

**The Story:
The God Who is Always Wise
Psalm 1
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, Feb. 12, 2012**

For the past few weeks, we have been tracing the plotline of Scripture, trying to get our minds around the sweeping story, the Bigger Picture.

If you were to take a telescope and aim it at **the moon**, you would gain much understanding. Zooming in we see detail. We notice the little stuff, and the little stuff makes it interesting. We often study the Bible this way, and it's good. We pick one book like John and we spend a year in that one book, turning it over like a diamond and focusing on each word, each sentence, each phrase. That sort of in-depth study is essential because it keeps us from skimming the surface.

Zooming in has its benefits but so does zooming out. When we step back, we see the **wide-screen picture**. We see that same moon, but we also see how it fits into its beautiful surroundings. We catch a glimpse of the panorama as we step back. That is the goal of this series. To see the whole things so we can better understand its parts.

And remember: the Bible is not a book about man. It's a book about God and it is designed to tell us what God is like, what He has done, and what He desires for us today. So, real quick...a review of where we have been:

So far...

Week One: The God Who Created Everything (Creation)

Week Two: The God Who Does Not Give Up On Us (The Fall of Mankind)

Week Three: The God Who Cuts the Covenant (He's a promise-making and promise keeping God)

Week Four: The God Who Writes the Rules (The Law: the 10 commandments and the rules for sacrifice)

Week Five: The God Who Reigns as King (The coming of David and the future forever King)

Today we focus on the middle section of the Story, the portion of the Word that says: God Is All-Wise. The wisdom literature.

Now, this message will not be like the first five. This will be a unique sermon in this series because the content I teach today will not advance the storyline. We don't see the narrative of God moving forward in our study, and yet, we must hit pause and ponder this portion of Scripture. To fly past these books would be a mistake since these ancient words reveal so much about man's journey upon the earth.

What is the Wisdom Literature of the Bible?

The Wisdom Literature in the Bible
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

These books supply a window into the souls of the saints. These books unveil—not so much the plight of God’s people—but the insight, the raw experiences, the ups and downs of real life.

How many of you enjoy the sampler platter appetizer at the restaurant? When you go to Chili’s or Fridays, you can get an assorted selection, a little of everything on your plate. I like that! And I wish I could preach 5 sermons today, to whet your appetite for each of these great books. I wish I could take you through a song in the Psalms, a section of the Proverbs, a scene in Job’s journey, a chapter from Ecclesiastes, perhaps one romantic poem in the Song of Solomon. But time restrains me! Cursed be that clock!

So I take you to the opening Psalm, which many believe to be a kind of preface to the whole. This psalm sets the pattern for the entire collection of psalms. If you can grasp the meaning of this one, then you have tasted the essence of the Psalter and the wisdom writings.

Let’s read Psalm 1.

What does it take to make “happy?” How do you manufacture this emotion. The song “Happiness is”...was included in a Charlie Brown episode once. The lyrics go like this:

Happiness is finding a pencil.
Pizza with sausage.
Telling the time.
Happiness is learning to whistle.
Tying your shoe for the very first time.

Happiness is playing the drum in your own school band.
And happiness is walking hand in hand.
Happiness is two kinds of ice cream.
Knowing a secret.
Climbing a tree.
Happiness is five different crayons.
Catching a firefly.
Setting him free.

That’s happiness according to the Peanuts gang, but you and I don’t live in the world of cartoon. This is reality and all of us hunger for happiness.

The very first word in the Psalms is the word happy, and that pretty much sums up the desire of the human race. The reason people chase alcohol or drug is for the fleeting feeling of happy. It doesn't last. But that's the goal.

And this Psalm tells us how to live our lives in such a way that we can find the treasure of happiness. Blessed is the man, happy is the man who lives God's way. Now notice how this wise man lives.

The Wise Man

1. He removes himself from the ways of the wicked.

Notice, he is known first for what he excludes from his life. He has no time for it. No associations with sinners' lifestyle. He does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. The word counsel is a bit ambiguous. It could mean:

Council: a fellowship of worldly people.

