

FAITH
FAITH FOR FRUIT

Psalm 1

Happy Father's Day. Dads, we have a gift for you. I think it's going to be a real encouragement to you. It's a Psalter, a copy of the Psalms. It has a devotion with each psalm and I believe it's going to be a real blessing to you.

Today is a very happy day for me and also a very sad day. It's a very happy day because my six kids will call me and bless me and express their love and affection. My wife will make me feel even more special than she does every day. My daughter who is in town will come by with her husband for a free meal. They will give me gifts. It's a wonderful day to celebrate the goodness of God in our family.

It's also a very, very sad day for me. My dad unexpectedly went home to be with the Lord just two or three days ago. Many of you are aware of that and you've been expressing your love and encouragement to me with so many texts and emails and phone calls. Please, hopefully you'll understand I've not been able to respond to most of those, but your love has been such an encouragement.

So, it is a very sad day in experiencing this unexpected loss. My Dad was just an amazing man of God. He pastored this church for many years in the 1980's, then led our missions effort for over a decade. It would be absolutely impossible to summarize the significance of this tremendous man of God in my life, and his influence even on this church.

Today as we open the scripture, I think Psalm 1 is a fitting passage for us in light of Father's Day and even what I'm experiencing, because in many ways my Dad was an expression of what is captured here. What I'd like to do is read the psalm and then for us to look at it together. So please follow along in Psalm 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;
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.
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 used to have a Sunday morning practice of calling my Dad early in the morning, generally while I would be here at the office praying, going over the sermon one more time, preparing my heart for the day. I would have a conversation with him and he would bless me. He would pray for me on the phone and speak blessings on my life. He would affirm what he saw God doing in my life.

This was really remarkable in that as a boy growing up in South Georgia, he never experienced verbal expressions of love. The first time he heard his father tell him that he loved him, his father was on his deathbed. It's not that my grandfather was a bad man. It was not unusual in that generation to have no physical affection and no verbal expression of love. The Spirit of God had really softened my Dad's heart.

My Dad was an incredibly stubborn man. I thought he was too stubborn to die, actually, so I'm totally in shock at his passing. There was an amazing strength about his life. It was his theory that people became more of what they were as they got older. So if you met someone who was unusually mean in their old age, his theory was they were always that way; they just couldn't hide it anymore.

He became very sweet in his old age and expressed his love in wonderful ways to his family. He would bless me, and this psalm communicates a blessing. It's actually a wisdom psalm/song and it tells you how to live in the blessing of God. It pictures for you what it is to live a blessed life. **When God speaks his word of affirmation on your life, the result is true blessing, blessing for this life and all of eternity.**

You will find certain psalms throughout the psalter that are wisdom psalms. Usually they have this telling phrase: "Blessed are." "Blessed is this person." We have a picture here of a contrast between the wicked and the righteous

Faith – Faith for Fruit

Psalm 1 | Sunday, June 17, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

– those who are blessed of God and those who are judged of God. Those who are like a tree planted by a stream of water – strong, healthy, fruit-producing – even in difficult times their leaves are not withering, blessed of the Lord.

In contrast, there are those that are like the chaff, that are without foundation and blown about by the wind. This psalm comes to us as an introduction to the entire psalter, all 150 psalms. It's really an introduction to life. The psalms are poems, they are songs. It's an introduction, an invitation to live a life of worship unto the Lord. It asks you this question: **Are you living for God or are you living for something else?**

It's offering to you wisdom. It's offering to you perspective on life, on the world, on God, on yourself. It's offering for you this very vivid truth of how to see the world in which you live and where you would place yourself.

So today on Father's Day, we want to receive this wisdom from God's word. I'm going to give you three directives, three instructions from this psalm on how to live. The first one is:

I. **There are two ways to live.**

The entire psalm carries out this unwavering distinction. You are one of two people. There are, according to scripture, the wicked, and there are the righteous.

I remember when I was in high school coming home one night after curfew. Curfew was 11:00 for a high school senior in my home. My Dad believed there was no reason to be out after 11. He didn't care how old you were. I came home one night at 1:00 in the morning. I almost never did this. On this particular night, I did something that I probably only did once or twice while I was living at home, but I had had alcohol. I wasn't drunk, but it was forbidden in our home altogether. I came home two hours after curfew.

