yeah? I didn't sing it to you, but it was a lovely song.

The camera pans around, and honestly, there's not a dry eye in the house. And Chloe, at this point, is cuddling into me. It was a lovely song. That was my first thought, lovely song. Second thought, what terrible advice.

It's the anthem of your age, if you think about it, is it not? That let your feelings, let your desires, let your needs be the compass that guides you in life. And it's terrible advice.

For if you think about it, I don't know about you, but I can categorically tell you that this year, my heart primarily wants what's best for me and not for you.

[ 4 : 38 ] Right? And I can tell you that your heart wants what's best for you this year, and I can tell you the people of the world, everyone else in the world's heart, wants what's best for them.

Now, it doesn't sound to me like a very happy world to live in, does it? And what if I follow my heart, and I work hard, and I really go for it in life, and what if I don't get what my heart desires?

You get people like Geraint Thomas, you know, the guy who won the Tour de France this year, he said this after he won, he was interviewed, he said, Kids, if you just dream big, if people tell you it can't be done, just keep going and believe in yourself, because with hard work, everything pays off in the end.

Right? Tour de France winner. Which is great advice. That's great for you if you've won the Tour de France, right? But, we all know life well enough, if you've been around the block enough in life, you know that it's not as simple as that.

Just follow your heart is a lovely song, but it's terrible life advice. And God, our Maker, the one who, as the psalmist would say, who knows us, who framed us, he speaks to us about our hearts in his word, the Bible, and he tells us what our hearts are really like.

[ 5 : 57 ] He tells us that they are deceitful above all things. He tells us that they are terribly sick. He tells us that they are like stone.

They are dead. They are unfeeling without the transforming work of his spirit. So, God is quite clearly saying in his word, if there's one place you don't look for advice as to how you live your life in the world to find happiness, it's to your heart.

And so, the question that Sam asks us to consider is if my identity and true happiness is not to be found by following my heart or the things of the world, then where is true happiness to be found?

This is where Psalm 1 comes in this morning. Because God, through his word, through this psalm, offers us a timely bit of advice as we step into this year. Now, many commentators, they call this psalm the gateway to the psalms.

I don't know if you were on a New Year's walk, kind of a tradition that we do, a New Year's walk.

You know what it's like? You go on a country walk and you come to the start of the country walk and you see the signpost.

[ 7 : 03 ] And the signpost tells you what you need to know and the signpost tells you, don't go that way, go that way. That's exactly what this psalm does. That's why they call it the gateway to the psalms. It's Psalm 1, saying go that way.

And in so doing, in Psalm 1, we're presented with a big choice. They'll have discovered that, as you heard it read, this big choice that is the choice that's right at the heart of the rest of the book of Psalms.

And really it's a choice that when it comes to happiness, it's a choice that means that you're traveling on one of two roads to find it. You're traveling the path of the world or you're traveling the path of the word.

And the psalmist is going to show us in this psalm what the people on those two different paths look like. He's going to show us what the people on those two different paths, how they live. And ultimately he's going to show us what the people on those two different paths, where they're ultimately headed.

And in so doing, as we read this psalm, the psalmist is screaming at us, don't go the way of the world. Don't go the way of the world. Go the way of the word. And how he does it is that he tells us about a person who's on that path.

[ 8 : 19 ] And that man, do you see the first word of this psalm? You've got it there. That man, that person, he's blessed. Now the Hebrew word there carries the idea of happiness.

This literally could be, happy is the man. Happy is the man. That's this man. That's this person. They're happy. They're happy. It's what everyone wants these days, isn't it?

If you think about it. It's not just Thumbelina who's out to find happiness. Everybody wants to find happiness. But your New Year's resolutions that you made this year were geared towards you finding happiness in your life.

It was Aristotle, let me get my Greek out for you here, right? Aristotle who said that happiness is the meaning and purpose of life and it's the whole aim and end of human existence.

It's one of the founding principles, isn't it, of the American Declaration of Independence that everybody has the right to life, to liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness. This is how our world lives.

[ 9 : 17 ] And the thing about Psalm 1, the thing about the man of Psalm 1 is that he's found it. He's found it. He's blessed. And if he's blessed, if this person is blessed, if this person has found true happiness, then I'll put my hand in the air and say, I want to know where they found it.

