

## ***Meeting God In the Psalms***

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Meeting God In the Psalms Series

Psalm 1

Over the next several months I am going to do a series from the Old Testament book of Psalms titled "Meeting God in the Psalms." It is interesting to me how the Psalms show up in unexpected places. For example, about a decade ago the *New York Times* reported on a very rough stretch in President Clinton's first term. Here is what the Times reported:

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Seeking solace from his recent political troubles, President Clinton said today that he had just read the entire book of Psalms...Friends, he said, have faxed him passages...on a daily basis..."During this difficult period, a lot of people were giving me different psalms to read," Mr. Clinton said. "It was amazing how many people sent me passages from the Psalms. So I decided to read the whole book." The President cited five particular psalms as being important to him now: Psalm 25, 27, 90, 103, and 139.

In the *New Yorker Magazine* recently Greg Loury, who is a very prominent social scientist talked about this moment in his life when he turned away from this downward spiral of self-destructive behavior. He sat in a mental institution and a pastor came and visited him and read the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm to him. He told him,

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*Ps 23:4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Greg Loury said that the words were familiar to him from childhood. He had memorized that psalm. But now he heard the words differently. "For the first time in my life, I felt that I wasn't alone and that God could help." That spring Greg Loury went to an Easter service. As the organ played and the pastor preached, Greg Loury said that he thought of his sins and thought of the psalms and particularly God's promise to forgive his sins. He said during that service he broke down and wept before God and asked God's forgiveness.

There is likely no book in the Bible that has brought more people greater comfort and help in times of trouble than the Book of Psalms.

Anatoly Sharansky, who was imprisoned in the old Soviet Union and held for years in solitary confinement, said he had nothing to read for years except the book of Psalms. When his release was finally agreed to and he was exchanged for a Soviet spy, Sharansky insisted on taking his Book of Psalms with him. He refused repeated efforts from his jailors to take it away from him. And when Sharansky finally emigrated to Israel, he held the Book of Psalms up in the air as he walked to the Western Wall, which is the holiest site in Judaism. Sharansky said that he found the expression of his deepest feelings echoed by King David thousands of years ago in the Book of Psalms.

The book of Psalms helps us to put into words what we experience and feel. It gives us language when we are struggling for language to speak about what matters most to us – our illnesses, our fears, our failures, the feeling of being betrayed by others. The Psalms help us to cry out to God for help. The Psalms speak to human pain. They give words that enable us to say thanks to God when we experience his blessing, and to complain to God when he seems remote or uninterested in our lives and situations.

One of the most wonderful things that we experience in the Psalms is the feeling that someone else understands; that we are not going through whatever it is we are going through by ourselves. We have another human being walking beside us. Isn't it a comfort to know no matter what your situation, to have someone who has been there before, put their arms around us and say, "I understand"? And best of all, we have God, who continually reveals himself to us in this book.

So in sum, the power of the psalms consists in at least four things:

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1. The psalms help us to get in touch with ourselves.

Sometimes we don't even know what we are feeling, what we think, what we are experiencing. The psalms help us get in touch with ourselves.

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2. The Psalms help us get in touch with our world.

The Psalms help us to get in touch with our world, especially a world in which many people suffer injustice, are in pain, or are sick, and hurting.

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3. The psalms help us get in touch with the gospel.

We discover in the New Testament that the book of Psalms was the OT book that Jesus quoted the most. And many of the psalms point forward to the grace of God demonstrated in the coming of Christ and his death for us on the cross. The Psalms put us in touch with the gospel.

And finally,

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4. The psalms put us in touch with God.

We are not just told in the Bible about God. The psalms give us a way to connect with God, to speak with God, to worship God, to know God, and to love God, to experience God. The psalms put us in touch with God.

For years, our church put up billboards around the city with the question: Looking For God? And, friend, if you are looking for God; if you are looking for a deeper experience of God, a deeper knowledge of God, there is no better place for us to turn than the book of Psalms. I've called this series "Meeting God in the Psalms." Let's pray.

Now why is the book of Psalms so memorable? The word psalms means songs, so the book is a book of songs. The way to think about the book of Psalms is that the book of Psalms has served as the hymnbook for God's people for several thousand years. And when you think about a hymnbook, you realize that you have different songwriters, you have different dates when the songs were written, and you have different life experiences from which these hymns arose. That's the book of Psalms. We have different writers. Many of the writers are anonymous. The author is not identified.

