Beginning today, and over the summer, we're going to look at some different types of psalms - like psalms of praise and lament, psalms of thanksgiving and repentance. But we're starting with Psalm 1 - which is often called a *wisdom* psalm.

Because just like the wisdom literature in the Bible - books like Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, or the letter of James, Psalm 1 is about living life with skill; and like those other books it helps you do that by considering the company you keep, or the influences you're under, or the outcome of the choices you make, and above all, by the place of God's word in your life.

And scholars reckon Psalm 1 was written as an introduction or, as one writer puts it, as 'the doorkeeper' to all the other psalms. Because it tells you, you're only really going to understand all that follows, you're only going to be able to sing the psalms from your heart, if what this first psalm teaches you has been laid as a foundation in your heart.

And the psalms are songs. And like all songs, they're written to speak to, and move your heart. And Psalm 1's no different. It wants to change the way you see and live life. So we're going to look at 4 things: *What* we're all looking for; *where* we look for it; the fruit that comes from where we look; and the joy that comes from being found.

What We're All Searching For

Su and I were talking once to a couple whose marriage was in trouble, and one of them said, 'well, anyway, marriage is for our holiness, not our happiness.' And Su and I responded, 'err, I, think you've missed the point!' Because is marriage a means for us to grow in godly character and Christ-like love? Absolutely. But it *is* also for our joy.

So look how Psalm 1 opens: v1: 'Blessed is the man…' or as you could translate it: happy is the man.

So the very first word of the book of Psalms, a book that plums the depth of human emotions, is not about your holiness but about your happiness, and how to find it.

And whether or not you realise it, the blessed and happy life is the life we're all looking for, isn't it? In one of his famous pensées, Blaise Pascal wrote, 'All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man.'

In other words, every decision you make, everything you do, you decide and do because you think you'll be happier by doing it. Because deep down that's what we're all searching for: happiness.

And we could discuss different definitions of what it means to be happy, but Psalm 1 gives us a pretty good starting point, doesn't it? Because it talks about delighting in something, and being fruitful in life, and having a sense of stability, value, and worth. And that's what happiness consists in, doesn't it? A joy, combined with an inner sense of thriving, and rootedness, of significance and purpose. Because if we had those, we'd say, 'yup, I'm happy.'

The question is: where can you find that?

Where We Look For It

And today, in our culture, we tend to think that the secret of happiness, the way of blessing, lies in our circumstances and of having our own way. That if I could find a significant other, or travel the world, or sort out my finances, or achieve career success, or if my kids or marriage do well, if I can get out of life what I want, then I'd be happy.

But look what the psalmist says - because he begins by telling us where true happiness *is not* found.

Verse 1 again, 'Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.'

Earlier this week I was reading an interview in the Daily Telegraph, a UK newspaper, with John Lennox, emeritus professor of mathematics at Oxford, who's also an outspoken believer in Christianity. And in the interview, Lennox references his 2008 debate with Richard Dawkins, the atheist, and fellow Oxford professor, which was titled 'Has Science Buried God?' And so the interviewer decided to watch it on YouTube. And here's what he writes having watched it, 'I found the two to be well-matched intellectually, but Lennox's relaxed good humour and ability to keep cool under provocation most remarkable in the face of an uptight Dawkins's taunts and sneering language about God.'

What's he saying? That Dawkins - in the language of Psalm 1 - mocked and scoffed at the idea of God - but of the two, Lennox *just seemed happier*. And when Su and I watched that debate years ago, we both came away thinking, 'regardless of the arguments, I want to grow old and happy like Lennox, not - in the words of the interviewer - uptight and sneering like Dawkins. And if that's where their respective beliefs lead them, I know which one I'm going to choose.'

And Psalm 1 says, exactly, and like Lennox, you can be happy - but it's all about what is *and is not* forming you.

Because as Derek Kidner writes in his commentary, to walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers, is all about who you're letting shape your thinking, behaving, and belonging.

