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Psalm 1 - Like a Tree by the Rivers of Waters



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Psalm 1 - Like a Tree by the Rivers of Waters," Steve Gregg explains that a godly person is like a tree planted by rivers of water, producing fruit in its season, and not withering. The deep roots of this tree can sustain it during spiritual droughts. To bear fruit, one must meditate on God's word, carefully consider the advice they receive, and resist being drawn off by worldly concerns. Gregg emphasizes the importance of not only studying but also obeying the Word of God to produce fruit and achieve happiness in life.

Transcript

Psalm 1, let me just read it short. This is Psalm 1. Now this Psalm divides into two halves, not in terms of the length of the lines, but in numbers of verses. The first three verses describe the godly man.

The last three verses describe the ungodly man. What I want to look at today is this analogy of the tree. He says that a certain person, the godly person, will be like a tree, planted by rivers of water that brings forth its fruit in its season.

Its leaf also shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper. Now, bringing forth fruit in season is a very important thing to God. Jesus said this in this, My Father is glorified that you bring forth much fruit.

I believe that's John 15, 8 if I'm not mistaken. And certainly in the Old Testament, being fruitful is one of the things that God required of his people and complained about when they were unfruitful. Of course, the parable of the vine in Isaiah 5 depicts Israel as a vineyard that God planted hoping for fruit.

He got no fruit of the right kind, and so he says he's going to tear down the hedge and let the beasts of the field destroy the vineyard, which he did. The Assyrians and the Babylonians he's talking about destroying Israel, which they did because Israel didn't produce fruit. The fruit that God wanted from Israel, he said in Isaiah 5, 7, was justice and righteousness.

He said he came looking for justice, but he found oppression. He came looking for

righteousness, but he found a cry for help. Instead of what he hoped, he got bad grapes instead of good grapes from this vineyard.

Now, this is not an isolated case in the Old Testament. When God made people in Genesis chapter 2, actually at the end of chapter 1, the first command, in fact the only command he gave to Adam and Eve besides to govern the world was to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Now, this is not about being fruitful in terms of reproduction, but fruit in the Bible is sometimes it's the fruit of the ground, sometimes it's the fruit of the womb, and both analogies are used throughout Scripture, especially in the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, to speak of God's looking for the spiritual fruit in the earth, justice and righteousness.

Now, Jesus of course said, I am the true vine in John chapter 15, and he says, you are the branches of everyone who abides in me, every branch who abides in me will produce fruit, much fruit. And therefore, we're talking about God's will from the Old Testament continuing to be worked out through Christ and through those who are abiding in him who bring forth the fruit. Now, it's not a different kind of fruit.

Jesus didn't make up a totally new analogy to refer to something else. The Old Testament said God planted a vine, he wanted fruit from it, he didn't get it. Now, Jesus said, I'm the vine, God's going to get the fruit.

If you abide in me, you'll produce that fruit that Israel did not produce. And so Paul later talks of course about the fruit of the spirit and so forth, which is basically the outworking of love, which is justice and mercy and faithfulness. These kinds of things that Jesus called the weightier matters of the law in Matthew 23, 23, justice, mercy, faithfulness.

These are the things that the Pharisees, Jesus said, did not produce. He said, what would you scribes and Pharisees, you pay your tithes of mint and anise and cumin, but you neglect the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. So even in Jesus' day, and that was near the end of his ministry, that was like just before his arrest almost, he's basically harping on the same thing that God was harping on in the Old Testament, you guys are not producing the fruit, the justice, the righteousness, what God's been looking for from you, Pharisees.

But in Matthew chapter 21, when Jesus gave the story of the vineyard, the New Testament story of the vineyard, where the tenants were supposed to deliver the fruit over to the owner, and the servants of the owner came and they were beaten and abused and killed and thrown out of the vineyard. And then he said, finally, he's going to send his son to them. So it's last of all, this is how Jesus puts it, last of all, he sent his son.

This is going to be Israel's last chance to get it right. They'd had prophet after prophet for 1400 years. They pretty much consistently killed all the prophets.

And Jesus said to them in Matthew 23, Woe to you Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and those who are sent to you. How many times I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not. Now, here's Israel being approached for the last time with the last opportunity.

Now we know this is true because earlier in Luke chapter 13, Jesus told a parable about an owner of a vineyard where there's a fig tree that didn't produce any fruit. And the owner of the vineyard said to the man who took care of the vineyard, no doubt this represents God speaking to Jesus, let's just cut down this fig tree. It's not producing any fruit.

Why should we let it burden the ground like this? And the person who attended to it said to the owner, listen, for these three years, I've been giving this tree a chance and it hasn't produced anything. And the attendant says, well, let me just work on it this season also. One more season.

Let's get one more season to bear fruit. I'll dig it up. I'll fertilize it.

I'll do everything I can to get this tree. It's never borne any fruit to bear fruit. And if it won't, we'll cut it down.

That's how that parable ends. What's interesting is that parable has no resolution. You never learn.

Did the tree bear fruit? Did the tree get cut down? You don't know. We're just told it's got one more season, had three years, which is probably about the time Jesus had been ministering there. And he said, let's just take this one growing season and see what happens.

If it doesn't bear fruit this time, it's done. It's up. It's out.

