Preaching Series: Eight Factors in Life Transformation
Sermon Title: Delighting in God's Word

Text: **Psalm 1:1-6 -- 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; 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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 wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked 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 wicked will perish.**

Introduction: In an article called, ***People of the Book***, **author and preacher John Ortberg** writes these words about the Bible: "It's a strange thing: THE BOOK HAS NEVER BEEN SO ACCESSIBLE. According to **the Guinness Book of Records**, ***L. Ron Hubbard's writings of scientology*** have been translated into 65 languages; ***the Koran*** is supposed to be read in Arabic so it hasn't been translated as much; ***the Book of Mormon*** is in about 100 languages. ***But 2,656 languages have all or some of the Bible***. Some 65 million copies of the Bible are bought or distributed in the U.S. every year--nothing else is a close second. The average house has at least three." Ortberg continues, "People cheer the Bible, buy the Bible, give the Bible, own the Bible—***they just don't actually read the Bible***. According to a **George Gallup Poll**: (*Only*) one third of those surveyed know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Fewer than half can name the first book of the Bible; 80 percent of born-again Christians believe the phrase "***God helps those who help themselves***" is in the Bible (*it's Ben Franklin, if you're curious*). So, I'm thinking a lot these days about how to help the people that God brings my way to know and love the book". That's a great ambition for any pastor isn't it? To teach the people he shepherds to 'know and love the book.'

This morning, we continue in our series, "***Eight Factors in Life Transformation***." This is based on a study performed by **Lifeway Research** of 1,000 pastors and 4,000 churchgoers in North America regarding the attributes they believe convictional Christians share in common. So far we've covered, **1) *Unashamed*** – which measures how open believers are in living out their Christian faith in the world and in the church. **(2) *Exercising Faith*** by trusting in God's perfect plan for our lives knowing that even our trials are meant for a good purpose – to increase our faith; **(3) *Seeking God***, which is HIs way to lift any believer out of spiritually depression; and **(4) *Building*** (*meaningful*)

Relationships which involves denying oneself and putting Christ and others first. This morning, we're going to look at the next one on the list and that is ***Engaging in God's Word***. Please join me as we look at **Psalm 1** and the contrast between those who value God's Word and those who don't.

The Way of the Blessed (**Psalm 1:1-3 -- 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; 2 but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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**). These verses tell us how we can experience God's blessings every day. They are His prescription for happiness. Here are four observations about happiness as it relates to the way of the righteous.

- **God's blessings are available to everyone** (**Blessed is the man/person…**). In biblical terms ***to be blessed is to be rightly related to God so that your life is full and meaningful***. This blessing isn't related to our circumstances. It is the product of the choices we make and is available to anyone who follows the path God has laid out for him. Someone has said that **this kind of happiness is like a cat**. Chase it and it will run from you. But go about your business steadily day by day and it will soon come and curl up at your feet. Any person can find true contentment and happiness, but it is only available on God's terms, not ours.
- **God's blessings come to those with resolve to avoid evil**. **Psalm 1** begins by telling us that these blessings are based first on what the righteous person does not do. (**1**) **HE WALKS NOT IN THE COUNSEL OF THE WICKED**. This is another way of saying that a godly person REFUSED TO LISTEN TO THE ADVICE OF THE MORALLY UNSTABLE. If you've been reading through your Bible this year, on June 30th you read in **2 Chronicles 22:3** *that* **Ahaziah** *became the king of Judah and reigned only one year – Why? His mother encouraged (counseled) him in doing wrong*. He was not a blessed man. (**2**) **NOR DOES HE STAND IN THE WAY OF SINNERS**. The person blessed by God refuses to adopt a lifestyle characterized by willful rebellion. This is not about the ability to discern between good and bad counsel. It's about deliberate disobedience to God. (**3**) **HE DOES NOT SIT IN THE SEAT OF SCOFFERS**. This means to have close, intimate, long-term fellowship with those who openly reject the Lord. The progression goes like this … BELIEVING…BEHAVING…BELONGING. Now some of you might be thinking, "***It seems that the only way I can avoid their influence is to avoid the ungodly completely.***" But that's not the point of this verse. It is meant to serve as a warning to us that the only way we can avoid walking in the counsel of the wicked,

standing in the way of sinners and sitting in the seat of scoffers is to do the what comes next.

