

Talk It Over

Happy How?
(Week 1)
Psalm 1

SMALL TALK

1. What makes you happy?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ Psalm 1.** What are the “blessed”/ “happy” like and not like? What do the “blessed”/ “happy” do and not do? What other word does this Psalm use for the blessed or happy people (see 1:5, and 1:6)?
3. What is the point of the tree comparison?
4. What are the “wicked” like and not like? What do they do and not do?
5. How can anyone meditate day and night on God and his instruction?

GETTING PERSONAL

6. There are only 2 descriptions of people in two categories in this psalm: the righteous and the wicked. Which category do you see yourself in? Is there a third category?
7. What is your favorite media? (Facebook, TV, Netflix, YouTube, etc...) What is the way of “happiness” according to your favorite media?
8. When you are bored or down, what is the first thing you turn to? How does this help you cope?

PRACTICE!

- a. What are you grateful for?
- b. What is something God has been showing you this week (in His Word or some other way)?

- c. About the people you are interacting with who do not yet follow Jesus, how can we join you in prayer?
- d. What is keeping you from having a better answer to questions a - c?

January 10, 2021

Happy How?

Week 1: Psalm 1

When you are not as happy as you would like to be, what do you do?

When you are bored what is the first thing you turn to?

When you are not quite coping the way you would like to be coping, what do you do to elevate your outlook?

It seems like more than ever we need better strategies than the common strategies.

When I'm stressed, or bored, or sad, I have a bad habit of trying to feel better by looking for snacks even if I'm not hungry. And even if I allow myself only healthy foods, I keep filling myself beyond what is necessary as if that will somehow fix something inside, and make me feel happier. It doesn't last.

When I'm bored, or I am in a waiting room, or something, I find myself turning to my phone... it has become a filler coping mechanism. The problem with that is the screen habit will take more and more of my attention if not carefully monitored.

I want a better deeper kind of happy, a longer lasting kind of happy. A kind of happy that is not so fickle, and never deeply satisfied.

I've seen it in others. I think of Connie Nichols. Her body was fading, but her spirit still surprised me with a deeper kind of contentment, and well, the best word I can think of is "glory".

Gina and I went to visit Connie at the assisted living facility she was at, knowing that because of Covid restrictions the best we could do was make arrangements to talk with her at her bedroom window. Our purpose was to go to encourage her. It actually worked the other way around. She was beaming, and although confined to limited interactions, she was living so well with God as her source of comfort, joy, and happiness, she was filled up to overflowing and making a difference in the lives of all those around her, as was her habit. Now, that's a deeper kind of "happy".

In this 3 week series, we are going to visit ancient wisdom on a deeper kind of happiness and how to get there. We will be doing this by looking at 3 different Psalms. Let's begin.

Psalm 1 (CSB) How happy is the one who does not...

Many translate the Hebrew word here, blessed. Blessed means supremely happy or fulfilled.

I. The Happy Life AVOIDS...

Here is a surprising starting point. You would think the focus would begin with, if you want a happy life, here is what you do. But this starts in a place we don't expect. If you want a happy life, first learn that there are some things you have to learn to avoid. Things you don't do!! There is a common mistake. We think, happiness is the chief aim so do whatever you think will make you happy. But God says, you have some weaknesses that you do not know about, and so you are prone to follow in the popular wisdom of the world, but the common approach will not work long term. This is God's perspective on the matter, and he should know what is best because he invented us and how we have been designed to be happy.

The rest of this psalm compares and contrasts the worldly "wisdom" common path people pursue thinking it will lead to happiness and God calls this "wicked" because it refuses to trust his wisdom.

This is contrasted with another label for the wise path. Look for it as we read Psalm 1.

***Psalm 1:1–6 (CSB)** **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.*

The two different approaches are described as opposite contrasts. The lifestyle or path of the "righteous" and the lifestyle path of the "wicked." One approach trusts what God says. The other approach trust more in what our mind, will, and emotions cry out for, and is so common around us, it seems normal, and even right to us, but it is a seductive path leading us to ruin.

