



Chapter 3

THE BLESSED MAN

A *man after My own heart...* This is how the Lord describes David in Acts 13:22.

How did this happen? Just how was this distinction achieved? These questions have undoubtedly provoked the interest and curiosity of God's people throughout the centuries.

Although we may be convinced that some deep, complex secret is involved, we may need only to examine a simple formula David has very clearly laid out for us in his first Psalm. His description of the *blessed* man in Psalm 1 reveals much about his philosophy of life and gives us a peek into his personal perceptions of how this sweet *affinity* can be realized.

The first verse of this psalm tells us, specifically, what the *blessed* man avoids. The next one defines his agenda. And the third verse elaborates on awesome blessings lavished on those who adopt this lifestyle. Sounds easy doesn't it? Well, here we go....

Blessed is the man....

(Here's what he doesn't do.)

....who does not -

walk in the counsel of the wicked

or stand in the way of sinners

or sit in the seat of mockers.

BUT....

(This is his daily agenda.)

....his delight is in the law of the Lord,

and on His law he meditates day and night.

(These are the blessings he enjoys.)

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.

(Psalm 1:1-3)

Stability and stamina like a tree on a river bank— growth, fruit, prosperity! Good things we all want to tap into. Right? Well, we may all want to grab the prize, but let's not get carried away. In our “quick fix” society, the prerequisites may prove a little more profound than are apparent at first glance.

The Man

It is significant that David wrote this psalm in present tense. *Blessed* (how happy) *is the man* . . . What

man? Any man! Or woman! Anyone who accepts the terms can experience the blessing. It's available to every life, every situation and every generation. It's as relevant to us now as it was in David's day. Generation, age, status, health, wealth, poverty or IQ are not relevant. None of these affect one's ability to enjoy the blessings offered here in Psalm 1.

Undoubtedly volumes could be written analyzing verse 1, but this chapter will focus on the more positive aspects of verses 2 and 3. From verse 1, we point out only that to enjoy *blessed* status there is a life style that must first be shunned. Simply put, we're told that the *blessed man* doesn't fraternize with the ungodly or become enmeshed in their rationale.

That's half the formula. Now comes the good stuff. What *does* he do? Look at verse 2.

*....his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on His law he meditates day and night.
(emphasis added)*

It's probably easy for us 21st Century Christians to pass this comment off as casually "reading" the Bible, perhaps with a brief time of meditation. It is, indeed, special to read and meditate on Holy Script but how much of it do we retain for consistent meditation with the usual, cursory approach? We're told the *blessed man* "*meditates day and night*". Is it possible to absorb enough solid truth from a casual reading for *day and night* meditation? If you've tried, you know the answer.

To meditate for any length of time, we need ready access to Scripture, in context. Is it conceivable, that the

blessed man of David's day would tote bulky, handwritten scrolls around with him *day and night*, everywhere he went, so he could meditate on them? And what of those long dark hours of the night? Could it mean he spent every wakeful moment poring over his scrolls by flickering lamplight, meditating? Not likely! There seems no question but that the *blessed* man must have amassed a substantial store of Scripture in his heart and mind in order to meditate on it any time of the day or night.

Bible scholars say that it was customary for orthodox Jewish boys to begin memorizing the Torah when they were three years old. By the time they were twelve, they could usually quote the first five books of the Bible from memory. Then they started on the Psalms and Prophets. As a young man, David's repertoire must have been quite significant.

In his younger years, David was a shepherd. He spent long hours, days and probably weeks out in the fields with his sheep. I can relate to this because as a child on the farm I was sometimes asked to "herd the cows". How I hated it! Not yet innovative enough to use the hours wisely, I just sat and fidgeted until it was time to take them home. Minutes seemed like hours. Hours like days. I, for one, couldn't imagine spending a whole day with nothing to do but watch sheep. But *days* and *nights* too? David did it. He spent endless days and nights out in the fields with sheep. That's a lot of time for meditation!

In our accelerated life of stress and frustration, we may have difficulty relating to such a serene existence. Even so, the most important aspect of our day should be the same as his. David's whole concept of life was based on Scripture.

