

# DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

January 30, 2022 | *The Freedom and Gifts of Righteousness*

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Why is righteousness important?

Read Psalm 112.

Pray that God would give you a longing for righteousness, first for righteousness' sake and second for its blessings.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

A commitment to God's law brings freedom to find an enduring heritage.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Righteousness is the key to finding what matters most in life.

### MEDITATE

*"Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!"  
(Psalm 112:1).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+Use this section to contrast how our culture depicts righteous behavior versus how the Bible depict righteous behavior.*

Q: *How do you define freedom?*

Q: *What are some ways people misunderstand freedom?*

My children hate to clean up. They can make a complete mess in a matter of minutes, but when I tell them to clean it up, they agonize over how long it will take. Imagine a father who gave up requiring cleanliness and allowed his daughter to leave her room a mess. She may feel an overwhelming sense of joy and freedom at this new way of life at first. She can leave her toys flung all over the den. She can allow her clothes to pile up in her room. She can have unending play, never interrupted by the dogmatic demand to “clean up that mess.” But when her friends invite her over for a dress-up party, she cannot find her princess dress under the mounds of clothes and costumes littering her room. By the time she locates her dress and its accessories, her friends have moved on to other games. Or perhaps Daddy is going to play golf after work one afternoon and invites her to come along, but she cannot find her golf club because it is lost in the yard, so she cannot go. When she runs to her room in sorrow and jumps on her unmade bed, she snaps the window on her toy car because she didn’t see it tangled in her covers. Her “freedom” is actually a burden. She cannot do any of the things she enjoys because of her misguided sense of freedom.

Psalm 112 tells a similar story. Although the wicked may think their wickedness creates opportunities for them, the psalmist recognizes that their wickedness will only lead to destruction. The righteous man, however, sees the freedom that righteousness provides. The more he confines himself to God’s will, the freer he is to pursue what really matters in life.

Q: *Do you view righteousness as a burden or as a gift?*

Q: *How do you see people trying to free themselves from the constraining demands of God?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The prevailing view of righteousness in our culture closely parallels the daughter in the example above. People see the righteous demands of God as a burden they long to be free from. They think if they could only cast aside the bonds of a hopelessly outdated morality, they would be free to enjoy all of life’s possibilities. What they are resisting, however, is the only chance they have for joy.

One of the most alarming trends in this vein is the attack on the traditional family. The dynamic of family has transcended time and culture. Anywhere you go at any time in humanity's past, you find moms and dads living together with children, sometimes with extended family members included. There are unique exceptions, of course, but they did not occur because of a misguided understanding of freedom. Today, however, many people see the traditional family as a burden imposed on them from outside. Some people want to be free from any ties to others. They do not want spouses or children or any of the sacrifices traditional family demands. Others want to release the traditional family from the structures that have characterized it at every point in the past. Why does the family have to begin with a husband and a wife? Why can't two women start a family? Why do we even have to stop at two? Why can't three or more people commit to one another in some sort of non-monogamous family? These longings to release humanity from the constraints of the traditional family have led some cultural elites to substitute the phrase "care unit" for "family." None of this is going to lead to greater happiness. Like the daughter who refused to clean up her room, this type of freedom only leads to disappointment, hurt, and longing. Anytime we seek to free ourselves from the righteousness of God, we will only find ourselves in bondage.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Psalm 112 is another acrostic. In this case, every half verse begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The final two verses are divided into thirds to begin with the final six consecutive letters. The use of acrostics suggests completeness or comprehensiveness. The psalmist is encouraging complete conformity to the righteous way of God.

Psalm 112 parallels Psalm 111 in several significant ways. Both contain ten verses. Both are acrostics with the same patterning. Psalm 111 focuses on the ways of God. Psalm 112 focuses on the ways of the righteous person. Additionally, these psalms share multiple themes and words. These parallels suggest that the arrangement of these psalms is not coincidental. The sequence of Psalms 111 and 112 invites us to see the character of the righteous person as an imitation of the character of God. Such imitation language corresponds to Paul's frequent use of imitation language (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1).

As with Psalm 37, the acrostic structure of Psalm 112 will influence how we study it. Rather than seeing a progression in thought, we see the psalmist moving between themes as necessary to complete his literary form. Thus, we will look at the major themes as they appear across the psalm.

1. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE EVIL AND RIGHTEOUS
2. BLESSINGS IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY
3. BENEFITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS  
-FREEDOM TO BE GENEROUS

- FREEDOM FROM FEAR
- AN ENDURING LEGACY: CHILDREN
- AN ENDURING LEGACY: REMEMBRANCE

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will examine the main themes of Psalm 112 in further detail and draw personal applications from them.*

# 1. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE EVIL AND RIGHTEOUS

## ■ PSALM 112:1, 10

Q: *What contrast is contained in the description of the righteous?*

Q: *What does “fear the Lord” mean?*

Psalm 112 begins by describing the blessedness of the righteous man (Psalm 112:1) and concludes by describing the frenzied ravings of the wicked man (Psalm 112:10). These function as antithetical “bookends” to the message of Psalm 112. This literary device provides the background against which the rest of the psalm can be understood. Think of it as a dart board. If you throw a dart at a plain wall, you have no frame of reference for whether the throw was good or not. When you throw a dart at a dart board, the graduated concentric circles interpret the throw for you. Hitting the innermost rings is a good throw. Hitting the outer rings or missing the whole board is a poor throw. This is what literary bookends do for psalms and narratives. They create the framework for understanding the rest of the psalm. Psalm 112 is about the contrast between the righteous and the wicked.

The psalmist describes the righteous man in two contrasting ways. He fears the Lord, but he also delights in the Lord’s commandments. In fear, we can sense the righteous man is uncomfortably aware of every sin in his life, every imperfection, every failure. God, on the other hand, is complete perfection. How could he possibly find himself in the Lord’s presence? In delight, we can sense the righteous man has completely forgotten himself and has become enamored with the perfection of God’s will as presented in His commands. The righteous man lives between these

two emotions and is never sure which impulse will take over at any given moment.

The psalmist describes the wicked by contrasting him with the righteous. Where the righteous man is enamored with God's commandments, the wicked becomes enraged when he sees the righteous seeking God through obedience to His commandments. Throughout this psalm, the psalmist highlights the enduring quality of the righteous man's character. The wicked man, however, will perish.

Q: *Can you describe a time when you have been enamored by God's presence?*

Q: *Why doesn't the wicked man give in to righteousness when its blessings are so apparent?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –I remember my mom remarking how she was always uncomfortable when entering the auditorium of our church growing up. She attended Catholic churches until she was in her mid-twenties. She said there was always a sense of reverence when her family entered the sanctuary for mass. The auditorium of our Baptist church was quite different. People chatted, sometimes boisterously, among themselves. Kids ran up and down the aisles before somersaulting into their seats. The sound crew was busy working out the last-minute kinks in the system. Even the lighting encouraged social interaction. None of this communicated a fear of God in my mother's mind. I'm not sure if she was correct in analyzing the reasons behind the two experiences, but I do believe she was correct to point out that many people lack any sense of fear or reverence toward God. Reverence demonstrates an awareness of the enormity of God. Since the psalmist claims that the righteous person fears God, perhaps, on some occasions, it would do us good to discover ways we can show we fear God through revering Him.

## 2. BLESSINGS IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY

### ■ PSALM 112:4, 7, 8

Q: *Where else do we see imagery of light and darkness in Scripture?*

**Q:** *What other biblical stories portray steadfast hope in the midst of adversity?*

Although the psalmist highlights the value of righteousness, he still maintains a realistic outlook on life. The righteous person is not free from adversity. In fact, righteousness often invites adversity into the believer's life. In Psalm 112, the psalmist acknowledges adversity but says the righteous person will overcome it. In Psalm 112:4, we see light dawning in the darkness that has overshadowed the upright. This light-darkness language is metaphorical. The darkness represents adversity that the righteous person overcomes with his faith in God. In Psalm 112:7 the righteous person receives bad news just like the rest of humanity, but his steady trust in God remains unshaken. The psalmist mentions the adversaries of the righteous in Psalm 112:8. Although these adversaries plot against the righteous man, he is eventually triumphant over them. A life of righteousness does not guarantee a perfect life, but the righteous person refuses to fear even in adversity and trusts God to overcome evil.

