

Two Ways To Live

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to Psalm 112. So if you're in your Bible, that's just over the next page.

Psalm 112 is also coming up on the screen. Praise the Lord. Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments.

His offspring will be mighty in the land. The generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Light dawns in the darkness for the upright.

He is gracious, merciful and righteous. It is well with the man who deals generously in lens, who conducts his affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved. He will be remembered forever.

He is not afraid of bad news. His heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. His heart is steady. He will not be afraid until he looks in triumph on his adversaries. He is distributed freely.

[0 : 58] He is given to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. His horn is exalted in honour. The wicked man sees it and is angry. He gnashes his teeth and melts away.

The desire of the wicked will perish. Well, I want to begin with a question. Just simply ask, what do we do with God?

How do we respond when we're confronted with the God of the universe? Because that's the question that was left hanging at the end of Psalm 111, which we looked at a few weeks ago and which we just read again.

Because in it, the psalmist presents us with God, with the character of God, and with all the works of God. If you remember, he said things like, look at creation. Look at the splendor and majesty of God's works.

You might say, smell the heather on the breeze. Listen to the waves crashing on the rocks. The psalmist wants us to look at God's creation and see who God is. See how it reflects his majesty.

[1 : 57] The psalmist also pointed to all of what God had done, God's mighty works of rescue, both in God's word, but ultimately in Jesus Christ, coming to save people from their sins.

Behold the God of the universe, the psalmist was saying, mighty in power, faithful to his promises, merciful and compassionate. The question though that hangs at the end of Psalm 111 is how will we respond to that God?

What do we do when we confront it with that God? Psalm 111 ended with our first response. Did you see it there? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Psalm 112 then expands on that. It expands on what the fear of the Lord is in verses 1 to 9. Then it presents us with the path of wisdom, you might say. Then in verse 10, the psalmist gives us the only other option.

Verse 10, the wicked man sees it and is angry. So two responses, fear and anger on one hand, two ways to live, wisdom and folly, two destinies, life and death.

[3 : 06] That's what the psalmist is presenting us with. Let's look at both of them in turn. Just as a health warning, we're going to spend most of our time on verses 1 to 9 because that's what the psalmist does. So first of all, fear the Lord and live.

What does the psalmist mean by that? Verse 1, we see blessed is the man who fears the Lord. You might say that's the summary statement, almost, of verses 1 to 9, which go on to describe the character of the person who fears God and how God blesses them.

But first of all, we need to understand what that means. What does it mean? What is the fear of the Lord? Psalm 111, if you remember, showed us that the fear of the Lord begins with recognizing how different God is to us.

That while he is all good, we perpetually fail, we know that. And while he is all powerful, we all too quickly realize our frailty and our weakness. We only have to get struck down by illness or as we get older, we realize how weak we are.

On the other hand, we also see that God is all knowing. We can spend a lifetime learning and we still don't know what's going to happen the next day. We'll always be asking questions. In other words, the fear of the Lord begins, it starts when we realize that God is big and we're quite small.

[4 : 24] We realize that difference. Now, that doesn't mean that we should fear God like a tyrant or a bully. God is powerful and he is majestic. And he does deserve our reverence and our all.

But Psalm 111 also reminded us, he said, the Lord is gracious and he is merciful. He is faithful. He is trustworthy. It reminds me of the way that C.S. Lewis described to Aslan the lion.

He said, he is safe. In other words, we don't mess with God, but he is good. He's safe, but he is good. And so the fear of the Lord begins with recognizing God is big and we are small.

And that's not just a one-off recognition. That's not something we just realize and that's all in our life. It's a lifetime of studying God and God growing in our estimation and us shrinking.

And that's not just a change of mindset and that's all. Actually, the psalmist wants us to see in Psalm 112 how the fear of the Lord must permeate from our head to our heart to our hands.

[5 : 31] It must affect all of our life. So let's just see what that looks like in practice. Let's see three subheadings verses 1 to 9. First of all, the fear of those who fear the Lord delight in his commandments.

That's verse 1. You see that? The blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in his commandments. Proverbs 8 verse 13 gives us the other side of the point you might say.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. In other words, the fear of the Lord should naturally overflow into loving what God loves on one hand and hating what God hates.

Do you remember maybe as a child looking up to someone at school or maybe as an older brother or sister and you really wanted to be like them? There's a period in my photo albums which look quite funny because all of my photos, I'm smiling like this with my lips sticking out because there was a kid in school who I thought looked really cool because he smiled like this.