I want to know that. I want to know where and how he's got it. So come with me to verses 1 and 2 of this Psalm and let's see how this man lives his life.

Now you'll notice, if you've got the text there, that there's three parallel phrases, parallel phrases, that's difficult to say, right? Parallel phrases. That'll look great on paper, I tell you.

That we get at verse 1, do you see, to describe this man, they're parallel, and we get essentially the same idea three times to hammer home the point concerning how he doesn't live his life.

Do you see them there? He doesn't walk. He doesn't stand. He doesn't sit. Many commentators will point to the fact that there's a downward progression there, walking, you're just living your life, standing, you're stopping to think about life, sitting, you've made your decision.

[ 10 : 30 ] He doesn't do these things. He doesn't walk, stand and sit in the ways of the wicked, the sinners, and the scoffers. Which I take it in the original context, he's thinking about those in Israel, and those ever since, who either actively or passively in their lives, they choose to live their lives with no interest in knowing this God, and no interest in a desire to keep his ways.

And they're in the path of the world. They own its values. They chase its dreams. They follow their hearts. But do you see how this man has said no to that path?

He said no to that path. I'm not on that path. How is he living? Verse 2, he's given his life to following the law of the Lord. That's what he's done in his life. Notice the capital letters there. Capital O, capital O, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. It's the covenant name of God there. So the psalmist, he's thinking about who his God is.

He's dwelling on the truth that this God is the God who has revealed himself mightily as he saved Israel from slavery in Egypt, revealed himself mightily, that he is the God of all gods.

[ 11 : 46 ] And this God has taken this people and he's so graciously and wonderfully bound them to him and him to them, saying, you are to be my people and I am to be your gods.

That's what the covenant is. That's what he's done. And he's given them his perfect law, his holy law that reveals his character. And he said, that's how I want you to live as my chosen people, as my covenant people.

And so the psalmist is reflecting on all that. He's thinking back and he's saying, in light of who this God is, the fact that he's so holy, that he's so gracious, that he is so awesome, that he's full of steadfast love, in light of who he is, in light of what he's done for us, why would I want to live my life anywhere else?

Why would I want to live my life according to a different set of standards? Or why would I want to live my life apart from relationship with the God who made me? Because my God, Yahweh the Lord, is that big, he is that great, and he's that good.

Do you see how he feels about the law of the Lord? He delights in the law of the Lord. Do you see it? He delights in it. Now the question we need to ask, isn't it, as we read that, is how has he got there?

[ 13 : 00 ] How has he got there? He meditates on it. That's what he does. Do you see that word? He chews on it. That's what to meditate means, not empty your mind, but to fill your mind.

He gets the word of the Lord into his bloodstream, and do you notice how he does that night and day to the delight and the benefit of his soul? My friends, I don't know how you respond as you read that this morning, but I read, I've been studying it all week, I've been meditating it all week, and I

read it again this morning, and I thought to myself, that's where I want to be.

That's where I want to be. You know, I've done this thing for the last few years. Every year I've got a new Bible, just make that my Bible for the year. Just take it everywhere, do my quiet times on it, do my visiting with it, and I picked it up this year, January 1st, and I read this psalm, and in my mind I thought, Lord, would you help me delight more this year in your word?

Would you help me delight more this year in your word? You know, my former colleague John, when he was here, he always used to joke about how I was terrible at doing one thing.

I've got your attention with that, right? Terrible at doing one thing. Do you know what that thing was? I couldn't make a decent cup of tea. And the thing what I used to do, used to go into that kitchen right there, and in my haste to get on with whatever I was doing, I would dunk the tea bag in, I would literally give it about 10 seconds, and I would take it out again, throw it in the bin, and I would take it through to him.

[14:25] You need friends who tell you the loving hard truths in life, don't you? He said, I was terrible at making a cup of tea, and the reason was, is that I didn't let it brew. I didn't let it brew. I didn't have the time to let it brew.

I was busy. I was doing things. I didn't let it brew. Here is a man who is allowing the word of God to brew in his life. And you see, because he's doing that, it's delighting his soul.

Friends, is it any wonder that often our affections for the Lord often go stale? Our love for him goes so often dim when we often go days without feasting and nourishing our souls on his word.