Now, what's interesting is that Jesus didn't conclude the parable. But when Jesus, in the final week of his earthly sojourn here, saw a fruitless fig tree on his approach to Jerusalem, he cursed it and said, no one will ever eat fruit from you again. Now that's, I don't know any Bible scholars who don't think that's a reference to Israel, the fig tree, nor in the parable.

Remember the fig tree, we're going to see if it bears fruit. If it doesn't, we'll uproot it. Now, Jesus didn't verbally finish the parable, but when he visually cursed the fig tree, that was the conclusion of that parable.

They had had one more season to get it right, and they rejected him. They still didn't produce fruit, so no one will ever eat fruit from you again. Again, it was their last chance.

When Jesus was here, it was their last chance. And so in Matthew 21, in the parable of

the vineyard, Jesus says, last of all, he sent his son. This is after all the prophets have been rejected.

And he says, surely they'll respect my son, but they killed the son too. And then Jesus said to him, therefore, the kingdom of God is taken from you and given to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it. Now here's Israel, which had been the vineyard in the Old Testament with the assignment to bring forth the fruit of justice, righteousness in the earth.

The Messiah, by the way, in Isaiah, said he will establish justice among the Gentiles. He will not fail or be discouraged until he's established justice among the Gentiles. It says in Isaiah 42, that's the Messiah.

Jesus came to establish the fruit that God was looking for from Israel. He didn't get it from them. He's going to get it from Jesus through the branches.

I mean, Jesus didn't really establish justice in terms of a better society during his lifetime. He didn't work very hard at that. He gathered his disciples, gave them instructions.

He's an important spirit on them. And if they abide him, they'll bring forth the fruit. That's, they're his body.

They're the extensions of him in the world, the branches of the vine. Now, having said that, we see that fruitfulness is, it remains, it remains the subject of God's concern for the church, for the world, that justice, righteousness be brought forth through the Messiah, through the branches attached to him. Now, this psalm talks about bearing fruit, talks about the godly man who will be like a tree planted by rivers of water.

Now, rivers of water obviously provide a continuous source of sustenance to a tree with its roots. And in a desert land, like Israel was, you know, trees often would suffer during drought. Even now, you know, that if you happen to be stranded in a desert and need water, I think everyone here knows where you want to dig.

If you can find a dry river bed, a dry stream bed, you can often find water just several inches down, whereas you'd have to dig feet anywhere else because the water is below the surface there. Even when the river is dry, it's there longer than it is anywhere else. And so the tree that's planted by the rivers of water, its roots are going to go down.

Even in drought, it's going to be nourished. Even in times where other trees are withering, dying, not producing fruit, the tree planted by the rivers of water is going to produce. And by the way, I won't turn there, but in Jeremiah, I think it's chapter 17, if I'm not mistaken, in Jeremiah uses the same illustration of the godly man who he'll be like a tree planted by waters.

But here, the tree that's planted by water will be able to live when others cannot. Now

there are droughts. There are droughts like it talks about in Amos, where it says, you know, there will be a drought not of water, it says, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

And in times of drought, the person who's like this man that's described in this psalm, which we will look at the description, that person is going to survive even during drought because that's if there's water from anywhere, it's there by the rivers. Even if the rivers appear dry, the roots of the tree are tapping into unseen resources to keep it whole and alive and fruitful. So that's a wonderful promise to tell you the truth, because frankly, there are times of spiritual dryness.

And there's other times of revival. You know, God pours out his spirit like rivers in the desert, it says in Isaiah 32, 15, and the desert becomes fruitful and justice and righteousness spring forth from the dry land, it says. Fruit.

Revivals happen, but not often as we'd like them. Some of us, most of us are old enough to remember there was a revival in our lifetime. Not everyone is fortunate enough to be in a place at a time where there's a real revival.

And there's been lots of, I think there's been a lot of pseudo revivals since that one. But in the late 60s, early 70s, there definitely was a revival that had impact on the church through most of the world, certainly the Western world and other parts too. And a lot of people got saved.

A lot of people became true followers of Christ. Many of them became pastors, missionaries and are still at work. That was a tremendous revival.

And those of us who happen to have been there, we call it the Jesus moment now, but we remember a time of great excitement and joy and spiritual showers of blessing, rivers of water being poured out. But those frankly I think are gone. Now I don't want to speak something universally.

There are revivals of sorts in other parts of the world and so forth. Many of them I'm sure I don't know about. But in the place I live and where I've lived for the past 50 years, there has not been a genuine revival, nothing I would recognize as a genuine revival since the 70s.

There's been talk about the Toronto Blessing, the Brownsville, Florida, what was ever going on down there. Other things like that have gotten a lot of attention, but they haven't transformed either the church or the world. And frankly a lot of it was a lot of emotion.

And sometimes the ministers got into scandalous things and so forth. Everyone wants a revival, so it's very tempting to fake one. But in my opinion, you can't have a revival unless God decides to send one.

It's his spirit that he pours out when he wants to. And at those times, those are not droughts spiritually. It's hard not to get saved during a revival.

I know this from when I was in high school, right in the midst of the Jesus moment. Everybody I knew went to Calvary Chapel every night, every night of the week. And we'd come together to school at lunchtime.

