

**The Way of Happiness**  
***Singing the Sacred***  
 Core 52 – Week 9

According to Rolling Stone

1. Bob Dylan – Like a Rolling Stone
2. Rolling Stones – I Can't Get No Satisfaction
3. John Lennon – Imagine
4. Marvin Gaye – What's Going On
5. Aretha Franklin – Respect

They might be able to make an argument for the last 50 years or last 100 years, but how do you populate any all-time music list with only songs from the last 50 years. If you are going to make a list of top songs of all-time, you have to have King David and the Psalms somewhere at the top of your list. To do anything else is ignorant and arrogant at best.

Imagine writing a song 3,000 years ago and that song is still being sung today. The Psalms are poems meant to be sung in praise to God. At least 73 of them were written by King David, and he likely penned several more. They stretch back more than 3,500 years to the earliest Psalm, Psalm 90 written by Moses. From there, they cover a span of a thousand years of Israel's history all the way to the time of Ezra in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC.

A good portion of the Psalms were likely collected and compiled by King David when organized 4,000 Levites as singers and musicians to lead Israel in worship. The final compilation was likely done in the days following Ezra after the people had returned from Exile. They were gathered into five separate books each with their own theme and focus.

The Psalms were sung when the original temple was built. They were sung when the Jews returned from the exile and a new temple was built. The Psalms were sung every day in the temple of Jesus' day. These are the songs that Jesus sang.

With the birth of Christianity and the rise of the church, the Psalms continued to be an essential part of worship. Paul urges the church in Colossians 3:16,

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

The Psalms continued to be sung in various form throughout church history. The Psalms remain central to our worship today with many worship song writers either basing songs on the Psalms, or borrowing from them heavily.

The Psalms are broad in their scope, universal in their appeal, and timeless in their power. The same things that moved David thousands of years ago are the same things that move us— a rejoicing so deep in your bones that you can't help but dance, a failure so great that you can't help but fall to your knees and beg for forgiveness, an abandonment so lonely that you can't help but cry out, an injustice so great that you can't help but shake your fist in anger. That is the Psalms.

As we continue our journey through 52 of the most important passages of Scripture, we are going to spend the next few weeks in the Psalms, and considering what they have to say about some of the most important truths of Scripture and how they capture the reality of the shared human experience.

One of the features of Hebrew poetry is that it loves to compare and contrast different ideas. Hebrew poetry is filled with these A-B couplets that compare one thing to another thing- the righteous compared to the wicked. Wisdom compared to folly. So, in the Psalms we are faced with lots of choices.

These different contrasts remind us that life is filled with choices, and every choice you make, makes you. Think about that. Every choice you make, makes you. We are the choices we make. Sometimes we end up in these really horrible situations and we wonder how we got here, and the truth is that if you go back and look at all the little choices you made leading up to that point, you can see exactly how you got there.

This is exactly what we see in Psalm 1. It's a short psalm. Only six verses, and it contrasts two different ways- two different paths you can choose in your life. The way of the righteous versus the way of the wicked. The way of blessing or the way of destruction.

Here's the thing. Most people don't realize they are choosing one of these two paths. They are convinced they are choosing third way. They are choosing the path of education, the path of family, the path living life to the fullest, the path of career, or some other path. The reality, though, is every path, no matter what road sign society puts up over it, leads to one of these two paths.

Our core verse this week is actually the first 3 verses which highlight the way of blessing.

*Blessed is the man  
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
 nor stands in the way of sinners,  
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
 and on his law he meditates day and night.  
 3 He is like a tree  
 planted by streams of water  
 that yields its fruit in its season,  
 and its leaf does not wither.  
 In all that he does, he prospers.*

### **The Way of Happiness**

According to Psalm 1, happiness is a choice. It's not just that we choose to be happy, but that we choose to follow a path that leads to happiness. Happiness isn't just something that happens to you.