- **God's blessings come to those who delight in His Word and meditate on it day and night**. This is what the Psalmist says should be the preoccupation of our lives. The godly person takes great pleasure in the Scriptures. It becomes a consuming passion that controls his or her life. Instead of delighting in food, a career, a particular friendship, a hobby, a sport, money or anything else for that matter, the blessed person of God can't wait to hear from heaven. The word '**meditate'** means to "***murmur under your breath***." In a sense it's like talking to ourselves only we're thinking about and reciting God's wisdom instead of our own.
- **God's blessings are marked by stability and fruitfulness**. The Psalmist compares the person who builds his life on the Word to a **tree planted by streams of water**. **His life reflects stability**. Like a mighty tree with deep roots that extend far out into the soil and cannot be moved during high winds or inclement weather, so is the believer who consistently devours the truth. With spiritual roots that run deep, this person is able to withstand any kind of storm that life can throw at him. **Also, his life reflects fruitfulness** (***He is like a tree that…*****yields its fruit in its season. Its leaf does not wither and in all that he does he prospers**). Trees produce fruit in their season. So do believers! **Fruit is a reflection of the true inner nature of something**. INEVITABLY WHATEVER IS ON THE INSIDE MUST BE SEEN ON THE OUTSIDE. Apple trees produce apples because everything necessary to make them is in the tree itself. Believers produce spiritual fruit for the same reason. We have everything we need for life and godliness according to **2 Peter 1:3**. ***Here's a piece of advice for you***: Don't be impatient when it comes to bearing fruit. It takes TIME and MATURITY to get there. On a visit to two California vineyards, **author Margaret Feinberg** discovered that **vintners** (*people who grow grapes to make wine*) must adopt a long-term approach to their work. According to Feinberg, the FIRST a vintner plants SHOOTS OF VINES RATHER THAN SEEDS because these yield the strongest vines. At the end of the first growing season, he cuts them back. A SECOND year passes what does he do? He cuts them back again. Only after the THIRD year does he see his first viable clusters of grapes. Serious vintners leave those clusters on the vines. **For most vintners, it's not until year FOUR that they bring in their first harvest**. For those growing grapes for winemaking, they'll bottle their harvest, but won't taste the fruit of their labors until year SEVEN or EIGHT. Most vineyards in Napa Valley won't reach a breakeven point for their investment until year FIFTEEN or beyond. ***Applying these insights to her spiritual life, Feinberg writes***, "Sometimes I look at my own life and wonder, '*Why am I not more fruitful? And why does pruning have to hurt so much? Why does*

cultivating a healthy crop take so long?' Yet those questions circle around the here and now. God's perspective is much different. Like a good vineyard owner, he knows how to bring about fruitfulness better than I ever will. And God is patient with me, more patient than I am with myself … [Also], as we fulfill our callings … we must recognize that like the vintner's, our fruitfulness will not come overnight. The first harvest of our labors may not come for three or five years."

The Way of the Wicked (**Psalm 1:4-5 -- The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous**). The way of those who ignore God's Word is found in these two words: "***Not so***." They miss out on God's blessings because they have chosen a different path.

- **The life of the wicked is ultimately without substance**. Chaff refers to the husk or hull that surrounds a nut or kernel. It might seem very strong, but once the fruit has been removed, it shows that it lacks any real substance. Think of a peanut. Once you crack it, open and eat the good part, the shell is tossed onto the ground and pulverized into dust. **That's what the wicked look like to God**. Though they may seem so hard and resilient on the outside, they become **like chaff that the wind drives away**. Why? Because life without the blessing of God is worthless and empty.
- **The character of the wicked will be revealed in the Day of Judgment**. When the time comes for judgment, the Psalmist tells us that wicked will not stand with the righteous because they ignore God's commands! Everything that characterized their lives was superficial and shallow. They did not focus on those things that will last, but had a short-term view of life contrary to the teaching of Scripture. As **C. S. Lewis** says, "***All that is not eternal is eternally out of date***."

The End of Both Ways (**Psalm 1:6 -- for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish**). This verse tells us what happens to the righteous and the wicked in the end.

- **The righteous will endure**. Notice it says that the Lord ***KNOWS*** the way of the righteous. He has a personal and intimate knowledge of those who seek Him through His Word. Just as we "***know***" our children in an intimate way, even more so, our Creator ***knows*** us and preserves us to the end so that we will still be standing after the final judgment.
- **The wicked will perish**. This is the sober reality of the people that disregard God's ways for their own. All that these people have lived for will disappear like "a mist in the morning sun." They will perish along with the works of their hands. Their "***way***"

will come to an end. It may not always look this way (**Psalm 73:3-5 -- 3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. 5 They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind),** but God will have the final word. Remember Nero, the emperor of Rome in the first century A.D.? He was a pervert and a world-class persecutor of Christians. At one point he ordered that believers should be arrested, dipped in some sort of flammable substance then lit on fire to serve as torches at night. He was the ruler of the largest empire in the world and greatly feared for his treacherous deeds. One day the Apostle Paul was brought to him for examination. Many scholars doubt that he knew much about Paul and cared even less. Why should he give any heed to an unimpressive, ineloquent Jew whose claim to fame was to be a follower of Jesus? Eventually he had Paul put to death, most likely by beheading. Later Nero died, and at his death, he was far more famous than the Apostle Paul. But 2,000 years later, the tables have turned. TODAY, WE NAME OUR SONS PAUL AND OUR DOGS NERO. **The Lord watches over the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish**.

