

Prayers

To God

Pray for peace. Praise God for the peace He brings to the human heart, and for the peace He can bring to our lives, if we let Him.

For myself

Weekly theme: Personal faith

Thank You Lord God for my redemption. I praise You, heavenly Father for all You have done to bring about my eternal salvation; for the price paid by Jesus Christ, for the glorious work of the Holy Spirit in convicting me of sin, and for Your wondrous love in drawing me to Yourself. I barely have the words to express these things but I do my best and I praise You with my every breath. AMEN

For others

Pray for the salvation of those with whom you live and work. Pray especially for those who rebel against God and seek their own destiny. Pray for the Holy Spirit to convict people of sin and ask the Father to love them.

Meditation

This is Your work O Lord our God,
and we ask You to do this for ever:

to give enduring love and purpose
to a world that has lost its way;

to shine Your light in the darkest of places
so that all of the people might see;

to challenge all evil wherever it is found
and confront it with all love and truth;

to overcome troubles, trials and distress
with the beauty of harmony and peace;

to offer healing and perfect wholeness
to all who are ravaged by illness;

to bind up what has been broken apart
and give real hope to the despairing;

to give back vibrant faith and confidence
to those who struggle with their lives;

to mend the broken in soul and spirit
with the love of a Saviour who cares:

Continue to do Your work, O Lord,
and we ask You to do this forever.

Bible Passage

Psalm 1

- ¹ *Blessed are those
who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of cynics.*
- ² *Rather, they delight in the Law of the Lord,
and they meditate on His Law day and night.*
- ³ *They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in season
and whose leaves do not wither.
Whatever they do, they prosper.*
- ⁴ *The wicked are not like this!
They are like chaff that the wind blows away.*
- ⁵ *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
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 will perish.*
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Review

The first psalm in the great Book of Psalms is a powerful and confident portrayal of faithful life as understood in Old Testament times, before the coming of Christ. It contrasts the dire consequences of worldly living with the fruitfulness of a godly life, and highlights the Lord's loving protection of those who are faithful to Him.

Today, some feel that the book of Psalms lacks the key ingredient of faith in Christ by which people are acceptable to God and saved. While this may be strictly true, Christians throughout the ages have found that while the Psalms do not speak overtly of Christ, they certainly speak prophetically of God's intention to save His people and they also describe many of the characteristics of faith and godly living essential for those of us who live in New Testament times.

Now the book of Psalms is a collection of poems used for centuries, before and after the time of Christ, as the 'hymn book' of God's people. Throughout this time, it has given spiritual expression to the thoughts and feelings of those who love God, and it is quite different from any other book of the Bible. The word 'Psalm' is the Latin form of the Hebrew word which is the title of the book, 'tehillim', meaning 'praises'; so the psalms are a collection of poems

designed to praise God. Many psalms obviously praise God (see Psalm 100, for example), but many of them, such as psalm 1, do not immediately trigger the idea of 'praise' in our minds. Nevertheless, all of the psalms address God in some way and express the outpouring of the heart to God, even if the sentiments are reflective, as in psalm 1, or sometimes questioning (for example, see psalm 13). In this sense, all the psalms are a form of 'praise' to Almighty God. The Psalms bring us close to the faith of real people in all circumstances of life, in joy, sorrow, thanksgiving, trouble, anguish, and much more; and throughout the ages, people have found that the Psalms help them understand both God and also themselves.

In its opening verses, Psalm 1 begins by honouring those who avoid evil (1:1,2) and choose instead to keep to God's 'Law' (1:3). By this, the writer does not so much mean sticking to legal codes, but rather to live in godliness and righteousness. Christians are not used to thinking about the Law in this way because the Gospel teaches us that we are saved not by Law but by the grace of Christ. However, the Law still has an important place in God's plan. Jesus Himself says this (see Matthew 5:17), and if we read psalm 1 we will get to know something of what the Law means to those who love God. So we must look carefully at what we mean by 'the Law'.

In the Old Testament, 'Law' means far more than mere rules and regulations, for God's Law describes what the world is like and why. Today, we turn to science with such questions; for example, the law of gravity describes why we remain on the earth and do not float away into space. However, ancient peoples saw the world in a very different way; they believed that God was present in the world, He had created it according to certain spiritual, practical and moral principles, the 'laws' which governed the existence of the world. In the Bible, this law is conveyed in different ways, for example, the story of Creation (Genesis 1-3) or the great stories of God's relationship with Abraham (Genesis 12-22), as well as in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) or the moral laws of Leviticus (e.g. Lev 19).

