How To Be Blessed

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Preacher: Chris Lamont

[0:00] In a moment, I'm going to invite one of our members, Miriam Montgomery, to come up. She's going to read scripture for us. But before that, I'm going to pray for us as a congregation. I'm going to bring our petitions before God, the one who knows all our deepest needs.

Let's pray. Lord, we rejoice that you, the almighty God of all the universe, all-knowing, all-powerful, everlasting God, you invite us, mere creatures, to call you Father.
So, Heavenly Father, we ask that you'd hear our prayers as we bring them before you this morning, laying before you the burdens, the fears, the hopes, the requests of your people. Lord, this morning we pray for all those who are suffering from illness and pain.
Lord, we pray that you would guide those who are caring for them, that you'd bring healing to them according to your perfect will. We pray for the families of those who are sick.
We ask that you would draw close to them, bringing comfort and peace that only you can provide. Lord, we pray for those in our congregation and across the city who are lonely.
[1:07] Lord, draw near to them, be a comfort to them. We pray that you would make us people with a heart for the lonely, so that we can be used in your service to bless others. But we know, Lord, that you are the friend that sticks closer than any brother could.

Lord, we pray for anyone here this morning who came to church purely out of a sense of duty or a way of coping with their guilt. Lord, would you give each of us true joy this morning as we come to worship our God?
Would you show us what it means to worship you with delight, delighting in your law, delighting in the Scriptures, not because we want to learn the Scriptures per se, but because the Scriptures reveal to us who you are, what you're like, how we are to live our lives in a way that brings honor and glory to your name.
Lord, we pray for those this morning who are here trying to determine where real truth lies. Lord, would you meet with them today so that they would see you in your word, that they would see themselves in the light of your law.
Lord, show them and remind all of us of our need for a Savior. And Lord, would you give us an experience of meeting with Jesus this morning. Lord, we pray for all the young people in our congregation.
[2:24] We pray for those who've just gone down to Kids Church, those who are sitting with us in the service for the remainder of our time together. Lord, please guide them from unwise counsel that would lead them astray, lead them away from the paths of righteousness that you've laid before us in your word.

Lord, we pray that you would open up their hearts, that you'd reveal yourself to them even when they're young and tender in years. Lord, we pray for all the people in the congregation traveling this summer.
Please take care of them as they go. Give refreshment to those who are on holiday and bring them back to us again in safety, we ask. Lord, we pray for all those in the congregation who serve in so many different ways, some more visible than others, but all to your glory.
Lord, would you encourage and strengthen them in their service this morning and throughout the year, knowing that when they work for the church, they're working to your glory. Lord, we pray for all the churches in this city and across our country where the word's been faithfully proclaimed today.
Would you bless those who lead and teach, bless those who hear, so that your great name would be praised. And Lord, for all of us here at St. Columbus this morning, take away from us the pressures of the week past and the week ahead, so that we can have our minds and our hearts set on worshiping you with our whole hearts.

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[3:43] And we pray, Lord, that you would hear our prayers as we come to you in the name of our beautiful Savior Jesus. Amen. I'm going to invite Miriam to come up and read scripture for us.

Miriam's going to read Psalm 1, which if you've got a church Bible, is on page 448. It's also in your bulletin and it'll also be on the screen. Thanks, Miriam. 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.
Amen. This is God's holy word. Well, years ago I worked in a supermarket, and one day there was a guy looking for some help, and he said, excuse me, and I said, hey, how are you doing?
[5:00] And he looked at me for just a quarter of a second longer than I thought was normal, and he said, I'm blessed. And it struck me, because that is not the way that we typically describe ourselves, I think, when we walk around the supermarket just now.

In fact, we don't really hear people talking about being blessed and blessing very much at all outside of church, unless maybe if somebody sneezes and we say, bless you. But even then, we don't really know why we say that.
Well, I do. I looked it up. It's just superstition. So when we look at this word blessed in Psalm 1, we need to take a moment to make sure that we know what we're talking about here.
So in the Old Testament, the Bible, the Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew, the majority of it. And the word for blessed here, or the word that's translated as blessed in the Old Testament, is actually, there's a couple of different words that are described or translated into English as blessed.
And the one that we have here is translated in other places as happy or happiness. So we could say, happy is the man who. And that's much easier for us to recognize, isn't it?
[6:21] Because we use happy all the time. I'm happy to help, is what I said when I was working in Asda. Or, I'm very happy for you.

