

Psalm 1: “Why am I Not Happy?” //

Question Everything 1

Prayer: *I’m reminded this weekend in light of the crisis involving brothers and sisters in Christ in Iraq; humanitarian crisis along our borders; situation in Ferguson... how much we need to hear from you. Reveal yourself to us in our hour of trial; make us a conduit of your blessing to others in their hour of trial.*

WELCOME BACK... We’re starting a short series today on the book of Psalms... We’re going to see how this Old Testament book written 3000 years ago deals with some of the most poignant existential questions that we ask today. **The first question is “Why am I not happy?”**

A lot of us are thinking about the (*shall we say*) **enigma of happiness** with the tragic death of **Robin Williams**—a guy who spent his life making others happy but was apparently so unhappy in his own life that he chose to take it (and I know there were some **neurological and clinical issues to his depression** that I’m not trying to brush over—very sad situation). But it’s made a lot of people think about that: *what does it mean to be happy?*

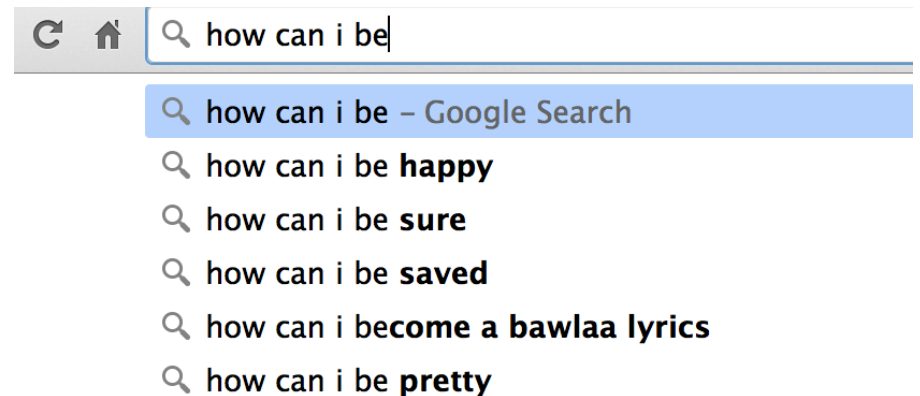
- I **don’t know if you saw this week** that Lauren Bacall, who was the last of the “golden era” Hollywood actresses (with people like Humphrey Bogart, Judy Garland) died on Wednesday.... and the article I was reading talked about how all her life she went through **cycles of happiness and despair**.

Can you be truly happy in life? *Let me ask you—Are you happy?*

- I talked to one Christian girl, very active in the church, who said, “I’m not sure I’ve ever been totally happy.”
- Maybe you go up and down: Happy one moment, but not the next...

- *Or, let me ask the question a different way:* If life didn’t change at all for you from this moment forward: your **situation** didn’t improve; your **marital status** didn’t change; your **career** didn’t progress; your **body** didn’t feel any better... could you be happy with life?

Google auto-complete verifies that this is a pressing question (whenever I want to know what everyone really thinks, I see how Google auto-completes my questions...)



(Full disclosure: I was actually looking up “how can I be pretty” when discovered this.)

The entire book of Psalms in the Bible opens with the word “happy”: **Psalm 1:1: Blessed is the man...** (“Blessed” is the Hebrew word “ashray” which literally means “happy.”) That’s what this psalm is about. **Furthermore, scholars say that since this psalm** opens the book of Psalms, it introduces one of the most dominant themes, which is going to appear a total of 26x throughout the book: **Can we be truly happy? And, if so, how?**

Now, I know at this point a bunch of y’all roll your eyes and say, “Uhh... *the pastor asks, ‘Where do we get happiness?’* I wonder if he’s going to say *Jesus*.” Reminds me of the story of the Sunday school teacher asks her class of 1st graders, “What is gray, has four paws, a bushy tail and eats acorns?” And one of the little boys raises his hand

and says, “It sounds like a squirrel but we’re in SS so the answer always has to be Jesus.” **I know you think I’ll say “Jesus,” but there’s more to this psalm than that.**

I’ve heard that¹ when you are young, you think happiness is inevitable... you’re going to find that special person; you’re going to get that fulfilling job... if you’ll be patient, happiness is just around the corner; **life is going to be good.** But by the time you are old, “happiness is inevitable” has been replaced by “happiness is unattainable.” I’ve heard it described as the **difference between two of Shakespeare’s** most famous plays: *Muchado about Nothing* and *Hamlet*.