So I did that. You can ask me, my parents are there. You can ask me. You've got like a year worth of photos where I'm smiling like that because I think that's really cool and I want it to be like that. We admire those we look up to and we want to be like them.

[6 : 47] For those who fear the Lord admire God. We see how great he is and we want to be like him. And so that's why this Psalmist says they delight in his commands.

God's commands show us what he's like. They tell us what God loves and what he hates. They tell us how we can grow to be more like him.

And so the person who fears the Lord searches the scriptures. They look at Jesus' life. They look at who God is so they might become more like him.

But I don't know what you think about that word delight. I don't know if we normally see think of God's law. We think, oh God's law. I delight in God's law. I think more often than not we can think it's more of a burden.

Now we see God's commands and actually we're like, you know, I'd rather do my own thing. And actually, that doesn't seem so much of a delight but a burden. But in some ways that just happens when we forget the gospel.

[7 : 46] Because in two ways, we can fall into two ways of thinking. On one hand we can start thinking that we need to obey God out of fear and well, I better do what God wants. Otherwise he's going to be really angry with me.

Or on the other hand, I've got a, obey God's commands so that he'll like me to curry favor with him, you might say. But if we think about that, God's law is only ever going to be a dark shadow above us.

You might see a weight around our neck or just an unattainable goal. See the gospel does away with, you might say, the carrot and the stick. That's not what God's law is meant to be.

The good news of the gospel is first that Christ delighted perfectly in the commands of God. We saw that again in that picture we did with the kids. Where Jesus perfectly obeyed God's law.

And God said, this is my son whom I love and whom I am well pleased. Second, the gospel tells us that Christ paid the punishment for all our disobedience. And that means two things. If we've trusted in Jesus, that means two things.

[8 : 48] First, that we don't obey out of fear. We don't obey out of fear because as Romans 8 tells us, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, Jesus.

There's no punishment because Christ has taken that punishment. So we don't obey out of fear. The second, we don't obey to gain favor because Christ has gained that for us.

We're told in Ephesians that we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm. So God's law can be a delight for the Christian because it isn't something that we're trying to attain favor with God.

And it isn't like we're frantically trying to obey it and dot the eyes and cross the T's, worried that if we don't, that God is going to be angry with us. It is possible for God's law to be a delight because we are in Christ and he has paid for our disobedience and given us his perfect obedience.

And so those who fear the law delight in his commands, and that leads us to the next thing because God uses his commands to make us more like him.

[9 : 54] Remember I was saying that, you know, I was sticking my lip out because I wanted to be like that kid. I wanted to imitate him. Well, God, as God gives us his commands, he gives that so that we will be more like him.

And so that's our second sub point. Those who fear the Lord become like him. Now this is something I think is really cool. This is why I read how to read Psalm 111 as well as 112.

So both Psalm 111 and 112, they're both acrostic poems. And so that means, like if you were to do poems in school, that means you might have a word, I don't know, happiness.

And you just start each line with the next letter of that. Well, these poems begin with taking the Hebrew alphabet and each line of the Psalm begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

And that means actually if you match the two up, you can see something quite cool. You don't even have to know Hebrew to it because the translations are very good. But there are places where God's character and the character of God and the God fearing person actually match up.

[10:59] So if you look with me at Psalm 111 and 112, if you've got a Bible in front of you, we'll see, for example, in the second part, second half of verse 3 in Psalm 111, and the second half of verse 3 in Psalm 112, we read with both of those, his righteousness endures forever.

There we go. It's up there. Or, for example, in the second part of verse 4, in Psalm 111, we read, the Lord is gracious and merciful.

In Psalm 112, we read, he is gracious, merciful and righteous. Now, that's not just pure chance. That's not just a trick of the translation. The Psalmist is making a point that those who fear God become like their God.

Those who fear the Lord become like their Lord. And we see that even in just the character of the person. We see the same principle in their conduct. So, for example, in Psalm 111, we saw the God who deals generously with his people, who is just, who is upright.

And we see it's all the same thing in Psalm 112. So just take verses, where is it? Verse 5, for example, it is well with the man who deals generously and lends, who conducts his affairs with justice.

[12:17] We see verse 9, he is distributed freely. He is given to the poor, both in the exact lines that match and in the character of the person. The Psalmist is telling us that God's people become like their God.

They imitate him. They reflect his character. And that's actually a very New Testament principle. We see that because the apostle Paul quotes verse 9 in 2 Corinthians chapter 9.