And you could be conformed by the world: walking in, accepting, and generally just imbibing its advice - that happiness is found in putting yourself first, and always getting your own way. And you could become gradually more settled, more fixed or, as the psalmist says, *standing* in its ways - that you need to have this, or achieve that if you're to be happy; until you're entirely at home and comfortable - you're sat down - with its attitudes: scoffing at the idea that there's more to life than what you earn, or who you're sleeping with, or where your next flight is off to. Mocking the idea that there might actually be a God who has a view on how you should live, or have something to tell you about where true happiness is to be found.

Instead, the truly happy person, the psalmist says, is being shaped by something very different: v2, 'his delight is in the law of the Lord.'

And the word for law there is the word *torah*, and that can mean the law of Moses, or the whole written revelation of God - the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament, that tells us of God's

steadfast love and covenant promises; of how he intervenes in history to win a people to himself who will bless the world, of his righteousness and justice, his mercy and his grace.

And it's in allowing that Word to shape you, the psalmist is saying; it's in knowing that God, of steadfast, covenant love; it's in being formed by his faithfulness, and by walking in his ways that you will find true happiness. Because as we've seen in Romans, and as Charles Spurgeon the famous preacher from the Victorian era said, the truly blessed person 'is not *under* the law, but in it.' Delighting in it.

Verse 2 again, 'his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.' And maybe you hear the echo there to what the Lord said to Joshua as he took over the leadership of Israel after Moses' death: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night" (Josh 1:8).

And who was Joshua? A general, a soldier, a man of action. So this delighting in and meditating on God's word is not just for contemplative types, like monks in their cloisters. This is for any of us who want to bring change to the world; who want to build, create, or achieve things. Or put cynicism and sneering on the back foot and fight for the true, the good, and the beautiful.

And how can you do any of that *and be happy*? By addressing what you delight in and give your mind to, the psalmist is saying. And doing that day and night, by having God's word shape you day and night.

Think what that might look like. It might be taking a Bible verse with you as you go for a run and chewing it over as you run; it could be by using God's word as a sword as you fight temptation. It could be praying God's word for those you pray for. Like when I pray for you and the elders each morning I take one of the verses I've been meditating on and pray, 'Father, may this truth be true for them today. May Marc find his delight today in you and your word.' Or it might be when you can't sleep at night, you bring that verse to mind, and ponder it and pray it for those you love.

And the psalmist is saying, adopt the counsel, the ways, or the scoffing of the world, and you'll never be truly, lastingly, ultimately happy. But let God's word form you and true joy can be yours.

So maybe ask yourself: what is forming you more? Is it Instagram, or your news feed, or the comparisons you make to others? Or is it God and what he says about himself and about you?

And that matters not just for our happiness.

The Fruit that Comes from Where we Look

Verses 3-4, '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. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.'

So, strangely enough, these two ways to live also determine what you're becoming - and the contrast is stark, isn't it? A rooted tree or a piece of chaff blown in the wind.

And if you had to choose between those two; between being a tree in an oasis, or a piece of dried dust blown in the hot wind, you'd choose the tree, wouldn't you?

Because this tree is planted. It is stable and steadfast. And its roots tell you it is living at a deeper level than the superficiality of being carried along by the world.

And it's thriving and fruitful. But does a tree bear fruit for itself, or for the delight and blessing of others?

So if the counsel, and the ways, and the behaviours of our modern world tell you 'look out for yourself and put yourself first', Psalm 1 says, 'do that and you'll never be happy.' And all the data on our current epidemic of loneliness, or mental health issues among young adults, tells us: he is not wrong. Because such a life inevitably robs you of the love, friendship and community that makes life rich. But root yourself in God, and and you'll be blessed and a blessing.

