

**Psalm 1 (1984 NIV)**  
***A Truly Blessed Person***

**Introduction**

It is the human desire to want to be blessed.

Today, I prayed that the Lord might bless me so that I could in turn bless others.

But what does it mean to be blessed?

There are at least two ways people view what it means to be blessed. One way is to view it as receiving in order to give in return. The other way is to view it as receiving in order to receive even more.

But the idea of being blessed in Psalm 1 is quite different in meaning.

When someone has a high position, we call him blessed. When someone has much power at his disposal, we call him blessed. When someone has much wealth and possessions, we call him blessed. When someone has much people connections, we call him blessed. But this is not what it means to be blessed here in Psalm 1.

The basis for blessedness here has to do with one's faith relationship with God. The blessed man in this psalm is a believer of God. He knows God and His Word. This blessed man here is equivalent to a blessed Christian today. It does not mean that a Christian is automatically blessed in the way Psalm 1 has portrayed blessedness. Rather it means that a Christian has the potential to be blessed in the way Psalm 1 has portrayed blessedness IF he lives the way of the truly blessed person.

How then do we live the way of the truly blessed person today? The psalmist exhorts us to two actions. First, we are to ...

**I. Avoid the wrong crowd (v. 1).**

Psalm 1:1 reads: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful ..."

We see here a progression of conduct—walk, stand and sit. To walk is to go along with someone on a trip. It connotes a mental act to decide to go along in the traffic of everyday life. To stand is to stop and stabilize at a point. It is to be more confirmed, more involved, and more influenced by some things. It connotes movement towards the formation of lifestyle habits and patterns. To sit is to remain and be fixated. It is to settle down and allow certain life patterns to become entrenched in our lives.

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Besides the progression of conduct, we see a progression of openness—in the counsel, in the path, and in the seat. To be in the counsel of someone is to adopt that person's view and think on the basis of that view. To be in the path of someone is to approve that person's life patterns and live these out as your preferred choices in life. To be in the seat of someone is to identify so closely with that person that you become what he is.

We see progression of conduct and progression of openness. Also, we see a progression of godlessness described—the ungodly, the sinners, and the scornful. The ungodly are the ones whose god is the self. The sinners are the ones who desecrate the morality of the self. The scornful are the ones who mock and challenge the rule of God over their lives—they boast, “I will live my life this way and even God cannot stop me.”

The opposite of a blessed person whom we see in v. 1 then is a person who is slowly moving away from God and surely moving towards sin. It is a warning to us that we cannot stand still in our faith—we either move slowly and surely to God, or we move slowly and surely towards sin. It warns us that we cannot remain passive about God and say, “God, I need some time to deal with other things first. I promise to take you seriously later.” No, we can't. Psalm 1:1 warns us that passivity towards God will lead to activity towards sin—we first listen, then we adopt the standards, and then we make fun of God's standards. That's the natural course of spiritual decline.

We have to come to terms with the words of Psalm 1:1 today. This is because it compels us to come face-to-face with three crucial questions: Where do I turn for advice? Who do I hang around with? Who do I look for approval?

But you may immediately conclude that Psalm 1:1 does not apply to you. Why? It is because you do not mix with ungodly, sinful, and scornful people. You say, “Well, none of my friends are murderers, robbers, cheats, drug pushers, rapists, troublemakers, gangsters, or terrorists. They all are decent people doing decent things. I share my problems with them and they give me good solutions. I like that and they are good people.”

However, when speaking of the ungodly, sinners, and scornful, don't think of big-time criminals. That will make us blind to the wrong crowd. Rather, think of people who rule out God in the affairs of human lives and of the world. In fact, they consider the greatest being in the world as not God, but the human being himself. Such a person is one whose philosophy is this: “I am first. I want it now. I am my own master—if it is to be, it is up to me.” So, this wrong crowd does not tell us that God does not exist. Rather, the advice is this: “If you want to have a blessed/happy life, it all depends on you. Don't bet it on God. He has no time for you, and you better not waste time on Him.”

This advice is subtly influencing the lives of many Christians in the form of prayerlessness. Also, the misconception of prayer as an act to get what we want from God has often reinforced our prayerlessness.

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It seems to me that God had often answered my prayers when I was a young Christian. I asked in simple faith and I received in simple things. I asked and things happened. However, as I grow as a Christian, things seem to be less straightforward. Often, I feel that the Lord is testing my faith and patience in prayer. It's as if the remote control to my TV has gone out of order. And what do you do when this happens? Well, you put the remote control aside and you go to the TV control panel and press the buttons yourself. When the remote is not working, you resort to DIY (Do-It-Yourself).