We'd talk about the things of God with great excitement. After service that night, we'd go out to a restaurant and talk about the things of God. Everyone was excited about the things of God.

If you could get some of your non-Christian friends from school to visit Calvary Chapel, you knew they'd get saved. It was harder not to get saved than to get saved in those days. And that's how revivals are.

That's not how it is now. And I'm not saying nobody gets saved, but in times when it's not revival, it's a lot harder. And the people who got saved, once the revival lifts and it gets dry, you find out how deep their roots were.

And frankly, a good number fell away. I don't know what the percentages are. But much too many of the people who were serving God excitedly back 50 years ago are still living, but not living for God.

But although some are. The ones who are are probably a lot like the ones described in this chapter here. And so I want to look at this.

The man who's going to be like a tree, or a woman like a tree near rivers of water, bringing forth fruit in proper season, their leaf not withering. Now, we're not told what that means. We know what fruit bearing means, but the leaf withering, I think, would suggest just obviously becoming dried up, becoming spiritually dry, feeling dry, maybe getting burned out a little bit.

You know, just discouragement. Now, even people who walk in the Spirit all the time have their moments, have their seasons where it's dry. But if they have their roots deep enough and they're by rivers of water, they don't dry up.

Their leaves don't wither up and perish. And it says, whatever he does shall prosper. In other words, prosper here doesn't mean make a lot of money.

It just means succeed. It's an older word for succeed. Now, that doesn't mean every carnal thing you seek to do will succeed because God doesn't have any interest in blessing your carnal plans.

But it means that as you, you know, you're seeking to be a fruit bearing tree. You're seeking to bear fruit for God. You're seeking to be, you know, an advantage to your

owner.

You'll be successful at it. And this is something that, frankly, anyone looking at my ministry would not necessarily call it a great success. The size of this group at this table hasn't gotten any bigger in the past years that we've been meeting.

Different faces, but it's not big. I don't, my ministry has never drawn large crowds, nor do I care if it does. But I will say that meditating on the Word of God day and night has made me not wither.

It's made me continue to be able to serve God. And prosperity that is sought, I think, is not in terms of large numbers. At least, I'm not.

I'm not seeking large numbers. I want to see people who, through my influence, just like any Christian might wish through their influence, would be stronger Christians, would be fruit bearers themselves. And if it's not a great number, that's okay.

There weren't a large number in Old Testament times either of Israel who were of that remnant sometimes. But here's what I can say the Bible teaches, and what I personally have experienced, so I'm very glad to share with you. The blessed man, the blessed man, is the one who ultimately we find him meditating day and night on the Word of God.

And this results in him bearing fruit, and not withering, and prospering in his spiritual efforts. He's a, first of all, somebody who had to reject some other things. In order to pursue those things that make you fruitful, there's things you have to put aside.

And those are in verse 1. That blessed man, we're first told what he doesn't do, before we're told what he does do. He doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly. That means he's not taking his counsel, his instructions, his advice, from people who don't share his values.

This is, I have to say, this line has always caused me to urge people not to go to counselors who are not Christians. Or even Christian counselors who learn how to counsel from non-Christians in colleges. You know, there's therapists who, you know, they might even be Christians, but they don't consult the Bible in terms of the counseling.

They've learned in school how to either follow Carl Rogers or Carl Jung or Freud or Maslow or someone else like that, all of whom were atheists or, if not atheists, at least not Christian. And they've learned how to counsel that way. And now they're Christians, so they sometimes slap a few Bible verses onto things that sound like they might fit.

And now they call themselves Christian counselors. Well, there are true Christian counselors, I'm sure. And I'm sure there are people who give true biblical counsel.

But there's also, unfortunately, people you need to be careful about. If you need counsel in your life, you don't want to go to someone who's not living according to the Word of God. You don't want somebody who's going to give counsel from a set of values that are not your values.

And there is no values-free counsel. There is no values-free advice. If someone gives you advice, it's because they value something they assume you value, too, and they're advising you how to get more of that.

You know, more relief from your trials, perhaps. More, you know, joy in your marriage or whatever. I mean, those are good things.

But those are not the ultimate values. Because you can make all kinds of compromises seeking those things. Which, you know, if your real value is to be holy, to be pleasing to God, there's going to be things you're going to pursue that aren't going to get you the things that the world is looking for.

And so, I mean, for example, a lot of people just go to a counselor because they're depressed and they want to feel better. Well, being a Christian doesn't always make you feel better. It can actually make you feel worse.

I mean, like Righteous Lot vexing his righteous soul day by day in Sodom, you know, seeing the unlawful deeds they're doing day by day. I mean, being a Christian can give you grief. It's a good grief.

It's, you know, blessed are those who mourn. But the point is, counselors don't all have the same values. The ungodly counsel is the counsel that this man does not seek or walk in if he hears it.

We do get counsel. We do take advice. We are encouraged in certain directions by the people we're around and by the people we ask advice from.

But we need to make sure that the people we're asking advice from are really people who know, believe, and live by the things you want to know and believe and live by. And that's not always the case. He doesn't walk in their counsel, the ungodly.

He doesn't stand in the path of sinners, which means he's not spending his time in, you know, the little clusters of sinners who are, you know, standing around at work or, you know, in social settings where they're just kind of standing among the sinners and trying to fit in. Now, I mean, if you go in to evangelize among sinners, I mean, Jesus did that, and some Christians do that. But we're not talking about that.