There is a lot of scholarly debate about when the titles to the various psalms were written, and what the titles mean – whether the prepositions mean that the psalm was written for David, the second King of Israel, or by David. You can look at scholarly literature on this.

I am going to take the traditional view that many of the psalms were written by King David, the second King of Israel. They seem to connect with the life circumstances that we read about in the Old Testament historical books. Other psalms are ascribed to the musician Asaph. And there are the psalms of the Sons of Korah, who were Levites and Temple singers.

I think it is important for us to pause here to understand again why the psalms have so much power. They are songs. Isn't it interesting that every culture, every race, every ethnicity throughout history has composed songs. You often

hear it said that what distinguishes human beings from the rest of the mammals on earth is that we are thinking mammals, we are thinking animals. But we could say with as much truth that we human beings are distinguished because we are singing animals. And in the Bible we have so many people who are singers and songwriters. Moses was a songwriter. His sister, Miriam, wrote songs. The great judge, Deborah, in the Old Testament wrote songs. Hannah wrote songs. There were groups of songwriters and worship leaders mentioned in the Bible.

The book of Psalms has power because it has found there is no easier way to remember something than to put words to music. My grandchildren, who are 3 and 4 years old, can sing multiple verses of songs. You yourself can remember songs going back to childhood.

The psalms are not only songs, they are poetry. There is something about poetry that gives expression to things, especially transcendent things like love, truth, beauty and spirituality, that we can't otherwise capture in words. Poetry is like art. Poetry is like music. Through poetry we experience something; we feel something. Poetry gets under our skin in a way that straight prose never does. Poetry, like music and art, doesn't just touch our brain; it communicates with our hearts.

I think because the psalms are songs, because the psalms are poetry, that many people would say that the psalms are their favorite book in the Bible. I might also add that if your Christian experience has been confined to the study of doctrine, if your mind is geared more towards being analytical, dipping into the psalms regularly might be just what you need to round out your relationship with God.

Now, let me just give you one brief word about the structure of the Book of Psalms. Whatever person or group edited this book of 150 psalms that we presently have, this individual or team decided to put these psalms into five books. It was probably an imitation of the five books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible, that is, that Christians commonly call the Pentateuch and that Jews call the Torah. Each of the five books ends with a statement like,

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Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen, and amen.

If you are taking notes, Ps. 1:1-41 forms the first book and it ends with Ps. 41:13. Ps. 42-72 forms the second book and it ends with Ps. 72:18-19. Ps. 73-89 forms the third book and it ends with Ps. 89:52. Psalm 90-106 forms the fourth book and it ends with Ps. 106:48. Psalm 107-150 forms the fifth book. And the whole book of Psalms ends with Psalm 150:6.

Now, just by way of the most informal structuring of these five books, and I borrowed this from a great Old Testament scholar named Derek Kidner – it is an informal, not exact way to structure, but it might help your memory. Books 1 and 2 are mainly personal in their subject matter. In other words, Ps. 1 to Ps. 72 which contains a great many of the psalms of David, speak out of David's personal distress, his personal praise, his personal pain. Books 1 and 2 are mainly personal in their orientation.

Book 3, which is Ps. 73 to Ps. 89, are largely national in their orientation. They are mostly prayers for the nation of Israel. And the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> books are largely liturgical. That is they are largely about the worship of the people of God. We move from the personal to the national to the liturgical.

What I want to do today is consider Psalm 1 which is the doorway to the rest of the psalms. Psalm 1 is the entranceway. The editors who put this book together decided that this psalm should have pride of place. That this was the way into all the other psalms. And if we are going to study the Book of Psalms, we need to get into this book the way the inspired editors wanted us to, which is via Psalm 1. Let's read Psalm 1 together.

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*Ps 1:1 Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, <sup>2</sup> but who delight in the law of the LORD and meditate on his law day and night.*

*<sup>3</sup> They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.*

*<sup>4</sup> Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

*<sup>6</sup> For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will be destroyed.*

Psalm 1 teaches us that there is a way of life that you need to adopt if you are going to benefit from the book of Psalms, otherwise all of your worship of God through the psalms is going to be hollow. Psalm 1 tells us that if you want to be authentic in your meeting with God, if you want to be real in your religion, here is the kind of person you need to be. Otherwise, when you pray the psalms, you are just going to be a hypocrite. You are going to be a fake.