Such is the danger when we view prayer as a spiritual remote control to God in our hand. When the remote fails to move God and heaven to do our bidding, we turn to DIY. We stop praying and start playing with the ideas of the world. We think it all depends on us now. We try out different ideas, keep what works and throw out the rest, and repeat the same process.

One morning when I was still serving in the Singapore Bible College, we had a combined chapel where both the English and Chinese Departments came together. At the end of it, someone came onto the pulpit to lead the college in praying for the preparation of our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. He had planned to lead us to pray for all the relevant concerns using a power-point presentation. But when he clicked on the PLAY icon, nothing was flashed onto the screen. He tried to rectify the problem but the technical fault remained. Half in jest, he said, "That's what will happen when we put our confidence in PLAY and not PRAY."

I believe that's the danger we face today. We try to find our blessedness/happiness by playing with the many things of the world rather than pray for that one thing of God. After all, we have prayed but God seems too slow or indifferent to listen to what we are telling Him. So, we decide to play rather than pray.

Many have mistakenly viewed prayer more as a way of drawing from God's resources than drawing close to God's presence. God is like an ATM machine! Prayer has degenerated into asking God rather than meeting God—"God, I speak and you listen." Little wonder prayer has become a language of words rather than a language of intimacy. I encourage us to turn that around and say, "God, you speak and I listen." And we listen not by talking but by being silent. Without being mystical, I believe we understand better what God has for us when we practice more silence rather than use more words in prayer. In silence, we focus on listening to that still small voice of God.

One time, I brought a group of doctoral students to the Sofitel Resort for a Spirituality Retreat. The emphasis there was to draw near to God through contemplation of Scripture and silence. During meal times, the retreat director set up four tables with the sign "S" for "Silence". This was to signify that those who chose to sit at these tables wished to observe silence during meal times as a spiritual discipline.

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This deliberate exercise of silence had benefited many of the students who were all busy pastors and ministers. One of them was actually earmarked as the next Bishop of the Anglican Church in Malaysia. He was a very busy clergy in Ipoh with a heart for the grassroots. One morning, I sat with him at the lounge and he pointed me to the high ceiling there.

He said, “John, look at the high ceiling and the giant lantern with wooden frames hanging from it. As a civil engineer in my earlier training, I studied structures and how best to maximize the use of space. And I can’t help feeling that the design of this lounge here is such a waste of space. But then as I practice my silence before God, I suddenly realize that that is exactly what I have been doing in my ministry. I seem to want to squeeze as much as possible into every available space of time I have. But God seems to be telling me this: ‘Do not rush to do things. Learn to rest in me by waiting in my presence.’ Yes, I am learning to ‘waste time’ in God’s presence; doing nothing and listening to Him without feeling guilty about it.”

I think much of our prayerlessness today is due not only to the powerful seductions of the world to play with its ideas. Sadly, our prayerlessness is also due to our own disappointment with God. We use prayer as our tool of asking from Him rather than listening to Him. We tell God, “I want A.” But God is saying to us, “You actually need B.” But we want A so much that when we get B instead, we conclude that He has not answered us. We tell God so much about what we want that we listen so little to Him about what we actually need. Our prayer becomes a language of many words rather than one of much intimacy with God. Little wonder we understand so little the will of God and hear so vaguely His heartbeat. We become disappointed and prayer is seen as a worthless exercise in our lives.

We are warned to avoid the wrong crowd today if we are to be a truly blessed person of God. The wrong crowd is not only those ungodly, sinful, and scornful people out there trying to distract us from God. There is also a hidden crowd right within us—i.e. the inner voices of our own demandingness, discontentment, and restlessness that crowd out the still small voice of God in our lives. In our silence before God, we learn to still this hidden crowd within ourselves.

Also, the wrong crowd in our world today can be in the form of the powerful media entertainment. There is this show on TV that features people doing some of the most unbelievable stunts. And there is always this warning: “These acts are done by well-trained people. Do not attempt any of these at home.” Why? Because people, especially the young, will not only be entertained by these stunts, but they will believe that these are so real that they want to try doing them.

When my second daughter, Stacey, was much younger, she saw this charity show on TV. It featured an actress doing a stunt—standing on a tray of eggs with both her feet without breaking any of them. The next day, Stacey took some eggs in the kitchen and tried to stand on them. And of course you know what happened. The message she thought she heard from that stunt she saw on TV was so real and inspiring to her—“I stand on eggs without breaking them. You too can do it.”

But when she heard Bible stories like Jesus walking on water, she would sceptically ask, “How can it be?” No wonder when I brought her to the pool one day, she was clinging on to me for dear life instead of trying to walk on water like Jesus!

