Rooted in the Word

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[0:00] My name's Tim, I'm part of the team here at Harvest Church. We are going to be spending a little time looking at the Bible together. Happy New Year and Merry Christmas.

Some of you are thinking, oh, it's day 11 of Christmas. We haven't eaten all the cheese, so it hasn't quite finished. Some of you are feeling about as wide as you are tall.
But nonetheless, as we kind of wrap up our feasting, it's time to start to look ahead to the new year. I'm going to be speaking today from Psalm 1. If you'd like to turn there in your Bible, if you've got them with you, they will appear on the screen in a moment.
Just before we get into that, I'd just like to take the opportunity, Church, just to essentially say, well done, because we can very quickly move on. Oh, it's the new year, and we're going to think about, oh, a new year, and we're doing new things.
And over Christmas, we had lots of meetings that we're inviting guests to. There were lots of guests there. In fact, an enormous number of guests there. I don't have numbers at my fingertips, but a huge number of guests at all our various things at Christmas.
[1:03] They're there because you invited them. So well done. You really grabbed hold of the stuff that we were doing. We're like, oh, yeah, okay, I'll invite my friend or my family member or my colleague or whatever it might be to that.

Well done. We saw numerous responses to the gospel. It always takes time to figure out exactly what someone making some kind of response really means and if they're going to kind of live that through in their life.
But we saw lots of people respond to the gospel. And that happened. Yeah, it happened because Jesus reached out and rescued them. Yes, it happened because, say, Adrian presented it very well. Yes, but it happened because you invited them.
So well done. Keep going. Bye. It's wonderful work. Right. We are going to be in Psalm chapter 1. Let me just read it to you. Psalm 1, excuse me.
Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
[2:08] He is like a tree, planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. This is the word of the Lord.
Psalm 1. This is one of the kind of entry points to the Old Testament. If you're a young Jewish boy, at least at the time of Jesus learning Hebrew for the first time, you learn it through Genesis chapter 1 and Psalm chapter 1.
And you learn it through them, not because they're the easiest Hebrew, they're not, but because they tell you something about how to read the Bible. And they tell you something about how to live your life.
What that means hopefully will become clear as I start to unpack part of this Psalm to us. But what's he say? He talks about a man or a person who is blessed, who doesn't do things that are wicked or sinful or hang out with scoffers, but instead their delight is in the law of the Lord.
[3:24] And on that law they meditate day and night. By the law the psalmist, it's referring partly to the first five books of the Bible, but also we can generally just think of the Bible. So they're meditating on the Bible day and night.

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And by meditate, that word means something like muse or mutter. So this person who is blessed is spending their days musing on the Bible.
It's like it's running as a soundtrack in the back of their head. You know how when you get an earworm and the song just plays in your head all day long, it's like bits of the Bible are just running in their heads over and over again.
Or they're muttering it to themselves. Like maybe even just under their breath all the time, you know, something they've read that morning, they're just repeating it to themselves so that it gets into them. Musing on the Bible, muttering on the Bible.
And to kind of, I'm going to spend a bit more time than this, but to cut a long story short, essentially what I'm going to be encouraging us to do this morning is make that your goal this year. Muse the Bible, mutter the Bible.
[4:33] Let's be this year, Harvest Church, together a Bible people who spend our time meditating, musing, muttering. The Bible.

To try and understand why we'd want to do that, let's get into this metaphor that the psalmist uses. He says, this man, okay, he's muttering the Bible, he's meditating on the Bible, he's musing the Bible.
He says, he is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields fruit in its season. So he's picturing a tree that's been transplanted, which means it was somewhere else, and it's been dug up and put down by a stream of water, and it's like an irrigation channel.
So for him, it would have been a very particular stream, someone's duck, to help there be water there, and he's putting the tree in a really good place for it to grow. So it's not luck that this tree happens to have sort of landed the seed in a place that's really good for it.
someone has actively taken the tree and they've put it somewhere where it's going to flourish. And that's by a stream of living water. Living water just means moving water, for all it kind of sounds more evocative than that.
[5:52] And what he's saying, and what if we are familiar with the Bibles, we might start to think, oh, I wonder if he means, is he's saying this blessed person who meditates on the Bible day and night is a lot like a tree in the Garden of Eden.