I don't know what possessed me to do this. I don't even remember. It was just a brief moment of stupidity. My Dad was sitting on the front step when I drove up. That's not a good thing, in case you are wondering. I walked up and I wanted to stay way away from him. He said to me, "Son, I don't know what you've been doing. I don't know what kind of choices you are making, but if you are going to live here you cannot do this, and you can never do it again. You either move out or you come home at curfew. Your mom and I have been worried about you. I'm going to bed." I said nothing. I offered no instruction. There was no instruction that he cared to hear.

Some of you may hear that and question that method of parenting. I'm not preaching on parenting. I'm not advocating, necessarily, this method, although I am advocating this, for sure. There was one thing about my father's life that was a testimony to me: **In our home we lived for the glory of God.** In that moment I had dishonored God. I

Faith – Faith for Fruit

Psalm 1 | Sunday, June 17, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

had disobeyed him. I had dishonored him. I had broken the fifth commandment. Our home stood for the glory of God.

Your life either stands for the glory of God or it doesn't. The scripture says there's no in between. In fact, the scripture tells us that there are many people who think that they are living for God, yet God does not view their lives in that way. The choices of our lives reflect the lord and the master of our hearts.

The psalmist is saying to us: You are living in one of two ways. You are not doing it perfectly. That's not the point. It's not that your devotion to God is without flaw or that it never is shaken, but it's just so simple for us. **The basic Christian confession is: Jesus is Lord.** In 1 Corinthians 12:3 the Apostle Paul said, "Let me be clear. No one can say 'Jesus is accursed' by the Spirit of God, and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit comes into our lives, he awakens us to spiritual truth, he awakens us to God. He awakens us to our need for a relationship with God, our need for forgiveness. And the Christian's affirmation is: "Jesus is the Lord of my life and everything belongs to him."

On a number of occasions as a pastor, I've been asked to give counsel in the sense of, "Should I do this? Do I have to do this? Can I do this?" On many of those occasions I've learned that someone will come and say, "Brian, tell me, do I need to be baptized?" Or, "Can I go and do this?" I've asked this question a number of times: "Listen, before we get into the subject of what you're asking, will you pray with me right now and purpose that no matter what the answer is, if it's clearly God, that you'll do it?"

I've actually had people in that moment say, "No, no, no. I want to know what it is before I commit to the answer to that question." I would have to say in those moments, "I don't know that I can help you." Because there's a more fundamental question that's really being asked here. Is God God in your life? And if God says, "Yes, you need to be baptized," will you follow him in baptism? Or whatever it is? Please don't get hung up on the particular illustration there.

In contrast, there are times when people will come to you and say, "Hey, if I become a Christian, do I have to give up _____? Fill in the blank. I always used to answer that question: "No, God doesn't care if you have a motorcycle." If you live in my home, Mom does, but God doesn't, perhaps. I've learned to say, "I don't know. You'll have to ask God." I don't know what God is going to say in your life.

Certainly, following God is not about a list of dos and don'ts. "I can do this, and I can't do that. Real Christians do everything a certain way." No, we are very diverse. You know the favorite question of the day is: Can I get a tattoo?

Faith – Faith for Fruit

Psalm 1 | Sunday, June 17, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

That question is getting old. I know I can't, unless I want to move out. Sorry, Babe. It sounds like I'm picking on you. Okay, my wife does not like motorcycles or tattoos, at least for me.

Listen, I understand the significance of the fact that tattoos are really irrelevant. God is after your heart. But you know what? A tattoo may be the way to your heart! Or it may be loving people with tattoos. Wow, I don't know – tattoos seem so irrelevant. I apologize to everyone here with a tattoo. I love you. God loves you. Certainly, you see through the illustration.

Romans 10:9-10: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, *you will be saved*. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Jesus alone perfectly lived the path of righteousness. We come to this truth: There are two ways to live. What is frightening is that as the Spirit of God moves on our hearts and brings conviction, we are all very aware: "I have failed to live the life that God wants me to."

Jesus perfectly lived a life to provide atonement for our sins. Sacrifice. Full payment for our sins, so that we can come to God and say, "God, I'm acknowledging that you made me, and you made me for a purpose. I failed to live according to the pathway that you set out for me."

