

# **Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 2,**

## **Psalm 1 – The Wicket Gate to Psalter**

### **20-min. Podcast Audio Overview**

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey everyone, and welcome back. We're going to be diving deep into Psalm 1 today. Oh, nice, and to help us unpack it, we have some incredible insights from a lecture by an Old Testament scholar.

Dr. Bruce Waltke. Yeah, Dr. Waltke, have you heard of him? Oh, absolutely. Yeah, he's, uh, he's quite renowned in the field. He is, so this is going to be really interesting.

Yeah, and you know, I think a lot of people, when they think of Psalm 1, right. They just kind of think of it as a nice little poem at the beginning of the book of Psalms, you know, just kind of a nice way to kick things off. Yeah, but Dr. Waltke argues that it's so much more than that.

Right. He calls it the wicket gate to the entire book of Psalms. Yeah, I love that analogy, the wicket gate. I've got to admit.

I'm not familiar with that reference. Yeah, so he's pulling that image from John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Okay. Are you familiar with Pilgrim's Progress? I am. Yeah, yeah, so it's an allegory where you have this guy named Christian who is on this journey.

Okay, to try and get to the Celestial City, and the only way to start that journey is through this small gate called the wicket gate, right? And so for Dr. Waltke, he sees Psalm 1 as acting like that gate for the Psalms, I see. So it's like the entrance point.

Yes, to the rest of the songs. Yes. It's the entry point.

It sets the stage. Okay, that makes a lot more sense. So it's not just some random poem stuck at the beginning. It really is foundational for the whole book. Yeah, I mean, which is why it's so important to understand what Psalm 1 is actually saying. So sure, because right off the bat it presents us with this idea. Okay, no third way. You know, there are two paths in life: the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, and there's no middle ground. That's intense.

It is, and I think that's one of the things that makes this so relevant, right? Even thousands of years after Psalm 1 was written, exactly. It's forcing us to confront these big questions, yeah, about how we're living and what kind of future we're building, you know, for ourselves. It's a call to self-examination for sure. It really is. Now, another thing that stood out to me when I was reading through Psalm 1 is that word blessed? Oh, yeah, right in the first verse, in the very first verse. Yeah, and Dr. Waltke talks about how the Hebrew word there is Asher, right? It's actually much deeper than just feeling happy. Well, and that's one of the things I love about studying the original languages, right? It's that you uncover all these layers of meaning that get kind of lost in translation. Yeah, and so Asher it signifies more than just you know, fleeting emotion happiness It really points to like a blessed destiny a future that's

intertwined with your relationship with God I see so it's less about feeling good all the time more about yes being in alignment with God's will Yes, even when things are tough, that's a great way to put it Yeah, it's about knowing that you're walking a path right that leads to something far greater than temporary happiness You know, even if there are bumps along the way Yeah, I think that's a powerful concept.

It makes you think about what really matters, yeah, and how our choices now impact our future, and that leads us right into one of the central metaphors of Psalm 1, okay, which is the two ways: the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, right, and the Psalm? Explores what those paths actually look like. Okay, and it does it in very, very concrete terms, I see, and Dr. Waltke breaks it down even further using four categories that he calls the four C's. Okay, I'm intrigued.

What are the four C's? So the four C's are character, context, conduct, and consequences. Okay, let's unpack those. So character. What do you think that means in this context? Well, I think it's kind of like who you are, you know, deep down, like your inner compass, right? Yeah, like, are you leaning towards righteousness or wickedness? I see that as your character, and then Context is kind of the people and environments you surround yourself with, right? The influences in your life. Yeah, absolutely.

Like, are the people that you're spending time with encouraging you to? Grow spiritually, or are they pulling you away from God? What kind of media are you consuming? Right, what kind of values are you absorbing from your surroundings? That's a really good point. Yeah, because it's so easy to underestimate the impact of our environment- exactly what you said. Yeah, conduct is all about your actions, right? So how you're actually living? Yes, how you're actually living out your beliefs in the day-to-day. So it's not just what you believe in your head.

It's how you're living. It's putting it into practice. Yes, exactly. And then finally you have consequences. Every action has a reaction, right? Right.

So the path you choose leads to certain outcomes. Okay, you know, both in this life and the next make sense, right? So our character, our context, our conduct all play together to shape our lives. It's like a chain reaction. And what I think is so brilliant about this is how Dr. Waltke connects these four C's to that broader way, metaphorically, right, that runs through the entire Bible.