If you've got a Bible, why don't you just turn there with me? It's not a B of D deal if it's not on the screen. I'll just read it out. So in 2 Corinthians chapter 9, Paul is trying to encourage the Corinthians to give to a church in Jerusalem where there's lots of Christians who are starving.

We might expect that Paul would quote this verse. So verse 9, where it says in Psalm 112, he is distributed freely. He is given to the poor. We might expect that Paul would quote that to tell the Corinthians, this is what you should be.

You should be like the man in Psalm 112. But actually, it's quite surprising what we find is that Paul quotes it to describe the character of God.

[13:29] He quotes it to describe how God will freely give and God will basically, as you give out in a generous, God's going to fill you up. God will keep supplying all of your needs.

And if you think, well, why can Paul suddenly take words that apply to us and then apply them to God? And the answer is very simple. It's that there is only one person who perfectly deserts the description of the man in Psalm 112.

And that's the man Christ Jesus. In fact, Paul earlier on in Corinthians tells us how he perfectly modeled that generosity. Earlier, if you were to even look just back at chapter 8 verse 9 of 2 Corinthians, we read, if you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

So both in Psalm 112 and in the New Testament, what we see consistently is that we see the character of God laid out and we see that God wants his people to be like him.

And ultimately, we see that Christ models that perfectly and it's from Christ that we can do that. And that's what we see when we see that verse I read in 2 Corinthians.

[14 : 49] That was the Gospel in that shell, that Christ though he was rich became poor, so that us through our poverty might become rich. It describes that great exchange, Christ taking all of our muck and mess and instead giving us his perfect obedience, all the riches, all the blessing that belongs to him.

And the fact that this Psalm is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, well that means that the Gospel is essential for understanding this Psalm. If we didn't have the Gospel, then we couldn't read this Psalm and understand it properly.

You see, left to ourselves, we've got no hope of resembling the character of God. We could try hard to live lives that are good, but that's not what the Bible is all about.

It's not about us just trying to live good lives because we all know that we'll fail. We all know that we can't go a day without doing something that's wrong. Maybe a minute, maybe probably an hour, none of us can live perfect lives.

But the good news of the Gospel is that not only does Christ save us, not only does he live the perfect life that we cannot and die in our place, but that also he promises that everyone who trusts in him, he will transform to become more and more like God, to be more and more like him.

[16 : 07] So earlier on again in 2 Corinthians 318, we're told that as we behold the glory of God, in other words, as we see Jesus, as we see God in Scripture, God is transforming us from one degree of glory to another.

So he's making us more and more like Christ by his spirit. And so that means that for the Christian, even as we will spend time and we'll see, sorry, as a Christian, we will have time when we'll look at our lives and we'll despair.

We'll look at our lives and think, I just mess up all the time. I don't live in a way that God wants me to live. I don't live anything like Psalm 112. But the hope of the Gospel is that while we must struggle and strive to growing godliness, that God comes alongside us by his spirit and strengthens us by his word, so that we can be made more like him.

In other words, if you're a follower of Jesus this morning, Psalm 112 isn't just about Jesus, it can be about and should be about you as well. It means that you can read this Psalm and say that not just this should be me, but this can be me, that with God's help, actually he helps and transforms us by his word to live and think more and more like the person of Psalm 112.

And I think one reason this is so helpful to remember is that so often we can lose perspective in the Christian life. We know that we're saved by the Gospel. We know that, okay, Christ died for me. He took my sins. He saved me so that I can be right with God.

[17 : 47] But then we think, what's next? What's the rest of the Christian life about? Well, actually it's helpful when we are given Psalms like this because it gives us perspective of who God wants us to be.

So in Ephesians 2, Paul reminds the church that we're saved for obedience. We're saved not just to stagnate as the people we are, but to grow more like Christ.

Psalm 112, you might say, gives us a template, a perspective of what that should and can look like. So you might think when you're a teenager, you might have put a poster on your wall of some celebrity you admired or some people put horses and dogs.

But let's just imagine it's a celebrity or a sports star you want to be like. And every day you're thinking, that's the thing that motivates you to get up and do those early morning swing practices because you want to be like Michael Phelps or go for the run because you want to get fit.

Even though it's raining, that perspective and seeing, okay, I'm going to work hard, I'm going to try to be like that, that motivates you. That kind of picture motivates you to put in the effort. Well, Psalm 112 can be like that.

[18 : 57] We remember that it's only by God's Spirit, it's only with His help that we can hope to live a life like this. But Psalm 112 can also be like that poster for us. We see this is how God wants us to live.

This is what Christ saved me for. This is what He's empowering me to live like by His Spirit. This is the kind of character that we should be praying for in ourselves, in one another.