He's not describing people who are like a physician going to the sick. He's talking about people who are just hanging out, standing with them, sitting in the seat of the scornful, joining them in their scorn. The man who is going to be blessed by God has got to say, I

don't need the friendships of those people.

I'd love it if I could be on good terms with them, but that's not going to be my pursuit. I'm not going to try to make the sinners in my family or my workplace or my school happy with me. I'm going to have to stand for what's righteous and not follow their advice.

And, of course, there are not very many young people at this table, but there's a lot of young people who need to be considering. I know, Chauncey, you're pretty young. All that gray in your beard is very deceptive.

But, you know, this is a situation that young people in college or even, frankly, even on social media have got to consider. Am I going to stand up for righteousness and have everybody scorn me, have everyone oust me, cancel me? Or am I going to comply with their wishes and do what they want me to do? Well, the person who's going to submit and comply with the request of the wicked is not going to be the person who's got his roots in the right place. The person who does says his delight is in the law of the Lord.

And the law of the Lord or the word of God is what nourishes him. There's nothing else mentioned here. He's like a tree planted by rivers of water.

Okay, that's the metaphor. What's the real life situation that caused him to be like a tree planted by rivers of water? Well, he's delighting in God's word and he's meditating on God's word. Now, what happens is the word of God then produces fruit in his life.

And this idea of the word of God producing fruit in your life is a common theme in Jesus' teaching and in the New Testament. And I have to say that many of us know a lot of the Bible. Most people at this table have been Christians a pretty long time, heard a lot of sermons, a lot of Bible verses, read the Bible, maybe studied, maybe memorized the Bible.

And all that's good, but there's a progression here. It's not all in this psalm, but it's certainly all in the teaching of Christ and in the apostles that makes you this person, that cultivates the word of God so as to bear fruit. Cultivate is the right word because Jesus referred to this word of God as seed.

Actually, other biblical writers did too. But in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, the very first of the parables recorded Matthew and a lengthy one, which gets a lengthy explanation from Jesus. You know, a sower went out to sow.

He's throwing seeds around. They fall on different kinds of ground. Some fall on the wayside where the ground is hard, doesn't penetrate.

The birds come and eat it. That's the end of it. Other seed falls on ground that's soft on top, but there's rock underneath.

It doesn't penetrate very deep. It grows, but it doesn't have roots deep, so it withers when the sun comes up. Other seed falls in ground that, for all we know, is good ground, but it's got thorns and thistles there, and they choke out the seed, so it doesn't bear fruit, Jesus said.

And the word. Then the last one falls on good ground, and it produces much fruit, some 30, some 60, some 100-fold. Now, that's the parable.

And when the disciples asked for the explanation, he identified the seed as the word of God or the word of the kingdom, depending on which gospel you read. One gospel just says the word. One says the word of God, and one says the word of the kingdom.

Matthew says the word of the kingdom. He says when anyone hears the word of the kingdom, well, then that's when the seed has been sown. The word has been sown, and the different kinds of soil that responded differently are different states of a person's heart who hears the word.

Whether you're reading your Bible on your own in your own devotions, whether you're listening to it preached or taught, anywhere you hear the word or experience the word, it's an attempt on the part of the sower to plant it so as to produce fruit in your life. Now, sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't, and Jesus tells us why it doesn't sometimes. The first type of seed fell on hard soil.

The wayside is where people walked. You don't walk on the plants you've planted. You have rows of crops, and you have walkways between them to tend to weeds and things like that, and those walkways are trampled down pretty hard by feet, by regular usage.

And when some of the seed is thrown and some of it lands on those parts, well, it doesn't even go under the ground. It just sits on top until the birds come. And Jesus said, that's those who hear the word of God, and they don't understand it.

And the devil comes and takes it away, and that's the end of that story. It's like sometimes when you're reading or hearing the Bible, you don't understand it. And I think probably this is more intended toward those who are hearing it for the first time who are not Christians yet.

You know, they're hearing the gospel. They don't understand it. And they don't understand it, but instead of saying, wow, I don't understand, I'm going to seek more understanding.

They just say, I don't understand, and the devil comes and takes it away, and they're distracted and do something else. You know, that's when Jesus taught in parables, that's why he did. There were people who'd hear the word, they wouldn't understand it without his explanations.

But it was not given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God. It was to the disciples given. Why? Because the disciples were not content not to understand.

The disciples didn't understand it either, but they came and said, Lord, explain this to us. We heard you say something. We know you don't say things that aren't important, but we're not getting it.

Explain this parable to us because we want to know what you're talking about. We want to understand. But the masses who heard him, the crowds, most of them didn't understand him any more than the disciples did, but they never asked.

They just thought, oh well, not getting anything out of this guy's teaching. And so they went home, and the devil snatched it out of their mind. The seed was sown, had the potential to bring forth fruit, but the people just weren't interested enough to pursue a less convenient access to understanding it.

They wanted something that's immediately accessible, and they hear it, they know it, understand it, can assess it. But they couldn't. Jesus used parables.

They didn't even know what he was talking about. I mean, they know what sowing seeds is. They were farmers, many of them, but had no idea what he was talking about.