Okay, you know, think about when Jesus says I am the way, the truth, and the life, right? It's this reminder that our choices, our character, our context, our conduct, right, all have profound implications for our journey, just like in Pilgrim's Progress, exactly. Yeah, it really does put things in perspective. It does; it makes you think about the path that you're on for sure. Yeah, okay.

Well, this has been a fascinating start to our deep dive into Psalm 1. Absolutely, and in the next part we're going to continue exploring these ideas of righteousness, wickedness, and the consequences of our choices. Yes, and we're going to be looking at some pretty interesting examples that Dr. Waltke uses. Yeah, he brings in some surprising illustrations that really help us understand these concepts in a new way. It's going to be good to stay tuned for part two.

Absolutely. Yeah, it really is a powerful framework for understanding not only Psalm 1 but also the broader message of the Bible. But getting back to those paths, you know, the righteous and the wicked, right? I think it's easy to fall into this trap of thinking, okay, that the righteous are perfect and the wicked are totally irredeemable, right? Like black-and-white thinking. Yeah, exactly.

But Dr. Waltke makes this important distinction. He says it's not about achieving some kind of flawless behavior. It's more about a posture of the heart. It's about a dependence on God.

So are you saying it's less about? Following a set of rules perfectly, right, and more about having the right kind of heart. Yes, a heart that seeks God. Okay, I see, and that's why he brings up this idea of progressive hardening into sin. Okay, he argues that it's not usually like this sudden fall from grace, right? But it's a slow, gradual Process where we become desensitized to sin.

Hmm. That's interesting, you know, and it starts with our thoughts. Then it moves to our actions, right, and eventually it can lead to a complete embrace of wickedness. So it's like a slippery slope; it is, it is, it's a slippery slope, and Dr. Waltke uses some really interesting examples to illustrate this. Oh, yeah, he does. He mentions a quote from Alexander Pope right about how we can get used to even the ugliest things if we see them often enough. Yes, and I think that is so relevant to our world today. It is; we are constantly bombarded with images and messages, right, that can desensitize us to violence, negativity, yeah, to things that pull us away from God. Absolutely.

Yeah, think about all the things we see online. Oh, I know on the news, right, even in conversations with people around us. It's everywhere. It's easy to just become numb to it all. It really is like we're slowly building up a tolerance. Yeah, two things that would have shocked us before, exactly, but he doesn't stop there.

He also brings up the myth of Medusa. Oh, Medusa. Yeah, the creature from Greek mythology with snakes for hair, right? What does that have to do with progressive hardening? Well, it's actually a really clever analogy. Okay, so the myth says that if you looked directly at Medusa's face, right, your heart would turn to stone. Okay, and Dr. Waltke uses this to illustrate how exposure to evil, right, especially over time, can harden our hearts. Oh, I see.

So it's like we're creating our own Medusa box. Yes, in our living room, with all the things that we're constantly consuming. Exactly, we're constantly exposing ourselves to things that can turn our hearts cold. Wow, and unfeeling. That's a powerful image, it is, and he also mentions the story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Oh, Colossus is a classic example of this internal struggle, right, between good and evil, right? You know, Dr. Jekyll starts out with good intentions.

Yeah, but he keeps giving in to his darker impulses, right? And eventually he loses control completely. He loses control. Yeah, so it's like those seemingly small compromises that can lead us down that slippery slope. Absolutely, and we might think we can handle it, right? I think we can dabble in things that are contrary to God's will without being completely

overtaken by them, right? But sin is insidious. It has a way of creeping into our lives and taking root if we're not careful, if we're not vigilant. Yes, so how do we guard against this? That is the question, right? We're not supposed to be perfect, right? How can we stay on the path of the righteous? Well, that's where this image of delighting in the law. The Lord comes in.

Okay, you know, the psalmist says that the righteous person Meditates on it day and night. Okay, so it's not about legalistic rule-following. No, it's about finding joy, okay, and aligning your life with God's will, okay, if that makes sense, you know. And the more we immerse ourselves in God's Word, the more we're transformed by it, and the more naturally we start to live out those principles. So it becomes less about forcing ourselves to be good, right, and more about letting God's Word shape our hearts.

Yes, exactly- our minds, our minds. Yeah, so it's about cultivating a deep love for God's Word. Yes, and letting that love guide our actions.

Yes, beautiful, and that leads us to another important concept. Dr. Wolcott addresses. Okay, which is the definition of righteousness, okay? Yeah, he highlights a definition by another scholar, Thomas Creech.

