

ESF Lord's day service message
1/4/2015

A Blessed New Year
Text: Psalm 1:1-6

1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. 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, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. 4 Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand 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 will perish.

On her visit to America, Princess Diana went into a department store and saw a red-and-black Polka dot silk scarf. "This is very smart looking," she said to an aide, and then instructed her to buy the item. Immediately after Diana's purchase, some men from the British Embassy rushed up to the counter to buy a scarf just like it – presumable for their wives. The wife of a store executive also bought one for her daughter, noting, "she'll be trilled." Later, when the store was reopened to the public, a swarm of women raced to the red-and-black, polka-dot scarves, as if guided by radar.

Oh, that we would be as quick to take our cues from the Lord as those people did from royalty! How blessed we would be if we studied the words of the Lord, the King of kings and followed His value and choices. Let's meditate on the King's words instead of looking to the world for direction in this New Year.

A blessed life

What is a blessed life? We can define a blessed life in many different ways.

Here the Bible text defines a blessed life this way: *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

According to these words, a blessed life is like a tree planted by streams of water.

Streams of water are channels in a desert. In a desert, when people want to farm something, they need to make a channel to their land and constantly bring water to it. That is the meaning of streams of water here. "A tree planted by the streams of water" means a tree that has stability and strength regardless of the conditions.

A blessed life means a life rooted in abundant resources so that the life can produce fruit no matter what the conditions are. This is what "*Fruit in season*" and "*whatever he does prospers*" means.

A life which produces "fruit in season and is always prosperous" does not mean a trouble free life. It means a life which receives the strength and wisdom to overcome troubles. We all will face windy days, cloudy days, or even stormy days this year. However if we have God's blessed life, we will remain strong until we will see prosperity. We will be able to overcome hardships, troubles, and depression with abundant resources that will be pouring out from God. And in the right time, we will see fruit.

To root our life into the abundant resources of God, we have to follow the instructions in this text. There are things we have to avoid and also things we have to pursue.

The things which we have to avoid

A certain courthouse in Ohio stands in a unique location. Raindrops that fall on the north side of the building go into Lake Ontario and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, while those falling on the south side go into the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. At a precise point on the peak of the roof, just a gentle puff of wind can determine the destiny of many

raindrops. It will make a difference of more than 2,000 miles as to their final destination. The spiritual application is clear. How we are influenced by the people around us could change the course of our lives here and now and could also affect our eternal destiny.

There are three things we have to avoid so as not to be negatively influenced by others.

1. Avoid walking in the counsel of the wicked

The term “wicked” does not mean what we might think it means – murderers, thieves, drug pushers, or gangsters. It simply means “ungodly.” They are the people who do not depend upon God but only on human power and human wisdom. "Counsel" means advice. So walking in the counsel of the wicked means to follow the advice of people who don't depend upon God. If you root your life in the advice of people who do not know how to depend upon God, your resources will dry out sooner or later. Of course, such advice may bring help to you in some circumstances. But when you face a furious storm in your life-such as a serious illness, marriage crisis, or severe depression, you cannot find strength and wisdom in the advice of ungodly people. So to find the right ground to grow your roots, you have to avoid the counsel of the wicked. We have a HIGHER Counselor. *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight”* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

2. Avoid standing in the way of sinners

Here the word "sinners" means people who miss the mark God has set in their lives. The mark which God has set for every man's life is to glorify Him through his or her life. If a man lives a life without glorifying God, the life misses the mark and will end in vain, no matter what the man does and achieves. Listen to what Paul says about the life of such a man in Romans 1:21-23 *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for*

images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

There are people who live their lives with good intentions. But if their way of life is not glorifying God, they end up glorifying something else. What is the result? Their lives are eventually heading to destruction and immorality.

When a storm comes in our lives, we can't get help from such people. So to live a blessed life, we have to avoid such people.

3. Avoid sitting in the seat of mockers

Mockers are the people who publicly deny God's existence and deny the absolute truth of God's words. They are openly antagonistic and opposed to God. They mock at the people who believe in God's existence and live by the truth of God's words. They are the people who are hostile against any idea of faith in God. Among them, there may be rich people, powerful people, or successful people according to the value in this world. So they seem to prove that there is no God or even if there is God, they are wiser and more powerful than God.

Such people may be powerfully influential in areas where we are struggling. And so we may be tempted to learn something from them and to be influenced by their power and success. Of course, there may be something to learn from them. But we should not root our lives in the same ground they believe in. Because what they have in this world cannot be a true source of strength. When life's storm hits hard, all those things they are boasting about can disappear in a day. And they will become like chaff which are blown away by the wind.

In 18th century there was a famous French philosopher. His name was Voltaire. While he was alive, he pledged that Christianity would be swept from existence within 100 years. Yet just 50 years after he died in 1779, the German Bible society occupied Voltaire's house with stacks of Bibles.

Where are the mockers? Gone like chaff! Psalm 39:6 gives warning to such people this way:

*Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro:
He bustles about, but only in vain;
he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.*

To live a blessed life, we have to avoid following the lives of these people.

The things we have to pursue

While we are avoiding the things just mentioned, there are things we have to pursue to live a blessed life. It is to put our delight in the law of the Lord and to meditate on God's law day and night.

1. Put your delight in the law of God

We have to take the word of God as the source of the most exciting and joyful experience in our lives. We should not take the word as a burden but as a love letter from our heavenly Father. Have you ever seen anybody who hates to open a love letter? Have you ever received a love letter from anybody? How do you feel about opening a love letter? How do you respond to the love letter? Is it burdensome to open it or to read it? Not at all. Actually, you will open it and read it with your heart pumping with excitement. A Psalmist confesses the joy of reading the words: *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* (Psalm 119:103)

There was a young lady once who picked up a book and began to read it. She soon laid it aside, though, because she said it was too dull and difficult. Later in life, she met a man, dated him, and came to love him very much. She learned that he was the man who had written the book that she once tried to read without success. Now she went back to it and began reading it again, and this time she read it cover to cover. What was the difference? The difference was that now she knew and loved the author! You see, if you know and love God, you can't help but want to read and study his book, the Bible.

If you consider that the word of God is God's personal love letter for you, reading the words will never be a burden to you. 1 John 5:3 says: *This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,*

If you love God and if you believe that God loves you, take His word as His love letter for you. Put your delight in His word. And God will pour out all His resources to you through His word. That is how you live a blessed life.

2. Mediate God's law day and night

The word "mediate" is a figurative word. It pictures a cow chewing her cud. A cow has several compartments in her digestion system. A cow can go out in the morning, take the grass and chew it while the grass is fresh with morning dew on it. But it is not the final chewing. It is just an initial chewing. When it gets hot in the middle of the day, the cow lies down under a shadow of a tree and begins to chew the cud again which she brought up from one part of her digestive system.

If you hear and read the words without meditating, your knowledge of the words may remain superficial. God doesn't expect all of us to be Bible scholars, but He does expect us to school ourselves with His Word. He wants all of us to acquire abundant resources through meditating on His word.

To root our life into the streams of water in a dry land, we have to chew a same word of God over and over again until our thoughts and minds are filled with the essence in the words. Even if you are reading and reflecting a word which you have read and learned many times and are very familiar with, you have to continue chewing it to get nutrition from the word. Because every word of God contains something to lead us into God's unlimited resources, it can always be a source of fresh nutrition for our souls.

When you read the word in some time of a day, keep that word in your mind and try to reflect on it over and over again during the day. Try to see the things happening in your life through the content of the word you are reflecting on. Try constantly to connect the word into your real life situations. Try constantly to connect the word into what is going on in your mind, in your feelings, in your thoughts, and in your decisions.

After you hear a preached or taught word, keep the word in your mind and try to reflect on it over and over again.

Also we should chew the word until we obtain good nutrition out of it. But we need enough time to chew it. Set aside time to read and reflect the word of God every day. If there is any day that you are too busy to read the word, just try it again the next day. Set aside a time regularly to participate in studying and sharing the word of God. Although your personal reading and studying the word of God should be basic, you also need to be sharing and studying the word with other believers. Because by doing so, you can be constantly nourished by a deeper understanding of the word which may be difficult for you to gain by your own personal studies and reflections.

That is why we offer not only weekly messages but also group Bible Study sessions. When we participate in group bible studies and sharing, we often realize that the taste of the word is more delicious and richer than if we just study alone. It is just like what we feel when we eat delicious food together. While we participate in group bible studies, we learn many practical ways a word can be applied to our lives. Also we can recognize the practical ways how God's power and wisdom is revealed through His words.

If you meditate in the word of God day and night like this in this New Year, you will be connected to God's abundance resources. This will sustain your life, strong and vital and your life will be prosperous. That is how you can live a blessed life.