Right out of the gate we see this word *blessed*. "*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.*" Now in Hebrew, when you park a word right at the front of sentence like this, it's like you are giving that word a double emphasis. You're turning it into an exclamation. It's like the Psalmist is saying, "O, how very blessed indeed is the man or woman who..." These opening verses are all about blessing and how to achieve that blessedness.

Let's talk about blessing for a moment. In the Hebrew, this word is actually in the plural. This isn't just

one blessing. It's a bunch of them. You aren't blessed in only one way. You are blessed in all sorts of ways. Now what are these blessings? What does it mean to be blessed? My Hebrew dictionary defines this word as "blessedness, happiness, good fortune, that is a state of joyful mind."<sup>i</sup> Blessing describes a general state of wellbeing and satisfaction.

Do you want to be happy? Here's how to be happy. You have to follow the way of blessing. This is the way of happiness. You could read this opening line as "O, how very happy indeed, is the one who..."

### I. What Happiness Avoids

Now the Psalmist begins with the negative. If you want to be truly happy, not just momentary flashes of pleasure that leave you feeling empty, then there are certain things you should avoid.

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

The psalmist is saying you won't find happiness down this road. Don't go this way. Avoid these three things if you want happiness: 1. Walking in the counsel of the wicked. 2. Standing in the way of sinners. 3. Sitting in the seat of scoffers. What does he mean? Notice how there is a progression to these three things, or it would be more accurate to say *regression*. These three things go from bad to worse.

There is a progression of behavior— We go from walking, to standing, to sitting. There is progression of receptivity to evil advice: first you just listen to their counsel, then you are full out in their path, then finally you take a seat and make yourself at home.

#### Walking

In our search for happiness, and I believe God wants us to be happy. The desire to be happy is hardwired into us. Our problem is sin makes us want to pursue happiness in all the wrong ways. Satan will try to convince you and the world will try to persuade you that your happiness will be found away from God. He'll start by getting you just a few steps away, just a little walk over here where you listen to some bad counsel. This preys on your thinking. It gets you thinking bad ideas. It gets you wanting ungodly things. It gets you questioning if God wants you to be happy at all.

#### Standing

Once you start thinking the wrong things, you start doing the wrong things. The second line says that the happy person does not stand in the way of sinners. *The way of sinners* is what they do. Your way is your behavior, your actions. Now, you're not just listening to what these people have to say, but you're standing there doing the same things they're doing. You're standing in the way of sinners.

#### Sitting

Finally, we go from standing to sitting. We put up our feet and make ourselves at home. The word for *seat* here can also be translated as *assembly* or *dwelling*. This is about your place of belonging. This is who and what you identify with. This is your allegiance. You're no longer just being influenced by their thinking, you're not just doing what they're doing, but now you're one of them.

Satan loves to convince us that happiness is found in disobedience, in rebellion, in breaking the rules. Notice how the world often defines happiness. When someone says, "We're going to go out and have a

good time this weekend.” What do you think they’re doing? Do you think they’re talking about going to church on Sunday? The world has totally twisted our understanding of happiness. Certainly, there can be a momentary thrill and excitement, and Satan will try to convince you this is what leads to lasting happiness, but it doesn’t.

Our culture has confused pleasure with happiness. And we have become a pleasure obsessed people. We pursue pleasure as its own end thinking it will make us happy. Pleasure is a momentary feeling that comes from something external– a good meal, stocks going up, making love, our favorite team winning. There’s nothing wrong with enjoying the pleasures in life. God made them and he created us to enjoy them. But these things aren’t lasting. They rely on external events and experiences. So what do we do? We seek more food, more drink, more sex, more money, more pleasure believing if we just had a little bit MORE, then we truly be happy. The more we chase pleasure the more happiness eludes us. We are drinking from a well that makes us more thirsty.