Neither did the disciples. So he had to explain it. That's the word of God.

I've been preaching the word of God to these crowds. Some of them are like hard-drowned. They don't understand it.

They don't care enough to care. They just walk away, and the devil snatches it. It's gone.

The other group do receive it. It's shallow soil with rock underneath, and so it germinates. It pops up.

These are people who receive the word with joy, he said, and they begin to grow. There's hope here. There could be fruit in this plant.

This one may become fruitful, but it says they don't have any roots. They're not deep. It's a shallow thing they've responded to, a shallow understanding, a shallow level of interest.

They're hearing about the kingdom of God. That interests them. They think that's pretty exciting, but they're not very deep.

Their interest is pretty shallow. As long as it's interesting, exciting, joyful, they're in, but he says when persecution and tribulation arises because of the word, they quickly fall away. In other words, they're converted at a time where there's no suffering going on.

It costs them nothing, and they're not willing for it to cost them anything, but it works out as long as it's costing them nothing. When the tribulation comes and persecution, then it costs them something, and they're not okay with it, and they don't stay. They fall right away.

The word then doesn't produce fruit, which it could have. These were people who potentially could have been fruitful, but they're not. And of course, the third group were those who fell on thorns and thistles.

Now, again, there's nothing said to be wrong with the soil or even with the beginnings of the growth, but what happens is as the plant grows, so do the thorns and thistles grow, and they just choke it out. Now, Jesus said, that's those who hear the word of God, and they receive it, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the good seed, so it doesn't produce any fruit. Cares of the world, deceitfulness of riches, this is not persecution.

This is probably more like prosperity. You get more cares of the world by having more of the world to care about. That's what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes.

You've seen people get wealthy, it just takes away their sleep. Too much responsibility with all that money. I mean, too many things that can go wrong, too many ways of getting stolen, cheated.

You make bad investments, you're just thinking about this all the time because your prosperity, your wealth is important to you. The cares of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, they just draw off the spiritual interest from some people. So some are drawn off by persecution.

Others are drawn off by no persecution, by actually having it pretty good. The world's a pretty nice place. The world's friendly.

There's money to be made here, and I'm doing pretty good, and I've got my mind on that. It's available, but not without me focusing some on it. And that focus is removed then from the Word of God.

And so, again, people can be so shallow that persecution takes them away, and people can be not as much shallow, but just over-preoccupied with the things of the world. That really takes, I mean, many of you probably have had a season in your life when, I don't know, your business, maybe family problems, maybe a boon that came into your life, a promotion, maybe, you know, you got suddenly some money, maybe an inheritance or something, and suddenly you're thinking all the time about, well, what can I do, either to fix a problem, or to increase this, or to not lose it? And suddenly the things of the world are what you're thinking about. And you notice after a while that, well, I'm not reading my Bible very much anymore.

In fact, I'm not really thinking much about it anymore. Not that I haven't left God. It's not like I'm not a Christian.

It's not like I don't believe. It's just that it's got other things to think about. It cares the world, and no fruit comes as a result because it doesn't remain the focus.

Then the good seed that fell on good ground, Jesus said, it's like a man who hears the word and with a good and honest heart, you know, receives the word, obviously lets it have its way in his life, and he produces fruit. Now, what is the issue here? The soil, in those cases. The question is, is the word received or not? The hard soil doesn't receive it.

The shallow soil receives it at a shallow level. The other two soils receive it also, but one gets choked out with other things that are also there in the soil with it, and then there's another that turns out good. Let me show you something in James.

James chapter one. James one and verse 21. James says, therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Now, he talks about the word like its seed. It has to be implanted. It won't be implanted if you're not putting away wickedness and overflow, you know, whatever, filthiness and so forth.

You've got to put that aside. You've got to renounce those things, turn from those things, but then you're in a position to receive the word potentially fruitfully. Receive with meekness.

Now, the word meekness here, I think, would suggest teachableness. A meek person is the opposite of somebody who's self-assertive. A self-assertive person is the opposite of a meek person.

A meek person is one who's willing to yield, as it says in James chapter three, and it's a person who wants to learn, wants to change, doesn't have his own agenda to push, and he's willing to yield to something other than his preferences. And so he receives meekly the word of God, like teachably. The word of God comes, and I'm not going to here stand by my agendas.

I'm going to let the word of God govern me, and I'm going to let it, I'm going to take it fully without reservation. So if you're going to cultivate the word of God and become fruitful, the first thing you have to do is receive it. And of course, we receive it when we read the Bible, or at least we have opportunity to receive it.

We receive it either deeply or shallowly, or not at all, because we're not understanding and not interested. But whenever you read the Bible, whenever you hear the Bible, and in this country, we hear the Bible, you can turn on the Christian radio station and hear

the Bible all day long. You can listen to someone reading the Bible.

You can listen online to people teaching the Bible. There's all kinds of ways to have the word potentially implanted. The question is, does it get implanted? And if so, does it get implanted very deeply? Well, the reason I bring this up is because in Psalm 1, it says the first thing about this blessed man that makes him unlike the wicked is that his delight is in the law of the Lord.

You receive without reservation things that you delight in, that they are your pleasure. They are your joy. David was like that.

