

God's Playlist Sermon Series  
Psalm 1  
Feb. 22, 2026  
Rev. Dr. Kory Wilcoxson

Imagine it's 3026. Kentucky has just won its 372<sup>nd</sup> national championship...in volleyball. America is thriving under the leadership of President Taylor Swift Kelce 4. The number one album in the country is the new solo project from Keith Richards...the original Keith Richards, not a descendant. And archaeologists have found an ancient artifact that they determine is what used to be called...a book. This book is blue with a chalice on the cover and contains a collection of spiritual writings with funny notations, numbers, and directions. These spiritual writings have titles like "Amazing Grace" and "It Is Well with my Soul." The archaeologists conclude that what they hold in their hands is a book of ancient hymns.

That's what the Psalms are for us, a collection of songs and poems assembled by the ancient Israelites and used to help them in worshipping God. Clocking in at 150 chapters, Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, but to call it a book is misleading. It's more of an anthology, a hymnal with 150 songs that span the entire range of human emotions, from joy and celebration to grief and anguish. For this season of Lent, we're going to be taking a closer look at the Psalms, both in the sermons and in Sunday School, to see how we can see ourselves and learn more about God through these words.

Do you have a go-to song? I have several, depending on my mood. If I'm going for a run, I want something upbeat, energetic, something loud to drown out the creaks and pops of my knees as I pound the pavement. Think Eminem and Fall Out Boy. But if I'm in a quieter, more contemplative mood, I need music to match, something that evokes deeper emotions and speaks to my heart. In those moments, I'm listening to Ben Folds or Brandi Carlile. When life is good and I want to sing at the top of my lungs? Pink is blasting in my headphones. There are songs on my playlist for every occasion.

That's exactly what the psalms are like. Most people's knowledge of the psalms starts and stops at Psalm 23. And don't get me wrong, that's a banger, for sure, No. 1 on the charts for most Christians. But that psalm just scratches the surface of what the book has to offer. There are 149 other songs written by a variety of authors that express the depth and breadth of human emotions, and not all of them are easy to handle.

For example, what do we do with Psalm 137, which dreams of revenge against a foreign nation that has invaded Jerusalem? It ends with, "Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. 'Tear it down,' they cried, 'tear it down to its foundations!' Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks." A desire to murder the babies of your enemies? Yep, that's in there.

So is this, from Psalm 13: "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" Or this from Psalm 89: "How long, Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?" Have you ever felt like God has forgotten you, like God is hiding from you? I have, and I have said these exact words. "How long, O Lord?"

That's the beauty of the psalms. They capture in words what we struggle to articulate. It's like when we sing "Here I Am, Lord" or "I Was There to Hear Your Boring Cry" or "Joy to the

World.” Music can express our soul-deep longings in ways that simple prose can’t. That’s the gift the psalms give us.

The psalms are organized into five different books that serve different purposes, but it’s the first psalm that sets the tone. The very first word of the whole book is “blessed,” the same word Jesus uses in the Beatitudes when he says things like, “Blessed are the poor” and “Blessed are the pure in heart” and “Blessed are the peacemakers,” all of which seem to be willfully ignored in our country today. The rest of Psalm 1 goes on to lay out who is blessed, why they are blessed, and what happens to those who aren’t blessed.

Basically, Psalm 1 does what happens often in scripture: it gives us a choice and lets us know the consequences of each choice. One choice is to follow God. The other choice is to do whatever we want. I’ll let you guess which way is the wicked way. It’s what Moses does for the Israelites at the end of his life in the book of Deuteronomy: “This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.” It’s also what Jesus does at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, when he talked about where to build your house. Choose life. Build your house on the rock. It sounds so simple, right?

And yet, we humans can be so easily swayed off the path. There have been times in my life when, in an effort to try and seem way cooler than I actually am, I have acted in ways and hung around people who distracted me from God’s path. These people made me do things I would have never done myself, like cuss on the golf course and eat vegetarian meals and not use punctuation in my text messages. I’m embarrassed just thinking about it!

That’s what Psalm 1 warns against. “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.” See the descent there? First, you just walk alongside the wicked, but then you stop and stand with them, and before you know it, you’re sitting down and keeping company with them. The progression of “wicked” to “sinners” to “mockers” is like the movement from a person who steals something once to a person who makes a career of stealing things to a person who openly makes fun of the people he steals from. It’s so easy to take one step off the path...then another...then another...and then you look back and realize you’re a cussing vegetarian who unnecessarily abbreviates their text messages. The horror!

So, how do we avoid such a fate? Psalm 1 says we are to meditate on God’s law. Now, that doesn’t quite sound like the kind of fun we would readily sign up for, so let me unpack that a bit. The word “law” can also be translated as “teaching,” which helps us move from the 613 laws in the Hebrews scriptures to the lessons Jesus teaches us in the Second Testament. The psalmist is not encouraging us to spend hours reading Leviticus; he’s encouraging us to spend time remember what Jesus taught us, what Jesus showed us, and to put that into practice.

The metaphor the psalmist uses for grounding ourselves is a beautiful one. When we spend time with Jesus, we are like “a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither-whatever they do prospers.” Every year on Christmas Eve, I bring home a poinsettia, and every year about three days later, I throw it away because it’s dead. But this year, I had the brilliant insight that, if I watered it, it might actually live longer. So, I put the poinsettia next to my sink as a reminder, and every couple days I would give it water, and son of gun, would you believe that thing lasted a lot longer than the usual three days? Who knew!

The psalmist did. The person who immerses themselves in God's word is like a tree planted near water. And what happens to that tree? It yields its fruit in season and its leaves do not wither. That makes me pause and ask if those qualities are true of us. What kind of fruit are we producing? Ripe peaches or sour grapes? Yellow bananas or brown bana-nots? Apples or crabapples? I find in my own life that when the fruit I'm producing is rotten its because I've not planted myself close to God's word.

The psalmist also compares the wicked to chaff, which is the dry, lightweight, inedible husks that surround grain, which are separated and blown away during the process called winnowing. The farmer separates the good wheat from the useless chaff, and the chaff is carried away by the wind. There are certainly some strong winds blowing in our world today, winds of despair and hatred and hopelessness, and if we're not careful, we'll get caught up in those tornados and find ourselves blown off course from who God is calling us to be. We have to make sure we are planted, we are rooted in God's word. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers.

That's how I ended up in church. I didn't really attend church much at all growing up and didn't have a faith to speak of. During college, I started attending First Christian Church in Jeffersonville, Indiana, because my mom invited me and half my family went there. I had nothing else to do on a Sunday morning, why not? At the time, I was a wayward college student without much direction or purpose. I was chaff. But in attending that church, I found a community, a church family, a place to put down roots and let myself be watered by the word of God.

I don't know what you're looking for, but I trust you'll find it in the psalms. If you need a word of hope, it's there. If you need to be shown that your life has value, you'll find that reminder in there. If you are wondering if it's OK to be mad at God because of what's going on in your life and in the world, it is OK. The psalms show us that. If you need to be reminded that God loves you, that God is your shepherd, your rock, your redeemer, it's in there. But the only way to find what you're looking for is to read it.

This Lent, I want to encourage you to read through the psalms. Lent is about 40 days long, so you can read four a day. That will probably take you about 10 minutes. But those ten minutes may make all the difference for you as you plant yourself by the living water God has provided for you, as you let God's word help you make the choice between life and death, as you build your spiritual house on the rock of Jesus Christ. And there's a good chance that, if you give God the time, God has something to say to you. All we have to do is listen and we will be blessed.