

Happy New Year!

We look forward to working with you again this year.

Shall we greet our neighbors, those in front and behind us?

There will be a prelude, so let us quiet our minds in meditation and wait for the Lord.

## “We Wish to Be Happy”

Psalm 1:1-4

January 1, 2025

by Senior Pastor Hong Poonghwa

### Psalm 1:1-4 (PowerPoint)

#### Preface.

The most important characteristic of the Psalms is that they are written in the form of poetry.

Since they are poems, they express the thoughts, experiences, views of life, and philosophies of the psalmists themselves.

The Psalms as a whole express “how the psalmists came to understand God’s teachings, which nurtured their clear view of life and the way they see things,” and “how God led the psalmists to a deeper understanding of God’s ways through their experiences.”

It is said that it is not too much to say that Psalm 1 not only summarizes the contents of the entire 150 Psalms, the largest volume in the Bible, but is also the Word of God, which is sometimes said to “summarize all 66 books of the Bible”.

Since Psalm 1 is the Word of God contains such a vast content, I, who lack wisdom, knowledge, character, capacity, and words, cannot possibly fully express its richness, but I would like to savor its splendor by the grace and mercy of God and the help of the Holy Spirit as we sing together throughout the year. With this in mind, I have chosen this year’s theme verse.

I would like to share the grace of Psalm 1 over three or four times, including today’s New Year’s Day service.

#### Part One

Psalm 1 is said to summarize the entire Bible. So what exactly does the Bible say and teach us?

There are many stories in the Bible, from geography and geology to history, from wars of kings and conflicts among peoples to the birth, marriage, and death of people, but I think the Bible has only one message.

The message is to see people (human beings) in relationship with the One who is called God, and what God has done for us and our salvation.

The entire Psalm speaks to that, and Psalm 1 also focuses our attention on the subject that the Bible is trying to talk about.

In other words, Psalm 1 is a summary of the essential content of what the Bible teaches about how people live in this world.

It is a psalm that helps us to pause and think, “What is my relationship with God right now?”

## Part One

We are now entering the new year 2025, and as the New Year begins, we feel as if we are in a new spirit.

However, Ecclesiastes 1:9 in the Old Testament says, “There is nothing new under the sun. What was, will be, and what has happened will happen again.”

Indeed, when we think about it, it seems that there is nothing new in this world.

Of course, new products and the latest versions appear every year, and there may be changes in the outward appearance of forms and methods, but in the substance and content of those who use them to carry out human activities, there seems to be no difference between those of us living today and those who lived in the past.

Psalm 1 tells us that there is no difference between what the people of the time in which the psalmists lived were looking for and what we are looking for today.

It is “Happiness”.

I think what most people think at the beginning of the New Year is, “May this be a happy year”.

In the past and in the present, people are always looking for “happiness”.

We want to be happy.

If something is said to be blessed, we want to acquire it; if a place is said to be blessed, we want to go there; if an experience is said to be blessed, we want to experience it; if a position is said to be blessed, we want to ascend to that position.

In the past and in the present, “blessedness” is the constant thing that people look for.

The composer of Psalm 1 knew this very well, and I believe that he himself began his poem by writing, “Blessed are the blessed,” because he wants to be blessed.

Blessed is the happiness that the entire human race has always been searching for, regardless of the time period and up to the present.

I think it is no exaggeration to say that “all of life, history, and civilization have been nothing but efforts in pursuit of happiness.”

No one wishes to be unhappy or miserable, and in the fact that everyone is seeking joy, seeking pleasure, seeking happiness, and wandering, there is no difference between the past and the present.

Looking back on myself, I have had many dreams since I was a child, but I think the content and substance of those dreams was, “If this dream comes true, I will have an indescribable happiness.”

“If I study hard and get into a good school, I will be happy.” “If I do my best in sports and win a championship, I will be happy.” “If I meet a good person, I will be happy.” “If I get that car, that house, that tool, that food, that person, that money, that fame, I will be happy.”, etc. In the end, all the goals and what I was expecting was happiness.

So, why do people seek happiness so much?

It is because the world seems to be changing, but it is not the substance that has changed, but only the appearance, formality, and shape, and there is still jealousy, hatred, war, competition, comparison, and evil deeds, and we are disappointed by these things.

