

Psalms 1 & 5 • Characteristics of the Righteous Man

Introduction

The Psalms can be thought of as “word journals” or diaries that capture righteous, spiritual men’s thoughts between them and God. They are the part of the Bible that teaches us the true intent of God’s Law and Word and how to apply it to our life on a real and practical level. In Psalms 1 and 5 we have two Psalms each detailing the characteristics of a righteous or godly man, someone in good spiritual standing with God. From them we can learn something about steps to take or the kind of behavior that is required to ourselves embark on the path of God’s righteousness, as well as compare and contrast them to the qualities and behaviors of our own life. In other words, what did David “do” to become “David”, God’s role model for us?

¹How blessed is the man who does not
walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
²But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and
night.
³He will be like a tree firmly planted by
streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.

[Read 1:1-3]

Q: To what characteristic of the righteous man does this Psalm speak?

A: Total commitment to the Word of God.

Q: What are the two practices evident in his life regarding his commitment to God’s Word?

1. **“...his delight is in the law of the Lord...”** It’s something both precious and special, even more so than other “possessions” or “things” in this life.
2. **“...in His law he meditates day and night.”** It’s something that is part of his prayer life and spiritual walk that is foremost in occupying his thoughts **and** time.

Q: What happens to those who DON’T commit their selves to God’s Word?

1. Not having the counsel of God’s Word, they “walk in the counsel of the wicked”.
2. Not adhering to the path defined by God’s Word, they “stand in the path of sinners”.
3. Not obtaining the insight and wisdom provided by God’s Word, they “sit in the seat of scoffers”.

Q: What is the result of this delight and commitment to God’s Word?

1. He has an unshakeable spiritual foundation (“like a tree firmly planted”) that is constantly nurtured by the Spirit (“by streams of water”)
2. His life produces spiritual results (“yields fruit in its season”)
3. The environment and circumstances may change but his steadfastness in the Lord does not (“its leaf does not wither”)
4. He continues to mature and grow spiritually throughout his life (“in whatever he does, he prospers”)

Application: What is your daily commitment to God’s Word? Do you see that spiritual maturity can be measured in direct proportion to one’s commitment to God’s Word? Is it possible that the areas in which you struggle are the areas in which you’re trying least to learn and apply God’s Word?

⁴The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind
drives away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in
the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the
righteous.

⁶For the LORD knows the way of the
righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

[Read 1:4-6]

Q: Is there a difference between being “wicked” and a “sinner”?

A: The Hebrew word “*rasha*” translated here as “wicked” means one who is hostile to God; in many translations it’s often translated as “ungodly”. It describes someone that is aware of God but chooses to act contrary and against Him. The word “*chatta*” translated as “sinner” describes someone who is counted as guilty for their offenses and, from God’s point of view, ready for condemnation. In both cases it describes someone who is making a choice or conscience decision either to rebel against God outright or rebel against His commandments.

Q: So what does rejection of God’s Word—not following it or allowing it to change behavior—eventually lead to?

A: They “will not stand in the judgment”—that is, God’s final judgment—nor will they be admitted into “the assembly of the righteous”—that is, those who will live and serve before God forever in eternity.

Point: *The clear implication is that the wicked and sinner may live THIS life having the things they desire, but they will pay the price in being rejected in the NEXT life. The righteous man knows that things get sorted out for all eternity, not necessarily in the immediacy of this life; therefore he lives in the shadow of eternity.*

[Read 1:6]

Q: What is the irony in this statement in the context of those who are committed to God’s Word versus those who are not?

A: God’s Word is the way by which we learn and come to know God and His ways. Those who are committed to His Word and putting it into practice in their life are come to be known in turn by God, whereas those who don’t seek to know His Word never come to be known by Him.

Application: *Do you see reading the Bible more as a “duty” or “responsibility” or the actual path by which you and God come to know each other? How should that affect your approach to His Word? Do you see why the righteous man does not just “read” the Word of God but “meditates” on it?*

¹Give ear to my words, O LORD,
Consider my groaning.

²Heed the sound of my cry for help, my
King and my God,
For to You I pray.

³In the morning, O LORD, You will hear
my voice;
In the morning I will order my prayer to
You and eagerly watch.

⁴For You are not a God who takes
pleasure in wickedness;
No evil dwells with You.

⁵The boastful shall not stand before Your
eyes;

You hate all who do iniquity.

⁶You destroy those who speak falsehood;
The Lord abhors the man of bloodshed
and deceit.

⁷But as for me, by Your abundant
lovingkindness I will enter Your house,
At Your holy temple I will bow in
reverence for You.

[Read 5:1-3]

Q: To what characteristic of the righteous man does this Psalm speak?

A: Total commitment to God through prayer.

Q: Is how we pray being defined here as strictly a formal act that has to happen in a specific manner according to certain rituals or ways?

A: No, it's really describing coming to God with the honest sincerity of your emotions and circumstances.

