

THE KEY TO HAPPINESS

Psalm 1

By Andy Manning

February 2024

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Everyone wants to be happy.
2. The most popular course ever taught in the history of Yale University is a class in happiness. It's called Psyc 157, or "Psychology and the Good Life." The class teaches students to show more gratitude, procrastinate less, and increase social connections.
3. It's not wrong to want to be happy.
 - i. The Puritan **Thomas Watson** said, "Happiness is the mark and center which every man aims at. The next thing that is sought after being, is being happy."
 - ii. The French Philosopher **Blaise Pascal** wrote all human beings are driven by the desire for happiness. "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end... The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."
4. However, most people are not happy. In 2022, the General Social Survey found that just 19 percent of Americans said they were very happy, down from 31 percent, nearly a third, three years before.
5. Why are so many people unhappy? Maybe it's because we are looking for happiness in the wrong place, and in the wrong things.
6. Did you know that the Bible teaches us how to be happy? God created you. He knows you crave happiness. And He knows the key to happiness. And He loves you so much that He has spelled out in His word how to find happiness. The key is found in Psalm 1.

II. TEXT: Psalm 1

1 How happy is the one who does not
walk in the advice of the wicked
or stand in the pathway with sinners
or sit in the company of mockers!

2 Instead, his delight is in the LORD's instruction,
and he meditates on it day and night.

3 He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams
that bears its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers.

4 The wicked are not like this;
instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand up 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 ruin.

III. DEFINING HAPPINESS

1. Notice that the Psalm begins with, "How happy..." The purpose of this Psalm is to teach us how to be happy.
2. Let's talk about the word "happy."
 - i. The Hebrew word is "ashre."
 - ii. This is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word that Jesus uses in the Beatitudes (Mt 5-7), when He begins the Sermon on the Mount with, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; Blessed are those who mourn, etc."
 - iii. Some Bible versions translate the word "blessed" in Psalm 1, but the best translation is simply happy. It means joy, satisfaction, and contentment.
 - iv. "Happy" refers to the good life. An enjoyable, full, and meaningful life.
 1. **Psalm 25:13** "He [the person who fears the Lord] will live a good life..."
 2. **Psalm 34:12-14** "Who is someone who desires life, loving a long life to enjoy what is good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech. Turn away from evil and do what is good; seek peace and pursue it."
 - v. "Happy" refers to the abundant life.
 1. **John 10:10** (NLT) "... My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

- vi. In his book *Coming Apart*, **Charles Murray** defined happiness as, “lasting, justified satisfaction with life as a whole.”
- 3. The purpose of this Psalm is to teach us how to be happy; how to live a happy, satisfying, meaningful, enjoyable life. In other words, “If you want to get the most out of your life, then do this.”

IV. TWO STEPS TO A HAPPY LIFE

1. Avoid wickedness.

- i. Psalm 1 contrasts the wicked and the righteous.
 - 1. The word “wicked” is used four times in Psalm 1. The word “righteous” is used two times in Psalm 1.
 - 2. The word “wicked” (Hb. Rasha) means morally wrong; an actively bad person.
 - 3. The Bible goes into great detail to define the character of the wicked:
 - a. They are arrogant. Ps 9:17
 - b. They don’t believe in God. Ps 10:4
 - c. They don’t fear that God will hold them accountable. Ps 10:4-6
 - d. They persecute the righteous. Ps 11:2
 - e. They love violence. Ps 11:5
 - f. They are too prideful to see their own sin. Ps 36:1-2
 - g. Their mouths are filled with evil. Ps 36:3
 - h. They don’t act wisely. Ps 36:3
 - i. They oppress the poor and needy. Ps 37:14
 - j. They borrow and don’t repay. Ps 37:21
 - k. They are hypocritical. Ps 50:16
 - l. They hate and reject God’s word. Ps 50:17
 - m. They are dishonest and deceitful. Ps 58:3
 - n. They are evil and desire evil. Pr 4:14
 - o. They treat people with contempt, dishonor, and derision. Pr 18:3
 - 4. If you want to be happy, avoid wickedness.
 - 5. Psalm 1 gives us three ways to avoid wickedness.
- ii. Three ways to avoid wickedness.
 - 1. Don’t take the advice of wicked people. HCSB

