

## A Tree by Living Water

I have a lot of habits. I enjoy structure to my day, and when that structure is messed up or disrupted, I can get frustrated easily. For instance, I brush my teeth every day. If I skip brushing my teeth one day, I can tell throughout the whole day. Things taste different, I can feel a film of dirt over my teeth, and my day does not feel complete. The only reason I feel this way is because I have the habit of brushing my teeth every day. I know what it feels like to have clean teeth, so when I skip taking care of my teeth the difference is sharp. Everyone has habits that shape their lives over time. There are tons of books written about shaping good habits. There are excellent speakers on why shaping habits are so important. Instead of repeating what they say, today we are going to dig into scripture and see that God wants to be the center of your habits.

The book of Psalms is a wonderful source of encouragement, wisdom and instruction. This impressive collection of songs and poems stirs the heart and the mind in amazing ways. The first psalm is a wonderful introduction to a godly life, and it exposes the importance of habits and the character of God. Psalm 1:1-2 says, **“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.”** I want you to notice two things about this first verse: the action of the blessed person and the kinds of people they are not supposed to imitate. Walking takes more effort than standing, and standing takes more effort than sitting, right? A wicked person has a worse character than a sinner and a sinner is worse off than a mocker. In the Bible, a wicked person is someone who goes out of their way to persecute others. It is not enough for them to just lie or steal once in a while. They find their fulfillment in hurting others. A sinner is someone who occasionally makes mistakes. They know they make mistakes, and they may or may not repent. A mocker is someone who belittles other people. They think of themselves as superior and walk around with a lot of pride. In the first verse, the author describes the importance of habits.

I believe that we are all bent towards sin. We all struggle against temptation, pride, arrogance, anger, envy, jealousy and a whole host of other negative traits. When Adam and Eve broke the command of God, they caused the rest of humanity to seek fulfillment in themselves. Isn't pride the root of all sin? In the very first verse in the first Psalm, we get a small glimpse into the brokenness of humanity. Everyone sins, but when we make sin a habit it quickly spirals out of control. Belittling one person, mocking them with others around you, may not seem like a big deal. If you make a habit of belittling others, you may wake up and find yourself very alone with no friends. Everything we say and do builds up one habit or takes away from another. In very poetic language, the author of Psalm 1 is describing the process of slowly becoming a wicked person. They call the man or woman who doesn't form these habits blessed, and they instruct us how to avoid these habits.

Staying away from bad people is impossible and it's not really going to help you. In Psalm 1:2 we learn that we should take delight in the law or instruction of the Lord, and focus on, memorize and internalize his instruction. The Hebrew word we translate into meditate is Hagad which means to moan, growl or make noise. The idea is that reading the instruction of the Lord should cause an audible expression of awe and wonder. When someone spends time every day, reading the Word of God and enjoying its contents, that person is prepared for blessings and trials. One of the best habits I have, has taken years to develop. Every morning I wake up early, grab some coffee and read the Bible. I first started reading the Bible every day at age 16. I had to force myself to read the Bible for at least 15 minutes a day. Over the years, I have grown to spend more and more time with God. Now I spend at least an hour, reading, praying and engaging with God. For me, this is the most precious and important time throughout the day. It took a long time to develop the habit, but I would not trade the time I spend with God for anything. I say this as a testimony to how important it is to spend time reading God's Word. The Psalmist describes what such a person is like.

Psalm 1:3 says, **“That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither--whatever they do prospers.”** Trees need water. A tree that is planted by an ever present and living source of water would be incredibly strong. It would have all the nutrients it

always needs nearby. The tree would have rich fruit that would not fail to grow due to a drought or lack of rain, because its source of water is nearby. A person who delights in reading and internalizing God's Word would be strong. No trial, persecution, pain or hardship would shake this person. They would always have what they need when they need it, because they have the Word of God in their heart and mind. I love this image of a tree planted by the stream of water. When I pray for strength, when things are not going well in my life, God draws up this image of a tree full of fruit. Unlike a person who delights in the Lord's instruction, the wicked fall away.