So Psalm 1 begins with this word: Blessed. We read:

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*Ps 1:1 Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked*

Now, you need to understand that there are two words for blessed in the Old Testament and also two words for blessed in the New Testament. This word for blessed leans towards the word “happy.” The Hebrew word is,

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Ashre = Happy

It is where we get the Old Testament name Asher from. I have a grandson named Asher. And when he was born, I laid hands on him and prayed that he might experience the full meaning of his name, Asher, which means happy one, fortunate one, blessed one.

Psalm 1 is giving us the secret to a happy life. Psalm 1 says if you want to be happy with the happiness of God, if you want to experience a solid, consistent joy in your life, here is the way you are going to find it. Now, the psalmist links our happiness to the kind of counsel and advice that we listen to. The psalmist understands that our happiness in life is determined very much by the people we hang around with and the advice we listen to.

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Two Sources of Value

So Psalm 1 begins negatively with v. 1.

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*Ps 1:1 Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,*

You listen to the wrong people, you follow the wrong counsel, you will not be happy.

Now, what does it mean to walk in step with the wicked? Or more accurately translated,

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“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.”

What is the counsel of the wicked? Well, of course, there is the specific counsel that people give you. The advice you might receive from a friend or a family member about your marriage that takes no account of God or God's Word. "Here is what I would do if my husband ever said that to me." "Here is the way I relate to my wife." "Here's the name of an attorney that I used for my first divorce."

The counsel of the wicked is counsel devoid of the mind of God. It takes no account of the Word of God.

Now, we could point to lots of illustrations of this. But let me just pick one. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we find the counsel of the wicked particularly in the area of our sexuality. There is a very powerful book that just came out titled *Unprotected*. It is written by a psychiatrist, who works at the health clinic at an Ivy League School and who wrote the book anonymously because of the fear of reprisal by her colleagues. In the book, she cites many examples from health pamphlets passed out at university health clinics and websites sponsored by university health departments regarding the kinds of counsel students are getting about their sexuality.

So, for example, there is a health question and answer internet service provided Columbia University's Health Education Program. Their mission is to provide readers with "reliable, accessible information and a range of thoughtful perspectives, so that they can make responsible decisions regarding their health and well being." Now, if you click on this site, which I would not advise you to do, but which your college-bound son or daughter might do, you are going to find university provided sex education about beatings and bestiality, and subjects that are too awful to mention and which even two decades ago were regarded as severe mental illnesses.

The counsel given by universities to our sons and daughters about sexuality is not the counsel of God's Word. It is not counsel from the mind of God. It is what Psalm 1 describes as the counsel of the wicked. This counsel doesn't tell a young person that sex is to be cherished as part of an exclusive covenant relationship between a man and a woman. Instead, the counsel is that you need to practice safer sex. Go ahead and have sex, but just make sure that every time you do you use a condom and you get tested regularly.

What young adults are not told is that covering yourself with latex may prevent you from getting certain sexually transmitted diseases, but it may not protect you from other ones. And that if you get an HPV as a woman that can cause you to never be able to have children. It can open the door to cervical cancer.

One woman cried in the psychiatrist's office and said, "Why didn't anyone tell me that if I had sex with my boyfriend and then we broke up, I might not only be left with a disease, but with a broken heart?"

The counsel of the wicked is not only the specific counsel people give you about sex or marriage. It is the whole outlook on life that they pass on to you. You know, the whole paradigm that people at your work just take for granted as being the way to a happy life.

- Of course, you are going to want to live in this kind of house.
- Of course, you are going to want to drive this kind of car.
- Of course, you are going to want to shop in these sorts of stores.

We human beings have such a high need to belong that we get shaped by people who we listen to, who we hang around with.

There was a powerful novel written a couple of years ago by Tom Wolfe called *I Am Is Charlotte Simmons*. It tells the story of a brilliant girl who goes off to college, a college patterned after a combination of Duke University and Stanford. She is a small town girl, full of intellectual curiosity. And through the course of the book, you watch this girl's values and morals break down not because of specific counsel, but because of the shaping powerful environment of life in the university dormitory.

That need to belong that causes us to be conformed. It is not just children, it is not just young adults – all of us, the psalmist warns, are tempted to pick up attitudes and values that are part of the organization where we work, or partnership we're in, or friends we have because we want to belong.

Then the psalmist goes on and paints for us what looks like a downward spiral.