Or we say, you have to do what makes you happy. We understand happiness in terms of moments and feelings. But we also understand that there's degrees of happiness.
There's things, kinds of happiness that we treat as like dopamine hits. So we say, something happens, you feel good, and then that goes away again.
And then something else happens, and then you feel happy, and then it goes away again. But there's another kind of happiness. A true, deep, and lasting happiness.
A happiness that doesn't ping up and down like a Geiger counter in an action movie. One that underpins you, that grounds you, that roots you, that gives you hope and joy, even as you navigate life's most challenging hurdles.
[7:29] And this brings me to the second reason. I said there was two reasons that this man saying blessed stopped me in my tracks. The second reason is because I want that happiness.

I think we all do. When we look at Psalm 1, Psalm 1 tells us, tells you today, you can be happy. None of us want to live an unhappy life.
It's why we work hard at school. It's why we get stuck in at work. It's why we forgive our friends when they mess up. It's why we buy our wife flowers.
It's why we purchase art, read novels, go to nice restaurants, play five-a-side football, listen to soul music. We're all involved in the pursuit of happiness.
And that's a good thing. And the Bible's big on happiness. God made us to be happy. He made us for a true happiness. Not dependent on our circumstances, which can change quickly, but on a life in relationship with Him.
[8:38] Psalm 1 doesn't just say that real happiness is possible, that it's available for us. It also teaches us how to have it. So let's go through this psalm together under three headings.

The righteous way, the righteous life, and the righteous man. First of all, the righteous way. The great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said that Psalm 1 is a text upon which the whole of the Psalms make up a divine sermon.

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A divine sermon. God preaching to us. And what Psalm 1 presents to us are two different ways of living. The way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.
And we don't just see this in Psalm 1. This is the story throughout the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We're repeatedly shown this image of two paths. Adam and Eve had a choice to make in the garden.
You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die. That's what God said to Adam and Eve when they were in paradise.
[9:43] And then later on in Deuteronomy, when God's people are right on the edge of going into the land that God had promised to them, for years and years, God says to them through Moses, he says, I've set before you life and death, blessing and curse.

Therefore, choose life. And then later on again in the Old Testament, the prophet Jeremiah, he sets up the same dichotomy. This time he does it through the image of two men.
And one trusts in God, one trusts in mankind, and he becomes like a shrub in the desert. And the other trusts in God, and is like a tree planted by water, which is almost identical language to what we have today in our psalm.
You see, the psalms are not mere poems. They're theology that we sing. So I'm going to say it right here in the middle of Edinburgh.
At fringe time, at festival time, there is a right way to live. And there is a wrong way to live. I know that's incredibly unfashionable. I know it's controversial to say something like that in some quarters.
[10:58] But it's true. Psalm 1 tells us. One way leads to happiness, because it leads to relationship with God. But the other way leads to judgment, because it's a way of rejecting him.

Let's look at the language of verse 1 together, because it gives us a clear list of don'ts, for if you want to walk in the way of the righteous person. 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.
Notice the progression that we have. First, we don't walk in the counsel of the wicked. The wicked here is not necessarily serial killers.
This is talking about anyone who chooses to live their life apart from God. When I was young, my mum used to say, if you fly with the crows, you'll get shot with them.
I don't know if anyone says that anymore. But it means if you hang around with people who are doing wrong, you're going to become judged in the way that they are. Notice that Psalm doesn't just say not to walk with people who are ignoring God, but it says don't walk in their counsel.
[12:08] As believers, we have to be careful not to walk in the way that people who don't trust God walk. Of course we do. But that begins by not taking their bad advice, not taking their counsel.

Don't be taken in by the rules that the world, people in the world make for their lives. The standards that they think that they should live by. Right and wrong, according to society, it's not necessarily right and wrong, according to God.
I think there's a time in everyone's life, anyone who was brought up in a house where your parents attempted to walk after the ways of God, who tried to raise you to know God, there's a time in your life where you're going to step outside that home.
And the confines and the care and the love of your parents, the influence that they have over you, you're going to be confronted by ideas and advice from people who are firmly opposed to God and people who are just ignorant of who God is, what he is all about.
And the thing that we have to be careful of is that often that advice can be cloaked to appear like wisdom. Sometimes this perceived wisdom isn't about telling us what to do, but it's telling us what we can and can't have our faith in.
[13:37] Maybe you've heard arguments like you can't believe in God because of science, which is a twisted argument that doesn't actually hold up when you interrogate it.

