

A Godly Man

Scripture: Psalm 112

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Morning Service

People of God: In early April I attended my first Promise Keepers Conference. Promise Keepers is a Christian ministry focused on developing godly men, especially as husbands and fathers. Which is probably the reason why I never attended their events before, not being a father or a husband. Still, they spoke to issues that all men face so there was something I could learn personally, as well as apply pastorally.

And so I learned that men are like waffles and women are like spaghetti. At least, that's how one speaker, Bill Farrel, described the differences between how men and women think and deal with issues. Men are like waffles. Waffles are in the shape of little boxes. Men are good in putting life issues into little boxes, being able to separate work issues from family issues, or their golf game. At times, men can even think about nothing.

Women, on the other hand, this speaker suggested are like spaghetti—where all the noodles are intertwined and touch upon each other. And so, for a woman talking about one issue soon ends up dealing with a host of other issues and concerns. A man might ask how we did end up talking about this topic when we started about something else. For a woman, it's all connected, whereas a man tends to keep it all separate.

Now I noticed that the speakers at this conference tended to give men a hard time. When Promise Keepers started, feminists were concerned that Promise Keepers would have a lot of negative things to say about women. They need not worry. The speakers give men the hard time. It seems as if it is men who need to be kicked in the pants, to start, let alone finish the “to do” list, the things men should be doing for the women in their lives. It's as if all men are like Homer Simpson—a man who needs to be taught a few things about what it means to be a father and a husband.

Often times, Father Day sermons tend to do the same thing: give a kick in the pants for the men in the church to stand up for their spiritual responsibilities in the home and in the church. While Mother Day sermons tend to glory and praise mothers, as if they do nothing wrong, fathers tend to get reprimanded. They get a scolding so that they will fulfill the calling they have as husbands and fathers.

I suppose there is a reason for this difference in tone between mother and father's day. It's easier for fathers to neglect their duties than mothers. Historically, that is a fact. Society has far more single-moms, doing all the hard work, than we do single dads. Men are willing to let the women to do the work. That can also be true in the spiritual life of the family and the church. And so, men do need to be encouraged and challenged so that they will be godly in all of their endeavors, whether at work or at home, whether on the golf course or in the church.

Psalm 112 speaks about a godly man, one whom the text assumes to be a husband and a father. Now these words of blessing apply not just to men, but also to women, not just to those who are fathers, but to any one who seeks to be godly. These words have application to any one of us gathered here this morning. After all, who doesn't want to be blessed by the Lord?

But still, they have in their original intent a focus on the godly man, a husband and father. When we have husbands, who are faithful to their marriage vows—to love their wives as Christ loved the church—then women will be blessed. When we have fathers, who will nurture and provide for their children, then children will be blessed. When we have godly men, then the church will be blessed, and so will society.

Now there are two important interpretative points to properly hear this psalm. First of all, this is a wisdom psalm. Wisdom reflects upon life in the created order. It considers how God has designed the world and when that design is followed, blessing follow. That's the way it ought to be. But it's not a guarantee that it will always be that way. The brokenness of the world disrupts the goodness of creation and can limit, at times, the blessings of creation.

That's important to keep in mind, when you hear the list of blessings in this Psalm. When it mentions children, wealth, justice—these things are not absolutely guaranteed for the godly man. Instead, these blessings should come to the godly man, but the reality of sin and evil in this world can disrupt that and could prevent them from being experienced—so that it's possible that the godly man has no children or no wealth or suffers injustice. But that's not the way it ought to be.

So, we need to remember this is a wisdom psalm. Second, this Psalm is very closely connected together with the previous one. Verse one of this Psalm builds upon on how the previous Psalm ended. Psalm 111 focuses on God and his faithfulness shown in the works of his hands. It concludes, though, with a word of wisdom: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.” Now this Psalm applies that to the godly man.

Now there are other parallels between these two Psalms. What is said of God in Psalm 111 is now applied to the godly man in Psalm 112. Remember humanity was created to image God. We are called to reflect the goodness and righteousness of the Lord in our lives. It’s like the relationship between the sun and the moon. The moon can only reflect the light of the sun. So too, we can only reflect the goodness and righteousness of the Lord in our lives. And in Psalm 112 that is specifically applied to the godly man.

And so, verse one states the basic theme. (Verse 10, which ends the Psalm and seems out of place—being so negative—, offers the counterpart to verse 1). But verse one states the basic theme:

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord,
who finds great delight in his commands.