David said about the words of God, he says, more to be desired are they than gold. Yeah, than much fine gold, sweeter than honey in the honeycomb. Now that you're saying, you name the things that people want.

They want gold. They want sensual pleasure. Well, frankly, the word of God to me is worth more than that.

I love it more than I love those things. I delight in it. Now, a lot of people read the Bible as a duty and sometimes aren't all that pleased with what they find.

I get calls from people like that. They don't like when they read about God, things he does in the Old Testament that are not what they would want. He's too tolerant of slavery.

He's too mean to the unbelievers, you know, things like that. Well, if you don't love to get to know God as he is, not as you would prefer him to be, you're not going to delight in his word. There's going to be things that rub you the wrong way.

You might tolerate them, but you're not going to like them. You see, the person who delights in the law of the Lord is one who delights in God himself. You delight yourself in the Lord and he gives you the desires of your heart.

Delighting in him means he is your delight. There's nothing you are more happy with than to have him, to know him. Even if you learn things that you find uncomfortable to learn, you delight to learn it.

You delight to have his word. It's sweet to your soul. It's more valuable than gold.

The person who delights in the Lord is going to be receiving the word. I know this because, I don't know, I remember when I first started going to Calvary Chapel when I was 16. I was just hungry to know God.

And I wanted to be there every night. I wanted to learn everything in the Bible. I frankly still do want to.

There's just so much eagerness to know God according to what he has said and to labor in the word. If you don't understand it, to seek further understanding. Because it's pleasant to your soul.

You delight in it. And whatever you delight in, you will have no trouble meditating in. Which is what this man does.

He delights in the Lord and he meditates in it day and night. And meditating is, of course, just ruminating. It's thinking about it.

And then thinking about it some more. And then, when you get a chance, think about it some more. Like a ruminating animal.

The animal chews the grass, swallows it down, regurgitates it, same grass, chews it some more, gets more out of it, swallows it again, regurgitates again, does it some more. I've mentioned this before, but I always wondered how a cow, which gives a steak, which is high-protein food, it doesn't eat anything but grass. Where's that protein coming from? How does its body build proteins, high-quality protein, in its tissues, from grass that is fairly low-protein content? Now, the thing is, all living things have proteins.

You can't eat a living thing without getting some kind of protein, because living things are made of cells, and cells are made of proteins. But some things have very little protein compared to others. Grass, not so much.

Not an awful lot of protein. But the cow, who only eats grass, makes sure it doesn't leave any protein undigested. If I eat a salad, which probably has a similar amount of protein as grass does, I swallow it, and it goes right through, and I get something out of it, but I'm not going to get everything out of it.

And I don't want to get everything out of it the way the cow does, but the point is, the cow is not going to let that stuff pass until it's gotten everything out of it. And that's ruminants. Not all animals do that, but ruminants do that.

Cows being the most familiar to us. That's what meditation is. It's meditating on the Word of God.

You hear it, and say, I've got a feeling that's something important for me to understand and apply. But I have to go do something else right now. I can't think about it now, but I'll think about it again when I get a chance.

I'll think about it every time I get a chance. I'm going to come back when I'm driving down the road, when I'm washing the dishes, when I'm doing anything that I don't have to think about something else. I want to think about the Word of God.

I want to think some more about that last thing that I read or heard, that I could sense

there's something in there that I'm not getting yet. There's more. I'm going to think about it all the time.

I'm going to turn it over in my mind. That is a habit of mind that people do very naturally if they delight in the Law of the Lord. A man delights in the Law, and he meditates day and night.

Why? Because you will meditate day and night on whatever you delight in. Most people don't delight in the Law of the Lord like that. They delight in their work or their prospects of promotion, maybe in their money, in what they're going to do in their vacation time, in the person they're getting interested in, they want to develop a relationship with.

This is what's on their mind. You meet a young couple that are in love, and you talk to them privately. You're not going to talk very long before they're talking about the person they're in love with because that's what they delight in.

It's going to be on their mind. It's just human nature. What you take delight in is what you will meditate about.

You'll think about it. If you don't have anything else you have to think about, it'll come back to your mind, and you'll welcome it. The man who delights in the Law of the Lord is going to welcome the Word of the Lord at all times when his mind is not forced to think about something else.

I know some of you have heard me say before, when I had to work regular jobs for a living, I always chose jobs that required no concentration. Sweeping a floor, washing a window, scrubbing a toilet, that's fine with me because I don't have to give it very much thought, and I can just think about what I really want to think instead of the job. I'd always meditate on the Scriptures.

Receiving the Word with meekness like a seed planted into good soil. Meditating on it because you delight in it. Choosing to delight in it.

Then there's, of course, believing it. Because a lot of people know the Bible and can quote the Bible, but they don't really believe it. That is, when the time comes in their life for the Bible to actually give them comfort or guidance, they don't have enough confidence in it to really let it become their worldview.

They don't really believe it. It says in Hebrews chapter 4 in verse 2, it was talking about how God gave the promise of the Promised Land to the Jews who came out of or to Israel who came out of Egypt. And it says the Word of God, which means the promise God made, did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith in those who heard it.

That's Hebrews 4.2. They could have profited from it. They heard it. They had access to it.