This is sometimes particularly difficult if you grew up in a good home or you grew up in a family where truth was really laid out and you endeavored to do what was right, then have had to face the reality that you also are in bondage to sin, as we all are, and in need of a savior. **So, the confession, "Jesus is Lord" begins with the confession, "Jesus is my Savior." He comes. He delivers me from sin. He delivers me from death. My hope is in him. And now, by the strength that he gives, I desire to follow him as the Master of my life.**

So the first truth is: There are two ways to live. The second is:

II. Think long-term.

This is where, really, the wisdom is applied and demonstrated for us in the psalm. Often wisdom passages are trying to help us connect the results to the choice – the cause and the effect. We often don't do that well, because there is a delay. The effect is not directly connected to the cause in a way that we always make the connection.

The classic illustration is turning on the hot water. You turn on the hot water but the water is cold. You wait, you wait, you wait, and then the water gets hot. There is a delay in terms of the cause and the effect. The psalmist here is

Faith – Faith for Fruit

Psalm 1 | Sunday, June 17, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

saying to picture your life and know this: **Your life will be tested. The foundation upon which you build will be tested, and what your life is about will be revealed.**

So, my Dad, at 85 years of age was sitting in his chair, at his desk, in his little condo in Birmingham, reading his Bible when God took him. Isn't that amazing? He just fell out of his chair and went to see Jesus. I hesitate to say it this way, but I think it's helpful if I do. There are many things you can get wrong in life if you get this one thing right. **If your allegiance from your heart is to God, then the grace of God carries us through.**

The psalmist here is saying: Picture this tree planted by streams of water. It is yielding fruit. Its leaf does not wither. When you read 1 and 2 Chronicles, 1 and 2 Kings, the books of history in the Old Testament, and you come to the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah, you will find a summary statement of virtually every king, and it's one of two things.

- Hezekiah *did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.* Or,
- Manasseh *did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.*

An entire life is summarized, not with some great description, but at the end of life, when everything is done, a measure is taken and a conclusion is given. Manasseh himself was a wicked king, tragically. He was the son of a godly king. He was a descendant of the godly king, Hezekiah. The description of Manasseh's life was: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord." He was a wicked man. He practiced all kinds of false worship and idol worship. He sacrificed his children to idols.

It seemed like there were few consequences, but at the end of his life, Babylon overran Jerusalem. He was captured, he was bound, and he was led with hooks into imprisonment. The scripture is unafraid to say this was a consequence of his rejection of God. **The fruit of your life will catch up to you, and wisdom is the ability to see what the fruit of your life will ultimately be.**

For my wife and I, married now almost 31 years, there have been a number of decisions that we have made in life that have been sometimes perplexing to people that love us – the decision to go into ministry, the decision to have a lot of kids, the decision to adopt older children from Africa, the decisions regarding how we educated our children. The decisions on how we celebrated Halloween were even in question at one time. Please don't ask me how to celebrate Halloween. The point is, we were trying in our own imperfect way to say, **"How do we glorify God in our home?"**

Faith – Faith for Fruit

Psalm 1 | Sunday, June 17, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

The temptation is to say, “What were the answers to those questions?” They are important questions and the answers matter, but what matters so much more is a deeper, more fundamental question that’s under every other choice, under every other question: **Do I believe that this will glorify God?**

So, there are times when we will disagree over some important issues and important things. We had those battles in our home. “No, you’re not going to go to church in flip flops, I’m sorry.” Again, if you’re here in flip flops, maybe you have tattoos as well, you feel like you’re really getting picked on. That’s not the message, right?

We had to make those choices! And you know what, we believed they mattered, with all our hearts, very imperfectly. And at times we communicated them in a completely inappropriate way. We’ve gone to our children multiple times and said, “Please forgive us for the things that we failed at.” But there is a long-term result when we drive a stake in the ground and say, “I belong to Jesus.”

It’s not that everything will go well for you. That is not the point. In fact, there are going to be withering seasons. The point actually is: **There will be withering seasons and they will reveal what your life is about.** You will not come through those perfectly. You will not come through those flawlessly. You may break down. But if you belong to the Lord, there will be a strength in God that you can get nowhere else.