Obviously, there are things that demand our attention and concentration. Psalm 1, however, seems to point out that the formula for blessing doesn't vary. Scripture must become part of us and our daily life. It must be there for us to draw from any and every minute of the day or night. It's not enough to just read it and count on residual retention. We must memorize it! Devour it! Digest it! Meditate on it! So that it becomes part of us. To enter into this blessing, Scripture must be available for constant input and/or output as we face our daily grind.

But the Word of God is more than just spiritual sustenance for the *blessed man*. We're told his *delight is in the law of the Lord*. For the Psalmist, the implication seems to be that he not only *delights* in memorizing and pondering God's Word, he joys in applying its truths to his daily walk. He is fully aware that Scripture's instruction is lovingly provided to help us avoid the pitfalls and heartaches of this life. The enemy strives to portray God's Word as a lackluster, laborious set of rules imposed on us by a dogmatic, judgmental God as sheer drudgery. But as John chooses to emphasize,*His commands are not burdensome*. (I John 5:3) They are the way of life! The way of joy for the blessed man.

The Psalmist, here, reveals an important aspect of memorizing Scripture in context. It should be approached with anticipation, excitement and *delight* in the idea that the great God of the universe wants to communicate his love and instruction to us through the medium of His written Word.

It's interesting that the word used in verse 2 is *delight*, singular. This *delight* is not one of many. It is unique, far exceeding anything else. Meditating on and

obeying the Word of God is the *blessed* man's greatest joy. It's the focus of his desire and the source of his pleasure.

How do we compare with the *blessed* man? Think for a minute. What is it that gives you the greatest pleasure in this world? In your list of *delights*, where does memorizing and meditating on Scripture appear?

Actually, it's not too clear whether the *delight* precedes the memorizing and meditating, or vice versa. I have seen both scenarios enacted in the lives of those who memorize God's Word. Some who dreaded and delayed memorizing a chapter finally began and with just a few verses burst into praise as the Lord touched their lives with blessing. Others have chosen a chapter to memorize because the Lord had already gripped them with its poignant message. So much so, that they craved the constant release of this power and blessing on a consistent basis. Committing the Scripture to memory answered this longing.

It was the truths of Psalm 1 that got me started memorizing by chapter. A longtime admirer of David, I looked for the reason that would cause our Lord to refer to Him in such beloved terms, and I took up the challenge laid out in this psalm.

Other psalmists also spoke about meditating on their beds, so one sleepless night seemed a good time to start. Having memorized many individual verses and short passages of Scripture over the years, I anticipated no problem. But there in the dark, it wasn't all that easy. After the familiar favorites were reviewed, the going got a little slow. Without a catalyst to spark recall, I found myself fumbling around, spending more time trying to remember

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a verse than I did meditating on it. I also found that verses out of context weren't the material that *prolonged* meditation was made of.

It became obvious, very fast, that meditation, the day and night kind, needed more substance than just random verses. I had to conclude that only memorizing in context, by chapter, provided enough material for serious meditation.

I began committing chapters to memory, small portions at a time, and reflecting on them throughout the day. Meditating became a natural part of my day. My favorite times to review and meditate were and still are in the early morning hours and before going to sleep. For the first time, I enjoyed special delight in the Word of God that had escaped me for some fifty years of just *reading* my Bible.

Verse 2 depicts a strong link between *meditating* and *delighting* in God's Word. It seems that serious memorization of Scripture is the stuff meditation is made of. And in most cases it does appear that it is meditation that ignites genuine *delight* in the powerful Word. It's obvious that the quick and easy approach so many people look for is not inherent in this psalm.

The Tree

Verse 3 tells us that the *blessed* man is like a tree, a symbol of growth and life. This tree is planted by a stream, assuring constant access to life-giving waters. It doesn't live a sporadic life, deluged with moisture one minute, wilting from thirst the next. Its lifeline is secure, abundant and continuous. Meditation and

delight in memorized Scripture provides this continuous nurturing for the *blessed* man.

We're told that this is a fruit tree. But fruit doesn't instantly appear even on this unique tree. It is a natural part of the growth process. Fruit is yielded *in its season*. In this day of instant "fixes", we want to see results right now. Eureka! Fruit! This psalm seems to emphasize that God's fruit comes with consistency over a period of time, not overnight. Not by infrequent gulps from a tentative source, but by burrowing deep roots into an abundant water supply.

