

“Default or Design – Part 2”

Psalm 1

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First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

Dr. Jim Davis

“Most adults move through day-to-day life in default mode. They show up and respond to what’s happening around them. But they end up doing less, much less than they hoped to do.” That’s where we left off last week.

And maybe you thought I’d start off today by telling you who wrote those words. Well ... I’m not going to do that, at least not yet! But I am putting the quote out in front of us again because I think it expresses in our language the same truth as Psalm 1.

Last week we started to look at that truth. We looked at a “life in default mode.” And we saw how deceptively easy it is to live that kind of life. The Psalm uses three key phrases to describe it.

“Oh the joys,” the Psalm says, of those who don’t listen to “the advice of the wicked, “the counsel of the ungodly.” And it’s around us all the time. You can’t help hearing it. But if you let it move from your ears into your mind and your thoughts, before you know it you’ll find yourself standing with sinners.

And we learned that the way the Psalm defines that word is not the same way we do. In the Psalm sinners are ordinary people who aim at joy in their lives, but miss it. And they miss it because they’re facing the wrong direction.

The problem is, when you aim your life at joy and miss it, when you do that over and over, eventually you get cynical. You join your voice with scoffers and you end up saying, “Joy? There’s no such thing! It never lasts!”

That’s the progression that happens, the Psalm says, when you live your life in default mode. But there is an alternative. There’s a way, David says, to stop living in default mode. And it starts with a decision to pursue delight.

Last week I mentioned that Hebrew's a language that has many words for joy. And this time the word is *haphesh*. According to the lexicon, it means attractive. It catches your eye when you see it. It makes you smile when you hear it. It causes you pleasure when you experience. Let your mind run with that thought for a minute and you'll get the idea.

Haphesh is "delight." And because of what it is, *haphesh* is powerful. In fact the root of the word means "to bend" because when *haphesh* enters our life, it "bends" us. We see it. We like it. We hear it. We want it. We feel it. We want to feel it again. It's like falling in love. It's *haphesh*, it's delight!

But is it really possible to find that. It is according to Psalm 1. There is something that can bring us that delight. What is it? The Psalm says it simply. It is *Torah*, God's word, His law for our lives. Now I know, I know, the law is the last thing you want to talk about after we've been talking about delight.

But it's the first thing David wants to talk about. You see when you and I talk about law, we immediately think about something that inhibits us from pleasure and delight. But that's not the kind of law David's talking about. No for David the law isn't something that inhibits. It invites. It invites us to let go of default and discover delight.

You see the primary meaning of *Torah* has nothing to do with a legal code or what we think about as law. Instead the word *torah* is a picture word. It pictures a path that leads to delight. The path begins when you make a decision to think about God's words. In fact, Psalm 1 says, if you want to start walking down the path that leads to delight you need to find a way to think about God's word "day and night."

Now let me ask you a question. What part of life isn't covered by those terms? Not much, right? So what's the point? Well the point is this. The advice of the wicked is so pervasive that you and I will always be in danger. Our only hope, the Psalm says, is to start walking with our minds down a different path. And God's word is meant to be that path. Delight, Scripture says, can happen, if you learn to look at life through the lens of God's word.

I was driving through town the other day and I came to an intersection. I was waiting for the car ahead of me to turn left. The driver was a woman. And as I was sitting, waiting behind this woman who wanted to turn left it quickly became apparent to me that she was indecisive. She started to move and put on her brakes. She started again and braked again. I was getting frustrated. Finally she made the turn and as she did I noticed that she was not only a woman. She was an elderly woman.

And a thought came to me. If I were her I'd probably be thinking, "I hope everybody remembers that commandment about honoring their father and mother!" And I smiled.

A moment before I'd been frustrated because my thoughts were being directed by the counsel of the ungodly. I was saying, "Why? Why does it always have to be me? I've got to get somewhere. It's important. Why do I have to get stuck behind a woman who isn't gutsy enough to turn?"

You see I was looking at the woman. But I wasn't really seeing her because I wasn't seeing her from God's perspective. I wasn't feeling what God feels when He looks at a woman like that at a time like that. And Psalm 1 says to me and maybe you too, we need to re-orient our lives.

