

Where Do You Live?

John 15: 1-11; Psalm 1

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Believe it or not, I was reading the current issue of House and Garden recently and was intrigued by its editorial, which said, "There's no question that living well means different things to different people. For some it means the pursuit of power. Or wealth. Or accumulation. Display. For others it has to do with a life that revolves around family pleasures. For a noble few, it means a life of spirituality. A turning inward for guidance and a turning outward only to guide others. It might even mean a shunning of the material world altogether. Which brings me to the furniture.

"I am a person obsessed with houses and gardens. For me, living well begins at home. It is the place that refreshes and restores me, the place from which I launch my engagement with the world, both social and spiritual. Our rooms have huge influence on our lives. They express our passions, desires, interests, habits and loves."

She's right -- where we live is very important for it is indeed that place from which we launch our engagement with the world. It prepares us for how we will treat that world. It gives us the values for living in that world. We would do well, then to consider where and what we call home.

Let us pray. We ask, O Lord, that in this time together you would, through your Word and Spirit, shape our lives so that we not only depend on our Savior but actually begin to look more and more like Him as we live in his presence each day. Amen

So, where do you live? If the Psalmist were asking, he would not want your address in Bethesda or Alexandria, in Rockville or Arlington, North or South of 66. No, he would more likely ask, "In what is your life rooted? Is it rooted at all?" And he is very clear that there are only two answers to that question. You are living in God or you are living apart from God. There is no nuance in this psalm. Even so, the psalmist is wonderfully descriptive about these two very different kinds of lives.

We learn what a God-centered life is all about by first learning what it isn't -- it isn't self-centered. And so, we immediately learn what the self-centered life is like. It's full of activity and plans and commitments. It could sound pretty responsible, at first glance. Listen again to how it's described.

First of all, the self-centered are called wicked or ungodly. This doesn't mean that they are necessarily out doing immoral things. In fact, they could be doing quite noble things. The definition of the ungodly or wicked is simply this -- whatever they do, they do without reference to God. They live their lives as if God does not exist or if He does, as if it doesn't matter. And these self-centered folk are busy walking around. The way the bible understands walking is this -- it is a metaphor for trying to find your way through life. So, those apart from God are going from point to point in their lives, making decisions. "This is what I need to do to make this part of my life work." All of this life planning and decision making is done without thinking about God. It is a busy-ness that depends solely on itself for direction and guidance and even energy.

Next, the self-centered stand around and become sinners. We don't like the word sinner -- it sounds as if we are saying that a sinner is worthless. Nothing could be further from the truth, for the worth of the sinner's life is measured by what it costs God and that cost is Jesus Christ himself.

The Hebrew is wonderful here for the word because sinner is someone who makes a lot of noise and creates disturbances. So, there's a progression here from the walking around without reference to God, trying to make sense of life on one's own, to now standing around disrupting things. For you see, by this time the self-centered person has begun to make some commitments -- things they stand on.

The problem is, those commitments disrupt God's plan, God's order, God's design. The self-centered person's life is now beginning to take some shape, but it doesn't look anything like what God had in mind for them.

Finally, the self-centered person sits—settles in and makes himself at home, so far away from God that the psalmist calls this person a 'scoffer.' Today we would just call them cynical. They mock what is good, having rejected it long ago and they are now at home in the house they have built out of their own resources, with their own vision, with their own hands. This is where they live—alone. It seemed good at the beginning, but the future they imagined then has turned to chaff, to dust in the end.

But there is another future that is possible. The psalm begins with the promise of a great future for those whose lives are lived in God. It begins with this promise—"You will be blessed" To bless someone is to give them a future with hope. The biblical understanding of blessing is not just a polite wish that everything will go well. To bless someone is to really create for them a future of good and not evil. And so, this psalm tells us that our future will be filled with hope if we will make choices that are God-centered and not self-centered.

