

PSALM 1 – A SONG FOR ALL SEASONS

There are certain things you can only say in a song. Over millennia and across cultures, humans have found that *songs* do things that nothing else can.

Songs provide soundtracks to our lives. When we fall in love, or a world cup victory requires celebration, or we're getting ready to go out with friends. It's to songs we turn to express ourselves.

Songs help us articulate ourselves in all of life's highs and lows.

Even better, of course, is singing with others. We become friends as we sing along together to a playlist on a long car journey. Corporate song has prompted communities to fight injustice, and to be reconciled with enemies. Singing together brings a common mind, a deep connection.

There really are certain things you can only say in a song.

That's why – at the heart of the Bible – the living God has preserved a collection of ancient songs for us. Though their melodies are long-forgotten, as we learn to sing them today, these songs have a unique power to stir, move and unite us.

Their lyrics are word perfect.

And it's the uniqueness of this collection that provides the theme of the very first song in the compilation. It says: in *this* song, and in the songs that follow, you'll find songs for *all seasons*.

The effect of singing these songs is pictured by the songwriter in verses 2 and 3. He depicts a tree. It's big and leafy, healthy and strong. It has thick roots which drink from a nearby stream, keeping it nourished.

This tree is a symbol of permanence. Through snow and wind, storm and sun, it remains. Year after year, it bears fruit in season.

‘That’s a picture of you,’ says the songwriter – ‘if you’ll sing these songs.’

But to grasp the power of this picture, we must contrast it against a second image, used in verse 4 – *chaff*.

Chaff is the dead stalks left behind after harvest-time. Once, these stalks grew up quickly, full of promise. But now they’ve had their day of fruitfulness. With the change of season and with harvest behind them, there’s no life left.

The chaff is dry, dead and worthless. One feeble gust of wind will blow it away forever. Unlike the tree, with chaff there’s no chance of future life – no season of fruitfulness to look forward to.

And here is the underlying beat of the song: we'll constantly be drawn to a chaff-life existence – a way which verse 1 describes as wicked – unless, as verse 2 puts it, we unfaithfully delight in God's law.

In other words, unless love for God's law grips our hearts, each of us will try our own makeshift ways of finding life and being fruitful. But we'll find that – when the seasons change – we're left as stalks. We're liable to be blown away and – as verse 6 puts it – doomed to destruction.

In the long term, the only way to find fruitfulness, season after season, is to delight in the law of God.

And, at that, our hearts sink. None of us feel like we need more *laws* in our lives. And, if we're honest, we know that external commands aren't enough to make us fruitful.

In fact, the songwriter knew that too.

The songwriter was from Israel. He believed that his God was the one true God – The God who had spoken to the Jewish nation, offering relationship and sustenance. 'God's law', then, refers not just to his commands, but all of his communication – his entire written word.

Therefore, meditating on God's law doesn't refer just to dwelling on God's commands, but also his promises – and the big story that climaxes in the coming of Jesus.

So here's the picture. If we want to stay strong through life's changing seasons, we must pay attention to God's promises, God's story, God's word. Then we'll reject wicked ways, and not only survive life's hard seasons, but thrive in them, with fruit to show and to share.

Any other route, says the songwriter, is to go the way of chaff. For a time, those ways may seem promising. Stalks may look healthy and full of life as they wave in the summer breeze. But when the season changes, none of that will last. Nothing but

God's word can permanently nourish us. And no other foundation will enable us to stand when we face God's verdict on our lives, to which the songwriter alludes in verse 5.

The living God longs for us to choose life. That's why he's preserved this songbook for us, at the heart of his word.

These songs have a number of composers. They're designed to be sung in the range of life's seasons. Like the best songs, they capture what life is really like and how things really feel. But they share a common theme. Each song encourages us to avoid futile or wicked shortcuts, calling us to find true life and fruitfulness in the Living God alone.

And we can be confident that these songs really will lead us in this path, because God's law – his written word – ultimately brings us to Jesus, the Living Word

Whether we worship God or not, none of us consistently delights in his law. We all have a past record of taking wicked shortcuts, which seemed to promise life. The only person who ever truly took God's law to heart was Jesus. *His* life exemplified fruitfulness. The Gospels depict how continually *nourishing* he was to others.

Yet – in his love for us – Jesus became chaff. He bore the full penalty of our wickedness as the judgement fell on Him. And then he offered his own record to us.

That means, to his followers, Jesus is like a stream – offering us not only wisdom for living, but refreshment and renewal in our failure. As we'll see, Jesus' songbook is not only for our seasons of apparent success, but also for our seasons of hardship and mess.

And that means that, in Jesus' songbook, we have songs for all seasons.