So Eden, or the Garden of Eden, Eden's the bigger place, but the garden's on top of a mountain, it's got lots of trees, but two very notable ones you might remember from the story, and it has four rivers flowing down from it.
And it's the place where you encounter the presence of God. And pretty much any time in the Bible you encounter a tree, you're supposed to go, oh, what's this got to do with the garden?
Because in the garden, you might remember the story, Adam and Eve, they're, well, in fact, they're describing Genesis 1 in exactly the same language as all the trees, which is interesting. That's what the psalmist is doing here. So they're supposed to think, oh, it's a bit like Genesis.
And they find themselves in this garden full of good things to eat, which appear to all be on trees, with two trees they're told about, a tree of life, and a tree of the knowledge of good and bad, which is like discernment or wisdom.
[7:04] So a tree of life and a tree of wisdom. And they're told, don't eat from that one yet, do eat from this one. And obviously it goes wrong, lots of you will know the story, they don't do what they're told, they end up being expelled from the garden, the whole story of the Bible kind of unfolds from there, sure.

But in that moment, where we're told that they walk with God, it's like they're face-to-face with God, they're enjoying God's presence and closeness and intimacy, those things happen in places with trees and fruit and running water.
In fact, in some ways, the whole story of the Bible as it unfolds is how do we get back there? And one of the things that the psalmist wants us to notice is that meditating on the words mediates the presence of God.
Let me say that again. Meditating on the word mediates the presence of God. What I mean by that is spending your time in the Bible is one of the ways that you encounter Jesus in his presence. Much like in the garden, Adam and Eve were like, they walked with God. How do you get back there? He says, well, be like a tree planted by water. How do you get back there?
[8:22] You meditate on the Bible. That's one of the ways that we find ourselves back in the presence of God. And we also get, actually, as Katie was highlighting earlier, how do you get to the presence of God in a kind of meeting together?

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Well, thanksgiving and praise. He says, I'll swear in the Psalms, we enter his courts with thanksgiving, we enter through his gates with praise. I've just got that the wrong way around, but same gist. We come into his presence through giving thanks to him, particularly for who he is.
It's good to give thanks in all circumstances. It's good to give thanks when good things happen. Sometimes good things don't happen. In fact, you might have noticed the Psalm seems to imply, oh, if I read the Bible, I'll prosper.
What that actually means is if you read the Bible, you'll grow up like a big strong tree, as in you'll be more like Jesus, rather than good things will happen to you. But it's good to give thanks when good things happen, yeah?
But actually, we can give thanks to God just for who he is and for what he's done for us. We can praise him, and when we do, he promises us that we will encounter him by his spirit. That's why, when we gather together, we particularly prize people coming and doing what we've heard people do this morning, opening the Bible and praying praise.
[9:41] Just being like, thank you, Jesus, for this thing. That's actually how all of us get caught up into the presence of Jesus. That's why we really prize it. Let's keep going. Well done to all those who did, but let's keep going.

We can all do that. So you can just, it's not what I'm supposed to be talking about, but you can just come and grab the microphone and say, thank you, Jesus, that you love me and give it back. That would be really great. That would draw lots of us into the presence of Jesus.
It would serve us and you. But meditate, what was I saying? Meditating on the word mediates the presence of God because walking with God is Eden life.
In fact, like I say, anytime you see a tree in the Bible, you're meant to think, has this got something to do with Genesis? And at the same time, you're then meant to go right to the end of the Bible and go, oh, has this got something to do with Revelation?
Because we start the Bible with trees, Genesis 1 and 2. We end the Bible with a tree, Revelation 21. That's the city that is the New Jerusalem. That's the church. It becomes clear kind of in the passage, but descends.
[10:40] It's described. It looks like a garden. Oh, and it's a city. Oh, and it's got a river throwing through it. Oh, and it's on a mountain. Oh, it's a bit like Eden. And there's a tree in the middle called the Tree of Life that somehow has a trunk on both banks of the river.