- *Muchado About Nothing*: in the end everybody gets to come home; everybody gets to marry whom they wanted to marry; the person they thought was dead is really alive; the ones who betrayed you didn’t actually betray you.
- Then you’ve got *Hamlet*, where everybody dies in the last scene bitter and disappointed. Spoiler alert.
- When you’re young and naïve, you think life is like *Muchado About Nothing*; when you grow up, you think it’s more like *Hamlet*.

The Bible says happiness is **neither inevitable nor unattainable**; but it is possible.

Psalm 1

Psalm 1: (BTW, for those of you who are new to the church and say, “What are P-salms?” Hebrew for “songs.” The book of Psalms are the greatest hits.) **1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, 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.**

¹ From a sermon by Tim Keller on Psalm 1.

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.

**4 The ungodly are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
5 Therefore the ungodly will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;**

6 for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly will perish.

This psalm contrasts the godly and the ungodly; **those who walk with God**, he says, are like trees with deep roots besides streams of water, who bear fruit year after year and prosper in all they do.

The **ungodly, by contrast** are like chaff... (**Chaff** is the shell around a wheat seed.... It is very light; to separate the wheat from the chaff they would put it in a basket and throw it up in the air and the wind would carry it away.)

He uses this metaphor to show you why those who know God can be happy in a way those who don’t cannot. He identifies two things people usually look to, to make them happy that cannot make them happy.

A. You won’t be happy... when your happiness is based on circumstances (v. 3).

- The psalmist assumes (v 3) that **life goes through seasons**.
 - **Spring and summer** seasons where the environment is favorable; **winter seasons** that threaten to kill you; **drought seasons** that threaten to starve you.
 - You can’t cut out the drought and winter seasons from life and if your happiness is dependent on being in a spring season, happiness will be elusive!
- I’ve been reading a new book by Tim Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*: He says the **modern approach** to happiness is to remove any and all suffering: **avoid pain**; or, if you

can't, **sedate it; eliminate disease; discomfort, and injustice.** And these are good and worthy goals. But *"no amount of money, power, and planning can prevent bereavement, dire illness, relationship betrayal, financial disaster, or a host of other troubles from entering your life. Human life is fatally fragile and subject to forces beyond our power to manage."*²

We will never succeed at removing all pain and suffering, and if our whole strategy for being happy is getting and staying into a summer season, we will fail. IF YOUR STRATEGY IS GETTING INTO THE SUMMER SEASON OF GOOD MARRIAGE, JOB, RETIREMENT...

I know some of you will lose all respect for me here, but I looked up on **Wikihow: How to be happy** (Wikihow, that repository of the human race's collective wisdom) **Top 8 ways to be happy:**

1. **Be optimistic.** So what if your life is a **huge mess**, with no promise that anything will change in the future? **Well, ignore facts and just assume things will get better!** CLAP ALONG IF YOU FEEL LIKE THAT'S WHAT YOU WANT TO DO... **Someone pooped on your front porch?** Hey, free fertilizer! *How many things in life will that work for?*
2. **Follow your gut.** Oh, sure. I mean, the Bible says the heart is deceitful above all else... but by all means do everything your heart says! **No one who ever** followed their heart ended up unhappy... Miley Cyrus
3. **Own yourself.** Meaning, "**Don't apologize** for who you are, because **you're awesome.**" *But what if you aren't, in fact, awesome, and have serious flaws that need addressing?* Hmm... *That's a tough question. We had better just ignore it.*
4. **Make enough money to meet basic needs.** That's great, until you don't. Or you lose your job. And, most of the unhappy people I know personally make enough money to meet their basic needs.
5. **Treat your body like it deserves to be happy.** Because, you know, **cancer only hits** unhappy people.