Let me prove to you pleasure does not equal happiness. Here are some things that bring pleasure but not happiness:

- Eating so much junk food that your health and weight suffer. Heart disease, diabetes, bad joints.
- Procrastinating from work that needs to be done. Fun for the moment, but miserable in the end.
- Indulging in hobbies at the expense of relationships and responsibilities.
- Buying things you don’t need with money you do not have.
- Having an affair
- Telling a lie to get out of a problem.

On the flip side are some things that aren’t pleasant in the moment, but lead to long term happiness:

- Exercising and working out to get into shape
- Eating right to lose weight and improve your health.
- Budgeting carefully and spending your money wisely.
- Renovating an old property in order to create a beautiful family home for years to come.
- Doing the hard work of marriage and working with your spouse through problems.

Do you get the picture? The difference between these two things is that pleasure is based on external things that happen to you, but happiness is found in who you choose to become. If you want lasting happiness, you need to avoid going the way the Psalmist is talking about here in verse 1.

## II. What Happiness Pursues

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse, Psalm 1 turns to what happiness pursues. The Psalmist writes,

*2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

If you are using a paper Bible underline or highlight the word *delight*. This Hebrew word means to take great pleasure or enjoyment in something. Instead of standing in the way of sinners, you delight in the way of the word. You want true happiness? You need to have a love affair with God’s word.

Lasting happiness doesn’t come from listening to the counsel of the world, instead it comes from

marinating in counsel of God. You have a choice— you can listen to what the world says, or you can listen to what God says. What is your final measure of truth? If it's anything other than God's word, no matter how it makes you feel in the short term, the final destination is a profound unhappiness.

The way of happiness is the pursuit of the word. Too many of us, though, have bought into the lie that the God's word is boring, that it's unfun. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's like when you eat nothing but junk food all the time, when you try to eat healthy it tastes bad, even though it's what your body needs and what your body is craving. You have desensitized your taste to what is truly good.

God's word is what your heart really needs. God's truth is what your mind craves. The Scriptures can satisfy the desires of your heart. I encourage you sometime this week to read Psalm 119. It's the longest chapter in the entire Bible and in Hebrew the whole thing is an acrostic set to the Hebrew alphabet. The whole chapter is extolling the virtues and joys of God's word.

*16 I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.*

*18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*

*24 Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors.*

*47 I find my delight in your commandments, which I love.*

*72 The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces.*

*97 Oh how I love your law! It is my meditations all the day.*

*103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.*

*111 Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.*

*127 Therefore I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold.*

*143 Trouble and anguish have found me out, but your commandments are my delight.*

*162 I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil.*

God's word brings a joy that is richer than possessions and money and the finest delectable sweets. God's word is anything but boring. It is the wellspring of happiness. Some of us wonder why we can't find happiness. We wonder why happiness is so elusive. I challenge you this morning to look at how much time you spend in the word.

How many times during the week do you open your Bible? How many times do you open your Bible app? How much time do you actually spend reading meditating on the Word? The reason so many of us don't know the joy of the Lord is because we don't know the word of the Lord.

Verse 2 doesn't mean that you spend all day and night having devotions and memorizing the Bible. It doesn't mean you have no other hobbies, but it does mean that you've spend enough time marinating in the word, that it simply becomes a part of who you are. You don't just know God's word. It knows you. Changes you.

### **III. How Happiness Blesses**

The blessing of being in God's word comes in verse 3.

*3 He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,*

*and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.*

#### **A. The Blessing of Satisfaction**

The first blessing is you are satisfied. That's the picture of a tree planted by the water. That tree has got all that it needs. It's never thirsty. It always has enough water. Jesus says in John 4:14, "*whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.*" The Scriptures are like the handle on the faucet that turn the water on.

A few weeks ago as we were driving through eastern Colorado, we saw a landscape made of really sparse prairie. Eastern Colorado doesn't get a lot of rain. Farmland out there has to be irrigated. If you ever fly over you'll notice every acre of land has crop circles. No, not the kind left by aliens or pranksters, but those left by center pivot irrigation systems that crawl around a field in circles.