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*Ps 1:1 Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,*

We have a picture of someone who is walking in bad company, then standing, and then sitting down. I think in the Bible of the apostle Peter during the trial of Jesus. We read in Luke 22:54,

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*Lk 22:54 Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance.*

Peter was walking with unbelievers at a distance from Jesus. Then in John 18:18,

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*Jn 18:18 It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.*

Here Peter stood. And then in Luke 22:55,

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*Lk 22:55 And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them.*

Peter sat down with them.

All of you know this one. The psalmist is warning us to avoid a deepening involvement and participation in the attitudes and behaviors, the whole way of life that rejects God and pushes God to the margins. The attitude that treats God as if God and his will and Word are irrelevant. The downward spiral - Hanging out at your boyfriend/girlfriend's apartment late into the night, beginning to get romantic, and then ending up in bed.

Now, notice the psalmist is primarily focusing on your thought life, your values, your attitudes, what is going on in your mind. These are things to avoid, the psalmist warns us. It is very much like the beginning portion of Romans 12:2 where the apostle Paul says:

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*Ro 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world,*

And then positively, the psalmist goes on in v. 2 and says this:

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*Ps 1:2 but who delight in the law of the LORD and meditate on his law day and night.*

And v. 2 is very much like Paul's next statement in Romans 12:2 when he says:

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*Ro 12:2 ...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

How do we get our minds renewed? How do we get the right values in our minds?

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*Ps 1:2 but who delight in the law of the LORD and meditate on his law day and night.*

The people of God are called upon not just to obey rules imposed on us from our slave master in heaven, but to delight, to find pleasure in, to value, treasure, and cherish the instruction from the Lord that we receive in his Word. Let me ask you a question, friends. Do you ever find yourself really grateful that God has given us a compass, a way to do life? That God has revealed a set of values and behaviors that if you follow these things, your life will work. Have you ever found yourself kneeling down before God in gratitude saying, "God, thank you so much that I don't have to go through life clueless, that you've given me instruction about how to deal with my anger; who to date; how to handle hurts; how to discover peace; how to have hope in the face of death; how to deal with crisis; how to relate to my parents; how to relate to my spouse; how to relate to my body; how to relate to children; how to relate to politics.

I would have made such a mess of things on my own. My life would be such a disaster apart from you. Thank you God, that your Word kept me from blowing up my life.

I talked with a woman here at the church not too long ago. She was a seeker coming from a thoroughly unchurched background. She came up to me after one of the services in tears and said: Pastor Rich, the truth is I have absolutely nothing to say to my teenage daughter who is beginning to be sexually active. I don't know what to say to her. I haven't ever transmitted to her any kind of fixed value system, any set of absolutes. I haven't had them in my life and I have nothing to say to her, other than "I don't think it is a good thing."

Have you ever knelt down before God and said, "Thank you, God, that you give us a guidance system for life in your Word."

Do you understand that the Bible is not a book of rules imposed by a slave master in heaven, but a book of guidance given us by our Father who loves us and wants our lives to be blessed and happy.

And then we are told that if we want to be happy, we will not only delight in the law of God, but we will meditate upon it.

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*Ps 1:2 but who delight in the law of the LORD and meditate on his law day and night.*

Did you know that we Christians are taught by the Bible to meditate? Meditation is not just an Eastern religious practice. Christians are also told to meditate. Unlike Eastern religion, the way a Christian person meditates is not by emptying your mind, but by filling your mind with God's Word. How do you do that?

Let me read to you from one of the great masters of Christian devotional practices today, one of my favorite authors, Richard Foster. He wrote a wonderful book several years ago titled *Prayer: Finding The Heart's True Home*. Here is what he says about meditation:

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*Have you ever watched a cow chew its cud? This unassuming animal will fill its stomach with grass and other food. Then it settles down quietly and, through a process of regurgitation, reworks what it has received, slowly moving its mouth in the process. In this way it is able to fully assimilate what it has previously consumed, which is then transformed into rich, creamy milk.*

*So it is with Meditative Prayer. The truth being meditated upon passes from the mouth into the mind and down into the heart, where through quiet rumination – regurgitation, if you will – it produces in the person praying a loving, faith-filled response.*

To meditate on God's Word means that you are trying to internalize the message. It is good to read the Bible in quantity, to read a few chapters a day. But it is important, if you want to be transformed by God's Word, to develop the discipline of chewing on a few verses, or a few phrases every day. For example, it says in Eph. 2:14

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*Eph 2:14 For he [Christ] himself is our peace...*

I chew on that text. And one of the ways that you meditate on God's Word is that you begin to speak it back to God. He himself is our peace. Lord, Jesus, what does it mean that you are our peace? What difference does the fact that you came into the world and the fact that you died on the cross make, in terms of my ability to be at peace with someone that I have a problem with. As I am meditating on this phrase, "He is our peace," maybe I will imagine Christ hanging on the cross saying the words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." As I picture Christ hanging on the cross, I might confess to him my anger towards this person, my hurt, the fears that I have of making myself vulnerable to them. At the cross I might choose to forgive this person. I might ask the Holy Spirit to empower me to be able to pray Jesus' words, "Father, forgive them."