- a. **Psalm 1:1** “How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked...”
- b. In life you will hear two competing messages. God will advise you to do one thing, and the world will advise you to do the opposite.
- c. Maybe the reason so many people are unhappy is that they are taking the advice of wicked people.
- d. What do wicked people say is the key to happiness?
 - i. Some say that happiness is a product of your environment.
 - 1. In other words, if you aren’t happy, it’s not your fault. It’s the fault of the people around you; it’s your spouse’s fault; your parent’s fault; it’s because of the economy; it’s because you live in America, an unjust country that tries to keep people like you down.
 - 2. The problem with this is that if your unhappiness is not your fault, then it is out of your control. There’s nothing you can do about it. The only way for you to be happy is for other people to change. That’s a recipe for misery and frustration.
 - ii. Some say that happiness can be bought.
 - 1. More money, more happiness.
 - 2. One little girl said, “Grandma, I just found out what happiness is. It’s that feeling you have just after you buy something (Vicki Robin).”
 - 3. The problem with this is that there is just so much evidence against it.
 - 4. In his book, *The Good Life*, Charles Colson wrote that there are three

reasons we know that more money doesn't mean more happiness.

- a. There are many things that money can't buy. "It can buy a house, but not a home; a bed but not sleep; a clock but not time; a book but not knowledge; position but not respect; blood but not life; medicine but not health; sex but not love; insurance but not safety."
- b. The experience of King Solomon. Solomon was the wisest and richest man in his generation, and he made five important conclusions about money (Eccl 5:10-15).
 - i. The more you have, the more you want. Money doesn't satisfy. Eccl 5:10
 - ii. The more you have, the more other people will come after it. Eccl 5:11
 - iii. The more you have, the more you have to worry about. Eccl 5:12
 - iv. The more you have, the more you have to lose. Eccl 5:14
 - v. The more you have, the more you can't take with you when you die. Eccl 5:15
- c. Many of the wealthiest people in history testify that money did not bring them happiness:

- i. **W.H. Vanderbilt** "The care of \$200 million is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it."
 - ii. **John Jacob Astor** "I am the most miserable man on earth."
 - iii. **John D. Rockefeller** "I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness."
 - iv. **Andrew Carnegie** "Millionaires seldom smile."
 - v. **Henry Ford** "I was happier when doing a mechanic's job."
- iii. Some say that the key to happiness is to pursue fun and pleasure and avoid pain.
 - 1. The problem with this is that sometimes the best things in life can only be achieved through great pain. "No pain, no gain." College. Childbirth. Building a business. Mastering a skill. Raising kids. Marriage.
 - 2. Also, pleasure and happiness are not the same thing. **Dennis Prager** wrote, "Fun (pleasure) is what we experience during an act; happiness is what we experience after an act. It is a deeper, more abiding emotion." He says that going to an amusement park or ball game and watching a movie or television are fun activities. They help us relax, temporarily forget our problems, and maybe even laugh, but they do not bring

happiness because their positive effects end when the fun ends.”

3. You can't experience pleasure and fun all the time. In fact, most of the time life is not pleasurable and fun. So, the question is how can we find happiness when we're not having fun or experiencing pleasure? That's what Psalm 1 is about.
 4. Alos, seeking happiness through pleasure eventually leads to destruction. **Zig Ziglar** points out, “For example alcohol, drugs, pornography, illicit sex, and gambling are all, for many people, pleasurable experiences. Yet, over a period of time, they become addictive and destroy any chance for happiness.”
- iv. Some people say that the key to happiness is reaching your goals and dreams.
1. The problem with this is that many people have found out that the journey is surprisingly more satisfying than the destination. Striving is better than arriving. The anticipation is better than the realization. Once you reach a goal, an objective, the top of the mountain, there is almost a sense of sadness that sets in. You quickly think to yourself, “This is it? This is all there is?”
 2. **Jim Rohn** points out that reaching your goals won't make you happy. “You won't be any happier when you reach your goals than you are right now.”
- v. Some people say the key to happiness is to reject God's authority.