This is what we should be encouraging one another to live like, challenging one another to live like. A church family, we're not saved in isolation as Christians. We're saved into a church family so that we can help one another be more like Christ, be more like the person of Psalm 112 even you might say.

So we need the Gospel to understand this Psalm. We see that in this and thirdly, we see that in our third point there. Those who fear the Lord are blessed by Him. Do you notice how the language of blessing is just all over this Psalm?

So let me just point out a few points in the text. So for example, verse 1, blessed is the man who fears the Lord. Or verse 2, his offspring will be mighty in the land, the generation of the upright will be blessed.

[20 : 10] Verse 3, wealth and riches are in his house. Verse 8, his heart is steady. He will not be afraid until he looks in triumph over his adversaries. So very simply, the psalmist is telling us that those who fear the Lord are blessed with an abundant life.

So what do we do with verses like these when we come across them in the Bible? Verses that describe blessing for those who are following Jesus. Is this telling us that if we fear the Lord and we're going to be rich, then our children are going to be successful and we're going to always overcome our position?

Well no, we know that's not true. We know that some people will point to verses like that and teach that, but we know that for various reasons. That is false teaching, that is ignoring other parts of what the Bible says. But why? Why don't these verses teach that?

Well first of all, there's a really important principle to remember and that is that we must always interpret Scripture in the light of other Scripture. So we don't read Psalm 112 in isolation and just say, well this is what it's like if we have faith or something like that.

Because that would be to ignore whole books of the Bible, maybe like Job, where we see someone who was greatly blessed but who also faced great loss.

[21 : 28] Or the Prophet Jeremiah who was called the weeping prophet. You know throughout the Old Testament and the New we see that the righteous and godly don't always have a happy and healthy life.

But that's only reinforced when we come and look at Christ. Jesus was the most godly man to have ever lived and yet he's also described as the man of sorrows and familiar with suffering.

And ultimately he died on the cross. And in John 15.10 he says to his disciples, that a servant is no greater than his master.

If they persecute me they will persecute you. So followers of Jesus shouldn't be surprised by suffering but expect suffering. So does that mean Psalm 112 isn't actually true this side of the cross? Does that mean all the blessing of language here is not true for the Christian?

Well no, because Jesus' life and death don't take away the God's promise to bless his people. Rather they just open it up into a new dimension you might say. So as I've said, God saves us. He brings us from death to life and we trust in him. He changes us to make us more like him but he also promises more.

[22 : 41] That's blessing but he promises to bless us in eternity. So in Ephesians chapter 1 which you read last week in the morning Paul says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

Even as he chose him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. I know I read that quickly but the key word in there is in Christ. All of the blessing that the Christian can have isn't because of who they are but because of who Christ is.

Because they're in Christ. So we don't fear God as we ought in order to deserve God's blessing. Rather it's as we trust in Jesus God looks on us with the same pleasure he looks on Christ and he blesses us with the same blessing that only Christ deserves.

The greatest blessing of course is that God gives us himself. That we may know him and call on him as Father. But also that we may be known. That we may be adopted and known as his children.

And the Bible does tell us that Christians will be blessed physically as well. I'm just outlining this briefly but most of all that physical blessing will come in the new creation where Christ promises to make all things new.

[24 : 08] When he'll renew this world and take away as I said all of that brokenness and make all things new. But that doesn't mean that we don't enjoy blessings in the present. And I just want to point to verse 7 just as an example of that which I think really sticks out to me.

So verse 7 in Psalm 112 we read that the person who fears the Lord isn't afraid of bad news but his heart is firm trusting in the Lord. Now that sticks out to you because I don't know about you but so often I feel like I get rocked by bad news.

I don't feel like my heart is firm. I don't feel like when bad news comes when things go wrong it feels like you get tossed around like a ship on the seas.

But what the psalmist is reminding us of here, what the gospel reminds us of consistently is that God promises the ability in the midst of uncertainty for those who trust in him.

That even when life is knocking us around even when we feel like a ship on high seas. That those who are following Jesus can know that actually in the midst of all of those things that he is in control.

[25 : 17] That we can rest our full weight upon Christ because he is our good and gracious God. We can read Psalm 111 see the character of God and say that no that is my God.

That is the one who's to use the ship language that's the one my anchor is fixed on. That's my unmovable, the one who's unmovable. That's the one I'm building my life on. The foundation that won't move.

And then even in the midst then of that we can know that we can cling to Christ. We can cling to who he is and we can find stability in those times.