**Q:** *How does your reaction to adversity compare with an unbeliever's?*

**Q:** *How could you respond to adversity more faithfully in the future?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Psalm 112 offers believers a sobering reminder. We are not entitled to a life free from adversity. Adversity will come eventually, and our response to it reflects the depth of our Christian conviction. If adversity blinds us to God's blessings, our joy is not centered where it should be. The key to sustaining faith through adversity is anchoring your life in the perfect will of God now.

### 3. BENEFITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

■ **PSALM 112:3, 5, 9**

**Q:** *Would you typically connect righteousness with wealth?*

Q: *How would you reconcile these verses with passages such as Luke 16:19-31?*

Righteousness gives us the freedom to be generous with others. A person who delights in the will of God does not need material resources to find purpose or contentment. Instead, he may use wealth as a tool to bless others in need. The parallels between Psalms 111 and 112 illuminate this point. Psalm 112:3-4 closely parallel Psalm 111:3-4. Psalm 111:3 describes God's splendor and majesty. These are innate qualities of His being. Psalm 112:3 says the righteous man's house is full of wealth and riches. This need not be taken as a universal truth but as a general principle (Luke 16:19-31). As with God's splendor and majesty, the righteous man is known for his wealth and riches because he blesses others through them. The wealth and riches of the righteous man (Psalm 112:3) are linked to his generosity (Psalm 112:9) by the repetition of the phrase "his righteousness endures forever."

Q: *How does your generosity reflect your commitment to seeking righteousness?*

Q: *Why is there a connection between righteousness and wealth and riches?*

**APPLICATION** – One connection between righteousness and wealth is the Christian commitment to excellence. This idea stems from passages such as 1 Corinthians 10:31. Christians recognize that the manner in which they complete their work, like everything else about them, reflects the perfection of the God they serve. In America, this commitment to excellence and hard work became known in some locations as the Protestant work ethic. Many popular ideologies among modernized cultures, such as pragmatism, undercut this commitment to excellence. Today, people seem content to do just enough to get by. I have observed this shift in the classes I teach. When I first started teaching, only several years ago, students seemed offended if their work received a C and challenged me vigorously on these matters. This did not improve their work, but at least I knew they cared. Today, I rarely get any pushback from students who are unhappy with their grades. Many students openly acknowledge doing just enough to get a passing grade. In addition to crushing the soul of their teacher, it reflects the changing mindset towards the quality of the work we produce. We are failing to recognize the connection between excellence, righteousness, and the God we serve.

## PSALM 112:1, 7, 8

Q: *Is fear a positive or a negative feeling?*

Q: *Is a righteous person fearful?*

Psalm 112 contains an interesting dynamic pertaining to fear. The righteous person fears God (Psalm 112:1). In fearing God, he finds freedom from all other types of fear. He is not afraid of the adversity he will encounter in his life (Psalm 112:7). He handles each situation as it comes with the confidence of someone who is secure in the righteousness of God. He is not afraid of his adversaries (Psalm 112:8). He is confident that God will address the wickedness of those who oppose righteousness. Their disdain for him is only due to their disdain for God (John 15:18). The key to becoming free from fear is fear itself. Fearing God sets every other fear into perspective.

Q: *Are you more controlled by the fear of God or the fear of man?*

Q: *What is your biggest fear?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – There is a poster hanging outside a cubical at work that lists the various types of phobias people have. It numbers well into the hundreds. I'd like to count them one day, but I'm afraid doing so may somehow contribute to the list. I've researched to find out the number of fears recognized by the American Psychiatric Association, but they seem too fearful to give a definitive number. They are willing to separate phobias into three broad categories. Phobias range from fairly common ones, such as arachnophobia (fear of spiders) and claustrophobia (fear of small spaces), to seemingly bizarre ones, such as hylophobia (fear of forests) and bovinophobia (fear of cows or cattle). Psalm 112 shows that this endless number of fears and phobias can be replaced by a singular fear of God. If you fear the Lord, you do not have to fear anything else. When we remove God from the center of our lives, other fears tend to multiply.

Q: *How does this verse relate to Genesis 22:18?*



**Q:** *Why are the blessings of righteousness passed along to children?*

The first gift of righteousness pertains to the patterns it will instill in your children. Fearing the Lord and delighting in His commandments have generational implications. The psalmist is echoing the promise God made to Abraham (Genesis 12:2). God promised to make Abraham into a great nation and to make him a blessing to others. In Genesis 22:18, we gain a clearer understanding of what God had in mind. God would bless all the nations through Abraham's descendants. This promise was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1–17), who blessed the nations by dying on the cross and rising again, but the implications continue to be carried on through successive generations who fear God and delight in His commandments. The commitment of a righteous person to God has implications for long after they are gone.