Spending time with him, reflecting on who he is as we encounter him and his word. Let me ask you, are you delighting your soul in the Lord? Are you making time for that to happen?

There was George Muller, the Christian evangelist who set up many orphanages down in Bristol, down in the south of England. He used to say that the first and greatest primary business of his day, that which he ought to attend to, was to have his soul happy in the Lord.

[15:40] A man with so many pressing demands on his day. And that is where he wanted to start his day, getting his soul happy in the Lord. Now listen, you've got to get our theology right on this one.

God won't love us more or less based on whether we've spent time reading his word or not. We've just got to get our thinking right on that one. We're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and Christ alone. We'll come back to that later on.

This isn't about working our way up to God. This is about getting to know God more as we spend time getting to know his word more. This is who he is.

Tells us who he is. I had a friend of mine recently who he, I heard him talk about how he asks himself as he reads his Bible in the morning, he asks himself what is it about what he's reading that causes him to delight in who God is more.

And what he does is he just takes a pen, he underlines it, he circles it, he tries to memorize it, and he prays and offers thanks to God for who he is. The essence of that is how this man lives his life, right?

[16:45] This is how he lives his life. His happiness is in the word of the Lord. And because of that, look at verses 3 and 4, this is where we are now. Look at what this man sees in his life.

So this man who's chosen the way of the word, this man who delights his soul in the God of the word, this man who's let God be in the driving seat of his life, do you notice the simile that we get here?

What is he like? He's like a tree. Not just any old tree, he's like a tree that's planted in that he's got his roots right down, established, and nourished by streams of water.

Is that not a wonderful image? Is that not a beautiful image of life and health? And there's fruit in this man's life. You see it? There's fruit in this man's life.

I don't know about you, but I love in my life being around fruitful people. Something that came out so clearly from what Paul said about Bruce and Kate. Sam 1 people, friends. They're just great to be around.

[17:52] We look forward to seeing them. I don't know if you've got people like that in your own life that you can think about. I think about Alex and I. We've got two good friends who we love to spend time with. We just love to be around them because of this reason.

Because when you're around them, the fruit of godliness, I can see it just oozing out of them. The way that they pray, the way that they talk, the way that they laugh. And we call them radiators.

That's what we joke about them.

Radiators. Because we spend time with them, we come away, and we feel warm, and we feel encouraged. And do you notice that the fruit of this person's life is produced in season? You see that there? Which I take it means that you see fruit when you'd expect to see fruit, which is a wonderful thing to think about, isn't it, as we sit on another year that will be full of different seasons.

I have no idea what the life seasons of 2019 will be like. I've got no idea what they will be like. But I'd imagine that the life weather forecast will be a lot like last year's.

[ 18 : 54 ] There'll be some sunny days, there'll be some rainy days, there'll be some patch drizzle that will be mixed in with the occasional spells of sunshine. That will be the year ahead, I'm sure. But friends, as I look back on the past few years, it continues to be one of the greatest joys for me doing this job to see some of you as you hit rocky seasons in your life, you produce godly fruit.

So often the case, isn't it, that as the seasons of life as they change, they reveal what's really going on deep down in our hearts. And I see some of you respond to uncertainties, respond to exam disappointment, respond to job loss, and respond to losing loved ones.

And I see you respond to it, not by running away from the Lord, but by pressing into him in prayer.

Because no matter what's going on in my life, I know he's constant.

I know my life will change. I know the circumstances of my life will change, vary. But he's not going to change. And that tells me a lot about where the roots of your life are.

They're right down here. You're like Sam 1. Your roots are right down there. Now I think at the back of our flat, there's a massive woodland park and it's full of giant oak trees.

[ 20 : 13 ] And the thing about those trees, I often look at them and I think, they didn't just spring up overnight. They're there because somebody decades ago, maybe even centuries ago, I don't even know, made a decision that this tree needs to be planted right here.

It's going to be planted right here. And as they grew and grew and grew, they continued to produce fruit so that come the winter of 2018, when I looked at them, that as the winds and the gales and the rain blew at them, they stood tall.

They stood tall. I wonder if this year and maybe even right now in this service, it's time for you to decide in your life that you're going to take a leaf, pardon the pun, you're going to take a leaf out of Mr. Sam 1's book.

And you're going to say to yourself, and pray to the Lord, saying, Father, I'm going to plant myself right here, in this psalm, in the word of the Lord. I'm planting my life right here.