The idea of consistency is perpetuated in that, unlike other fruit trees, this one is *ever-green*. Its *leaf does not wither*. Whereas fruit comes *in season*, the evidence of life and growth are always present.

Jeremiah also compares the *blessed* man to a flourishing tree. Speaking about this, he says:

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. (Jeremiah 17:8)

"Turning up the heat" is an interesting cliché. This tree isn't threatened by the *heat* of external circumstances. Even though the world around swelters, its leaves remain lush and green because its roots are well grounded in an all-sufficient source.

Obviously an impressive sight, this tree is like others of its ilk: stable, reliable, predictable, always in its place, unwavering, trustworthy. Such trees traditionally served as landmarks, providing direction for wayfarers.

So then this stalwart specimen of Psalm 1 doesn't exist only to be admired for its strength and beauty. It is a

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many-faceted blessing to all those whose life it touches. Its strong, sprawling branches are extended for shelter. As a landmark, it offers direction for the wanderer. It provides shade for the weary, refreshing fruit for the pilgrim. Hm! Is this an allegory of what you'd like to see in your life?

The Ultimate

Whatever he does prospers. Wow! What a promise! We didn't miss that with a quick reading, did we? According to the first part of verse 3, the one who memorizes Scripture, who meditates and delights in the Word, is like a flourishing tree. This in itself is an impressive promise. But in addition, we're told unequivocally, *Whatever he does prospers.* Another awesome promise! Perhaps even more so than is evident at first glance.

Because our American society is one of the most affluent in the world, there is a great temptation for us to be lured into its materialistic concept of prosperity. We may see it fulfilled in such things as "money, mansions and worldly gain". Perhaps this *is* what is meant in this passage, but the eternal aspect of wealth is undoubtedly of greater interest to the *blessed* man.

Christians coming to this country from areas of persecution say that it's much more difficult to live a committed Christian life in the prosperity of the United States and Canada than it was under persecution. Whereas we were praying for Russian Christians, especially during their years of oppression, a friend of mine returning from there said Christians in Russia were praying for us because they feared our fixation on affluence was turning our hearts

away from the Lord. If their fears were justified, then there could be a vast difference between our concept of *affluence* and the *prosperity* referred to in this psalm. Scripture reminds us:

...what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (II Corinthians 4:18)

The Lord admonishes us:

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:2)

Phillips translates this same text:

Give your heart to the heavenly things, not to the passing things of earth.

Perhaps we should not be too quick to accept our own version of “prosperity”. *Eternal prosperity* will surely be more wonderful than anything we could ever imagine. Remember:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

(I Corinthians 2:9, KJV)

Whatever he does prospers. Do you long to know God’s prosperity in *whatever* you do? The promise is sure. The conditions are clearly explained, memorize, meditate and delight in the Holy Word of our Almighty God.

Blessed Commitment

The concept of this psalm is most profound. The depth of devotion described delves almost beyond the comprehension of the average Christian in our culture. Constant meditation and delight in Scripture characterize the *blessed* man of verse 2. This consistent life is further illustrated by the *steadfast* tree deeply rooted in an abundant water source depicted in verse 3. Surely this was David's secret, a life securely anchored in divine truth resulting in a consistent, intense, enduring relationship with his God, *a man after God's own heart*. We often interpret this as God's heart reaction to one intent on His purpose, but it may also be seen as David's seeking after the heart of God.

We are frequently admonished: "Be sure to read your Bible in the morning and start your day off right." This often gives us a sense of accomplishment. We have read our little passage. We have started our day right and our duty is done. But what about the remaining hours? How much of what we read in the morning continues with us throughout the day? An idea? A perception? A phrase? Clearly, this casual approach does not meet the criteria described by David in this psalm. Perhaps it's time for all of us to re-evaluate our *priorities* and *delights*.

How does our own personal approach to Scripture compare with that of the *blessed* man of Psalm 1? Can we be honest with ourselves and with our Lord about the depth of our commitment? Where do we place our priorities, and where do we find our greatest delight? Are we really serious about a closer walk with God? Serious

enough to exercise the needed discipline? Enough to begin memorizing Scripture *in context* to fill our hearts and minds with the Living Water of God's Word?

The depth of David's commitment to the Lord cries out in his bold assertion:

I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8 KJV)

David memorized, meditated and delighted in God's Holy Word. David was a man after God's own heart.