Indeed, the message of the world often sounds more believable than the message of the Bible. What the world is saying often sounds more true than what God is saying. Anyway, we are often so busy doing and talking that we find it hard to be still and hear what God is saying.

I don’t think I am wrong to assume that each of you has some decision to make in life. For the younger ones, education is a priority right now. The crucial question is this: “How do I match my education with what I want to be/do in the future?”

For the older ones, perhaps there are plans ahead. The crucial question is this: “What should I do with the rest of my life so that I can LIVE well when I still have time, and LEAVE well when I have run out of time?”

We are all busy people. So, it is redundant to ask, “Are you busy?” Rather, the more appropriate question is this: “In your busyness, are you moving in step with God?” So, whatever your question may be, let me encourage all of us to do that one great work in order to be a truly blessed person of God. That one great work is this:

Wait upon God till we hear His still small voice. Don’t tell God, “God, I will go for A. If you close the door, then I will go for B. And if you close yet this door, then I will go for C ...” Rather, tell God, “God, these are the options before me. What have you for me to do? Teach me to walk in the counsel of your Word, stand in your path of righteousness, and sit in the seat before your throne of grace. Teach me not to talk too much or act too fast until I hear your still small voice.”

To live the way of a truly blessed person, the psalmist exhorts us to two actions. The first is to avoid the wrong crowd that would stray us away from God’s presence and into prayerlessness. The second action is to ...

## **II. Stay the right course (vv. 2-3).**

Psalm 1:2 reads: “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.”

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The word “delight” is a word of romance. It has to do with feeling great love for something. In this case, it is the law of God. The truly blessed person is one madly in love—in love with the law of God. At the time of the psalmist, the law refers very much to the Mosaic Law. For our time today, the law has a much broader reference—it refers to the whole counsel of God that we find in the Bible.

Reading verse 1 by itself seems to portray for us a person who is self-righteous. He thinks he is better than others whom he labels as ungodly, sinners, and scornful. However, verse 2 clarifies that why he lives the way he does is not because he thinks he is better than others. Rather, it is because he has discovered the truth about himself from the law of God. In his natural self he is no better than others. Therefore, he needs to guard himself against the wrong crowd. He knows very well that he can easily live and act like them. He lives and acts the way he does not out of condemnation of others, but out of awareness of himself.

And out of this self-awareness, the truly blessed man preoccupies himself with God’s law (I shall interpret it as God’s Word). He meditates on the Word day and night. He is constantly and consistently preoccupied with it. He reads, studies, and thinks through God’s Word with the view of application. He learns the Word with the intention to live the Word. He is a serious student as well as a zealous practitioner of the Word of God. Through this, he enjoys the presence of God and draws on the strength of God everyday in his life. He is a truly blessed person in that he is enjoying his relationship with God rather than enduring it—do you know the difference?

But often, this is not the picture of our own experience. The truly blessed person described here finds God’s Word a blessing; we often find it a big bore. The truly blessed person finds God’s Word delightful; we often find it dull. The truly blessed person finds God’s Word to be spiritual food; we often find it to be something like sanctified fantasy. The truly blessed person finds God’s Word to be inspirational; we often find it to be nothing more than informational.

Let me ask the younger people here, “Do you believe in the Bible?” I like to believe that all/most of you will say, “Of course! It speaks of the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac ... and of my parents.” I think that’s where the struggle is—“I believe in the Bible that speaks of the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac ... and of my parents.” I think a more affirmative answer from you should be this: “I believe in the Bible that speaks of the God of Abraham, Jacob, Isaac and my parents ... and mine.” In other words, the harder question for the younger people is not “Do you believe in the Bible?” but “Do you believe in the Bible enough to embrace that belief as a personal conviction?”

Perhaps, the younger people find the second question a harder one because they have doubts. You have so many options to choose from. So, why lose

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this freedom by committing yourself to just this God of the Bible? After all, you do have some unanswered doubts and questions. Can doubt and faith co-exist without resolving all the obstacles between you and God in order to have authentic faith?

In his book, *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel related the experience of a pastor by the name of Lynn Anderson. This pastor was once counselling a man who confided that he no longer loved his wife. Pastor Anderson said, “Go home and love her.”

The counselee protested, “But it would be emotionally dishonest for me to treat my wife that way when I don’t feel it.”

Pastor Anderson asked, “Does your mother love you?”

The man answered, “Of course!”