If that's what the Psalmist meant, then this means the man does not closely associate with people who try to find happiness apart from God. He does not enter into a circle that has not been sanctified. Sure, he consorts with all types of people, but the inner ring of his friends are like-minded individuals, who fear God and make good choices.

In the opening lines of Proverbs, it is said, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." So this man tethers his ankle only to the God-fearers. He deliberately chooses to swim in their pool, their "council."

However, translators are a bit uncertain about that word. It could also come to the English like this:

Counsel: the advice of worldly people

The happy man does not take his cues from the minds of the godless. He is careful about who and what informs his conscience.

Do you know that there is a lot of bad advice available today? And it's free. Always has been. Bill Cosby once said (and I quote), "A word to the wise ain't necessary. It's the stupid ones that need the advice."

Sometimes God fearing people take their cues from the world's system. The world tells our young women: wear your clothes as tight as you can if you want catch a handsome man. Bad advice. The world tells us our teenage boys: To stand out among your peers, you should get your hair cut crazy and get your body covered with ink. That's how you set yourself a part from the pack. The world tells our brightest young business men: if

you want to make good use of your gift, you have got to let go of that family. They are holding you back! Bad advice.

The happy man does not give an ear to the godless. In fact, he avoids their beguiling pleas.

Whether that word is council or counsel, it makes little difference. Both ideas are true. Avoid the advice and the fellowship of those who seek happiness apart from God.

Now notice the seductive web that comes forward. Three action words we should notice: walk, stand, sit. These three words show the progress of a man outside the will of God. And all of us have been duped at some point, to follow the path of the wicked. Here is temptation 101:

- Step one: he pays attention to something sinful. Might be a bad channel on his TV, a gossip person at work, or a Hollywood magazine. But something catches his eye and he chooses to linger.
- And so he then stands. He has gone from walking, to standing. Now it has become more than indulgence, he has taken the bite, it has hooked his lip. He has stopped.
- And then he sits. He is now being changed and transformed by that circle. In another place in wisdom writings, it is said, "Bad company corrupts good character." Now the man is to be pitied. He is like a poor animal in a trap. Stuck in sin.

Turn with me for a moment to the book of 1 Timothy. The seasoned warrior, Paul, pays attention to the ministry of a rookie. Timothy had been called by God to high task of spiritual leadership. Paul saw God's hand on Timothy's life. And so he says these important things.

1 Tim. 1:18.... Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you...

Paul had been present when the Spirit of God called Timothy to a life of ministry. Later he would say, "Fan into flame that gift of God that is in you." Timothy was gifted...so Paul gives him good advice, He says, "The spiritual life is a fight. Spiritual warfare is certain. You want to be used by God? Get ready for the flaming arrows!"

Here is the survival kit...two things: hold on to the faith, and a good conscience.

Two things you must do to survive spiritual attack.

- Hold fast to the faith. The faith means "the instructions manual." Hold on to the Word. The revealed words of God. The great teacher in the New Testament, Apollos, in Acts 18:24, it says he came to town and he was "a man mighty in the Scriptures!" What a wonderful thing to say about a man. Spurgeon said, "A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone who is not." For the Ephesians, Paul prayed, "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly." Every chance you get in

your busy life as pastor, or a teacher, or a mother, or a business owner, drop the anchor, and give an ear to God's Word. Depend on it.

But Paul gives one a second piece of advice.

- Pay attention to your conscience.

Recently, Lynley and I were taking in a television program with your children. We had popcorn and blankets and it was one of those nights when Lynley and I were so exhausted, we were just happy to be sitting. And some things started happening on the screen, and my conscience came alive. And I thought, "Conscience, can I just sit here and say nothing, please?"

We all face moments when we are tired and weak and we ignore the quiet call of the conscience. But the key to a good life is a good conscience. And so long as your letting the Word dwell in you richly, then you will have an active conscience. Be careful to keep a clear conscience.

And then Paul gives a post mortem example of two men who failed.

V.19b-20...

These two men shipwrecked. They crashed.

But Psalm 1 says, "Happy is the man who does not hop on the boat with them." He does not participate in their foolishness. He walks away.

But if he is walking away from something, then what is he walking to? What does he pursue with passion and with diligence. What is he "about?"

Psalm 1: 2-3...

