

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Wisdom

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Scripture:

Psalm 1

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do 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 leads to destruction.

Transcript:

Good morning. My name is Becky Bastien, and I am our elementary director. I work with our kids. If we haven't met before, it's nice to meet you all. And today our reading comes from Psalm 1, which says this, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand

in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do, prospers. Not so the wicked, they are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction."

So God, I ask that you would fill this room with your spirit. Would you speak through me? Would you prepare our hearts to hear and understand what you have for us today? Help us to draw closer to your wisdom, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, this summer, if you don't know, we are looking at the Psalms as ways that we can pray and talk to God. And today we're looking at Psalm 1 as a wisdom Psalm. A psalm and a prayer acknowledging our need for God's wisdom in our life. Now, wisdom is a funny thing because if you think about it, what I think is wise you might think is not wise at all, and I encountered this reality just last weekend. Now a little context, July here for our Kids and Students department is a big month. We have a lot of fun camps and it's great, and it's tiring.

And so once I had finished all my camps, I had plans for a very relaxing Saturday. I went to the mall, I bought some donuts and I was going to go home and spend the whole afternoon reading in the sun and eating donuts, when? I got a flat tire. Bummer. But luckily I was in a pretty safe location. I had pulled out of the parking garage and was in that alleyway before you pull out onto the street. So I called AAA and then I called my husband to let him know that I was going to wait for the technician to come and help me change it because I wasn't going to change it, and that I was just going to eat donuts and hang out. And he agreed, great plan, you just hang out and wait. Well, an hour went by. I ate donuts, I waved cars past me with a donut, and then eventually the technician came.

He took one look at my car, he took one look at an open parking spot next to where I was and laughed out loud and said, "Did you not think about just pulling your car into that spot so that you wouldn't have to wave everyone else around you?" No, I hadn't. I had no idea that was an option. Not once did I consider that I could move my car after I got a flat tire. Now, it's funny because over the last week I've told this story to a lot of people and all of them have had a different opinion on if you can drive on a flat tire, what kind of tire you can drive on. How old was my car? What was the terrain? How fast you can go, lots of different opinions. And in fact, if we took a survey in this very room, I imagine there would be very diverse opinions about what the wise thing to do would have been.

And here's my point, we all have our own beliefs about what's wise or smart, and it's based on our experiences and our backgrounds, and what we have encountered to work well for us. And so when we're talking about wisdom, it's important that we look at not our own wisdom, but what is God's wisdom and where is he pointing us to look for it. Now, an invitation, if you're still thinking about tires and what I should have done come back with me because Psalm 1 gives us places to look for wisdom, and none of it has to do with tires. First, it tells us what we should

not do. A great place to start. It says this, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers."

So the beginning of this Psalm is all about how we need to acknowledge what may influence us. And this is a clear warning here that people of God cannot ignore how the ways of the wicked and sinners might influence us. However, I think it's important that we hold this scripture as we always do in light of the example of how Jesus lived out his life because Jesus had a lot of friends that were wicked and familiar with sin and familiar with mocking God's plan for humanity. And so we see in scripture that Jesus was able to maintain friendship while never acting out in the ways that they did. Jesus was friends with tax collectors and murders, and yet never became one himself. And so we have to believe that God is capable of doing the same thing in our lives, but the amount of influence that others can have on us can't be understated.

Now, a rather innocent example that I thought of in my life has to do with my husband's love of hockey. Now, Kyle grew up in Southern California, and his dad is Canadian, and he had a Canadian roommate in college. And so when we were dating, we watched a handful of hockey games together before I noted something really interesting. You see, Kyle normally speaks with a Southern Californian English accent, but when watching hockey, all of a sudden develops a lot of elongated vowels and As, and becomes, in his own way, a Canadian. So I pointed this out and he was flabbergasted. He had no idea this happened, but he started to hear it in himself and acknowledge it. Now this makes sense, he mostly watches hockey with Canadians. That is what became his vocabulary for the sport. And this is a rather innocent example, but it illustrates how the people we are around can influence how we talk, how we view the world and how we view our relationship with God and so much more.