Anderson went on, “Three weeks after she had brought you home from the hospital and you were screaming with dirty diapers and she had to wake up dog tired and put her bare feet on the cold floor, clean up your miserable diapers, and feed you a bottle—did you think she really love doing all that?”

The man answered, “No, I don’t think so.”

And Anderson suggested, “Well, then, I think your mother was being emotionally dishonest.”

Pastor Anderson’s point is this: The measure of the mother’s love wasn’t that she felt good about changing the diapers, but that she was willing to do it even when she wasn’t feeling particularly happy about it.

This is what we need to learn about faith—faith is not always about having positive emotional feelings towards God or life. Indeed, where there’s absolutely no honest doubt, there’s probably no healthy faith.

Even the great patriarch of faith in the Old Testament, Abraham, had doubts from time to time in his life. When we have questions and doubts, what we need most may not be answers. Why? It is because answers often lead to knowledge rather than to faith. In fact, unanswered doubts and questions can allow faith to grow in us—when our human reasoning cannot provide the answer, it is our faith in God who knows all things that will carry us through to the end. Honest doubt and healthy faith can co-exist. We need not have to feel emotionally dishonest about it.

So, how do you believe enough to embrace this belief in God as a personal conviction? How do you stay the right course in a world where you are free to choose from so many options before you? Well, go to the right people. Get around people whom you respect for their life, their mind, their character, their

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faith, and learn from them. Go to the right media—read books, watch movies, and listen to tapes/music that will inspire/motivate you towards faith. Make the deliberate choice to believe, and ask God to help you with your unbelief.

Let me now ask the older ones among us, “Do you believe in the Bible?” I can almost sense you frowning, “What a silly question! Of course, I believe in the Bible. In fact, I believe in the Bible since I became a Christian 20 years ago.” I think that’s where the real struggle is—“I believe in the Bible since I became a Christian 20 years ago.” Perhaps, the harder question is this: “Are you excited about the God of the Bible today just as you were 20 years ago?”

Perhaps 20 years ago, the starting point for you in your search for meaning in life was God. What about today? We talk much about networking in the working world today. And that has much to do with our horizontal relationships with people. Important as networking is, what about our vertical relationship with God today? Is there also a need not only to do networking with people, but also reconnecting with God after all these years?

20 years ago, we may have started life with the right anchor in our life—i.e. Jesus Christ. What about today? Where do we anchor all our doing and being in life now? Are we living more by biblical values rather than cultural values these days? Are we worshipping the God we want instead of the God who is the Great I AM? Is Jesus Christ still our Saviour and Lord, or is He becoming one of the many “baggage” we carry in life?

There are some indicators that will alert us if we have changed our spiritual anchor in life. They all have to do with how we view God in life today:

- God is there, but He is not relevant to me.
- I believe in God, but it’s up to me to live my own life.
- God loves me, but I’m on my own.
- God is there to meet my needs.

All these indicators point to a low view of God. It alerts us to the need to reconnect with God so that He can again be our spiritual anchor in life. This then is the way of the truly blessed person of God.

Psalm 1:3 describes such a person this way: “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”

The word “planted” is more accurately translated as “transplanted”. To plant is to take root and to be firmly established. To transplant is this and more. It includes taking a plant out of one environment and placing it into another that is more conducive for growth.

Hence, the truly blessed person of God is pictured here like a firmly rooted, transplanted tree. He has intentionally chosen to pull away from the wrong



crowd, and be rooted in God and His Word. He then becomes a picture of strength and stability, capable of withstanding the storms of life.

The transplanted tree also pictures the concept of growth with time. It takes time to grow and mature in the Word. There is no instant, overnight transformation and change. True and lasting spiritual strength comes from a long-term, established relationship with God in His Word.

And a third picture of the tree is that of fruitfulness in ministry. Our first concern is to be faithful in our relationship with God in His Word. And it is God who makes us “fruitful tress” as we serve and minister in His name. The prosperity mentioned in v. 3 is not to be understood primarily in material terms. Rather, it is primarily in terms of spiritual growth and capacity for life with people and in service to God. This is what it means to be a truly blessed person of God.

## **Conclusion**

How do we live the way of a truly blessed person of God?

- Avoid the wrong crowd.
- Stay the right course.

Note the picture of doom in the closing verses concerning the ungodly in vv. 4-5: “The ungodly are not so, but like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”

So, let’s choose the way of divine blessedness by renewing, revitalizing, rediscovering, and reconnecting our relationship with God. After all, it is foolish to choose otherwise because Psalm 1:6 gives us this solemn reminder: “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Pray that the Lord will help us choose the way of the righteous and not the way of ungodly—for that is what it means to be a truly blessed person in Him. Amen!