**Q:** *If you are an empty-nester or do not have children, how can you still apply the implications of this verse to yourself?*

**Q:** *How are you trying to instill your love for God in your children?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Psalm 112:2 demands that we stop to reflect on how this generational blessing takes place. Many parents today are hesitant to force their beliefs on their children for fear it will turn them away from the faith. Their concern is no doubt fed by the observation of many rebellious youth who have despised their parent's instruction. They hope their commitment to God may be transmitted passively to their children. This hope is reinforced by modern parenting advice that emphasizes providing choices for your children to encourage critical thinking and individuality. These concerns are well-intended but fail to recognize the importance God instilled within the family for training children to fear Him and keep His commandments. Our society is committed to an unrealistic and unhealthy view of self-autonomy. Their concern is to liberate children from the oppressive expectations of their parents, especially those parents who are committed to anything like biblical Christianity, so they may be free to become whoever and whatever they want to be. Our ears have been trained to think that this type of "freedom" language is an unquestioned good, but the Bible provides us a much different view of raising children. Ephesians 6:4 commands fathers to resist provoking their children but instead to raise them up in discipline and instruction of the Lord. Parents must actively pass along their faith to their children. This takes discipline and a conscious effort on the part of Christian parents. Children may refuse this instruction, but that is no excuse for parents to fall short

of the expectations given to us in Scripture. Christians who fear God and delight in His commandments will actively pass this faith to their children. This is the vision underlying Psalm 112:2.

### ■ PSALM 112:3, 6, 9

Q: *Why does righteousness stand forever?*

Q: *Can a righteous person ever be unconcerned with righteousness?*

Psalm 111:8 announces that God's precepts are established forever and ever. Thus, when a person pursues righteousness, he is seeking something that endures. This makes his character dependable. A righteous person maintains his character even in the midst of adversity because his character is grounded in God rather than himself. Psalm 112 also says that righteousness will be remembered. Being firmly established in God's commands creates a legacy that will be remembered long after the righteous person is gone. Family and friends will reflect on his or her commitment to God's precepts and be encouraged to do the same. Even after he passes from memory, he remains a part of how righteousness has been carried from one generation to the next. Christians today know their faith because people 200, 300, 400 years ago carried on the legacy of those from whom they received the faith. The righteous person will be remembered forever because he is part of something far greater than himself.

Q: *What do you hope to be remembered for after you are gone?*

Q: *How have others sought to create a legacy?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – One of the dangers of the digital age is that we have nothing of substance to pass along to those who will come after us. If you enjoy reading biographies, you know that historians reconstruct the lives of the people they write about, at least in part, by reading letters they penned and journals they wrote. It is hard to see emails serving this function for the current generation. There is no way to go back to a time before we digitized so much of our lives. Once technology is created, it demands to be used. But we can refuse to allow it to take over every part of our existence. Consider keeping some part of your devotional routine physical. Take notes in a physical Bible that could be handed down to someone else. Keep a journal with pen and paper. Make sure convenience does not completely exclude you from recording a legacy for others to receive.

## NEXT STEPS

This is a great lesson to encounter so early during Oakwood's emphasis on creating a strong devotional life because it reminds us of why a strong devotional life is important. If the only thing that can be said after this emphasis is over is that you read your Bible and pray more, then it has not achieved its goal. The goal of a strong devotional life is to transform your character to become more like Jesus Christ. As you continue to think about instilling strong devotional habits, make sure you never divorce your devotional life from the development of righteous character. What you do in private with God has implications for who you are in the world when everyone is watching.

## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*Father, thank you for the freedom I have in Jesus Christ. I am able to pursue joy unencumbered by the demands and expectations of the world.*

*Lord Jesus, you suffered and died for me. Give me the strength to pursue righteousness in the midst of adversity.*

*Father, keep me from living in fear. Although difficulties can come, nothing that happens to me can take away my faith in you.*

*Lord, make me central in how the gospel will be carried over into the next generation.*