In the past, cannons were the object of fear, but now, nuclear bombs, cyber attacks, etc., are the object of fear, and the only thing that has changed is the form, and what is inside is fear and disappointment.

In the problems facing us human beings living in this uncertain world, nothing has changed.

The fact that we have not been able to solve them has not changed either.

We are still wandering around in search of happiness.

It is true that “there is nothing new under the sun.”

In a world where “there is nothing new under the sun,” I wonder why I am so attracted to this Psalm, and I think it is because this verse is God’s own teaching, and I am experiencing the happiness that this verse teaches.

## Part Two

It is sometimes said that all learning is connected to philosophy, and the common theme pursued by philosophers, or perhaps we could say that all human beings are philosophers, is “happiness”.

We ask ourselves, “How can we create an ideal world utopia? How can we be happy?” All of these quests are only human words, and have yet to bear fruit that will fundamentally change things.

It only gets more complicated.

It only gets more complicated, and only those who understand it can understand it.

No, it feels like we are going in circles, wondering if we really understand.

In such a roundabout world of happiness, this Psalm 1 is God’s prescription for us regarding happiness.

The prescription is to become best friends with the Bible.

It is to become best friends with the Bible, the Word of God.

To be best friends with God’s Word would also mean to be in a close relationship with God, to be best friends with God.

As is true in human relationships, you cannot be best friends with someone with whom you do not exchange words. The more deeply you speak your mind, the more you are listened to, and the more you let your mind wander through the words you exchange, the closer you will become to that person and the more you will get to know them.

Let’s read Psalm 1:1-2 again.

**Psalm 1:1-2 (PowerPoint)**

Pondering God's word, ruminating on God's teachings, and intoning the words of the Bible are God's prescriptions for blessedness.

I am ashamed to admit that I knew and believed that the words of the Bible were the Word of God, but I had never read through the Bible until before I entered seminary.

I don't think I thought of the words of the Bible as a blessing in and of themselves, but only as a tool or something to be used in order to obtain the blessings I was pursuing.

After entering seminary, I read the Bible a little bit every day from the beginning out of necessity, but as I read the Bible, the thought that kept coming to my mind was, "Oh, this is clearly different from the books I had read before, which were written by human hands."

I was taught in my seminary studies that "the Bible is a book that is essentially and absolutely different from any other book," and I was blessed to be able to say "Amen" to that teaching 100%.

The Bible is not a human book, nor is it a human creation.

It is not invented by man, it is not a list of man's ideas, and it does not belong to that category.

The Bible is God's revelation.

It has always been God's revelation, and it is still God's revelation in this 21st century.

The Bible was desperately needed in the past, and the Bible is still desperately needed in this world.

I believe that now is the time when we need the Bible even more desperately than before.

Nevertheless, I feel that the question of whether we are truly making this biblical verse our blessing has always been our challenge, and it is still the most serious message from God that has remained unchanged.

### Part Three

The interesting thing about the Bible is that it confirms its teachings through the experiences of the people who lived in each time period.

I think it is an interesting feature of the Bible that it is not just an empty theory, but God's own words, including the results and

consequences of whether or not people actually put the teachings into practice or not.

It describes the experiences of individuals, it describes the experiences of peoples and nations, and it describes history.

We all, interestingly enough, even little children, think that we know things best, that we are smart, and that we are different from everyone else in a good way. However, when we look back at the history recorded in the Bible, we are painfully aware that “there is nothing new under the sun, we all make the same mistakes, and we all suffer from the same things.”

People have lived through the same predicament at any time, regardless of the era, in the past and in the present.

And we have always been searching for happiness that would free us from such predicaments.

That is why I think how beneficial it is to reflect on this biblical record, in which people and nations tell us their real experiences of the evil and right paths, the false and true paths.

I think to myself, “This is it! I finally found it!” The interesting thing about the Bible is that it tells us God’s story.

The interesting thing about the Bible is that it does not end with God speaking, God doing, and God alone accomplishing everything, but it also speaks as the Word of God, including real experiences that people experienced, people thought, people worried, people practiced, and people did not practice.

The whole Psalm is like that, and the Apostle Paul once said, “God does not think that He is doing God’s work alone, but that He is God only when He is with me, the weakest and smallest of all” and he has even been fearful of God’s love and thoroughness in his care.

