

Psalm 1

- ¹ Blessed is the one
 who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
 or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers.
- ⁴ Not so the wicked!
 They are like chaff
 that the wind blows away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
- ⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

This is the Word of the Lord...

Dear People of God,

The New Year is one week old already. Time flies, we often say. It's true. I'm sure some of you have made resolutions. I mentioned here on New Year's Eve that the best resolution we might make for a new year is to grow closer to God, to deepen our relationship with him, to renew our covenant vows to live fully for him.

The book of Psalms is the reflections of God's people as they live with God. It teaches us lessons about navigating our relationship with God. And this very first psalm sets the tone. With wisdom from God, it points out the path of blessing that flows from living with God on a daily basis.

Blessings not Curses

Psalm 1 shows that there are two ways to live: either under the blessing of God, or under the curses of following our own pattern for life. It involves how we respond to him. We either become strong like a tree rooted and nourished by abundant waters or we wither and die and become like chaff that the wind blows away, says Psalm 1. The choice is ours as Christians! Live by the God's word and listen to his voice which will lead to blessings in this life which resemble a

strong tree. Or do your own thing, turn a deaf ear to God's word and suffer the curses that come with that way of life, resembled by dried out chaff.

Psalm 1 calls us to trust God's word completely and to live by it. Verse 1 calls us to ask ourselves if we are walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing alongside of sinners or sitting in the seat of mockers. In New Testament language, it asks if we are grieving the Holy Spirit by neglecting to heed God's counsel. Or, vv. 2-3 ask if by contrast, we delight in God's word which can help us grow into a stronger Christian. Covenant living is about seeking to obey God's word or law and Spirit which leads to his blessings.

Growing the Tree—what to watch for negatively and positively

Let me just presume that you wish to grow in your faith. Do we want the life of blessing with God or the life of curse from following our own sinful way? If we want to enjoy the blessings of God, then we must grow the tree of our faith. And a growing tree or any other kind of plant requires an eye for what has a negative influence and a positive effect on it.

The clear negative influence on trees that we read about in Psalm 1 is a lack of water. The foolish person described here as dwelling with the wicked is someone who is not drinking the right stuff, you might say. A healthy tree is nourished by streams of water. By contrast, the unhealthy one is not getting nutrition. It's dying of thirst.

Compare that to what we put in our bodies for a moment. I know that from time to time I'll joke about how Patsy—my wife—is encouraging me to eat well. That's because she loves me and she wants me to be as healthy as possible. There are some things about our health that we can't control. But there are many we can. According to the nutrition label on this can of Pepsi, one 355ml can has 11 teaspoons or 41 grams of sugar. That's a lot of unhealthiness, isn't it? I think our society is increasingly waking up to the reality that all of our processed foods might taste good but they aren't necessarily very good for us because they are full of things like sugar and salt and a whole lot more things we can't even pronounce. Small amounts of sugar and salt are okay. So Pepsi is wet and might taste good, it might deceive us into thinking it's like water but it is not a healthy replacement for water if we want to grow our body strong and healthy.

In a similar way, growing the tree of our faith means we have to know who our spiritual enemy is and what kind of things our killing our faith, rather than building it up.

Often this surrounds lies we believe. The Apostle Paul tells the church in Rome,
Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

When you prayerfully read God's word, he informs your mind about what displeases him—what lies you are living by, lies that conform us to the pattern of the world. So Paul is calling us to let the Holy Spirit convict us. Pray for his help to change our actions so that rather than doing what's wrong, we start to more and more do God's good, pleasing and perfect will as spelled out in the Bible. Part one of growing the tree is identifying what's wrong on the input side and what you will reap negatively if you don't take action.

Dr. Peter Kreeft, a leading apologist, philosophy professor, and author of over 100 books, delivered the commencement address at Franciscan University of Steubenville in May 2022. Dr.

Kreeft told graduates to be on the lookout for 10 lies of contemporary culture. Ten ways we might be conforming to the pattern of this world. I'll only share the first two in abbreviated form.

The first lie we are fed in our culture is that you can be whatever you want to be. You hear this lie all over the place. It's part of the deconstructionist philosophy in the western world. But, as Kreeft rightly said, "God cannot be whatever he wants. He can't be the devil even if he wanted to be... Nothing can be what it is not," including God. He goes on with an illustration our children might enjoy: "Hobbits cannot become wizards, only better or worse hobbits." Likewise, more seriously, "you cannot make yourself immortal" even if you want to be. And you cannot make yourself God, for that matter.