They had a promise from God, but they didn't believe it. They didn't mix it with faith. Now, it's interesting that God puts it on them.

They didn't mix it with faith. It was not mixed with faith. That was their problem.

That wasn't God's problem. He got mad at them for this. They should have mixed it with faith.

Now, mixing it with faith means you've got the Word already. You've got to bring the faith into the mix. You've got to say, okay, I choose to believe this.

This is where I'm going to stand. You know, this thing I've read in the Scripture, I can't prove it to be true. Much of it is about invisible things, but faith is the evidence of things that are not seen.

There are many things invisible and not seen that we know about only because we believe them. Because God tells us and we mix faith with it. It's very common.

I've found people who read the Bible and they don't come with the default attitude of, I'm going to believe this. They decide on a case-by-case basis what part they're going to believe. They come to the Bible thinking, I'll see what it says and then I'll see if I can accept it.

And I've told this story before because it sticks in my mind. There's a girl in our church in Santa Cruz who went to a home Bible saying, I didn't read it. It was by a friend of mine named Charlie.

She came up to him after the meeting and she had her Bible open to a passage. It happened to be 1 Corinthians chapter 14 where Paul seems to say contradictory things. He says, you know, tongues is a sign for the unbeliever, not for the believer.

Then the next verse he says, if people come in and you're all speaking in tongues, they'll think you're mad. And she had marked these in her Bible and she had written in the margin, contradiction? Question mark. And Charlie, she came up and asked him about it.

He says, you know, I just need to tell you, most people I see when they mark their Bibles, mark the things that are a blessing to them, something they want to remember, something important to them. You don't have anything marked in your Bible except what makes you doubt. You know, you've only focused on what challenges your ability to believe.

I mean, that just is an attitude that's not going to work out well. If you're going to mix the word with faith, you've got to decide the faith is in the bowl before you even put the word in the mixer. When you go to the word of God, you say, I'm coming to the word of God.

I'm not going to be tentative about whether I believe it or not by whether it strikes me well. I know before I read the first word I set my eyes on, I believe it. I may have to study it to know what it is I believe, to know what it's actually saying, but once I know what it's saying, I believe it.

That's my commitment. I'm going to mix it with faith. I'm going to set my faith and my trust in whatever it says here.

And so you mix it with faith. If you don't do that, you won't be like a tree planted by water. You should just be a person who has head knowledge and doesn't believe, like the devil.

The devil knows all the stuff in the Bible. He just doesn't put any confidence in it. I mean, if he did, he would change his ways.

Two other parts real quickly. Having mixed it with faith, we need to obey it. Now that might seem obvious, but apparently it's not obvious to everybody.

A lot of people devote themselves to studying the Bible, but not with the mind of saying, what am I going to find here about how I can please God more in my life? What will I find here that will correct my wrong behaviors that are based on wrong perceptions? How can greater clarity of God's Word make me more obedient to Him? Once again, I think some people read the Bible thinking, I kind of want to obey God, but let's just see what it is first He wants me to do, then I'll decide if I want to obey that or not. No, you've got to obey it, or else you'll go no further. You'll go no further in your fruitfulness.

It will not be cultivated to the point of bearing fruit. We've got another statement in James chapter 1 that makes this particular point. James chapter 1 and verse 22.

That's right after he said receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to serve your souls. Next line, verse 22, James 1 22, but be doers of the Word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves. You have to be a doer of the Word, or else you're deceiving yourself.

Now, how are you deceiving yourself? Well, because many times because we believe something, we assume that we own it. That we are, you know, that we're in compliance with it, because I agree with it. I remember A.W. Tozer saying on various occasions that, you know, many people think that they are Pauline in their life.

That they're like Paul, because they read what he says and they agree with it. And so they assume that they are like Paul, but they don't have anything like the spirit of Paul. They don't have anything like the lifestyle of Paul.

They're not doing anything that Paul's doing. They're not even doing what Paul's commanding. They just read it and they delight in being able to explain theologically,

you know, his theology and things like that.

They understand, they believe it, but they do nothing about it. And therefore they are not like Paul at all. Because he did what he taught.

And, of course, that's what we have to do. You have to be a doer of the Word, not only a hearer. Because if you're not doing it, then you're deceiving yourself.

Jesus said in John 13, 17, if you know these things, what? Happy are you if you do them? If you know it, okay, that's not enough. You want to be happy? Then do what you know. And Jesus, of course, said, Whosoever keeps my words, meaning obeys them, is my disciple indeed.

Last thing, if you want to be fruitful, and if the Word is going to have its effect in making you fruitful, and not wither, then there's more than just receiving and delighting and meditating, and even believing and obeying. There's another step, and that is disseminating the seed. The purpose of a sower sowing seeds is, of course, so he'll have food to eat, but also so he'll get seed for the next year.

The plant he's growing, the fruit he bears is the very seeds of the next year's crop. And so it bears fruit, but then that fruit that it bears is to be disseminated to bear more fruit elsewhere. And so this is our relationship to the living Word of God.

We receive it like it's planted seed. We meditate on it. We believe it.

We obey it. But we actually see it as something that needs to be distributed, disseminated, needs to be passed along to others, so that that process begins in their life, as we're receiving more seed to grow in our lives, too. So, if you're not sharing what you know, you actually lose a lot of it.