But if we're not in the scriptures, if we're not trusting in God, then it's easy for us to be swayed. Or maybe you've heard people say things like, yes, the Bible says right and wrong, but that's just not an acceptable way to live in modern society.
This wisdom, it's not true wisdom at all. Notice that walking, after walking in the council of the wicked, we progress to standing in the way of sinners.
You see, if you let these voices, the voices of the people who don't know God, who don't trust God, who don't want anything to do with God, move you in that direction, sooner or later, you're going to

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be standing with them.
You're going to be doing the things that they're doing. You're going to be one of the crows who's likely to be shot, to go back to my mum's old adage.
[14:40] Until finally, you're sitting with them, permanent and comfortable in the way of scoffers. You see, the danger is that if you let yourself be swayed by people who don't know God, you just end up becoming them.

scoffers are like the ones, are the ones who pour scorn on believers, people who trust in God. And these scoffers are saying now, you're one of us, pull up a pew, come sit with us.
The picture is somebody gradually moving into rebellion against God. And so this morning, we have to remind ourselves, we've only just got to verse one.
We have to say, hey, are we walking in the council of the wicked today? Do you recognize anything of that in yourself? Are you living by advice that you've seen in places other than from God? Because it seems intriguing. Because it seems interesting. And today the pressure is so intense, you don't have to walk outside your door. Your radio, your TV, your smartphone, all these things are desperate to offer you counsel.
[15:53] And so often that counsel is counsel that is not good for your eternal soul. Do you find yourself being swayed by it? Maybe you find yourself this morning in a position where you think, I know that this isn't right.

I know this isn't good for me, but I've been drawn in. Or maybe you find yourself thinking, it's okay, I've got a handle on it. I can switch it off anytime I like.
Or Psalm 1 reminds us that we must follow the voice that is going to lead us to God. Because when we listen to any voice, there's a danger that that voice will lead us somewhere.
You've got to ask yourself, who am I being most shaped by? How am I being influenced by what I consume? In the news, on social media, am I being discipled by scripture or by sin?
Because Psalm 1 teaches that while happiness is available, God wants happiness for your life. Sin will not make you happy. Scripture doesn't just describe the dangers, it also gives us the solutions.
[17:06] Part two, the righteous life. So we move on to verse two together and it tells us a blessed, a truly happy person delights in the law of the Lord. Delight is the thing that your heart most desires.

The thing that you want more than anything else. So while the warnings about the wicked path were about walking, standing, and sitting, godliness is about your heart.
This verse emphasizes law twice, it says God's law twice. Law here includes God's law as we find it in the book of, in the first five books of the Bible, in the Ten Commandments, but it extends to the whole of scripture.
Every word that we're given is a word from God and good for us. So how can we make, so how can God's law make us happy? There are lawyers here and I'm sure that you enjoy studying law, but the rest of us, we don't enjoy studying law books.
Well, first of all, the reason God's law can make us happy is because God's law reveals so much to us about God himself.
[18:25] It shows us what God is like. It shows us the things that matter to him. It shows us the things that he wants for us. When we think about the law as revealing God as he is, it changes things dramatically for us because we're not believing in the Bible.

We're not delighting in the Bible alone. We're living for the God of the Bible. The law brings us happiness because it brings us closer to God.
Who he is, what he's like, what he's done for us. We don't worship the Bible. We worship the God of the Bible. This is an illustration that I heard credited to Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, who was one of the great preachers of the 19th century.
And he spoke about a man who had to go away on business. He went on a long journey. And if you're under 40, you're going to have to use your imaginations that there's a world that existed without smartphones.
This guy's gone on a long journey, and he's taken with him a photograph of his wife. And he doesn't put his photograph of his wife in his hold luggage.
[19:36] Of course he doesn't. He needs to keep it near him. He puts it in his wallet. He puts it in his breast pocket. So it's close to his heart. And when he goes to bed at night, he takes it out and he looks at it. And he thinks about it and he dwells on it and he longs for it.

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But this guy's not longing for a photograph. He's longing for the thing the photograph is the picture of. He has a photograph, but he's longing for his wife. And that's the same principle as what Scripture does for us.
We love to be in Scripture. We want to read the Scripture. The Bible is so important to our lives, but not for the sake of the words on the page, for the sake of the God who's behind those words.
Psalm 1 is pointing us to the law. But it's pointing us to the law so that we can see God. His word allows us to be closer to him, rest in him while we're traveling through our arduous journeys in life so that we can have happiness knowing that he's there.
Second reason that the law is a delight for the righteous person is because it shows us how to live. So if we want to get blessed, truly, deeply, eternally blessed, then we follow God's law to get it.
[20:55] You see, God's law is not like national laws. You should keep the laws of the land. Of course you should. The Bible tells us that we should keep the laws of the land. But the best abiding by the laws of the land can do for you is keep you from trouble.