Oh, right. Yeah, he says that righteousness, in the context of the Psalms. Okay, is all about dependence on God and serving others. Yes, and living in alignment with God's will. It's such a good definition.

Yeah, it's such a good definition. I love that; me too. It really shifts our perspective, yeah, from a focus on ourselves and our own actions, right, to a focus on God, yes, and how we can serve him by serving others. Yes.

It's not just about being good for our own sake, exactly. It's about allowing our relationship with God to overflow into every aspect of our lives. I love that; me too, and that contrasts so sharply with the way of the wicked, right, who are characterized by Self-absorption, okay, and disregard for others, right? They're focused on themselves. They might find temporary success, okay. Their lives ultimately lack true meaning and purpose, right, because they're not rooted in something bigger. Exactly. They're not rooted in something bigger than themselves, and that brings us to that beautiful image of the righteous as a tree planted by streams of water.

Oh, yeah. It's such a vivid image, flourishing and bearing fruit. Yes. It's such a beautiful picture of a life That's connected to God, right, and nourished by his love.

Yeah, and Dr. Waltke points out this fascinating detail. Okay, about that image. What's that? He says that it might actually be inspired by ancient Near Eastern art. Oh, interesting, where you often see depictions of canals, right, bringing life-giving water from a temple, which represented the presence of God. Yeah, so the righteous person, yeah, is rooted in God's presence.

Yes, is constantly being nourished and strengthened by his grace. Beautiful, just like a tree planted by a source of flowing water, yeah, but in contrast to this image of flourishing life, right? We have the wicked who are likened to chaff. Oh, yeah, that dry, worthless husk,

right, that gets separated from the grain during harvest. Yes, they're rootless, right? Weightless, easily blown away, easily blown away by the winds of circumstance because they're not grounded in anything substantial, exactly. It's like they're just drifting, drifting.

Yeah, through life aimless without purpose or direction. Yeah, while the righteous are firmly planted, grounded, and growing stronger day by day. Yeah, and that stark contrast brings us to the very end of Psalm 1, right where it says the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. Wow. That's a powerful statement. It is; it's a sobering reminder. Yeah, that our choices ultimately determine our destiny.

Yeah, it really makes you stop and think about it, you know, are we making the right choices, right? Yeah, and the impact- the long-term impact of those choices. Yeah, but it's not meant to be a message of doom and gloom, is it? No, not at all. It's actually a message of hope, it is, right?

It's about recognizing our need for God. Yes, and seeking his guidance, seeking his guidance and choosing to align our lives, yeah, with his will absolutely, and when we do that, yeah, the psalm seems to be saying, right, that we can be confident that he'll be with us, yes, every step of the way, every step of the way, helping us to flourish, yeah, you know, to bear fruit just like that tree planted by streams of water. I love that image, me too. It's so powerful, so powerful, so encouraging.

Yeah, and you know, circling back to Dr. Waltke's idea of someone as the wicket gate. It's like we've been given this new lens through which to view the entire book of Psalms.

I agree. It's like we've been given this key, yeah, to unlock the deeper meaning, the richness of the Psalter. Yes, exactly.

We can see how these themes of righteousness, wickedness, and dependence on God. Yeah, and the consequences of our choices play out in the lives of the psalmists. It's like we have a full new understanding of what we're reading. Yeah, it's like a whole new layer has been revealed. Yeah, I'm definitely feeling inspired to go back and reread the Psalms.

Yeah, with these insights in mind, it's amazing, isn't it? It is how much wisdom and depth is packed into a single psalm. It really is, and speaking of discovering those hidden gems. Okay, I would love to hear from you, our listeners. Oh, yes, it's a gateway right to a deeper experience of the psalms. Yes, what part of this psalm resonated with you the most? Yeah, was there a particular Phrase or image that stuck with you? Yeah, and how might that shape your approach to reading the rest of the psalms? Oh, that's such a great question. I think it would be fascinating.

I know I want to hear people's perspectives. Yeah, because we all come to these texts right with our own unique experiences and perspectives. Absolutely, and so I think it'd be really enriching to hear. Yeah, what stood out to you and how it spoke to you personally. Exactly, so let us know your thoughts. Yeah, leave us a comment, connect with us on social media, share what you've learned with a friend.

Yes, we love hearing from you. We do, and keeping this conversation going. Absolutely, and who knows, maybe your insights will inspire our next deep dive. That would be awesome.

So until then, keep exploring, keep questioning, keep seeking those deeper truths. Beautiful.  
We'll see you next time. Bye everyone