Because this man who has his life planted in the word of the Lord is like a tree planted by streams of water. A lovely image. Prospering, growing, standing.

[ 21 : 24 ] It's a wonderful image. But you see how that's not the case for those who are in the path of the world. What's the simile that he picks to describe them?

They are like chaff. Do you see it? I've lived in a city so long, I didn't even know what chaff was. I had to Google it. It's the empty husks that are left over when the farmer threshes the field and which the wind just blow away.

They give the impression of life, but there's nothing inside. They're substanceless. They're rootless. They're unstable. That's what the lives of those who live without God, live without knowledge of his words, trying to find their own way, following their own heart.

That's what their lives are like. So when uncertainty comes in life, as looks fade in life, as jobs are lost in life, as death comes in life, they fret and they crumble because they have got nothing to cling to.

As the circumstances of life change, their hearts change as well. There's nothing to ground them. Why? Because their lives are built on things.

[ 22 : 31 ] Their happiness is derived from things that will be here today and gone tomorrow rather than on the unchanging God. I know someone shared a quote with me recently from Russell Brand.

I've all heard of Russell Brand. From a recent interview with Jeremy Paxman, definitely all heard of Jeremy Paxman. Jeremy Paxman asked him about his fame in life and whether it brought him happiness and he said this and hear this, Russell Brand, you realise you need nutrition from a higher source.

It's like being presented with the most glorious meal but when you start eating it, you realise there's no sucker, there's no nutrition and it's tiresome. It's reflecting on his fame and what fame's brought

him.

There's no sucker, there's no nutrition and it's tiresome. Do you see how that's the testimony of a man who's chewing on chaff? That's not the man of Sam 1.

It's not the person of Sam 1. He isn't a malnourished man. His life is like a healthy tree because his happiness, his life, is rooted in the word of the Lord.

[ 23 : 42 ] And because of that, see verses 5 and 6, it's what this man, where this man goes rather. The psalmist wants to know that these two paths, these two paths, these two ways to live, they've got two very different endings.

Let me flick it back. I gave the game away. You'd be surprised when that comes. Okay. But do you see how he's saying these two very different ways to live, they've got two very different endings. God will make a distinction.

Do you see the promise between his people and the wicked? Those who have ignored God, those who have decided to go their own way, they will not stand in the judgment. When God brings all wrongs to right, they will not stand, they will not have the last laugh because God will have the last word.

That's what this psalm is telling us. And they will perish. But the righteous, do you see the wonderfully, wonderful relational promise here, the Lord watches over and he knows the way of the righteous.

What a glorious and an intimate truth that the Lord's people can carry around with them all the time. That this God, his character never changes. That this God, his promises are true.

[ 24 : 58 ] That this God, his purposes are on track. And that this God knows the way. He knows. It's a wonderful intimate term, isn't it? He knows what's going on in their lives. He knows them and he knows their way and he watches over them.

Here is a man whose happiness is in the word of the Lord. And so the psalmist says, as we read this here, he says, have a look at this person. Straight off the bat, as you come into the book of Psalms, have a look at this person.

Look what their life is like. Look what they're basing it upon and learn from this person. And get on this path. Get on this path, the way of the word. That's the wisdom of Psalm 1.

That's the wisdom of it. But the thing for us to see, just as we finish off this morning, as we work towards a close, is that this is not a moralistic sermon.

This is not pushing us towards moralism, okay? This is no, as I like to call it, this is no cowboys and Indians sermon. You've probably heard tons of them in your life if you've been around church long enough.

[ 26 : 02 ] The kind of sermon that said the world is full of baddies and it's full of goodies. So we just stop behaving like a baddie and start behaving like a goodie. And everybody goes, that's a cowboys and Indian sermon, isn't it?

Nobody wins with those kind of sermons because we don't win because we leave here set up for a fall. And God doesn't win because he is made out to be a religious taskmaster who's setting us impossible standards, that which we cannot keep.

But the answer to this psalm is to be found not simply by just looking to the choice that it forces us in the direction of, but it's to be found in the person that it pushes us in the direction of.

Because this psalm ultimately, primarily, is not about me. I once heard a preacher say, and I loved this, he said, you're so vain, you probably think this verse is about you.