Maybe all of it. And I remember this when I was younger. I was amazed when I was going to Calvary Chapel every night, sitting in 90-minute Bible studies every night, learning stuff.

I was amazed how much of it I retained. And I often attributed that to the fact that when I came home from the Bible study, I'd sit at the table with my parents. We'd talk about... I'd share with them what it had been.

When you share what you've learned, it becomes yours. When you just receive it, you're just borrowing it from whoever gave it to you. But when you share it, it's your own.

And it sticks. This is why teachers are so advantaged in this area, because most people who don't teach just don't have the opportunity to share it as widely as a teacher does. A teacher who shares is... How is that teacher going to forget it? It becomes part of his very output to his friends and social groups, people he's with.

But you can do that if you're not a teacher, too. You can just share what you learned with your wife, with your kids, with people at work. If they ask questions or whatever, you have an opportunity.

One of the scriptures I really think is relevant to this is Hebrews 5 in verse 12, where the writer of Hebrews is rebuking his readers. And he says, I've got some things about Melchizedek I'd love to get into with you people, but I don't think you're ready for it. I think it'd just go right over your head.

Because he says, for the time you ought to be teachers, you seem to need someone to teach you the first principles again. You're supposed to be able to teach others. Not all are teachers, not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all are teachers, but everyone can teach something at some level.

If you know something, you can pass it on to somebody else. And when you do, that's when the seed that was planted in you originally has come to full bloom and is now planting a new potential harvest. I'm going to close with this because we've gotten late, of course.

I can't be blamed entirely for that. We started pretty late. But anyway, in the book of Ezra, one of the great verses for me has always been Ezra chapter 7. It's talking about how Ezra came to...he was a scribe, which means a Bible teacher.

And he came from Babylon to the newly rebuilt city of Jerusalem after exile to teach the law for people. But it says about him in Ezra 7 and verse 10, For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. This man had prepared his heart and that's what you have to do if you're going to do what he did because again, if you're going to delight in the law of the Lord, you've got to decide on that.

You've got to shape your heart to build its priorities somehow different than the world has been building since you were young. The world has given you certain priorities. If you're going to delight in the law of the Lord, you're going to prepare your heart to love it, to seek it, to want it, to crave it.

He says that's what he'd done. He'd prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord. It's more than just kind of a casual reading of the Bible.

It's searching. It's seeking. It's wanting to find buried treasures in the world.

It's seeking. It's his heart's focus to seek the law and to do it. So he was eventually going to be a teacher but before you teach you have to be a doer.

I mean some people skip that step. You know, they study, they learn, they teach but they don't do and that ends up being problematic. But he had the right motive.

He wanted to seek it out. He wanted to do it. He wanted to live by it.

He wanted his life to teach it not just his mouth. And then after seeking and finding and doing then he wanted to teach it to others. That's really the full cycle of the life of the seed planted.

Growing into a tree of course Jesus used the imagery of wheat but trees grow from seeds too. I mean there's a fig tree and an olive tree and a grapevine. These are all images even a wheat harvest are images in the Bible for what God's looking fruit from his people.

And it all starts with a seed and the seed is the word of God. So how you cultivate that seed, how you receive it and how you treat it in your heart and your mind and then whether you share it with others when you're counseling others or whatever. That's going to build it into you and it's going to put your roots right into it so that you become accustomed to drawing on that in times of trial, in times of confusion, in times of ignorance and it gives you life.

It's a living thing the word of God. The word of God is alive and powerful and sharper than two-edged sword. And so that living seed can impart the life of God in you.

I said I was done with Ezra but that was going to be the last scripture but I never tell the truth when I say that. One more scripture and that is in 1 Thessalonians. The only lie I ever tell is when I say just one more scripture.

I'm honest other than that. But verse 13, 1 Thessalonians 2.13 Paul says, For this reason we also thank God without ceasing because when you received the word of God which you heard from us you welcomed it not as the word of men but as it is in truth the word of God which also effectively works in you who believe. That last line has always been so important to me.

The word of God that you received is working in you. It's effectively working in you. It's a living workman in you.

You are his workmanship and his word is that which is doing the work. And I like to compare it with the work God did in Genesis 1 with his word. It started with a creation that was formless and void and in darkness and he spoke his word and light came, spoke the word and order came, spoke the word and life came and at the end of it, at the very end of the whole process he had a man and a woman in his own image.

And that's, Paul said, if any man's in Christ he's a new creation. The word of God is creating in you a man or a woman into the image of Christ. That there'd be when God's done, when the word has done its work, effectually in you you will be a person in the image of God.

That's what the creation was. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, 6, he said God who called the light to shine out of darkness, referring to Genesis 1 when he said let there be light. God who has done that has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So the same action of God shining light into the darkness of the world, Paul says there's an analogy to that in what, in God speaking his word to us and giving us that light. And the rest of the chapter 1 of Genesis follows a similar trend. So that he starts by speaking his word into a formless void darkness of our souls and when he's finished doing so he's created a man and a woman in his own image, which is his goal for us.

So that word effectively works in us but not if we don't let it work. It's something we have to love, we have to cultivate, we have to believe, we have to obey have to share. And so that's what I wanted to share from Psalm 1.