But Psalm 1 doesn't begin by offering us immunity from punishment. It begins by offering us blessing. So the righteous person meditates on God's law day and night.
And that doesn't mean checking in twice a day like brushing your teeth. It means all day, morning, night, every moment in between. And we know that meditation, therefore, in this case, can't be about, you know, a class in a spa where you sit for 10 minutes and empty your mind.
But it's also not just reading the Bible. It's lingering on what the Bible says, turning those ideas over in your mind, letting yourself be infused by it every day.
I don't think modern life is set up for this. When I've drank too much caffeine, I switch to decaf coffee bags and on the box it says to leave it for four minutes.
[22:14] Man, four minutes? Four minutes seems like a lifetime when you're waiting for your coffee to brew. I think that's silly, but it's symptomatic of our culture, right? We want everything now.

We're so rushed, we're so pressured. We don't have time to contemplate God's word. We don't have time to carry it with us, to think about it. We're constantly bombarded by messages and interference.
I think that by nature what we want, what people in our day, maybe every day, I don't know, but in our day, what we want is a planner for the day that looks something like read Bible, collect dry cleaning, pay cancel tax, meet Brian for lunch, kids' football practice, read Bible.
And we want that so we can go tick, tick, tick, tick and we can clear them off because once it's done, it's done and we can forget about it and move on. Maybe that is actually quite a good way to handle the tasks that you have in your life.
But it's not meditating on scripture as it's described here. The Hebrew word here for meditates not about 15 minutes of quiet time in the morning and then 10 minutes of quiet time at night.
[23:23] This word can also be translated as moaning or to mutter. This isn't a nice tidy slot that you fit somehow into your day.

This model of meditation is a whole life posture towards scripture. So practically, it might mean reading the Bible in the morning and then bringing it before your mind all through the day.
When you're in the queue of the supermarket, when you're getting your lunch, instead of waiting, instead of instantly going to your pocket to see who's emailed you since you left the office or to see who's text you to see what's going on later on today.
Maybe it's thinking about God's word, the word that God gave to you that morning for that day to carry you through. I promise you that God knows what you need to be happy much better than your Instagram algorithm does.
And look what that heart posture leads to. Verse 3 tells us the righteous person is like a tree planted by streams of water. So in verse 1 we were walking, then we were standing, and then we were sitting, but now we're planted.
[24:34] Planted is much more than sitting. It's deep, it's rooted, it's grounded and connected. The other thing about being planted is that it's deliberate, it's being deliberately put somewhere.

And then even the word streams, this can be translated, I think, quite accurately as a channel, a water channel or a canal. So even these waterways that come to refresh you are deliberately placed there.
Do you see what this means? This means that God himself plants his people by streams he himself provides. So being planted is not just about not being moved, having roots so you're not blown

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around in the wind.
It's also about being nourished. A tree that's not planted beside streams of water is so vulnerable. To survive you have to pray that the rain comes. But the blessed tree has the security of being beside constantly flowing streams of fresh water.
There's no need to be anxious about where the next rain shower is coming from. Your day-to-day circumstances when you're rooted in God are inconsequential to your overall blessedness because you're planted beside streams of water that he himself provides.
[25:58] And so free from the anxiety of circumstances with the constant feeding and blessing that this water provides, the blessed tree brings forth fruit.

fruit in a person we know from the New Testament manifests as things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
This is the fruit that the blessed person who meditates on God's law produces. These are the evidences that God through his spirit is working in your life.
Changing you. Become more like the character that you read about, the character of God that you read about in his word. Not only do the Psalms tell us that the blessed person prospers, that the blessed person brings forth fruit, but they prosper in everything they do.
Everything that they turn their hand to is a success. It's nothing to do with gaining wealth. It's nothing to do with getting a promotion. It's nothing to do with adoration from other people.
[27:13] But a flourishing life living by God's law does mean a better life. It really does. It makes you a better husband or wife.

It makes you a better parent. It makes you a better neighbor. This is in complete contrast, we see, to those who are not in relationship with God.
The Psalmist tells us that they're like chaff. That's the waste product that's produced when grain is threshed. They're empty husks. There's nothing to them.
They have no roots. They don't bring forth fruit. They're just waiting to be blown away by the wind. We see the righteous become increasingly stable and the wicked increasingly unstable until the wicked meet their ultimate end, which verse 6 tells us is destruction.
You have to be careful not to think that living by streams of refreshing, flowing, pure water means that our life is therefore going to be easy.
[28:27] That's not what we're saying. But, the one who trusts in the Lord remains fruitful even during the harshest of rites because God is with them and they take refuge in him.