Which is interesting. It's like two trees have been woven together. It's like everything that went wrong in Eden has somehow been put right. And this tree has fruit in season, but every month. We're told that we'll be a tree that yields fruit in season, so not all the time, but one day a tree of life is coming that has fruit that feeds people, leaves that heal the nations, but fruit that feeds people all year round.
And then as we're looking from, oh, there was a problem in the garden with trees, and then at the end it seems like the tree problem has been fixed. I'm not quite sure I understand what the tree problem was. We might notice that in the middle of the Bible, not the literal middle, but the kind of thematic middle, we meet Jesus nailed to what the Bible keeps calling a tree.
Okay, it's a beam of wood, the cross, but the Bible keeps calling it a tree. And that's so that we spot that this problem with trees in the beginning and this solution with trees at the end comes, we kind of look from one to the other, comes through the cross.
[11:59] That it's as Jesus dies in our place that everything that was wrong in Eden is fixed for us. And that as we come to him in faith, we find our sin is forgiven and we're able again to meet with Jesus and enter his presence.

And every time you see a tree in the Bible, you should think this has something to do with that story. So to be told that essentially as you meditate on the word, you will be like a tree planted by a stream of water, you should think, are you telling me I get this Eden life?
Are you telling me I encounter Jesus, I can enjoy all that he's won for me as I meditate on the Bible? And that's what he's saying. In fact, even, you might not notice this, but the writer of the psalm wants you to know it so badly that this psalm is a mirror image of itself.
It's a little easier to see in the original language, but that first paragraph and that last paragraph, they deal with the same things in the same order so that right in the middle stands a tree. We're supposed to kind of look at it and go, this thing about trees matters.
He is perhaps speaking better than he knew, saying the cross stands right in the middle of all of this. Okay. So we're supposed to be like trees, transplanted, moved, to be like, to sit next to water.

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[13:22] I wonder if you've ever done that. I have tried, well, sort of tried a few times. I want to say I, I mean mostly Helen did it because I have brown fingers and she has green fingers, but I really love magnolia trees.

They sort of, they can be very big trees that have these really big flowers on them. They bud in Advent and they flower at Easter. So they're gospel trees.
This is how I view the world. But they exist to tell me a story, right? They're literally put there by the Lord so that you go, hang on, it buds in Advent and it flowers at Easter. This is a, this is a gospel tree.
I'm supposed to look at it and remember the story a lot of the world has given to us so that we do that so that we go, oh, yes, this story is actually written into creation for us, but I love them. They're beautiful. We have three times attempted to have one. We first, in our back garden in Nottingham, had a little one. It was, and got entirely swamped by a bush.
[14:23] In our front garden in Birmingham, we put another one in, slightly bigger this time. And then in one of those really hot summers a few years ago, sort of 40 degree heat kind of thing, the sun hit the glass of our car, or maybe the metal of our car, and bounced off it and essentially burned the tree.

So scorched it. So one was swamped and then one was scorched and this starts to sound like one of Jesus' parables, but the third one, which is a bigger one, put it somewhere else in the front garden and took a lot more care.
You know, put the hose pipe in the ground so you can pour water right down to the roots and carefully fed it and try to look after the thing. And I mean, admittedly, we then moved away, didn't we, because we came here. But certainly when we left, it was getting well established.
It didn't need so much care. It was able to feed itself. And there is something of a story there for us. This tree, it needed water right at the roots. It needed to be in the right place and we hadn't always put it in the right place.
And it needed love and care and attention, particularly to get established enough that it could feed itself. You are the same.
[15:33] If you're to be a tree planted by streams of water, you need to be in the right place. You need to get yourself into the Word. You can be swamped by things. You can be scorched by things.

You might be feeling like that this morning, even if that's not the language you use for it. It's like your faith, perhaps, is just sort of all tumbled over with stuff in your life, maybe not even bad stuff. There's nothing wrong with that bush that drowned the magnolia tree. It's just the tree couldn't live there. You might have felt scorched by things. But we need to put ourselves in the right place in order to be able to drink.
We need water right at our roots. We need love and care so that we can learn to feed ourselves. That's how we should think of reading the Bible. Not just as a chore that you're told to do and you find kind of tricky.
You're not really sure how to go about it. But we should be attempting, excuse me, but it's your source of life.
[16:38] These are the very words of Jesus given to feed us. I mean, it's that time of year we think a lot about food, right?