Both approaches are pursuing what the subjects believe will make them happy, but only one path leads to the sweet spot of happiness God delivers.

The very word "righteous" in our language, is from the Middle English *rightwyss* (right + wise). If you want to be happy, pick the right "wise". Not the worldly "wise" but what God defines as wise.

I. The Happy Life AVOIDS...

A. ...walking in bad ADVICE

Psalm 1:1 (CSB) How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked...

B. ...standing in the SINNERS PATHWAY

Psalm 1:1 (CSB) How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners...

C. ...sitting with the MOCKERS

Psalm 1:1 (CSB) 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!

If you are blindly following the common and broad path, WATCH OUT! **Matthew 7:13–14 (NIV)** “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

We assume we are not doing this, but are we?

- How much time do you spend on Social Media? Why is that?
- How much time do you watch the News? Why is that?
- What other forms of media are you exposed to? How many hours of your life is devoted there? Why is that?

There is a disturbing new 2020 documentary on Netflix entitled, “The Social Dilemma” that highlights how individuals are being manipulated in social media by the algorithms of artificial intelligence on so many software platforms.

Algorithms are opinions embedded in code. These algorithms are not objective. The algorithms are optimized to some definition of success.

When a commercial enterprise designs the algorithm for profit, the goals of the algorithms are not the goals you share when you are using the app that is governed by those algorithms.

We usually think of the internet as one giant library that we can access in so many different ways to learn so many things and to connect etc. But unlike a library that is a useful tool that holds both good and bad books passively, the internet is not a passive tool. Search engines, social platforms, and apps are all using Artificial Intelligence to track you and even lead you.

“There are only two industries that call their customers ‘users’: illegal drugs and software.”

--Edward Tufte

Artificial intelligence is tracking you and effectively putting before you what it learns from your behavior that will keep you longer on the screen. This is driven by AI technology which is advancing exponentially!

On the opposite side of the screen are thousands of engineers with a different set of goals than you have... Who is going to win when artificial intelligence is used to manipulate us...?

“We are all looking out for the moment when technology will overwhelm human strengths and intelligence. When is it going to cross the singularity, replace our jobs, and be smarter than humans. But there is this much earlier moment when technology exceeds and overwhelms human weaknesses. This point being crossed is at the root of addiction, polarization, radicalization, outrage-ification, vanity-ification, the entire thing. This is overpowering human nature and this is checkmate on humanity.”

--Tristan Harris, former design ethicist for google, president and a co-founder of the [Center for Humane Technology](#)

Our habits can either set us squarely in the cultural broad road, or we can choose a different pathway, leading to the sweet spot of God’s favor and blessing.

II. **The Happy Life Is ROOTED**

Psalm 1:2-3 (CSB) 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.

A. **In God’s WORD**

Psalm 1:2 (CSB) ² Instead, his delight is in the Lord’s instruction, ...

B. **Meditating on it day and night**

Psalm 1:2 (CSB) ...and he meditates on it day and night.

Happy are those who are Nourished, Consistent, Fruitful, and Strong, and God is telling us how to be happy in this better and deeper way!

The contrast between the two ways is stark. It is the difference between those who are in love with sin and those who love God. You are either going to love the path of sin and follow it, or love God and seek him in Scripture, where he may be found. Which will it be for you? Where is life’s delight for you?

STEPS: Watch the Social Dilemma. Set safety parameters around these tools that are not as passive as you think. *(I shut down some apps, I limited how often I'd check news, I stopped taking the suggested or recommended next video, or show. I changed which search engine I use. I am more intentional about time in prayer and the word, and with people in more meaningful ways. I'm moving toward "digital minimalism"... which is a book title recommended to me, that I have not read yet, but I like the title all by itself.*

I want my life to be rooted in God and His Word, because he is the source of a better "Happy" and its eternal! And I'm asking Jesus who is my savior to help me in all of this, because Self-Help is not enough.