6. **Stay close to family and friends.** Unless they are **jerks**, of course. And what if your family and friends **desert you?** Well, you should have picked better friends and family.
7. **Have deep, meaningful conversations.** Unless you're depressed or sad. Then they can be a real drag.
8. **Smile.** That's right: if all else fails, just fake it.

Seriously—is that the best we have?

- (the commentary was mine)
- Last week I contrasted **happiness and joy.**
- *Is your happiness dependent on your happenings?*

You need something deeper than circumstances; roots that go deep into something that can endure both spring and winter seasons:

- In a later psalm, David would say this: *"You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound"* (Psalms 4:7).
- *I have more joy in God than people have when their wine and grain abound; and, when I'm in a season where my grain and wine don't abound, I still have God!*
- *Listen: For the Christian, seasons of drought actually can deepen your joy; because those seasons drive your roots go deeper into Christ! And in those seasons where Christ is all that you have, you discover he is all that you need.*
- *When you don't have wine and grain, you see that Christ is all you need; when you do have it, you see that he is better than anything wine and grain can offer!*

B. You won't be happy... when you have no anchor point outside of yourself (vv. 4–5).

- The happy man is like a tree with deep roots anchoring him... And **this attacks one of our cultural myths** head-on: the belief that **happiness comes from complete freedom:** You'll be happy when you **answer to no one;** when are free to **make your own** rules, to **define your own** meaning; when you're like a **room without a roof.**

² Loc. 104

- C. S. Lewis compared this to the **fish that decides** he wants to be **free by escaping the confines of water**. So he flops out of the ocean. **True**, he is now free of the confines of water, but **is he happy?** No, because the fish was made for water. You and I are made for God.
- **A tree without roots is tumbleweed.** Tumbleweed is freer than a tree, but is it happier?

Look at how the psalmist unpacks this...

4 The ungodly are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

- When we're not anchored into something outside ourselves, there comes a point at which we are just gone. We are **forgotten**. Nothing we did **mattered**. We **blow away**.
- **Life is a tale** told by an idiot **full of sound and fury** signifying nothing; there is **no real justice**; no answer for the yearning for **meaning and eternity** in our spirits.
- And when you begin to think of life that way, an incredible despair starts to encroach over you.
- You say, "Oh no, I'll **just have fun** while I'm here... You know, **YOLO**, then you die." No. That may work for a while **when you're young**; but as you age you'll have to start fighting off this suffocating futility that presses in on you.

Leo Tolstoy, (*War and Peace; Anna Karenina*) *"Something strange began to happen to me at age 50. I had a wife who loved me and who I loved; I had a large estate which, without much effort on my part, increased; my name was respected, I enjoyed physical strength (Iron Tribe guy), and yet I could not live because of death. The question, which brought me to the verge of suicide, sought an answer without which one cannot really live. (Here it is) Is there any meaning in life that my inevitable death does not destroy? Today or tomorrow death will come to those I love, and then to me. Soon not only I will not exist and but eventually no one who exists will remember anything I have written or done. So why then go on with the effort? What is it all for? What does it all lead to?"*

What difference does it make whether or not I do this thing or that thing or nothing at all?

I could give no rational meaning to any single action of mine, or even to my whole life. What was so surprising was how we can fail to see this. For a time it is possible to live intoxicated with life but as soon as one is sober, it is impossible not to see that life in the face of death is a fraud, and a stupid fraud at that. How often I have been told, "oh you cannot understand the meaning of life so don't think about it, just live." But I can no longer do that.³

If your life has no anchor outside itself, it is chaff; with no real permanence, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing...