We know this. If we've been around church, if we've read the Bible, we know this. We know this is the case. We know that God's law provides refreshing and blessing. We know that sin leads to damnation.
So why are we still sinning? Anyone who's here who's compromised their faith in some way. Maybe you've reported inaccurate figures on your tax return.
Maybe you've laid somebody off at work to appease your boss even though what they did wasn't really anything worth getting rid of them for. Maybe you told a lie to avoid getting into trouble from your parents.
That was a choice that you made. You did that thing because you wanted to. Maybe you didn't want to compromise. You didn't want to have to compromise on your faith.
[29:34] But you wanted the thing that compromising could get you at that moment more than you wanted to walk in the paths of righteousness. righteousness. the praise, the promotion, the pacifying somebody else at that moment was more important to you.

You wanted that thing more than you wanted to walk with God at that time. Look, I think all of us are maybe feeling uncomfortable when we think about that truth.
I am. Who's ever walked and not been strayed by the influence of those who don't love the Lord? Who's ever perfectly delighted in God's law?
Well, don't despair because someone isn't pointing accusingly at you. It's pointing hopefully beyond you. Which brings us to our final point, the righteous man.
Someone once said that classic literature are all the books that everyone wants to have read but nobody wants to read. Sometimes we feel that about scripture. We want to have read it. We want to want to read it.
[30:44] But we simply don't. We want to meditate on God's law. We want to be the kind of people who have that discipline but it just evades us. We don't have that desire that burning aching to be in

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God's word like we know that we should have that the Bible describes.

It's because our hearts are corrupted and our desires are distorted. Even though we want to even though we want to want to we can't.
Who could? And if you read the Bible like this it's either going to crush you with the weight of expectation or you're going to be eaten alive by guilt.
But the Bible isn't about us. It's for us but it's about Jesus. You see it's not you who resisted every temptation to walk in the counsel of the wicked.
It's not you who never sinned. It's not you who delighted perfectly every moment in the Father's will. It's not you who always bore healthy fruit.
[31:59] It's Jesus. The New Testament book of Hebrews tells us Jesus took delight in the law of the Lord. That's why he's constantly withdrawing to lonely places so that he could be in communion with his Father.

Even at the most arduous points in Jesus' life when the devil takes him into the wilderness and tempts him it's scripture that comes out of Jesus' mouth. When he's on the cross the most agonizing moment of his life it's scripture that Jesus speaks because he loves God's law.
Jesus is the blessed man of Psalm 1. And the Bible tells us Jesus is our wisdom and he's our righteousness. When we're in him when we trust in Jesus he fulfills the demands of the covenant obeying perfectly.
He does it for us. And yet to our human minds the unthinkable happens doesn't it?
The righteous man suffers the fate of the wicked. On the cross Jesus bore the judgment that was due for the wicked people. Jesus bore the guilt and the shame that was ours to have.
[33:15] God experienced the curse of the godless. Why did he do that? So that sinners like you sinners like me can receive the blessing that belongs to him.

Paul says Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. See Psalm 1 finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. He was the tree that was planted by streams of water but he also hung on a tree and was refused water and he did that for us.
Jesus is not simply our example then. He's our substitute. He stood in judgment in our place. One commentator wrote in Christ we hear Psalm 1 not as a manifesto for self-righteousness or as a sentence of miserable moralism but rather as glorious gospel.
When we understand Psalm 1 like that it saves us from three big errors. It prevents us from trying to portray a superficial righteousness.
Jesus had harsh words for the scribes and the Pharisees in his day who tried to act as though they had everything sorted out. We're free to be honest before God because of what Jesus has done.
[34:36] Secondly it saves us from the futility of becoming a zealot becoming a person who overwhelmingly tries to fulfill all the things that Psalm 1 demands by strength of our own will our own determination because that's crushing and thirdly it saves us from despair.

We can never attain this level of godliness through our performance. Jesus has attained it for us. In Jesus the true righteous man we're free of all these errors and now because we're united to Christ through faith his walk becomes our walk.
His standing becomes our standing. His righteousness becomes ours and this is how we can begin to become the kind of people Psalm 1 describes because the Holy Spirit works in us increases in us not so that we can earn his blessing but because we've already received blessing through Christ.
God give you this song because he wants you to be truly happy and he knows your only path to true and everlasting happiness is through his son Jesus.
Let's pray. Lord God we thank you for the truth and the wisdom contained in your holy law. Lord we lament that we do not love your law in the way that sometimes we wish our hearts wish that we could but we rejoice that you knew this.
[36:15] This is not a surprise to you Lord. You sent your son Jesus to come into the world to fulfill the law perfectly to obey your demands fully to die in the place of sinners so that we can be reconciled to you.

Lord we praise your glorious and great name this morning and we ask that you would hear our prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

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