I know I'm flicking through these verses very quickly and there's a lot more that could be said on that. But the point is that blessed is the one who fears the Lord. In the gospel we can know the promise of this Psalm.

If we're Christians I hope that we can even see as we look back in our lives the way that God has blessed us. But also can I encourage us to look forward and to hold on to this as a promise that blessed is the one who fears the Lord.

[26 : 24] That even when this life just throws us curveballs and we get battered around. That we can hold on to the promise that a fullness of blessing that God will give us when Christ comes again.

That he will give us new bodies with no aches and pains. There will be no more tears. He will give us all of those. He will give us all of the physical blessings that are true of this Psalm.

That Psalm will be true for us in the new creation. Blessed is the one who fears the Lord. But briefly I want to turn to verse 10 because the Psalm doesn't end there.

I told you it would be brief at the last point so don't worry. The Psalmist doesn't end by just telling us about the person who fears the Lord. He also gives us the alternative.

Second that, so first we fear the Lord and live. Second reject the Lord and perish. Because sometimes being told in life, being told what the wisest thing to do isn't all we need to hear is it.

[27 : 27] As a kid if you're told to walk on the pavement because that's safe, you're probably still going to wander into the road. We also need to be told that if we wander into the road then we might get hit by a car or that's dangerous.

And in just three lines in verse 10 the Psalmist is trying to tell us how dangerous it is to respond to the God of the universe with rejection.

Instead of that fear and awe and trust. Let's just read the first 10 again. The wicked man sees it and is angry. He gnashes his teeth and melts away.

The desire of the wicked will perish. See how the wicked contrast with the one who fears the Lord both in their response, in their character and in their destiny.

The wicked see God and they're angry. They hate what they find. That's because unless and until we fear the Lord by kneeling before him, God is always going to stand as a challenge to the way we want to live.

[28 : 27] He's always going to be the rival who wears the crown when we want to live it for ourselves. He's always going to challenge our desire to self-rule. His commands are always going to challenge our desire to live as we want.

And that's infuriating. And there might be some people listening here in person or online and you know that's you. But can I just urge you then to listen to the warning of this Psalm that there is no future for those who reject Jesus.

Who reject Christ. The Psalmist tells us the story isn't that God backs off eventually and we get our hearts desire.

He says rather than the wicked gnashes teeth and melts away, the desire of the wicked will perish. Just as God promises everlasting life for those who trust in Jesus.

So he promises that those who reject him will perish. There are only two ways to live. That's what the Psalmist presents us with.

[29 : 31] Fearing the Lord and trusting Christ or rejecting God and perishing. As we heard in the children's talk in John 3. Actually I didn't forget to quote this in the children's talk.

John 3.36. Jesus says whoever believes in the son has eternal life. But whoever rejects the son will not see life for God's wrath remains on them.

Now you might be surprised that the Psalmist only does give us two options though. You might think surely there are many more ways in which people can respond to God. Surely as well as committed followers of Jesus and hardened atheists aren't there?

Are there people who have not made up their mind yet? Are there people who are still searching? Those who are just interested, who are still reading it through, thinking it through?

Even those of us who follow Jesus might think surely this is all a bit black and white. Even the most godly person sins. Even none of us perfectly fear the Lord.

[30 : 30] And yes our lives aren't black and white. Yes we know from looking around us, even from God's word, we see that in the narrative section of the Bible that people's lives aren't black and white.

Good people do bad things and the bad people do good things. But the Bible gives us wisdom and literature like the Psalms to show us that there is only, there's no sitting on the fence.

The Bible gives us wisdom and literature to show us that the choice that we have in how to respond to God is black and white. That it is either fear the Lord and live or reject God and perish.

There's no sitting on the fence. Can I say that if you are thinking about Jesus for the first time or even the 50th or 100th time, if you're listening online or if you're still thinking who is this Jesus person, what is the message of Christianity?

Can I encourage you to keep thinking, to keep learning, to maybe the best thing you can do is to ask the question of who is Jesus. Maybe read a Gospel.

[31 : 36] The Gospels are, there's four of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They're eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life. And if you have a friend, we'll want to ask to read it with them.

Look at who Jesus is. But the point of this Psalm is that for every single one of us at one point, we do have a choice to make. We have a choice about how we will respond. God has made himself known.

We see that in creation. We see that in his word. God has ultimately opened his heart and love to show us himself in the person of Christ Jesus. The question is how will we respond?

Will we reject him and perish in one hand? Or will we fear God kneeling before him at the foot of the cross and receive life?