But the Psalmist goes on: **5 The ungodly will not survive the judgment**

- **Not only is life here meaningless**, even worse, at the end you stand under judgment.
 - The Bible says, *"It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment."*
 - At the end of life you stand before God and hear the word "condemned." FORGIVEN/CONDENMENED
- **What's it like for you in that moment—have you thought about it? You say, "You sound like one of them crazy pit preachers."** Well, maybe, but I'm telling you something you know to be true.
- Jesus asked the question: "What does it profit a man...EXCHANGE" What accomplishment will you trade for your soul? What earthly dream will you say was worth the forfeiting of your soul for eternity?"

Hasn't the psalmist put before us two ways to live? Psalm 1 tells us: *The man who knows God lives with an abundant, never ceasing source of joy that endures throughout all the seasons of his life; and when he dies he is received into eternal glory. The ungodly live with an increasingly suffocating sense of futility; they have no recourse in*

³ From Tolstoy's *Confession*.

pain, they can find no deeper meaning in suffering; and when they die they go into judgment.

- Closest believers ever come to hell is pain and suffering on this side of the grave; closest unbelievers come to heaven is fleeting pleasure this side of the grave.

2 WAYS. OVER AND OVER IN PSALMS. Which of these two ways do you want to live?

Now, the Psalmist does one other thing in this psalm and I want to take a few minutes to show it to you before we close, because he reveals the secret to really being happy. It's not enough to simply "be a Christian" or "try Jesus" or "go to church" or "let go and let God."

No, look... go back to vs. **1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, counsel:** he's talking about the way you think; **nor stands in the way of sinners, the way of sinners:** that's a reference to how you behave; **nor sits in the seat of scoffers;** in Jewish culture, where you sat showed where you belonged; men sat with men; the young with the young; the old with the old; the rich with the rich. He's talking about where you find your identity.

He's saying: Let your mind, your behaviors, and your identity be shaped by the Word of God. It's not enough to come to church, "be a Christian;" or even "be saved;" *you have to drive the roots of your soul deep into the gospel, so that your thinking, your actions, and your identity are all shaped by it. The gospel must become an anchor for your soul; roots that go so deep that whatever seasons you pass through—whether winters of loneliness or droughts of depression or storms of temptation—that your soul remains steadfast.*

The secret to happiness is driving your roots deep in the gospel (vv. 1–2) In light of that... some of you need to get a lot more serious about two things:

1. The Word

- See where he says, vs. **2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night...?**
 - Meditation not duty, but delight... when I fell in love with Veronica, it wasn't a duty to think about her... where my mind constantly went, day and night... I read her letters 5-600 times...
 - The idea is that the Word of God becomes such a *delight* to you that it frees you from the seductions of the world.
 - You'll only escape the pleasures of the world through a greater pleasure in the Word. Only as you turn your eyes on Jesus and look full...
- **Some of you have never experienced this.** The Word is just a religious duty to you; something you put on a checklist to feel guilty about... but there is no delight in it.
 - **Jonathan Edwards:** "Sometimes only mentioning a single word will cause my heart to burn within me, only seeing the name of Christ or some attribute of God will suddenly make my heart burn, and God suddenly appears glorious to me, making me have exalting thoughts of him. When I enjoy this sweetness it seems to carry me above the thoughts of my own estate. It seems that at such times I am at such a loss that I cannot bear it and I cannot bring myself to take my eye from this glorious present object, to turn it to myself or to my interest." DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT?
 - One of my fav's: Brother Lawrence, 16th century dishwashing monk, **"I find myself attached to God with greater sweetness and delight than an infant suckling at his mother's breast... I have at times such delicious thoughts on God that I am ashamed to mention them."**⁴ That's taking it to a whole new level (and we call that level "awkward"). **Do you have anything like that?**

⁴ The Practice of the Presence of God, 25.