He is not known for what he hates, he is known for what he loves. Notice that word "delight". He delights in the will of God. Here is a man who is in love with a woman. He delights in her. He yearns to spend time with her. And when he is with her, he drinks in every word she speaks. He is intoxicated with her beauty. So it is with the godly person and the Word of God!

Just look at the fruit of his life.

- His has a reflective life. He meditates on the law day and night. That is, he carves out time to consider his life and the current outcome of his ways. As he holds himself before the mirror of Scripture, he continues to see sloppy areas of his outward witness. On a spiritual level, he grows increasingly handsome in the eyes of God as he grows older. He reflects.
- He has poise under pressure. In times of trouble, he is not overtaken. He can withstand strong winds, and it's not because he has enormous biceps, impeccable

peaks, and tree trunk quads. He is strong because he has formed deep roots. These roots are unseeable.

This is the Wild Fig Tree that lives in Mpumalanga (Om-poom-alon-ga), South Africa). It has the deepest roots of any tree in the world, driving down 400 feet into the earth. The ancients had a myth about this tree, that God had planted it upside down. Because the seeable portion, was not much to see, but the secret part plunged deeper than the sea.

This is a coast redwood tree, found in our own country, in California. Believed to be the tallest trees in the whole world, the highest measuring 379.1 ft. It is impressive to our eyes. If the tree were a person, it would most certainly be vain. For who among us can handle the constant praise of people, “Wow, how awesome your are. Goodness, how great you are!”

And herein lies the trap of the world’s system, how many of you have ever heard of the Wild Fig, or the place called Om-poo-alon-ga? For the record, your honor: ZERO. And how many of you have ever heard of the mighty redwood tree. Raise your hand! Why is this so? Because men have always celebrated the public portion of life, and men have always ignored the private portion.

And so we saw last week, that the people of Israel wanted a king. And so they picked one. Saul. And why did they pick him? Because he looked good! If that story were told today, the Bible would read, “And so they picked Saul, because all the ladies thought he was HOT.” And we shouldn’t think less of Saul because he was blessed with striking good looks. Some people are born with beauty; it’s not their fault.

But the problem with Saul was not found in his height. The problem was found in his lack of depth.

And so God rejects Saul, and chooses, a little shepherd boy, whom nobody expected much from—not even his own dad or brothers. But God chose him because years in the solitude of shepherding, he had cultivated a deep system, he had built a phenomenal faith.

And God said, “It is now the season for that tree to yield its fruit. His leaf will not wither. Whatever that young man does, I will cause it to prosper.”

And so David’s secret weapon was not smooth stones and sling. He had become mighty in the Scriptures, and His conscience was as clear as well-filtered water. He became powerful. Not with weights, but with faith.

And so Psalm 1 is quintessential wisdom literature because it presents two different paths of pursuit, then it presses you for decision. Will you choose door #1, which leads to life and happiness, or will you choose door #2, which leads to...

V.4-6...

Those verses require little explanation. They are easily understood. If you go your own way, you will have no help from God. Good luck with that. Say hi to Hymenaeus and Alexander for me. But if you go God's way, he will watch over your way. He will be your secret weapon.

Proverbs 14:12. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

So if I could use one more image today, to teach wisdom literature, I would use this one. **(Crossroads image)**

Wisdom literature forces us to consider our ways. Which way am I going? Wise people pause and ponder that question.

And one day, the wisest person that ever walked the earth preached the greatest sermon ever preach. No sermon ever spoken from a man's lips has had enduring impact as this one. It was called the sermon on the Mount. And you will never guess what this "God-man" said:

Picture two people. One builds a house on a rock; the other builds a house on sand. The storms come and beat the walls of both houses. One stands, one is blown away. The man who built a foundation below the surface—he is the one that endures.

Picture two gates. One gate is so wide that a hundred people holding hands could pass through it. The other gate is skinny. A single person has to squeak through. The popular, convenient gate leads to a steep cliff. The narrow gate leads to a tropical paradise. Which path would you choose? This is wise thinking.

But this wisdom preacher goes one step further, when he says, "I am the narrow gate." I am the way, the truth, the life. It's high time to make a choice.