So, I believe God for the best. I believe God for my children to serve the Lord. I believe for my marriage to be blessed. I pray for health. I pray for God’s provision. I believe for the best in all those areas, but when God brings a test and ordains that I’ll be tested in this area, ultimately what results is a revelation of where I’m at with the Lord in my own faith in him.

I’ll speak to dads for just a moment. As a dad, there is a pull we have that’s very strong. We want to be successful. We want our kids to see us as successful. There is something genuine of the Lord in us that is driven to accomplish, to do. But I want to tell you, I absolutely believe this based on scripture, based on personal experience, based on my experience as a pastor: **Your family and the people around you will not ultimately measure you by your accomplishments, by your measurements, but by your heart. And is it for God?**

I would say, in a certain sense we rightly honor those who have accomplished great things, because it takes skill, it takes effort, it takes courage. We commend those things, but ultimately what we long for are hearts that serve the Lord and count for him.

I would say the Sermon on the Mount is probably the greatest sermon ever preached, Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. Jesus ends that sermon with what would best be described as an invitation. He tells a little story, a little parable about two individuals. One builds his house on the foundation of the sand, and one builds his house on the

Faith – Faith for Fruit

Psalm 1 | Sunday, June 17, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

foundation of the solid rock. When the storm comes, the one is washed away and the other stands strong. He says, “Those that stand strong are those that hear my words and obey them.” He is helping us understand that there are two ways to live. He is appealing to those that are hearing his sermon: Think long-term. Think about the long-term consequences of the choices that you are making today and measure them by the one ultimate choice: **Is Jesus the Lord of your life?** The fruit of your life will catch you.

As I shared, my wife and I made some wrong decisions. We made some right decisions. But one of the things that we’ve experienced is that we’ve had people that have known us for a long time and family members who have come back who have commended not our perfection, not how well we’ve done, but they’ve commended the fruit because they have seen God’s grace. Perhaps they’ve seen it most of all in times of difficulty when we feel like we’ve failed the most, but Christ has been so faithful. **Jesus is the Rock upon which to build.**

Let me share Galatians 6:9 for your notes: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” Again, just reinforcing a couple of other places in scripture to think long-term. Then in the negative, Paul, speaking to Timothy, his son in the Lord: “The sins of some people are conspicuous (that is they are obvious), going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.” **The fruit of our lives will eventually catch us.**

Our third and final point:

III. **Get started.**

This is an interesting part of the psalm, because he gives us a progression. He tells us to walk not, to not stand, and not sit. Walk not in the counsel of the wicked or the ungodly, nor stand in the place of sinners, nor sit amongst the scoffers. There is a progression here. I think it’s a helpful summary. The word “counsel” speaks of advice, instruction – so, thinking, behavior, or belonging. It is this progression that we go through in terms of the voices, the influences that we listen to, to whom we attach our allegiances, and the progression from thinking to acting to identity. Again, this distinction is being drawn for us. We are in one of two groups.

I had a situation one time where an adult young woman came to me. She was a late teenager and she had had an abortion. I ministered God’s grace to her. I tried to help her seek the forgiveness of the Lord. When she went and told her parents (this was probably 20 years ago), her parents came to me and were angry at me that I didn’t keep that knowledge from them.

Faith – Faith for Fruit

Psalm 1 | Sunday, June 17, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

It was a very difficult moment because I had to say, “Do you understand that what we are after here is your daughter’s heart? And that these actions are so monumental that she needs now to experience God’s grace? You are saying that your personal peace is more important than her spiritual health. I don’t know if you’re ashamed, but I’m ashamed of you. This is perhaps, of all your bad moments, your worst moment as a father. Not because she failed, but because your...”

Well, you get the point. Dads, it’s not better to not know, because you will stand before God and give an account for the gift of these children. My counsel to you is: Let your life stand for God so that God’s name is on it. Do it by the grace of God. Not your own perfection, not your own self-righteousness, but humble yourself before the Lord and say, “God, this is overwhelming. I need your grace. Meet me in this hour so that when I stand before you and give an account, it will be according to your grace.” Amen?