In this verse, we have combined two elements that we have the tendency to separate: believe and conduct. Yes, it is important to distinguish between right doctrine and proper behavior, but we can never separate the two. A godly man will give evidence of both.

He will fear the Lord. Now, we always need to be reminded that in the Bible, the word “fear” does not mean “afraid.” At least, that’s not its primary intent. Before a holy and majestic God, there should be some shaking in the boots—think of the reaction of God’s people at Mt. Sinai, or Isaiah when he came before the presence of God. But fear is intended to convey a deep respect and awe before God. We bow before the presence of the Lord.

This sense of fear underscores that we’re talking more than simply saying: I believe in God. Most Canadians would say that. But most Canadians do not fear God. They do not offer to God the worship and devotion to God that God expects. A godly man does.

He also delights in the commands of God. He doesn’t merely obey them, but he delights in them. He knows that following the way of the Lord is the means of blessings, while rejecting God’s will for our lives is the way of misery. Now this isn’t work righteousness, as if the godly man thinks he can earn his way into God’s favor. Instead, he sees that God’s design for human living, which is reflected in God’s commands, is the way of blessing.

Jesus echoes this in the Sermon on the Mount, when he offers his interpretation of the commands of God. At the end, he says that those who put his words into practice are like the wise man who builds his house upon the rock.

And so, a godly man combines both vibrant faith in God, as well as a desire to live out the will of God in his daily conduct. Belief and conduct go hand in hand. And what's true for a godly man is true for a godly woman as well. This is what we need in every disciple of Jesus: faith and obedience.

And when that happens, the blessings flow. Verse one says "blessed is" and verse 2 through 9 describe those blessings. As you look over those verses, notice how they weave together visible blessings as well as inner godly virtue. The blessings of the Lord are not merely a list of material things—like children and wealth, but also a list in inner qualities, like generosity and justice.

And so, for example, we have mention of children, but the blessing isn't merely to have children, but to have children who are upright. Verse two says: His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. In the Biblical worldview, children are a blessing of the Lord.

What a blessing for Jason and Heather to have their three children. But what a great blessing it is when godly parents pass on the faith to their children and their children develop that faith as their own. That's even a greater blessing. That's our prayer for this family and every family.

Verse 3 mentions wealth and riches as a blessing of the Lord. This is where it is important to realize this is a wisdom psalm. Wealth is not guaranteed to every believer, but still we can look for the blessing of the Lord upon the work of our hands, when our work is done in accordance with the will of God. And if I consider the standard of living we have in our community, we have been blessed.

But tied to this blessing is also a sense of generosity and giving. We read in verse 5: Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely. Verse 9: He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor. With material blessings comes also the responsibility of sharing with those not as fortunate. Being able and willing to give is also a blessing. What's the old saying: It is more blessed to give than to receive. A godly man is also a generous man.

This generosity is tied to a concern for justice and righteousness. Those are words that reappear throughout this Psalm, reflecting the Lord's concern for justice and righteousness that is described in the previous Psalm. A godly man seeks to do what is just and right. As someone who works for

the RCMP, Jason applies the public standard of justice in the criminal field. We are called to apply the concern for justice in whatever field we might be working in.

Now this description of the blessings of the Lord is not a naïve picture of life in this world. The psalm also recognizes that there are times of difficulty. Verse 4 speaks about being “in darkness”, verse 7 about “bad news.” Sin and evil rear their ugly head in our lives. The brokenness of the world also touches the lives of believers.

But in such situations, the godly person finds security in the Lord. We confess, “Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Creator of the heavens and earth.” And so, when outside forces threaten, we can find security in knowing that the Lord is watching over us. As we have been marked with the covenant sign of baptism, God promises to take care of us. It’s an eternal security.

It is often in difficult situations that our true character is revealed. Is it a godly character? It’s when we face the brokenness of life that our faith needs to come through. Is it a biblical faith?

“Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands.” These words are a challenge to all of us to live the blessed life in the Lord. But they do form a special challenge to men, especially as husbands and fathers. To use the opening illustration, sometimes men have to be a little less like a waffle and more like spaghetti. We need to see how all of life is tied together, based on our faith in the Lord.

But the words of Psalm 112 isn’t meant to be another hammer to reprimand men to live up to their responsibilities, at work, home or church. I hope they are heard as a word of encouragement. We can walk a different path than our sinful world. And we will be blessed when we do so. At times, the blessings will be visible and concrete. At other times, the blessings are a security in the Lord that goes far beyond a list of material blessings.

Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who finds great delight in his commands. Amen.