So it's important that we be aware of what influences us, and if it's pointing us towards God or away from God, and I won't comment on if hockey pushes me towards God or away from God. But when I think about friends who are quick to say, "Thank you," I know that when I hang out with them, I am far more likely to practice gratitude in my own heart. Or when I'm making a big decision and someone offers to pray for me, I am far more likely to begin to think about that decision and how God might be calling me to act in that situation. Our interactions with others can push us towards or away from God. So how do we pray about this? Well, first we take time to notice what is influencing us, and if that's hard to do, I recommend that you ask those who are close to you. Because Kyle would've never noticed his accent on his own.

Or another thing we can do is ask God to show us what is influencing us, and if what comes out of this is something that might be pushing us away from God or influencing us negatively, we can ask God for his assistance on how we respond better. So I came up with a hypothetical, completely hypothetical, you might pray, "God, when I'm around this coworker or this family member, all I can think is that the response to the problems of the world is anxiety and worry. Help me to see when this is happening and help me to respond better, and maybe even help me to influence them in how they see the world." You see, when we can move from a false wisdom

of the world to God's wisdom, we are able to step into what God is calling us to do. Second, Psalm 1 tells us a source of God's wisdom that we cannot thrive without. It says this, "Those who delight in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night, that person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season."

Now, if reading law sounds boring to you, stay with me. I am with you. But this is not our kind of laws, and when I talk to our kids about scripture and when I give them their first bibles, this is something I emphasize that this is not a boring rule book, but this is the incredible redemptive story of God's love for his people across generations. You want to know if God has advice or wisdom for that problem or situation you cannot figure out on your own? Look into scripture and see how many times God hops into people's lives when they're in messy and complex situations, and he's able to bring them to the other side. Now, reading the Bible not only gives us the literal wisdom of whatever it is we're reading. Of course, it does that, but also I want to emphasize today it gives us perspective on our life. It helps us to see that the world is God's world and that is where we are living. It helps us to see that we are in God's story and not the other way around.

It humbles our hearts and reminds us that we need God's help, and shows us that God has been faithful to show up in the lives of believers for many years before us and so we can trust that he'll do the same for us. Now, when I was thinking about this truth, it reminded me of the Winnie-the-Pooh movies from my childhood. Now, if you are over the age of 30, you'll remember VHS tapes, and on VHS would be the Winnie-the-Pooh stories, I watched them all throughout my childhood. And if you're not familiar, Winnie-the-Pooh stories tell you the story of the various characters of the Hundred Acre Woods. And normally you just see the cartoon and it would play out, but every once in a while, the narrator would zoom out the story and you'd be able to see the whole book.

And this usually happened when something big happened, like maybe there was a big flood, and the narrator wanted you to show that it crossed several pages, maybe even several chapters, or the narrator saw that a character was stuck somewhere and needed to turn the book sideways and maybe shake it a little bit to get, say, piglet where he needed to go. It's important to remember we are not the narrator in our story, God is, and God can see how the plot of our lives will develop over the years or chapters ahead of us. God knows what lessons we need to learn now that will help us in the future, and God sees how it'll all work together even when we cannot in the midst of it. Sometimes God has to turn the book sideways and shake it a little bit to get us where we need to be. I know he's done it for me.

This allows us to pray in new ways when our perspective changes. We might pray in a season of change, "God, I trust that your wisdom is greater than mine, that you have a plan for my life like you did for David, like you did for Mary. And so I trust that even if I can't see it right now, you have a plan." Or in a season of disappointment and sadness, we might pray, "God, help me to remember that you are faithful even during difficult times as you have been for the people

before me." I think it's important that we remember that God is not surprised or disappointed that we need his help, and so we don't need to be nervous about asking for it. And when we spend time in scripture, we can see how God did the same for people before us, and it helps us to gain confidence in knowing that God has wisdom and a plan for our lives.

Number three, we meditate on the law day and night. One of the things that I know about myself is that if I hear something over and over and over again, I will learn it. Now, I don't have much of a memory for historical dates or scientific formulas, but if you were to play half of a jingle that was on TV in my childhood, I could probably complete it for you. And I say this with a good amount of confidence because a few weeks ago I was scrolling through social media and I saw a video of a credit score monitoring commercial from the early 2000s and I knew every word long before I knew what a credit score was, long before I knew what credit fraud was, and I knew all the words. Why?