Plus the leaf of this tree does not wither. Now, does that mean you'll never experience times of drought or hardship in life? No. But it does mean you won't shrivel up in them. And so along with happiness such a person displays a hardiness, an endurance in suffering and a humility in success. Because when you're formed by God's word, you know his delight in you is not dependent on your circumstances or your performance, good or bad.

But look again at what he says in v3: 'In all that he does, he prospers.' Does that mean you'll pass every exam, and get every job, drive the latest Mercedes, and go on holiday on a private jet? No. It means what it means for a fruit tree to prosper. Which is to bear lots of fruit for the blessing and benefit of others.

The alternative is very different, isn't it? As Derek Kidner writes, chaff - the dried husk of the wheat removed by threshing - the outcome of a life lived for self, is 'rootless, weightless and useless'.

But of course, it doesn't look like that does it? You see a person pushing themselves forward, getting themselves seen, who everyone notices, and who gets all the likes, you'll think they're the one living the life of substance, who's making something of themselves, who's a mover and a shaker. It's the opposite the psalmist says. Because ultimately such a life will be shown to be the empty shell it is. Because what fruit has ever grown from a piece of dried out chaff?

And yet again, it's not just that such a life fails to bring blessing to others, it fails to deliver for the person themself: Verse 5: 'therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement, not sinners in the congregation of the righteous.'

And so in the final accounting of all our lives, the shallowness of such a life lived for self, and without reference to God, will collapse under the weight of it's own emptiness, and find itself excluded from what the Book of Common Prayer calls, 'the blessed - happy - congregation of all faithful people.'

The Joy of Being Found

Verse 6, 'For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.' Now, given that the Lord clearly knows the way of *the wicked*, that he knows the way of *the righteous* must mean more than him simply knowing the facts of our lives, mustn't it? And it does - because elsewhere that same word for 'knows' is translated 'cares for'.

And to be cared for and loved by, and smiled upon by God, and to be the object of his delight and his blessing - to be *known* by him, is to be found by him and that's the ultimate blessing, the source of true happiness, in life and death.

The question is: how do you get that? Because unless you live under the delusion of self-righteousness you know you don't always delight in God's word, or give it the attention you should; none of us do. Instead, we're tempted to think like, and behave like, and get comfortable with the ways of the world. And we give in to that temptation.

So where's the hope for people like us in this psalm? Well, scholars tell us this psalm is giving us the perfect, godly example of what a person should be like. And there is one man who has managed it.

Because think of the two friends walking to Emmaus, that first Easter Sunday morning. They'd witnessed Jesus' crucifixion, and were anything but happy. In fact, Luke tells us, 'they stood still, looking sad' (Luke 24:17). But Jesus meets them and Luke tells us 'he interpreted to them in *all the Scriptures* the things concerning himself.' (Luke 24:27).

What do you think he would have told them about Psalm 1? How would he have shown them, 'hey, this is pointing you to me'? Because he was the ultimately blessed and happy man, the One who unfailingly delighted in God's law, and who was unflinchingly stable and steadfast in the drought of suffering.

And yet he, the happiest of men, became the ultimate Man of Sorrows, crucified *on a tree*, as he bore our failure to live and delight in God as we should. But he bore our sorrow that we might share his joy. He was crucified outside the city walls, cast out of the congregation of the righteous that we might be brought in. And he - the wisdom of God himself, the fulfilment of God's law - was threshed like chaff that we might be rooted beside the river of his love. And he was judged that we might stand. And he died that we might live. He lost everything that we might be found, And that cross, that tree of death has become for us a tree of life.

Because Christ is the ultimate tree planted by the river, the fruit of whose life, death, and resurrection have brought countless blessings to those who trust him.

And Luke tells us that as Jesus opened the Scriptures to that couple on the road, their hearts burned within them.

And as we see what they saw, or if you're not yet a Christian when you see it for the first time, you'll want to grow in your knowledge of him, and you'll find yourself delighting in his word. And as you do you'll become more like him. And your joy, and stability, and blessing to others will grow.