As we were driving, I noticed a thick line of trees off to the north. These were real thick, like deep woods sort of trees. It seemed so out of place next to mile after mile of barren, treeless prairie. Slowly this band of trees crept ever closer to the highway, and eventually, as we crossed a bridge you could see the reason for the trees. There was a river. There was enough water to satisfy all these trees. When you're firmly planted in God's word, you have enough. No matter what life throws at you, you are satisfied.

#### **B. The Blessing of Success**

The first blessing is that you are satisfied, and second blessing is that you are successful. Now by success, I don't mean houses, cars, boats and bank accounts. Real success is a fruitful life. You will have a life that bears fruit. You are like a tree who yields fruit in season, and its leaf doesn't wither.

When you are firmly planted in the word, your life is fruitful. You're fruitful in what you do. You're fruitful in in your relationships. You're fruitful in spiritual growth. You prosper in all you do. You have a lasting source of happiness no matter your circumstances. You can weather any storm. You can survive any drought, because you're rooted in the right place.

You are invited this morning to look at God's word maybe in a way you never have before. You are invited not to look at it not with fearful dread, nor casual dismissal. Rather, I invite you to delight in the word of God. I invite you to a wholehearted joy that satisfies and secures so deeply that it holds you no matter what hurts you.

#### **Conclusion**

During the Cold War, Soviet oppression kept Eastern Europe behind what was known as the Iron Curtain. Christianity was forbidden. The church was persecuted and the Bible banned. In July of 1961, Christian minister, Lynn Camp was working in Vienna Austria and had the opportunity to travel to communist controlled Budapest, Hungary.

While in Budapest he met Ivan Martos, a member of an underground house church who worked as an officer of the National Bank of Hungary. Lynn and Ivan quickly struck up a friendship built on their common faith.

Lynn was happy to learn that a part of Ivan's job with the National Bank of Hungary required him to

travel to Vienna twice each year. Over the next few years, these biannual reunions were a source of joy for both men. Ivan loved their discussions about God's Word, conversations he wasn't usually free to have at home.

One summer, Ivan arrived in Vienna and Lynn was waiting on the train platform as was his custom. However, Ivan's sunken eyes and drooping shoulders betrayed a grief and fear that only comes from a great loss. Ivan, nearly in tears, relayed his bitter experience.

That day, uniformed guards boarded the train at their next to last stop before the Austrian border. They made their way through the cars checking the identifications and paperwork of all the passengers. The guards immediately discovered that Ivan was a high ranking official with the National Bank. His papers were all in order, however, they insisted that Ivan open his briefcase.

The first item they removed was his personal Bible. In a loud, angry voice the guard held up the Bible for all in the car to see and yelled, "What is a man in your position doing with a Bible?" Before Ivan could respond, the guard threw the Bible through an open window of the moving trains. Ivan had just lost his best friend.

Now fast forward two years. Ivan once again was arriving in Vienna, and again Lynn was waiting to meet his friend. This time Ivan's face was beaming. He was as happy as he had been sad two summers before. A few days before leaving Budapest a small package had been delivered by the postman. Iven did not recognize the name or the address, but as he opened the package, he immediately recognized its contents— his Bible!

With it was a letter of apology and explanation. "Some of our children were playing one day along the tracks when they found your Bible. Not knowing what it was, one of them took it to his grandmother who immediately recognized it. Word quickly spread through our little village. Some of us who are older had possessed Bible before they were banned and we could remember the significance and the power of the Word of God. We decided to conceal the discovery while those who so desired could make handwritten copies. That joyful task took two years. Please forgive us for keeping your Bible for so long. You might like to know that we are now a secret band of about thirty who have baptized each other and seek to follow Jesus in our daily lives.

Do you realize the treasure that you hold in your hands? The way of happiness is found in the delight of God's word.

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<sup>1</sup>Swanson, James. Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament) 1997 : n. pag. Print.