The reason many of you struggle spiritually is you don't know anything about joy in God. ***You can only escape the pleasures of the world through the pleasures of the Word.***

Look at the last verse: **6 for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, This is the Psalmists' trump card.** "Yada" experiential knowledge. Romantic, even sexual. "knew his wife." "They got married, yada, yada."

The psalmist says, "God, my greatest joy is that I know you and you know me!"

- I've told you that **on my wedding day with Veronica**, not concerned about other girls. *Not consumed with one I didn't marry, but the one I did.* The Psalmist consumed with God.
- **Some of you have never gotten to that...** and that's why you struggle so much spiritually.

You say, "J.D., I'd love to feel that way about God—I'd love to crave his Word the way a suckling child craves his mother's breast—I may not use that image—but, you know, I'd like to feel that way, but I don't. What do I do?"

- **Confess your cold heart to God.** Listen, one thing I've learned: He's a God who overflows with grace for all who come to him with need. He never turns away the sick. He never turns away the broken or those crying out for mercy.
 - Prayer by **AW Tozer**: "O God, I have **tasted** Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am **painfully conscious** of my need of further grace. I am **ashamed of my lack of desire**. O God... I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made **thirstier** still... Give me grace to rise up and follow Thee."
 - Jesus heals spiritually dead; heals spiritually sick.
- **So, delight in the Word... then meditate on the word.** See that in vs 2, "on his law he meditates day and night?"
 - The **Hebrew word for "meditate"** literally means, "mumble to yourself." Mumble the gospel over and over.

- I've heard this compared to how a **cow chews the cud**: A cow wakes up in the morning, eats some grass, and then lays down to take another nap. After his nap, he regurgitates the grass he ate, chews on it a little, extracting more nutrients; and then he takes another nap, and then wakes up and regurgitates again and continues this process until all the nutrients are gone. That's what we are to do with the Bible.

- Write this down: **Read your Bible like a cow.** You've never heard a sermon application that said, "Be like the cow."

- **You will only delight in the Word when you meditate on it.**
- **You've got to get a lot more serious about the Word.** Read it daily. Memorize it. Study it in small groups. Meditate on it.

You've got to get a lot more serious about the Word. Then, #2, **get serious about...**

2. The church. Don't stand in the way of sinners, he says, or find your place among the scoffers.

Sermons might inspire you, but it is your community that shapes you.

- Friend: **"Your friends are your future you."** If you want to know what you'll be like the future, look at your friends in the present. *Your friends are your future you.*
- **Parents, your kids' friends** are the future them. *Hearing a once a week pep talk* is not going to make a difference for them spiritually. It's when the church and the people of God become their community.
- **The church should not be an event you attend occasionally on the weekend;** it should be your *community*; your *best and deepest relationships* should be here.
- Volunteer/Join/Small group/student ministry

Do you want to be happy? Devote yourself to the Word of God and the people of God.

- **There is so much joy in God...** (*“In your presence is the fullness of joy, and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Most intense joy for the longest time... but you’ll only know if it you go all the way.*)
- **Charles Spurgeon said the half-committed Christian is the most miserable person on earth.** He’s just enough in the world to be miserable in the presence of God; he’s just enough into God to be miserable in the world.
- **Go all the way one way or the other.** Either drive your roots deep into God—and get serious about the Word of God and the people of God (NO SUCH THING AS SERIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WITHOUT DEEP COMMITMENT TO WORD OF GOD AND PEOPLE OF GOD—or walk away!

GOSPEL

Communion

I’m going to call our teams forward to take communion... This bread and cup **represent the believers’ constant source** of happiness. **God doesn’t keep us from the storm**; he keeps us within the storm. He doesn’t deliver us from the **changing seasons** of life; he delivers us within the changing seasons of life.

- Regardless of where you are, this is what you have. Embrace it. Recommit yourself to it.
- Now, as they are coming... (Fence the table)