That's related to the second lie Kreeft mentions. He starts out with reminding the audience of the 1970s children's TV show, *The Electric Company*, which had what he describes as the most seductively satanic sentence in its theme song: "The most important person in the world is you!" In other words, that song is suggesting to us that we are more important than even God! Such thinking has filtered down through the decades from 1970 and is now dominant in our society. I'm in charge of my life. I'm not accountable to anyone else. If it makes me happy then who are you to tell me it's not good." All of this stems from the lie that we are God of our own lives. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7FtUlnIXd0>

In short, we are taught lies in our society that will not help us find the life of blessing that God has in mind for us. Those are dry rivers that won't strengthen our bond with God and serve us well in life. We need God's word to guide our minds, to transform our thinking so that we are not deceived by Satan's lies which are so popular all around us and which ultimately will not bless our lives but curse them.

Now then, the flipside. We must give the tree of our faith the positive nurture it needs to grow. Not only do we have to know what's wrong or what to stay away from, we also need to ensure that the right amounts of the right kinds of nutrients and water are present to fortify the tree. The blessed person, according to Psalm 1, is this:

Ps 1:3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers.

A healthy tree needs good soil but it especially needs a steady supply of water. This psalm indicates that the strong tree gets enough water to ensure that it produces its fruit in season. It's not drying out because not even the leaves are withering. It is healthy and vibrant.

What that means for you and me is that we need to take in a good supply of faith-building nutrients. The first and most important is drinking the water of life. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well,

Jn 4:13 ..."Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

It starts with Christ. That's justification. It means Jesus is all we need to be saved fully and freely. Faith in him makes us right—justifies us—with God.

But to live in the joy of the new life Christ died and rose to give us, we need to keep looking to the Holy Spirit. This is sanctification. In Ephesians 5:18, the Lord illustrates the point I'm making here by talking about what we need to get rid of as well as the nutrients we need to add in. He tells us, for example,

Eph 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

So we need to continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We must pray daily for the Spirit to help us to think right thoughts and to make right choices. And the means the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen our faith is the word of God. We call it the Bible. The Old Testament saints called it the law of God. That's why Psalm 1:2 says about the blessed person,

*Ps 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

We need to take that to heart as we think about growing our relationship with God in 2023.

We can't grow without a steady supply of good nutrients. Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit-inspired word of God. The Bible needs to be like Psalm 119:105 teaches us. There the psalmist says,

Ps 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

God's word directs our steps. So we need to know what it says.

We shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking we can grow stronger alone and without doing anything. We can't. But by the power of the Holy Spirit we can and we will grow stronger and healthier. As we pray for the Holy Spirit to help us read and understand the Bible and apply it to our lives, we take in all the nutrients we need, like a tree on the bank of the river.

I get to talk to people all the time who say things like, "I can't believe how dumb I have been for years. I never read my Bible and just never noticed how I was doing so many things that were leading me away from God. Now that I read my Bible, God helps me see myself the way he sees me. He comforts me with his compassion and he gives me courage to fight against the sin that's been holding me back for years. He helps me do the right things for my spiritual growth. So, I'm becoming a new creature."

I praise God for these kinds of testimonies. That's the picture Psalm 1 gives us—people nurturing their faith by meditating on God's law and reaping the benefits.

Anchoring Your Life

That leads us to consider the results of living that kind of life. The psalmist said that the person who loves God's word and seeks to live by it becomes strong and prospers. He pictures that kind of life as being anchored—strong and steady.

I think we've all seen pictures in the news after hurricanes. Most recently it was storms in Atlantic Canada last September. The mighty winds were no match for some trees that were as much as a meter wide. They toppled over.

In comparison, Psalm 1 says that the life of the person who loves God's word, meditates on it, and seeks to pattern his or her life by it will stand strong. The life of the wicked has no spiritual or moral compass except their own sense of right and wrong which will not stand. They will topple. They are, says the psalmist in v.4,

Ps 1:4 ... like chaff that the wind blows away.

Yes, wind can be very powerful. It can blow chaff away when the grain is being threshed. And it can blow big trees down if they are not anchored solidly. Providing food is one of the functions of roots. But their other primary job is to anchor the plant into the ground so it won't get

blown over or pulled up.... I read that "Roots of large trees are known to grow 100 feet deep. The roots of the California Redwoods (some of the biggest trees in the world) are amazingly shallow, about 10 feet, BUT they spread out as far as 125 feet. The roots of individual redwoods frequently grow intertwined with the roots of their neighbour. By intertwining underground, the roots form a network that allows the trees to withstand great storms." (*The Original Inspirational Bathroom Book*, W.B. Freedman, 108)

Do you get it? Drinking in the word of God is going to help us grow stronger as we grow closer to God. That's the life of blessing God has in mind for each of his children. He makes the nutrients of our faith available to us and invites us to enjoy them and be blessed by them as they guide our lives into paths of righteousness.