It’s like the young pastor who came to the old pastor and said, “You know, I’m frustrated that I don’t have more people in the church, that the church isn’t larger. The old pastor said, “Son, I suspect on the day of judgment you’ll be happy you didn’t.” Again, we are consumed, even pastors and preachers, with success. **May God grant us grace to be consumed with the glory of God, by his grace.**

There is this progression. Here’s what’s interesting. When he talks about the righteous, obviously the progression is assumed. In the positive we are told to avoid this. But we are told to delight and meditate – to delight in the law of God. I want to give you three prompts toward that. How do I delight in the law of God? Let me provide this for you.

Here is the best definition that I can give you in this moment for the law of God overall, from the whole scope of scripture. It is God’s will, founded on God’s grace. The message of God’s redemption: We failed to keep the law and we now receive forgiveness and give ourselves to following God and keeping the law by his grace. We are not under law in the sense that this is how we build our relationship with God, but we want to know what pleases God and we live that out by God’s grace.

Delight – three things.

1) **You have to be born of God.**

Jeremiah said, “A time is coming when God will give you a new Spirit. He will take away the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. God will write upon your heart and your children’s hearts the very will and desire of God. There is a place where we delight in God and God’s truth and God’s way because the Spirit of God has breathed on our hearts and given us spiritual life. That would be the first and most important message for anyone and everyone here. You are saying, “I’m not sure where I’m at with God. I’m beginning

with God. How do I delight?” It is to go and say, “God, forgive me of my sin. Come in. Breathe life on this heart. Save me. I’m trusting in Jesus Christ, that he died for my sin and was raised from the dead, conquering sin and death.

2) Secondly, **give all to God.**

Remove all barriers that keep God out of certain segments of your life. All of my life belongs to you, Lord. It’s a fearful thing when we really mean it. But then we understand that God’s desire for us as a perfect, loving Father – all wise, all knowing, all powerful -- is better than our desire for ourselves. Give all to God. **When we harbor and allow and defend secret sin, we erect a breach between us and God and our delight in the things of God.**

3) **Trust in Christ.**

Christ provides all that we need. This is really where duty – which is a part of what we are called to do, to be responsible to do the right thing -- where it is transformed into delight. As we learn to see that Jesus is actually working – Jesus in all of his beauty, in all of his majesty, and all of his excellency -- by his grace, he is working these things out in my heart. That leads us then to:

4) **Meditate.**

Let me give you two prompts here for the subject of meditation. When I come to scripture, what do I do? Just two things that might help you in that.

- **Talk to yourself.**
- **Talk to God.**

Walk through a passage like this and ask yourself questions. Repeat phrases. The literal Hebrew is “murmur to yourself.” You might say, “I wonder if there is _____.” Obviously, we walk, we stand, we are seated. What does that progression mean? What does that look like? What does that look like in my life? Just making connections and asking questions. Then ask God to give you insight. Ask God to help you, by his Holy Spirit, to open God’s word. Ask God about the things that don’t make sense to you.

In this particular passage, I was asking the Lord questions like: “Well, Lord, are you saying that life will always be easy? That we’ll always prosper if we follow you? And that whenever we don’t it’s because we haven’t chosen you? I’ve already shared some of what I think the answer to that is. No, there are going to be

times of testing, times of revelation that not only reveal where we are with God, but actually draw us to him to produce, to create a greater fruit in our lives, a sweeter, richer fruit. Learning to meditate helps us to go back to thinking, behavior, belonging.

Really, the emphasis here in scripture is that if we'll get started, asking God to do the renovation of our hearts, trusting him, meditating on his word, there is a progression where we resolve that we belong to God, that we will follow him, and that our identity is ultimately found in him.

We conclude. There are two ways to live. Think long-term. This is a key to wisdom, to experiencing God's overall blessing, and get started.

What's interesting about Manasseh is that when he ended up in Babylon, led by a hook, bound – when this wicked man got there he cried out to God. And God had mercy on him and returned him to Jerusalem. It's just a wonderful place for us to conclude, to say, "Okay, I don't do this in the strength that is my own. I do this by the grace of God."

Perhaps there are individuals here...you are a dad or are not, but you look at your life and say, "I've made some big choices that revealed God was not behind those choices. And I knew, if I was honest with myself, that I was not glorifying God." Or, "There were weaknesses, strongholds, sin in my own life that really came out in a way that influenced others."

Listen, if God forgave and showed mercy to Manasseh, what a testimony to you and me. **God invites you to come and experience his grace.** What a wonderful message of hope for all of us, right?