1. In other words, the key to happiness is to do whatever you want, and don't let anyone get in your way – not religion, not tradition, not God, not your parents, not the Bible -- nothing.
 2. The problem with this is that God loves you; His commands are not to hurt you, but to help you. And God is much smarter than you. He knows better than you what you need to live a happy life.
 3. When you run from God, you are not running to happiness; you are running straight into a brick wall called reality. And it's going to hurt.
2. Do not hang around with sinners.
 - a. **Psalm 1:1** "... or stand in the pathway with sinners..."
 - b. The Hebrew word for "sinners" (Hb. Chatta) means "criminal; to miss the mark; pass the limits of the law (Dake Reference Bible)." It describes "those for whom wickedness is habitual – a way of life (NIV Study Bible)."
 - c. If you want to avoid wickedness, then don't make close friends with wicked people (sinners). They will rub off on you. They will pull you down. They will impact you negatively.
 - d. **1 Corinthians 15:33** "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"
 - e. Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future.
 - f. We should love unbelievers and try to reach them for Christ, but we should not choose them as our closest friends, or to date them, or to marry them.
 - g. Who are your closest friends? Are they passionate about Jesus Christ? Do they love God's word? Are they serving the Lord? Are they involved in church?
 3. Don't join in with mockers.

- a. **Psalm 1:1** "... or sit in the company of mockers.!"
- b. One Bible version (NLT) says, "or join in with mockers." In other words, it means don't do what mockers do.
- c. The Bible doesn't have anything good to say about mockers (Hb. Luwts). Sometimes the word is translated scoffers, or sneering at God."
- d. The **NIV Study Bible** defines it as "those who ridicule God and defiantly reject his law."
- e. The ESV Study Bible (Pr 19:25-20:1) describes the scoffer or mocker. "This person is a complete reprobate [morally corrupt] and the quintessential fool. Of such a person it can be said: (1) the only hope for correcting his stubborn attitude lies in beatings, which may or may not have the desired effect (19:25); (2) he has no respect for parents (19:26); (3) he will not listen to sound teaching (19:27); (4) he rejects all notions of right and wrong (19:28); and (5) again, he gets beaten for his behavior (19:29)."
- f. The opposite of mocking and scoffing is to get very serious about God and His word. And that brings us to the second step to a happy life in Psalm 1.

2. Pursue righteousness.

- i. The word "righteousness" is used two times in Psalm 1. The righteous person is the opposite of the wicked person.
- ii. The Hebrew word for "righteous" (Hb. Tsaddiq) means "just; innocent, in the right; upright, devout (Logos Bible Software)." It is the person who conforms to God's character and God's will.
- iii. The NIV Study Bible (Ps 1:5) describes the righteous as "those who honor God and order their lives according to His will."
- iv. **Psalm 1:2** gives us TWO WAYS TO PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS:
Psalm 1:2 "Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night."
 - 1. Delight in God's word.

- a. The word “instruction” is the Hebrew word “Torah,” which refers specifically to God’s law, or the first five books of the Old Testament; but in general, it refers to all of God’s word.
 - b. What does it mean to delight in God’s word? To delight is to desire. It means you have a strong desire to know, and understand, and obey God’s word.
 - c. To delight doesn’t mean you know God’s word fully; but you have a strong desire to. And it doesn’t mean that you obey it perfectly, but that's your greatest desire.
2. Meditate on God’s word.
- a. Biblical meditation is different than Eastern, Hindu, New Age meditation, which is about emptying your mind and repeating a sing word or a mantra.
 - b. To meditate on God’s word is to think deeply about it so that you can apply it to your life.
 - c. It is becoming a serious, dedicated student of God’s word, not so you can become smarter and win at Bible Trivia, but so that you can become more righteous. So that you can apply it to your life.
3. In verses 3-6 we are going to see the rewards for righteousness, and the consequences of wickedness.

V. FIVE REWARDS FOR RIGHTEOUS LIVING

1. Provision.

- i. **Psalm 1:3** “He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams”
- ii. Scholars say that the Hebrew terminology refers to “small channels which divide a garden for irrigation (Dake Reference Bible).” This is not a tree next to a random stream. It is a tree intentionally planted in a garden with irrigation channels placed next to it.
- iii. In other words, this is a promise that God will provide all that you need. He will provide what you need spiritually, emotionally, physically, financially, relationally, etc.