This is not about me ultimately. This psalm is a description of Jesus, isn't it? He's the ultimate Psalm 1 man. He's the king of Psalm 1.

[ 27 : 10 ] If you're a Christian here this morning, gaze at Psalm 1 and see the life of your king. Your king. This is his righteous life. And it's his righteous life that makes him qualified to be our saviour king.

Think about it. Think about his life. Because we see it in the Gospels. In light of everything that we've thought about this morning, think about his life. You know, I love it when, in Matthew's Gospel, the Pharisees send people to Jesus, and they start off with, Jesus, we know that you're a man of integrity.

Jesus, we know that you're a man who teaches the truth. Jesus, we know you're a man who's not swayed by the opinion of others. Right? That's what they saw in his life. A Psalm 1 man sold out to the word of the Lord, delighting in it.

Delighting to do the will of his Father. And what did he see in his life? Think about it in the most intense season of his life, as we see it in John 17, in the garden.

What's he doing? When all his disciples around about him are panicking, they're running, they're questioning, they don't know what's going on. What's he doing? He's praying. And through sweat drops of blood, he is trusting the Lord.

[ 28 : 22 ] That's what the fruit of his life is. And where did he go? Well, because of his determination to do the will of his Father, that saw him travel all the way to the cross.

God exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, the name of the risen Jesus, this king, one day every knee will ultimately bow. Jesus is the ultimate Sam 1 man.

He's the ultimate Sam 1 man. And praise him that, and this is the gospel, isn't it, that Jesus saw me and he had compassion on me, saved a wretch like me as one who was by my very nature on the worldly path, wanted nothing to do with him, was on the path marked destruction, and Jesus had mercy on me.

He died for my sin that I might not perish, and by the power of the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to see the path that I was on and picked me up, took responsibility for my sin, and put me on the path marked the way of the word.

Friends, we are saved by grace, not by works, saved by faith in the Sam 1 king. And this Sam 1 king, now that he's made me his own, calls me to be a Sam 1 person, calls me to be this kind of person.

[ 29 : 48 ] Words of English hymn writer William Cooper, to see the law by Christ fulfilled, to hear his pardoning voice, changes a slave into a child, and changes duty into choice.

Friends, as we close, do you remember the advice of Mrs. Blue Swallow? Do you remember that? What does she say? To find Thumbelina, to find out who she is, to find out true happiness. Where should she go? Where should she look? To the heart. Well, let me just tell you, and let's close with this, another piece of wisdom I heard over Christmas time, and it came from the Royal Palace.

Did anyone see the Queen's speech on Christmas Day? Okay, I didn't. I googled it afterwards, but another piece of advice was offered, wasn't it, if you think about it, to our world. A speech that the Queen made on Christmas Day.

She talked about the joys and the struggles of the year gone by, the delights of the years gone by, and she talked about the challenges of the year ahead. Now, I have no idea where the Queen is before the Lord.

[ 30 : 49 ] I don't know what's going on there, but I know what she did say after this. She said this. Only a few people acknowledged Jesus when he was born. Now billions follow him.

I believe his message of peace on earth and goodwill to all is never out of date. It can be heeded by everyone. It's needed as much as ever.

The Queen is saying, look to Jesus. Someone is saying, look to Jesus. Friends, as we stand here as a church community on the cusp of another year, let's make this year about an all-out pursuit of Jesus Christ.

Let's find our all-in-all in who he is because our identity, our true happiness is not to be found in following our hearts or the things of the world.

Our identity and our happiness is to be found by looking to Jesus, our Savior, our King, and our brother. My favorite old hymn, Trust and Obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey.

[ 31 : 57 ] Let's pray together. blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

And so, Heavenly Father, in the silence now, we offer you our own prayers, knowing that you are the one who knows our hearts.

and so, Father, in the silence now, I pray that as we respond to your word that you would speak to us. Our Heavenly Father, we long for the truths of Psalm 1 to be true for us this year, to be true for us right now in our own hearts.

I pray that you would help us by your spirit to have a new resolve to be people who are sold out for you and who hang our lives on your every word, who are people who live not by sight but by faith and that we would find our identity and our happiness by fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ.

And it's in his wonderful name that we confidently know and pray knowing that you hear us. In Jesus' name, Amen.