Because I had heard it a thousand times and in my childhood I sang along to it because it was catchy. When we spend time with something, whether it's something we read, something we meditate on, something we talk about, something we pray, it becomes something we know, and then it is something that when the time is right, God might use to talk to us late. Not the jingle but his word. Now, many of you saw on our social media that Anthony who's on our staff shared that Psalm 1 is one of his favorite Psalms, and it's a Psalm he was taught in his childhood to memorize, and his family used it in a really unique and cool way.

They would personalize the Psalm by putting their names into it. And so Anthony was taught to pray, "Blessed is Anthony who does not walk and step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. Anthony will delight in the law of the Lord." Anthony then talked about how knowing this Psalm kept him on the right path when other things in life could have distracted him later. You see, he learned this Psalm, he meditated on it, he prayed it, he knew it. And so later in life, God was able to use it to speak to him. Now, please hear me. This is not me saying that if you read the Bible or memorize it, then you've learned enough and you never have to go back to it. That's certainly not true. But scripture gives us the tools to see what is and isn't wise, and God is capable of talking to us through scripture across our lives.

And so putting ourselves into scripture helps us to bring it into our understanding of who we are. It could sound like this, "God, help me to not walk and step with the wicked. God, help me to delight in your law. God help me to be like the tree planted by your river." Now, these are prayers rooted in wisdom that acknowledge our need for God's help in our lives. And it's not by our strength that we stand tall or that the tree produces fruit, rather it's by the nourishment of the river that it is planted by. I also just want to take a moment to note something about this tree that I think is so important for us in our culture. The Bible itself says that the tree yields its fruit in season, not all the time, but in season. And this verse is saying that there will be seasons when

the tree is not producing fruit. And this is in direct contrast to our society's hyper-focus on living your best life and maximizing productivity.

No, God is saying that in season the trees will produce fruit, and therefore we can expect that there are seasons where we may not be producing fruit, but maybe we're resting, learning, rebuilding. It's a continual cycle of revisiting God's wisdom in preparation for what God has next for us. Now, the stance in contrast to the depiction of the wicked that we hear here, it says, "They are like chaff that the wind blows away." Now, chaff is the husk of the grains that were common in biblical time. And so the people who heard this Psalm originally would've been able to picture the husks blowing everywhere in front of their house, down their fields, to and fro getting dirty all around them. And the chaff, and when we think about this is easily influenced by the winds. They might go one way and then they might come back the other, whatever seems like the wisdom of the day, the chaff looks for protection following the whims of the world, whether that's money, power or ego.

It stands in contrast to the tree rooted by the river. However, I think it's important to note that this doesn't say that the tree won't experience the wind or the storm. The tree's branches will move. It may lose some leaves. That's because this isn't a promise that once we follow God, our lives become perfect or that nothing will ever upset us, but this is a promise that God, like the river, remains faithful even in the storms. And so we have a choice, and the Psalm is telling us that there are consequences to our choices. What we are devoted to will influence our lives and our relationship to God, which is why the Bible is teaching us how to ask for wisdom and how to draw near to God. Because the good news is we don't have to do this alone, God wants to help us. You and I can ask God to help us understand where are we being like the chaff and where are we being like the tree?

And we can thank God that he loves us where we are, but he loves us too much to leave us there and instead wants to call us to something new and good in our lives. One of the prayers that I was taught very early on in ministry was this, "God, I can't do this on my own and I would be foolish to try, come and do what only you can do." It's an acknowledgement of my relationship to God. It's an invitation for God to come into my life and to work through me, and it's a reminder that God is on my side and on your side too. God wants to be our river nourishing us, guiding us, teaching us and giving us wisdom. Let's let him. Let's pray. So God, we thank you that you are the river and that we are the trees. Would you teach us how to seek out your wisdom, remember our need for it and put it into practice? Help us to rely on you and not on ourselves in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- How is God's wisdom different from ours?
- How can we pray using God's wisdom?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.