1. "my words" (v.1)
2. "my groaning" (v.1)
3. "my cry for help" (v.2)
4. "my voice" (v.3)
5. "my prayer" (v.3)

Q: But doesn't David speak of a regular commitment to prayer? What is the nature and substance of that commitment?

A: There is a daily commitment by which each day is begun in conversation first with the Lord before the business of life ensues. He specifically designates "I will order my prayer", which is the same phrase used when laying out the wood and sacrifices on the altar or putting the showbread on the table. It's a way of stating that he will pray acceptably, adhering to the same attitudes and practices as one making an acceptable and proper sacrifice to God, coming before Him with the right attitude, purpose, and respect.

Q: What is implied in his post-prayer actions, to "eagerly watch"?

A: He knows that one way or the other God will answer each and every prayer. The petitioner must be open to whatever the answer is, whether it's an outright granting of the request by God, or a message that our walk needs further refinement.

Application: How do we approach prayer in our attitude before, during and after? Like the sacrifices of old, do we realize that we're coming into the very presence of God (the temple, which is now us)? Are we listening and receptive to His response? Are we coming to Him haphazardly or "ordering" our prayer?

[Read 5:4-7]

Q: How do v.4-6 relate to God and His temple?

A: As the place God chose for His very presence, much of the Law pertained to consecrating the people and things that came into the temple before Him, to be cleansed of the impurity of sin. God could not abide sin in His presence.

Q: But how would that relate to those that come before Him to pray?

A: People that bring their prayer while allowing such wrong behaviors to continue in their life such as wickedness, evil, boasting, iniquity, lying, bloodshed, and deceit will not be heard by Him as He cannot abide the impure condition of their heart before Him. Their "sacrifices" are not properly prepared beforehand by the condition of their heart or behavior.

Point: Just as the Old Testament sacrifices did not actually remove sin for those following a ritual without a changed heart to accompany it, so prayer that is given without a changed and submissive heart has no affect.

⁸O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness
because of my foes;

Make Your way straight before me.

⁹There is nothing reliable in what they
say;

Their inward part is destruction itself.

Their throat is an open grave;

They flatter with their tongue.

¹⁰Hold them guilty, O God;

By their own devices let them fall!

In the multitude of their transgressions
thrust them out,

For they are rebellious against You.

¹¹But let all who take refuge in You be
glad,

Let them ever sing for joy;

And may You shelter them,

That those who love Your name may
exult in You.

¹²For it is You who blesses the righteous
man, O LORD,

You surround him with favor as with a
shield.

[Read 5:8-12]

Q: What are traits associated with the unrighteous in v.8-10?

1. **“There is nothing reliable in what they say”**. This is a way of stating that their nature is to be unfaithful and cannot be counted on even if they say they will, because their actions will always go the opposite way.
2. **“Their inward part is destruction itself”**. Their unfaithfulness and unrighteousness proceeds from a heart and spirit that themselves are corrupted by and dedicated to sin.
3. **“Their throat is an open grave”**. Their speech reveals for everyone to plainly see the bones, decay, and disease of a corpse rotting away so that everyone knows them to be unrighteous.
4. **“They flatter with their tongue”**. There is no sincerity in their speech, which in reality is just a tool they use to try and hide their true intentions.
5. **“They are rebellious against You.”** Taken altogether, the unrighteous are those actively pursuing a life contrary to the Person and ways of God.

Q: What are the contrasting traits associated with the righteous in v.11-12?

1. They **“take refuge in You”**.
2. They **“ever sing for joy”**.
3. They **“love Your name”**
4. They **“exult in You”**.

All of these traits contrast the insincerity and rebelliousness of the unrighteous to the sincerity and devotion of the righteous. The former is devoted to self, the latter to God.

Q: How does God deal with the unrighteous differently than the righteous?

A: For the unrighteous, God will **“hold them guilty”** and **“thrust them out”**. (v.10) For the righteous He **“blesses”** and surrounds them **“with favor as with a shield”**. (v.12) It’s a description of the end, eternal result of being forever separated from God versus eternally in His presence.

Point: *This last contrast should tell us something of why the way we approach God in this life parallels what will happen in the next. Just as God cannot abide the presence of sin and pride in His earthly temple, neither will they be found in us, His heavenly temple.*

Observation

Q: Although Psalm 1 focuses on God’s Word and Psalm 5 on prayer, what are the things that they have in common that speak about the nature of the righteous man?

1. Both God’s Word and prayer are approached first with a heart dedicated to Him and living His ways. In other words, sin and bad behavior are not allowed to go unaddressed.
2. Everything is seen from the perspective of eternity, not just for the present life.
3. Both are acts of being nurtured, matured, and growing in a personal relationship with God to be in turn known by Him.

Overall Application

How do you approach prayer and Bible study? How is it the same or different than presented here? What do you need to do going forward to follow these examples?