Practical Steps to Reaping Blessings

In summary, if we wish to grow in our faith, we must reinforce our hearts and minds with the things that will prevent spiritual drought, such as lies from our world. Instead, we must maximize spiritual nutrients from the word of God. We need this so that we develop hardy roots below ground and enjoy the blessings of living by God's word as we walk on this earth, helping us steer clear of the paths of the wicked described in v.1.

On a practical level, these are a few points to consider as you go home today.

1. **Get rooted in Christ.** If you don't yet trust Christ for salvation, believe in him today and start growing your faith. He is the water of life. It all starts with him.
2. **Check for poor growing conditions.** What sort of bad things might you be drinking in spiritually? A little too much worldly philosophy of self-first instead of God first won't nurture you well for the new year or ever. Read your Bible and let the Holy Spirit teach you which things are causing you to have a famine of the soul.
3. **Strengthen your roots by reading and studying the Bible and spending time in prayer.** These are Christianity 101 things but they are important. Let the Holy Spirit teach you not only what's wrong but what to do right. Let the word of God renew your mind, change your heart and transform your actions. Like the children's song puts it, "Read your Bible, pray every day and you'll grow, grow, grow."
4. **Strengthen your roots by getting connected.** Reading your Bible personally is a good place to start. But you can't grow alone. Like the California Redwoods, you need roots intertwining with the roots of other Christians so that you help each other stand strong. And that, of course, means we're all together rooted in Christ. To that end, we should each make a concerted effort to
 - a. **Be faithful in attending worship** services where together with others we deepen our roots as we drink in more of Jesus together. We are bound together in Christ. One of the lies Christians today believe is that we don't need to gather for worship. We do. More happens in worship than we realize. The Spirit is at work through the word whether it's read, preached or sung.
 - b. Likewise, attend **Bible study groups, catechism classes, small groups and the like.** Don't underestimate this for yourself and for your children. Feed your heart and soul and mind. Just as you can't feed your body with just one meal per week, spiritually you need more than one meal a week as well. God has given us

ample opportunity to pour good nutrients into our lives so we grow stronger. All of these means of taking in the law of God or the Bible are like streams of water in a world that constantly drying us out or providing things that it says are nutritious but are not! Take advantage of feeding your soul from various places the Lord gives us to drink from.

- c. Along with that, be an **active member of the church**. If each of us is a tree, together we are a forest. A tree might contain a bird or two. A forest contains a whole biosphere, a community of life. Every single part enriches or blesses the others. As we learn to serve others in Christ's name, we develop more Christ-like virtues. We not only grow ourselves stronger, but the blessing reaches to the broader community of faith and even beyond that to our world. Or think of the church as a choir such as these wonderful children we have here today. One kid alone can make some music. But together they make a joyful noise that is sweeter than any single voice alone. Friends, when you find your place to serve in the body of Christ, you enjoy that service and it strengthens your faith as you serve those around you. Our lives as Christians are even stronger when we intertwined, connected and supporting each other as we all drink in God's word and grow stronger side by side as a forest of trees together serving the Lord.

Friends in Christ, let's ensure that we grow spiritually this year. Follow the example of the blessed person in Psalm 1. Let God's word saturate you and strengthen you so that you are a tree that yields abundant fruit year after year. That's the life of blessing God calls all his covenant children to pursue.

And all God's people say, Amen.

MORNING WORSHIP – TRINITY CRC

JANUARY 8, 2023

With the Joyful Noise Choir

A word from the choir on behalf of Rehoboth

Prelude: **“Come See”**

GOD CALLS US TO WORSHIP

Welcome & Announcements

*Call to Worship—light

*God’s Greeting

*Gathering Songs: **“Goodness of God”**
“Light of the World”

WE RECOMMIT TO COVENANT LIVING

Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Forgiveness

God’s Will for Thankful Living

*Song: **“You Are My All In All”**

GOD GIVES US HIS WORD

Children’s Message **Rein Selles**

Children Ages 3 to Grade 4 leave for Wee Worship

*Song: **“Let it Rise”**

Prayer for the Word

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1

Sermon: ***God’s Ways for the Year and Forever***

*Song: **“Only A Holy God”**

RESPONDING TO GOD’S GRACE

Congregational Prayer Bryan VanBoom

Tithes & Offerings

1. Trinity Ministries
2. Rehoboth Christian Homes

*Song: **“Sing We The Song of Emmanuel”**

GOD SENDS US IN HIS STRENGTH

*God’s Parting Blessing

*Sending Song: **“Psalm 150 (Praise The Lord)”**

*Postlude