This phrase, "he himself is our peace" gets chewed on and chewed on until it becomes part of us. We are not simply talking about scripture study, which is important. We are not simply talking about examining commentaries, which is helpful. We are talking about internalizing God's Word so that we are different people.

And then the psalmist goes on and talks about two kinds of life. This time he begins positively in v. 3.

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*Ps 1:3 They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.*

And then he speaks negatively in v. 4,

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*Ps 1:4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.*

The picture in v. 3 is of a tree that is rooted and draws up into itself the nutrients and water that causes the tree to flourish and bear fruit. The person who is delighting in God's instruction manual for life; the person who is meditating and assimilating the mind of God into the very core of their being, that person is going to be a rooted person, a healthy person.

You know, this week our nation paused to remember President Gerald Ford, who recently died, and who had been the 38<sup>th</sup> President of the U.S. And it was interesting to me how many folks who spoke about President Ford used the word rooted in describing this man's life. I heard the Michigan Governor say that "President Ford was rooted in good old fashioned Midwestern values like hard work, and sportsmanship, and integrity, and honesty." Tom Brokaw said "Gerald Ford brought to the political arena no demons, no hidden agenda, no hit list, or acts of vengeance. He knew who he was and he didn't require consultants or political gurus to change him. The man was rooted."

As I listened to the various eulogies, they almost seemed to carry with them an undercurrent of sadness and regret that perhaps these deeply rooted values – hard work, integrity, decency, humility – that these things seem to be rare in American politics now.

And notice in v. 3 that this rooted tree brings forth its fruit in season.

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*Ps 1:3 They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.*

If you are rooted in God's Word, if you are rooted in the people of God, your roots go down deep into the church and you are listening to the advice, and following the example of those who are going after God, you are going to bring forth fruit in its season.

You watch a young Christian and it seems like everything in their life is delightful. It is like the season of spring – everything is fresh, exciting and wonderful. They are experiencing all these new discoveries about Christ. But that season doesn't last. A person then encounters difficulty, crisis, and the heat of summer. And if they are really rooted in God's Word and the church, God will bring forth the fruit of perseverance, the fruit of endurance. At other times in other situations, God might be bring forth the fruit of forbearance, or patience, or forgiveness towards someone who has hurt you.

But those who live apart from God are not like this. We read in v. 4,

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*Ps 1:4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.*

You know what chaff is – when grain is threshed, it is thrown into the air. The heavy grain sifts down, the chaff blows away. The picture of those apart from God is that they are rootless. They are weightless. We might say today that their lives are like snowflakes, or like soap bubbles, transient; there is no substance.

Is that not a picture of life in the modern world – weightless, rootless, and transient?

Years ago I tore out my bathroom when Marlene and I lived in an old house in the Linden area. And, yes, in case you are wondering, Marlene did allow me to use her power tools. I tore the whole bathroom out down to the studs and floor joists. This old house, of course, had walls made of lath and plaster. I couldn't believe how much stuff I had to carry down in huge trashcans from this small bathroom. I had hundreds and hundreds of pounds of substance. Houses today? They are like chaff. You lean on wall board now and you could put your thumb through it.

All of our furniture now is throw-away. Our furniture is designed to disintegrate. You don't hand it down. It is all pressed particle board. Our appliances are designed to be tossed after a few years. The sheet metal in our cars dents when a large drop of rain falls on them.

Is that not a picture of contemporary life? We are so fragile. We can't handle any weight. We lack substance. Where is the person about whom it could be said that they have good old fashioned values of hard work, integrity, honesty, and humility?

And then finally:

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We see two very different outcomes of life.