This psalm presents people of all times and places with a clear choice. They either accept God's natural and revealed Law and live by its light (1:1) or they live according to human desires, characterised ultimately by sin and wickedness (1:4-6). Those who choose God's ways find it a '*delight to the soul*' (1:2), and discover that dwelling on such things fills the mind with all that is good and of God. They are then given the blessing of growth, and verse 3 contains dynamic picture of fruitfulness and prosperity; the god-fearing soul is pictured as a tree that is planted and watered, which in these perfect conditions will certainly bear fruit (1:3). This is a powerful promise of God to all who are faithful and live according to His ways; they are recipients of God's care and love for ever (1:6). On the other hand, those who choose their own ways (1:4,5) have decided to walk away from the Maker of the World. Their lives are therefore inconsequential in God's eternity; they have nowhere to go, because '*the way of the wicked will perish*' (1:6) and their lives are fruitless.

Some do not like the way that this psalm appears to judge people, and they baulk at the description of sinners as those who are rejected by God (1:4-6), even the wicked. Some dismiss the psalm, suggesting that what it says is untrue. They say that the psalm implies that those who love God will have a good life but those who do not will fare badly; however they point out that wicked people have lives that appear no better or worse than anyone else. To say this is to miss the point, however, because the psalm is not talking just about the rewards of earthly life, it describes life from the perspective of God's eternity. It says that those who live according to what God has revealed will benefit eternally from their obedience, but those who reject God have ultimately given themselves no future, certainly no future in God's presence. All this is most obvious in verse 6, which contains both a strong word of caution for those who reject God, and a beautiful promise of His love and care for those who seek the Lord and long for good to prevail!

Psalm 1 may be contentious for some, but for people of faith who can perceive its eternal perspective, it holds wonderful promises which connect strongly with New Testament faith. It encourages us to be 'doers' of God's Word (see Romans 2:13, James 1:22,), to bear good fruit (Matt 7:17, see also the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and to prosper in the things of God (1 Tim 1:18,19 etc.). All together, Psalm 1 provides God's people with a straightforward spiritual assessment of the path of faith, and contrasts this with the fruitless pathway of unbelief. It also confirms God's justice and moral authority, and it promises His sustenance and counsel to those who trust in Him and do not reject Him for their own ways. As such, it is a powerful and succinct song with which to praise God at the beginning of the book of Psalms!

Discipleship

Application

Accepting the truths of our faith

A psalm such as this is wonderfully helpful when we find ourselves downcast or downtrodden by the difficulties of life. It reminds us that God cares and has an eternal purpose for us that may lie beyond our immediate perception. It encourages us to take our eyes off our trials and look to God's eternal promises and His fruitful pathways, for if we allow ourselves to be blinded to these things we will indeed suffer.

I also suggest that the psalm does not ask us to wallow in the idea that those who reject the Lord get no ultimate benefits. This psalm acts as a warning to us personally to make sure that we do not walk in the wrong paths and find ourselves walking '*with the wicked*'. This is important. We are not the world's judge; God is, neither are we the means whereby God will judge the world and its people. Our duty is to remain constant on the pathway of life given to us by God, and to be an example of all that is good in this world, including '*growing*' and '*being fruitful*'. We will do this if we are active in our faith and seek to 'do' God's will and live according to His ways.

A personal assessment

This Psalm has reminded me afresh that the 'two paths' are always there before me, and yet I frequently do not perceive them. I often see only one option in life and carry on as if there is nothing to do except follow the path before me. However, this is a little blind. I need to realise that at all time I face choices to follow the Lord's ways or become trapped by my own, and I need a full and godly perspective on everything that is before me. Looking back, I have faced far more 'right or wrong' decisions than I perceived at the time. For me, the message is that I must ensure that I am more acutely aware of the Lord's presence with me at all times. Then, I will be able to check out what He requires of me at each step of the way.

Ideas for what to do

- Try to pick up one or two things from the psalm that suggest how better you might live for the Lord and keep close to Him in everyday life. For example, spending time meditating on Scripture, and ensuring that you are consuming the spiritual food God gives.
- Pray for those who have lost their way with God. Pray for any individuals you know, and do your best to be of practical help to these people if at all possible. Make yourself ready to be a means God can use to bring a person back to faith.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What is meant by the phrase '*the counsel of the wicked ... the way of sinners*' (1:1), and how does this tempt people away from God's path today?
2. Look at verse 3 and discuss in your group what this picture tells you about God's blessings.
3. Consider whether '*the judgement*' (1:5) is something that happens in the present or the future?

Final Prayer

Eternal and ever loving God, You have been the help and refuge of Your people for generations. May we live in Your presence, love all that is good and true, and serve you throughout our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN
