

ESF Lord's Day service message
1/5/2025

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.

A certain king had two servants. To the first he said, "I want you to travel for six months through my kingdom and bring back a sample of every weed you can find."

To the second servant the king said, "I want you to travel through my kingdom for six months and bring back a sample of every flower you can find."

Six months later, both servants stood before the king. To the first, the king asked, "Have you carried out my command?" The first servant answered, "I have, and I was amazed to find there were so many weeds in the kingdom. In fact, there is nothing but weeds in this kingdom!"

To the king's question the second servant also answered, "I have, and I am amazed how many beautiful flowers there are in the kingdom. In fact, there is nothing but beautiful flowers in this kingdom!"

These two servants each found what they were looking for.

Around this time of the year, we greet each other with "Happy New Year." We all want to make this year a "Happy New Year." How can we make this year a "Happy New Year?" We can do it by looking for something that can make us happy.

Today's word shows us what we must look for to make this year a "Happy New Year." It is to look for God's blessings pouring out on our lives.

A blessed life

What is a blessed life? We can define a blessed life in many different ways. Today's text Psalm 1:3 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.

Here, streams of water do not mean naturally existing streams. They mean water channels made 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.

So, "a tree planted by the streams of water" means a tree that has stability and strength despite harsh conditions surrounding it.

A blessed life, like a tree planted by streams of water, means a life rooted in constant resources. It means a life that can produce fruit no matter what the surrounding 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. Rather, it means a life which receives adequate strength and wisdom to overcome troubles.

We all will face windy days, cloudy days, or even stormy days this year. We all will face harsh situations like in a desert. However, if we keep receiving resources flowing from God, we will overcome clouds, storms, and the desert. We will overcome hardships such as illness, accidents,

conflicts, and financial strain. We will remain strong until we see God's intervention and deliverance.

To plant our life in the constant resources of God, we must follow the instructions in this text. There are things we must avoid and things we must pursue.

The things which we must 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 people around us can change the course of our lives today, and it can affect our eternal destiny as well.

There are three paths we must avoid so as not to be negatively influenced by others and to stay on the way of God's blessings.

1. Avoid walking in the counsel of the wicked

The term "wicked" does not mean what we might think it means – murderers, thieves, drug dealers, or gangsters. It simply means "ungodly." They are the people who do not depend upon God. They depend on human power and human wisdom.

"Counsel" means advice. Therefore, walking in the counsel of the wicked means following the advice of people who don't depend on God. If you root your life in the advice of people who do not know how to depend on God, your resources will dry up eventually. Of course, their advice may help you in some circumstances. But when you face a furious storm in your life-such as a terminal illness, severe depression, or situation beyond man's control, you cannot find strength and wisdom in the advice of ungodly people.

To find the right ground to plant our roots, we must avoid the counsel of the wicked. We must depend on the perfect adviser who can give strength and resources to overcome all storms in our lives. So, *“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 without glorifying God, his 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.*

Many people live 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 will eventually end in immorality and destruction.

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

3. Avoid sitting in the seat of mockers

Mockers are the people who deny God's existence and deny the absolute truth of God's words. They are openly antagonistic and opposed to God. They are hostile to any idea of faith in God. They mock people who believe in God's existence. Among them, there may be rich people, powerful people, or successful people according to the value in this

world. They seem to prove that there is no God or if there is a God, they are wiser and more powerful than God.

Such people may be powerfully influential in areas where we are struggling, and 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 plant our lives in the same ground in which they are planted. What they have in this world cannot be a true source of strength. When life's storms hit hard, all those beliefs they are boasting about will disappear in a moment. And they will become like chaff which is blown away by the wind.

In the 18th century there was a famous French philosopher, named Voltaire. While he was alive, he predicted 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 like Voltaire? 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 must avoid following the lives of those who are mocking God.

The things we must pursue.

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

1. Delight in the law of God

We have to consider the word of God as a source of nourishment and joy in our lives. We should not consider the word to be a burden but 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 a love letter? Is it burdensome to open it, or to read it? Not at all. You will open it and read it with your heart pumping with excitement and expectation. 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 who once 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 from 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, the word of God will give you joy even if sometimes you may struggle to understand. 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. Delight in His word, and God will pour out all His resources for you. That is how you live a blessed life.

2. Meditate on God's law day and night

The word "meditate" 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 and eat grass, chewing 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 the 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 on them, 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 plant our life in streams of water of a dry land, we have to chew the same word of God over and over again until our thoughts and minds are filled with the essence of the words. Even if you are reading and reflecting on a word which you have read and learned many times and which you are familiar with, you have to continue chewing on it to get nourishment 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 nourishment for our souls.

When you read the word, no matter what time of 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. Apply the words to every aspect of life.

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

Also, we need enough time to chew the word until we obtain good nourishment from it. Set aside time to read and reflect on 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 of 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 the taste is by studying 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 the word can be applied to our lives. Also, we can recognize the practical ways 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. Your life will become strong and vital, and your life will be prosperous. That is how you can make this New Year a Happy New Year.