Psalm 1:4-5 says, **“Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.”** Chaff is an incredibly light shell that encases wheat grains. When harvesters beat the sheaves of wheat, they are trying to knock off the chaff on the grains. The author declares that wicked people cannot stand firm during trials. They fall away easily, because they are not rooted in anything strong. Have you ever watched the news, when someone is exposed as corrupt or wicked? There are many examples of people who cripple and fall when their wickedness is exposed. They lose power, wealth, fame and friends when everyone is aware of what they have done. People who build their characters off of bad habits will not be able to stand when they face their consequences. The author proclaims one final promise.

Psalm 1:6 says, **“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.”** When you spend time delighting in God's Word, you build an intimate relationship with Him. The Lord will watch over you. This does not mean that your life will always be free from pain or hardship. No, hard trials often plague good people as well as wicked people. Delighting in His Word gives us the assurance that He is always with us. The opposite is true as well. Living out wickedness only ends in one way: utter destruction. Whether the wicked experience that destruction in life or in eternity, it is not for us to decide. God's instruction is available for us all. We have to form the habit of delighting in His Word. Like a tree drawing from its source of water, we should spend time of wonder and awe before our creator. Jesus reinforces this important lesson in the sermon on the mount.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus had a lot of followers. People were fascinated by his ability to perform miracles. They longed to be healed, to receive freedom from an oppressive spirit, or to hear the radical interpretations of scripture. Jesus' ministry fluctuated from reaching thousands of people at once to having his life threatened on more than one occasion. The sermon on the mount in Matthew is one of his most famous recorded sermons. Towards the end, Jesus says, **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”** Matthew 7:24-27 Reading the Word of God is not enough. We need to practice, to live out, to engage with the Lord's instruction. We need to build habits to change our character into a wise man who builds his house on a rock. Everyone can agree that rock is a much better foundation than sand. Jesus is encouraging us to live out his instruction.

Our characters are formed by habits. Our habits are formed by actions. Our actions are formed by thoughts. What are you focusing on today? I encourage everyone who claims Christ as their Lord and Savior to live out his words. Jesus is the Word of God. John 1:1-5 says, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”** Jesus is the Word of God. When we read the Bible, we are instructed on how to be more like Jesus. Every Christian makes mistakes, but there is no excuse for not knowing the Word of God intimately. Delight in Jesus! Delight in the Bible! Be a tree planted by streams of water. You will see God strengthen you in ways you did not think imaginable.

How much time do you give to reading the Bible? There are so many things that are competing for your attention. Satan is great at distraction and a master at lies. Putting off spending time with God is the easiest trick he uses to push you further from relationship with the Father. There is no excuse for the Biblical illiteracy among Christians today. We have every reason to meditate on God's Word day and night. How can we expect to have a deep relationship with God if we won't even read the words he says to us? Of course, we can't live life by only reading the Bible. We need to eat, sleep and work. There are so many demands that this life makes of us. Meditating on God's Word takes intentional action and discipline. We should make reading God's Word a priority in our day. Allow the Word of God to shape the rest of your day. The water is there. Are you willing to drink?

I know that habits are hard to form. It takes diligence and patience. When I miss a day of reading the Bible, I have to force myself to get back into the habit. The longer I go without reading the Bible, the easier it is to continue feeding that habit. Every choice I make either takes away or adds to one of my habits. The Word of God has changed the way I view life around me. Meditating on God's Word is the best habit to have. It will convict you, encourage you, build you up and humble you. I promise you this, you will learn more about yourself by reading God's Word than you probably ever desired. God wants a relationship with you. Like a tree by living water, the Word of God is the only thing that can fill your soul. The Word of God is Christ. Be shaped by him.

Yours In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris A Rice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Aaron