We need to learn how to think about the circumstances of our life and how God's law relates to them. We need to that "day and night." It's a practice the Bible calls meditation. But that's a word that puts people off. It sounds mystical, when the truth is it's meant to be enjoyable. To tell you the truth, the word for meditation in the Bible is the same word that's used for a lion growling softly as it eats its prey. Can you hear the growl? Can you feel the delight of the lion? If you can then you know how enjoyable meditation is supposed to be.

The truth is all of us meditate. We do it all the time. We place something in our memory. Then whenever we want, we go back and chew on it again. Let me illustrate that for you. Let's meditate together for a minute. I'll start the meditation, and can finish it. "Now sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip ... that started from a tropic port aboard a tiny ship!"

So tell me, was that mystical? No, most of you knew those words already didn't you? You may not have thought about them for a while but when you wanted to think about them again, they were right there. And they were because you walked down a path. You exposed yourself repeatedly to a

television program. You sang along with it as it began week after week until you knew the words by heart. You enjoyed doing it. And now you can meditate on the words of the theme song to Gilligan's Island.

Of course, some of you probably think that was a silly illustration. So let me give you another one. You see I know that some of you sitting out there have been meditating on the sports page lately. You can tell me the current batting average of every player on the Astros. I know. I've heard you do it. You've been meditating on the sports page but when was the last time you took time to meditate on a page from God's word?

Or maybe you haven't been meditating on the sports page lately. You've been meditating on the stock page. There are people sitting in this sanctuary this morning who can tell me exactly what happened to the stocks in their portfolio last week. They know the starting value for the week. They know the closing value. They know the number. They can tell you. They've been meditating on the stock page, but when was the last time do you think that they meditated on a page from Scripture?

I could go on. But do I really need to? You see the question is not if you're going to meditate. The question is what you're going to meditate on; what number, what average, what song are you going to hide in your mind so you can meditate on it whenever you want?

Are you going let the world around you set the program for you? If you do, it will. And you'll know the words to "Gilligan's Island" and "batting averages" and weekly "stock prices." But at the end of your life if all you can remember are those things, what kind of a life will you have had? Will it seem like a delight, or will it seem like "dust in the wind."

Don't do it, my friends! Don't drift through life. Make a decision this morning. Make a decision to take a new path through life. Make a decision to meditate on something that matters. Meditate on something that can bring you delight. Meditate on God's word and God's law.

If you do, you'll be like a tree planted by a stream of water, the Psalm says. Your life will bear fruit. And I was thinking about line, meditating on it while I was putting some fruit on my cereal a few years ago. I was also turning the *Seattle Times* and my eye caught a headline in the obituary pages.

Now I don't often read the obituary pages, but that I saw the headline. It caught my eye; "*Young Man had Old Soul.*"

And underneath the headline was a story about an 18 year old teenager named Hunter Simpson who died of brain cancer on December 18th 2005. Listen to what the newspaper wrote about him.

"During his first and only semester in college, Hunter Simpson spent his meal-plan money on soup. For lunch and dinner throughout the semester, Hunter ate soup. Not a bowl of soup, just a cup – because at \$1.50 it was cheaper.

When the semester ended last month, he used the credit remaining on his meal plan to clean out the cafeteria at Trinity Western University, a Christian College. He bought \$900 worth of food and water and he delivered it personally to homeless children in Seattle.

Most of us, the obituary said, move through our day-to-day lives in default mode. We show up and respond to what's happening around us. But we end up doing less, much less than we hoped to do. We were meant Hunter Simpson said, to do more!

What does God's word say? "I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink ... Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you did it to me?" I wonder if that was the Scripture that Hunter Simpson was meditating on at the end of his life?

So now it's time to end this sermon and now you know where the quote came from at the beginning. It came from an unknown writer who heard about a young man named Hunter Simpson. He did something different with his life. He stopped living by default and he started living by design. Maybe if we start meditating on God's word, it's something all of us could learn how to do. And if we did, imagine the difference it would make in our world.

Let's pray ...

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