It seems strange that this very first psalm begins by telling us what NOT to do. But, as I thought about it, I realized that living a God-centered life runs contrary to our every 21st century impulse. The description of that self-centered person doesn't sound so much like a description of the wicked as it sound like a strategic plan. Walk. Try lots of things out. See what works. Stand. Make few commitments that advance your agenda. Sit. Focus on what you've decided you really want in life. Settle down, Make yourself at home in the life you've created. Infomercials and books tell us to do this all the time and they guarantee a way to do it and become happy.

The pull of this is so powerful that it is our default setting. The psalmist knows this all too well, because he himself has gone in that direction. If you want to move in the direction of God's future, God's blessing, God's happiness, he tells us, don't do this stuff.

Instead, there is somewhere else where you can live. You can be like a tree planted—actually, transplanted—by streams of water. You can be a tree that produces fruit when it is time to do that. You can be a person whose life flourishes and prospers in all that God has set out for you. This is the psalmist's description of the God-centered life and it is in stark contrast to the life of the self-centered.

Think about it. The life of those who live apart from God is described in way that makes you tired just to hear it. They are walking, standing, sitting and in doing so are creating disturbances, while developing a well-honed cynicism. That's a frenetic life. Every ounce of its energy is expended in the effort to secure life on one's own terms.

God calls us to something entirely different, however. He doesn't just ask us to channel or redirect our energies and skills into more appropriate goals. He asks us to give up control over our lives and give that control to him. Listen to how this psalm talks about that kind of life.

We are transplanted—that's passive. Someone else, God, plants us right where we belong. We don't have to find that place. It's already been picked out for us. We just have to settle in—settle down. And that place is by a stream of living water. All we need in order to live, grow and be effective in the work to which God has called us is to put down deep roots. And we know what that living water is, don't we? It is nothing less than Jesus Christ himself, the Living Word of God.

When we are at home in Christ, here is what we will do. We will delight in the law of the Lord. I didn't read anything about joy or delight in the frenzied life of the self-centered. But we will be filled with joy as we meditate day and night on God's Word.

Now, what does it mean to meditate on God's word night and day? Well, it's got to mean that we do read the Bible regularly. That's why we put the readings on the back of the bulletin. But even if you read all of those every day, that would take only about fifteen minutes each day. You can read more, you know, but at least read those.

But there is also the sense that to meditate on the law of the Lord night and day is to keep God's word in your thinking no matter what your circumstances. When it is 'day,' and that to the Hebrew poets meant, when things are going well, think about what God's word says about that. It will tell you that you should be thankful and generous. When it is 'night,' when things are going poorly, think about what God's word is telling you then: that God has not forgotten you, that you belong to Him, that whatever happens, you will not be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus. This is where you live. This is your home. You live in the heart of God.

You know, Moses was a man who tried to take life into his own hands. When that didn't work, he ran away to the wilderness to get away from intrigue and danger. But God had other plans and Moses ended up leading the people of Israel from bondage to freedom. Moses never had a place he could call home. But Moses wrote the 90th Psalm and this is what he declared in the midst of his nomadic and unsettled earthly life: O Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. When the world around him was frenzied and chaotic, Moses knew where his true home was. And so it can be with us.

But the pull of the world without God is strong and so our psalm ends with a stern reminder. When we make our home in and with God, our lives will be truly secured. Remember that when you look at those who live without regard for God, the psalmist says. They may look good. John Calvin says that their happiness is only imaginary. But they are nothing more than chaff (that's the worthless stuff left over from threshing wheat and it just gets blown wherever the wind takes it. All that work). All that busy work and nothing to show for it.

It is God's greatest desire that we make our home with him. From the beginning in Genesis where he shared the garden with Adam and Eve, to the Book of Revelation where we see him knocking on the door, wanting to be at home with us, his invitation is there. The editor of House and Garden is right. Our homes do express our passions, desires, our habits and our loves. And so, the one question left for each of us to answer is: Where do you live?