The Life Transformation Study: While the majority of churchgoers desire to honor Christ with their lives and even profess to think on biblical truths, the study found that the majority read the Bible only once a week or less.

- ***90%*** agreed with the statement: "***I desire to please and honor Jesus in all I do***." While ***59%*** agreed with the statement: "***Throughout the day I find myself thinking about biblical truths***."
- When asked how often they personally read the Bible, ***45%*** said "***daily or at least a few times a week***." While ***55%*** said "***once a week***", "***at least once a month***" or "***rarely or never***."
- Says **Ed Stetzer**, the president of LifeWay Research, "***God's Word is truth, so it should come as no surprise that reading and studying the Bible are still the activities that have most impact on growth…As basic as that is, there are still numerous churchgoers who are not reading the Bible regularly***."
- The survey does reveal that ***certain actions positively impact the Bible engagement scores of believers***: **(1)** Confessing and repenting of sin; **(2)** the belief that Jesus is the only way to heaven; **(3)** the ongoing decision to obey God and the awareness that choosing to do so might be costly; **(4)** reading a book about spiritual growth; and **(5)** being discipled by a more mature Christian.

It's clear that most Christians would agree that God's Word is vital to their spiritual development, yet the majority seem unwilling to seek ***daily*** nourishment from the Scriptures. Let me wrap up this message with a few REFLECTIONS ON Psalm 1 that might persuade us to pick up our Bibles and read them:

- **Casual flirtation with sinners EVENTUALLY leads to total domination by evildoers**. If you walk in the counsel of the wicked, stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers, you are in real danger of becoming what those people already are! So be warned and be on the alert. What may seem like a small compromise today can lead to a very big compromise tomorrow.
- **As long as the world is what it is, godliness must begin with the negative**. ***It begins with a separation from evil***. That's what the word "***sanctify***" means, at least in part (**See 1 Thessalonians 4:3** for an example). Jesus recognized that the Word of God is an essential player in separating ourselves from evil (**John 17:17 – Sanctify them in the truth. Thy Word is truth**). To ignore the negative, in this case, is to never arrive at the positive side of godliness.
- **Many people who seem successful by the world standards will be judged as total failures by God's standards**. While we may live in the shadow of such people, and, may in fact, be unfavorably compared with them, we shouldn't lose heart. Remember that the only judgment we care about is the Lord's, and if we're faithful, everything will work out alright in the end.
- **The happiest people are those whose lives are built on the Word of God**. The only truly happy people in the world are those who build their lives around Psalm 1. Temporary happiness is for everyone and is based on happenings, but those who do not know God and walk in His ways will never sense the joy and deep satisfaction that comes from knowing we have His approval. This is only for the true children of God.

Conclusion: In light of what we've learned this morning, what do all of us here at River Ridge Church need? The answer is easy. We need the Bible. Our pastors and elders should teach it; our people should be reading, meditating and memorizing it. When we faithfully do what God commands, then we'll be ***a Bible Church made up of Bible believing Christians***. Without God's Word, we're just as lost as the unchurched. In 1986, five-year-old **Saroo Munshi Khan** and his 14-year-old brother were searching the streets for spare change in their home city of **Berhanpur, India**. Saroo's older brother Guddu wandered beyond the station and Saroo fell asleep waiting for his brother's return. Sometime later, **Saroo woke up 1,500 kilometers away**, **in Calcutta**, eons away from his home and family. He survived on the streets for weeks, was taken into an orphanage,

and eventually adopted by an Australian family. Saroo grew up in **Hobart, Tasmania**, but twenty-six years later, he found his way back to his hometown with the help of **Google Earth**. An article explained how the thirty-one-year-old found his way back home: In 2011, using vague memories and Google Earth imagery, Saroo identified his home town. Using the ruler feature in Google Earth, he mapped out a search radius by making an educated guess about how far he traveled by train. After countless hours of scouring this area of Google Earth imagery, he came upon a proverbial needle in a haystack. Saroo zoomed in on **one vague landmark** that led him to the next, helping him unlock a five-year-old child's memories. He eventually spotted **a neighborhood, street, and tin roof** that looked familiar. In Saroo's words, "***It was just like being Superman. You are able to go over and take a photo mentally and ask, 'Does this match?' And when you say, 'No,' you keep on going and going and going***." Then, in 2012, Saroo embarked on a trip from Australia back to India. Once he arrived, he shared his story with locals, who helped him find his way back home to his mother and surviving brother and sister. **Twenty-six years after accidentally leaving home, he finally found his way back**. Wouldn't it be great if everyone who had lost their way in the world could have **a spiritual GPS** to lead them home? They do, you know? It is the Word of God. Those who follow it, find their way back to the Lord and to a life of blessing and fruitfulness.