

The Transplanted Tree

Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17; Revelation 22
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INTRODUCTION

How do people learn to pray? Is prayer instinctive or do we learn it from others? How did you learn to pray? Did one or both parents teach you some simple prayers in your childhood? Like: “*Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the Lord my soul to keep; and if I die before I wake; I pray the Lord my soul to take.*” Or the commonly observed Table Grace: “*God is good, God is great; now we thank Him for our food. By His hands we all are fed; give us Lord, our daily bread.*” Or maybe you learned “The Lord’s Prayer”...

If we asked the early church or the Reformation church or OT Jews this question, the answer almost surely would have been—we learned to pray by praying the Psalms. Our faith ancestors considered the Psalms their necessary masters in prayer; their school of praying).

The Psalms is the oldest and best school for prayer. In both Judaism and Christianity the entire Psalter has been used for prayer, both liturgically and devotionally. The Book of Psalms contains both individual prayers and congregational hymns arranged and ordered in a way that the collection is scripture—God’s inspired word. For Luther the Psalms became for him “*the Romans of the OT.*” And Calvin found in the psalms both the knowledge of God and the knowledge of self, to use his famous categories.

A. What are the Psalms?

**answering* speech (Hebrew responses to God who speaks first)

**prayers/hymns* of the Hebrew people

**poetry*: intensified speech; memorable

*human *words* that are God’s *Word* to us.

B. How are the Psalms organized?

1. Five-fold divisions (deliberately like Torah?)
2. Psalms 1 and 150 (from *duty* to *delight*) (there is delight in duty and there remains duty in delight)

-C. S. Lewis (do what you ought until you enjoy it)
-eat your vegetables as a kid—later you might like them!
-the shape of life involves duty/delight and prayer along the way.

C. Psalms 1 and 2 as pre-prayer (doorway into prayer)

PSALM 1

1 *Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.*

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, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does 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 will perish.*

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UNDERSTANDING THE PSALM

The psalm begins and ends by referring to “*the way*” or to one’s “*path*.” Life is a journey and we all are pilgrims. What path are you traveling? For God’s covenant

people the path is marked by a devotion to Torah—one walks the path paying attention to God who speaks, who reveals Himself to us.

The psalmist is the cultivator of images—after all he is a poet. Path, tree, water, chaff—all these images draw a poetry-picture for readers and for all who become pray-ers of this psalm.

The psalm declares that the blessed person is characterized by a certain action and described by a certain metaphor or picture. Blessed also is translated as “happy” or “fortunate.” Jesus took this same word and used it as the first word in his most famous sermon—the key word in his octave or eight-line stanza we call the Beatitudes.

By the way, Psalm 2, the other pre-prayer psalm, ends with a word of blessing. Psalm begins with blessing and psalm 2 concludes with it. The notion of blessing arouses our expectation of something good. What is the content of this benediction? We must read on.

1. Action—torah meditation
2. Image/metaphor—fruitful tree
3. Destination: two paths

TORAH MEDITATION

-torah (*yarah*—javelin—targeted words—path)

-*hagah* (Isaiah 31:4 allusion to this Hebrew term for meditate)

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FRUITFUL TREE

Tree of Life (Garden)—conferred everlasting life on Adam & Eve

See Jeremiah 17 and Ezekiel allusions to the well-watered tree.

Ezekiel 31:3-5, 7-9; Ezekiel 47:12; Proverbs 3:13a, 16-18.

See also Revelation 22:1-6.

Psalm 1:3 “planted” means “*transplanted*”; that is, not planted from seed but transplanted as a seedling, branch or shoot. God delivers Israel from Egypt and saves them in the wilderness and *plants* them in the land flowing with milk and honey.

See Psalm 92: 12-15 (transplanted trees in the house of Yahweh)

The term “*transplanted*” is mentioned in both Psalm 1:3 and Psalm 92:13 (kings had transplanted plants from many locales placed in the royal garden. The Psalms were compiled in Babylon where the Babylonians irrigated with ditches or channels and planted trees from shoots along these canals.

King David and Messiah—shoot, branch of Jesse, “*netzer*” (fruitful tree like the good king). Cf. Isaiah 11:1-2 (*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a Branch will bear fruit; the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him...*)

DESTINATIONS

The psalmist clearly mentions two paths; one for the righteous and one for the wicked. The good path is the one that moves from duty to delight. We know from experience, however (and the rest of the psalter confirms such experience), that no path is entirely a smooth one. Even the good path has twists and turns and rocky places. The psalms are filled with prayers about enemies and troubles. And these are prayers of the righteous who meditate on torah and seek righteousness.

Of course, it is best to be on the right path. We desire to be fruitful trees even though we know there will be storms and drought along the way. Even though we must submit to the pruning of the Master Gardener

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CONCLUSION

“*I am the way and the truth and the life...*” Who said that? Jesus, of course, recorded in John’s gospel. The **way**—this psalm recommends one way over the other; in the NT we learn that the way of righteousness is the Jesus way. **The truth**—an English word whose etymology comes from the old English word for “tree” (*Treow*=the deeply rooted idea). To be true is to be strong and stable and solid like a tree. And “**the life**” that develops is one sustained by life-giving water. A fruitful tree is planted by or near streams of water. The life of righteousness is like a well-watered tree. The tree is strong and true and not easily moved. It can withstand the storms.

This picture—these pictures, prepare us to pray. Praying in the school of the psalms begins when we follow the way of God. Following God is nurtured when we are **torah-meditators**, feeding upon his word. Such meditation leads us to the God who speaks and who answers prayers.

Psalm 1 bids us pay attention to Torah—and this prepares us to pray. Next week we study Psalm 2; Psalm 2 is the other part of the gateway or entrance to praying the psalms. It also helps us get ready to pray. You may want to read it this week to prepare for next Sunday's message.

Readers of J. R. R. Tolkien's imaginative stories will know how important trees were to this Christian author. There are the many references to trees in *The Lord of the Rings*: the White Tree of Gondor, the woods of Lothlorien and Fangorn; and those marvelous living tree-creatures—Treebeard and the Ents. Plus, in his little allegory, *Leaf By Niggle*, the title character devotes his entire life to the painting of a single tree—with forest and mountain range seen in the background, noble representatives of God's creation.

In November of 1963, four days after the death of C. S. Lewis, his lifelong friend, Tolkien expressed his bereavement in a letter: "*I have felt the normal feelings of a man my age—like an old tree that is losing all its leaves one by one: this feels like an axe-blow near the roots.*"

We get ready to pray via the psalms by picturing a well-watered tree—one that boasts green leaves and fruit in season. Comprehension of the invisible begins with the visible. Praying to God begins by looking at a tree.