2. Usefulness.

- i. **Psalm 1:3** “that bears its fruit in its season”
- ii. We all want our lives to matter. We want to make a difference. We want to make an impact. We don’t want our lives to be wasted. To be irrelevant. We want significance. We want our lives to touch others in a meaningful way.
- iii. That’s the promise for righteous living. The Bible calls it fruitfulness.
- iv. A tree doesn’t produce fruit for its own benefit. It benefits others. The reward for righteous living is that God will use you to help and benefit others, especially by helping them grow closer to God.

3. Longevity.

- i. **Psalm 1:3** “and its leaf does not wither”
- ii. God has a certain amount of time that He wants you to live. It could be fifty years, or it could be 100 years. If you live a wicked life, then your life will be cut short. But if you live a righteous life, you will live out all your years.
- iii. **Proverbs 10:27** “The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked are cut short.”

4. Success.

- i. **Psalm 1:3** “Whatever he does prospers.”
- ii. The word “prosperity” just means “success.”
- iii. This is the promise that you will be successful in life.
- iv. It doesn’t necessarily mean you will succeed in every task, every venture, every attempt. It doesn’t mean you will never experience difficulty, failure, rejection, or setbacks. It’s talking about the overall trajectory of your life. Overall, you will be successful in life.
- v. The phrase “whatever he does” refers to whatever God calls him to do, whether it is the ministry, construction, finance, education, or being a homemaker. Whatever God calls you to do, you will succeed at it.

5. Protection.

- i. **Psalm 1:6** “For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous”
- ii. God is going to protect you from anything that isn’t good for you. It doesn’t mean your life will be pain free, because sometimes

pain is good for us. It means that God will protect you and guide you so that whatever happens to you will be for your good.

- iii. **Psalm 34:15** “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry for help.”
- iv. So, it also means that God’s ear is open and attentive to your prayers.
- v. Finally, the Psalm ends with the consequences of wickedness.

VI. TWO CONSEQUENCES OF WICKEDNESS

1. Eternal punishment.

- i. **Psalm 1:4-5** “4 The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.”
- ii. First, it says that the wicked “are like chaff that the wind blows away.” Second, it says that “the wicked will not stand up in the judgment.” Both of these are references to eternal punishment.
- iii. Let’s start with chaff. Chaff has to do with the ancient grain harvesting process. The first step was threshing or loosening the grain from the straw. This was usually done by the treading cattle. The second step was winnowing, which was done by tossing the grain into the air with winnowing forks. Because the grain is heavier it falls straight onto the floor, but the chaff, which is the straw that you don’t want, it is blown away by the wind. The chaff is then thrown away.
- iv. In the same way, the wicked are like chaff; they are thrown away. They will go to hell.
- v. Second, “they will not stand up in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.” To “stand” means “to withstand God’s wrath when he judges (NIV Study Bible).” The assembly of the righteous refers to heaven. One day the wicked will face eternal wrath in hell.

2. Earthly pain.

- i. **Psalm 1:6** “For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.”

- ii. The word “ruin” can be translated “perish,” “destruction,” or even “doom.”
- iii. Not only does a life of wickedness lead to eternal destruction, but to earthly pain.
- iv. Choose to sin, choose to suffer.

VII. CONCLUSION

1. We all want to be happy, and the Bible tells us how. Avoid wickedness, and pursue righteousness.
2. If you are a Christian, have you backslidden? If so, then you’re living in misery. There’s no way for a true Christian to be happy and sin; to be happy and backsliding; to be happy and far from God. Would you come home today? Would you return to God, and rededicate your life to Christ today? Remember that God’s way is best.
3. If you are not a Christian, here’s my message to you. God’s way is best. God loves you. Even though you have sinned against Him, He loves you. And He wants to give you the best life. A happy life. And He wants to give you eternal life. But to receive the best life, you have to be a Christian.
4. How can you become a Christian? It’s as easy as A, B, C.
 - i. A – Admit that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.
 - ii. B – Believe in Jesus, that He died for your sins to pay your penalty and rose again.
 - iii. C – Call on Jesus to be your Savior and Boss. Hand over the steering wheel of your life to Him, and ask Him to take over your life.
5. The moment you say that prayer, God will save you, you will become a Christian, and you can begin experiencing God’s best for your life.