The Bible contains the vivid, real-life history of people who believed, practiced, or did not believe and did not practice the words of God’s Word, the Bible.

That is why we can learn and be taught from the Bible.

#### Part Four

In this way, the Bible clearly presents us with a fundamentally important and vital path and guides us to choose it.

How the Bible refers to and deals with our lives is basically very simple.

The Bible is the Bible because its message and subject matter are quite simple.

On the contrary, human language is complex.

They list arcane jargon and intertwine it in complex ways to make it seem as if something amazing has been created or exists.

Because they want to look like they know what they are talking about.

But the Bible, thankfully, is quite simple.

It is linear, it is plain, and it is the Bible that brings together all of our complicated and tangled problems in life into one big problem.

The Bible clarifies the issues at all times and in all situations.

The Bible says, "There are two paths for you. There are only two ways."

It sums things up by saying that there are only two ways: the way of God or the way of Satan, the way of Abel or the way of Cain, the way of Jacob or the way of Esau, the way of David or the way of Saul, the way of Peter or the way of Judas, the narrow way or the broad way.

In Psalm 1, too, there are the righteous and the wicked, those who rejoice in the Lord's instruction and those who do not, sinners.

It says that People always belong to one of these two groups.

Either you look at your problems, kneeling before the Word of the Lord in prayer and reexamining who you are before God, or you look at people instead of God, bumping into people, staring at people, asking people for help, blaming people, boasting about your righteousness or lamenting your inability to do anything about it.

The Bible brings together the complexities of life's problems by exposing them in a simple, linear fashion.

The Bible brings together the complex issues of life into one simple, linear picture, asking the question, "Which path am I on? Is it God's way or man's way?"

Of course, this does not mean that the Bible ends with a single simple story, but rather, it brings the truth of the matter to light through a variety of real-life examples.

That treasure trove of examples is also the entire 150 Psalms.

And I think Psalm 1 sums it up.

## Part Five

It would be wonderful if we could all realize how much God loves us, and that is why God came down to meet our weak and ignorant gaze.

The Bible is the record of God's work that He has done to meet our gaze.

People often ask, "Why is there so much talk of fighting, strife, jealousy, war, and killing in the Bible?" But that is because we, who are so rabid and full of the desire to fight as described in the letter of James, can never measure up to God's standards, so God has to measure up to ours, right?

### James 4:1-4 (PowerPoint)

God came down to us, His enemies, and was even crucified and killed by our hands.

God uses all kinds of audiovisual materials: parables, true stories, real experiences, and historical facts. Unfortunately, these visual aids are not the pretty pictures that we use to teach our children, but are far more often graphic and unbearable to look at. But God uses them to lead us to a clear realization of the truth.

The history of God, filled with the real experiences of people, is recorded throughout the Psalms, and is summarized in this year's theme verse, Psalm 1.

The paths of the wicked and the paths of the righteous, the deceptions of the wicked and the teachings of the Lord, the tree planted by the stream and the chaff blown away by the wind, the negative and positive paths, the paths of destruction and the paths of prosperity.

In order to show what is truly right and truly good, it does not take up only the good, but also the bad, and highlights the difference between the two.

By comparing the examples of the blessed and the unblessed, it will clarify the contrast between the two.

What is the blessing thus made explicit?

What is the blessing for the person whom everyone desires and everyone wants to be?



And the psalmist's confession, expressed as a song, is filled with the realization that those who put it into practice are living a blessing that those who have not done so cannot comprehend.

### Conclusion

We all desire happiness.

The Bible tells us that we can be happy as much as we want.

It tells us that happiness is possible.

And it tells us that happiness is the Word of God.

### **Psalm 119:72, 103 (PowerPoint)**

I hope this year will be a year of tasting, receiving, and experiencing this kind of blessing.

In order to help you experience the blessedness of God's Word, the Bible reading list that we distributed to you about two weeks ago is available at the reception desk. If you have not received one yet, or if you have lost it, we would appreciate it if you would bring it with you.

This Bible reading chart begins today. If you would like to renew your mind and get in touch with the Word of God, please take advantage of this chart.

It is by no means mandatory.

If your heart is in the right place, please take advantage of it.

Let's pray.

Benediction: Psalm 1:1-2