Again, negatively, in v. 5,

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*Ps 1:5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

And positively in v. 6,

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*Ps 1:6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will be destroyed.*

Where it says in v. 5,

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*Ps 1:5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*

I don't believe the psalmist is just talking about the end time judgment when you and I stand before God and get assessed for all that we have done. I think he is also speaking to us about the outcome of forming a life apart from God and apart from the mind of God. He is talking about the inevitable consequences of living life according to the counsel of this world. What happens to the person who is rootless and weightless, all veneer and no substance? The judgment is not just an end time judgment. What happens to the person in this world's crisis moments when you are not deeply rooted in God, when you discover that you have breast cancer, or your company shuts down, or you have a miscarriage, or your house burns down, or your spouse wants a divorce, or you lose a parent?

The psalmist says you will not stand, your life will collapse and in the end you will be excluded from the assembly of the righteous. You will be utterly and completely repelled, exiled, estranged, and, finally, excluded from the presence of God.

On the other hand, we read in v. 6 the outcome of a rooted life, a life that delights in instruction from the Lord, a life that delights in the counsel of the godly, a life in which people are deeply assimilating the Word of God into their lives.

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*Ps 1:6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will be destroyed.*

It makes a difference, friends, not only on the day of judgment, but now in this world's crisis. Let me close with this. You know, there were hundreds of stories that came out of Hurricane Katrina last year of two very different responses to this horrible natural calamity. Tens of thousands of people were homeless. Tens of thousands lost everything in their lives. Some lost family members. Many more lost all of their possessions, their homes, their neighborhoods, their jobs, their churches. Some people who lost a great deal said their lives were over. They didn't know if they could go on. Very tragically, the suicide rate in the aftermath of Katrina tripled.

But I want to read to you what one woman who was rooted in God said after she lost all of her possessions in Hurricane Katrina – her house, every single thing she owned, every photo and accumulated possessions over a lifetime of hard work. Her name is Gwen Williams and she testifies to the truth of Psalm 1. Here is what Gwen Williams wrote:

*I believed the words of the old gospel hymn, "Long As I Got King Jesus, I Don't Need Nobody Else." As I drove through my old deserted neighborhood in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, I had a pain in my heart for the many who never escaped, or for those who would never come back. As we turned down Franklin Avenue where my church stood, the parking lot, which used to overflow with cars on Sunday mornings, was eerily vacant. There was nothing there but the same black mold that greeted us everywhere. I saw the waterline that circled my beautiful church building and tears filled my eyes. It, too, was ruined. As we drove past, I realized again that we had nothing left but God.*

*Not only was my church gone, every church in the city was damaged or destroyed by floodwaters. Ironically, many of the bars and strip joints in the French Quarter were open for business. There was no place open to praise God, but plenty of places to drink and have a good time. I imagined Satan's laughter. Was he thinking he'd won a battle against God's children? Then God's Spirit assured me this battle was just beginning.*

*In my heart I knew God was preaching a message to His people. Before Katrina, New Orleans was a sick city. Sin, poverty, and corruption had taken its toll on our neighborhoods, our schools, even our churches. Now, in a sense, we had a clean slate. Perhaps God took all of us out of the city in order to bring a few of us back to do His work. God does not need mega-buildings to get His message out. He needs people who will be obedient to His Word. He needs people who are willing to give everything so that others may come to know Jesus.*

*I wanted to be counted among those people. Like Isaiah, my heart cried out: "Here I am, Lord..." (Isa. 6.8)*

*I am among the remnant of believers who will return to New Orleans with nothing but God. He took everything away so that I would have nothing left to depend on but Him.*

*Amid the upheaval, I made an amazing discovery: When there is nothing left but God, He is enough. He is all you need to start over again. What a foundation to build upon! God is all you need for every need. Stay close to Him, and the material concerns will take care of themselves.*

*Let's pray.*

***I. The Power Of The Psalms***

**A.** The Psalms Put Us In Touch With Ourselves

The Psalms Put Us In Touch With Our World

The Psalms Put Us In Touch With The Gospel

The Psalms Put Us In Touch With God

**B.** The Psalms Are Songs

The Psalms Are Poetry

The Psalms Are Structured

***II. The Doorway To The Psalms (Psalm 1)***

**A.** Two Sources Of Value

1. Negatively: Counsel To Avoid (Ps. 1.1)

a. The Counsel Of The Wicked

b. The Spiral Down

2. Positively: Counsel To Heed (Ps. 1.2)

**B.** Two Kinds Of Life (vv.3, 4)

1. The Rooted Life

2. The Rootless Life

**C.** Two Outcomes Of Life (vv. 5, 6)

1. The Awful Outcome

2. The Blessed Outcome