I mean, I do. Some of you probably do too. Many of us have had too much Christmas pudding and you can kind of feel that. We have eaten in our household a lot of cheese.
And there is that famous, in fact, we haven't eaten all the cheese, which is why you know Christmas isn't quite over yet. But it's that famous saying, you are what you eat. And you start to wonder at this time of year if you're kind of going to turn into a Christmas pudding or just start to smell of cheese, perhaps.
But do you know where that phrase comes from? That's St. Augustine. You are what you eat. I mean, he said, you become what you consume, which sounds a bit posher, but you are what you eat.
And he was talking about the Lord's Supper, about communion, which is a thought I'm not going to get into. Maybe we'll talk about it in another day. But the point holds that what we take in is what we turn into.
[17:43] What we consume is what we become. If you eat the Bible, if you like, you will look like Jesus.

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In Ezekiel chapter 3, God says to him, so Ezekiel's a prophet, God says to him, eat this scroll. And it was to be a piece of performance art that he would stand in front of the people and eat a scroll so that they'd remember that back in Deuteronomy, God had said, this is your food.
And people were largely ignoring it. In Matthew chapter 4, Jesus, when he's being tested by the devil himself and is asked to turn stones into bread, he responds by quoting that passage in Deuteronomy and says, man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Father.
He said, this is your food. The son is saying, this is your drink. What we eat is what we will become. Thank you. I'd only realised halfway through that it was on this slide, but anyway, Tom spent a lot of time designing that. Okay. So what we're thinking about this morning is essentially, how on earth do you be a disciple?
[19:14] And that's a difficult topic because I'm not trying to give you a, oh, it's the new year, you need a new year resolution, read your Bible more. And I actually think it would be quite easy to hear what I'm saying, that that's essentially, that's it.

It's like, come on, you've eaten a lot of food, you're all looking a bit tubby. You're not, but you'd be easy to believe that I'd be saying this. And then just come and read your Bible. You know, wake up. It's not quite it. I mean, that's good for you. There's nothing wrong with that kind of discipline, actually. There's nothing wrong with that at all. That's not quite it. What we're saying is we need to be disciples, that our food and drink comes from Jesus, his presence, and his word.
And the world is a complicated place. It's fast changing all the time. Most of us, it will have changed dramatically in our lifetimes. It looks very different to how it did 25 years ago.
It looks very different to how it did 5 years ago. It might feel like it's very different to how it did last week. That might be an exaggeration, but it feels like things change a lot. How do we live for Jesus in the moment that we find ourselves?
[20:23] That's a key question. In some ways, it's the question that we as a church, like how do we be disciples that we want to, it's not a, here's your answer, but we want to be thinking about and working on for years.

How do we follow Jesus well in the moment that we find ourselves? I mean, ultimately, it's not super different to any other moment. The things that make up discipleship are learning.
It's part of it. Learning, yeah, learning the Bible, learning Jesus and his presence and his spirit, community, being in authentic community with other people. You can't really be a Christian on your own.
It doesn't really work about the Bible. Jesus is quite explicit about that, but it just doesn't work. You need authentic Christian community in order to follow him and habits.
habits. Doing the same thing over and over again is good for you. It forms you and it changes you to be like him. And this is not, and it's about to sound like, ha ha, the thing I'm about to tell you about is the solution to all of this.
[21:26] It's not. In fact, it's not a solution at all. But we are this year launching something which might be a small part of a help to that. We are keen to spend more time in the Bible together.

And so we are launching something cleverly called Sunday Bible Study, which you can probably figure out quite a lot about it from the name. But roughly once a month, we will, I don't know why I said roughly, it will be once a month, we will gather together on a Sunday evening to open the Bible. You might be like, what, more preaching? No. No, we're just going to open the Bible together and explore. And ask questions. And have you ask your questions. And see what it would teach us with a relatively minimal agenda.
We're going to spend the first three or four months in the book of Ruth. I don't really know what we're going to do after that. But that's where we'll begin. Just kind of teasing our way through the story.
What's actually going on? Where's Jesus? What does he have to say to us? Anticipating that we will meet God, he will change us, and we'll encounter his presence. But actually with very little agenda. I'd love you to come.
[22:36] I mean, I'll have fun sat on my own probably, but that's not quite what we're aiming for. Why not consider this? So starting in February, and then each month after that, I think we've just put them through to the summer for now.

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But why don't we gather together and just sit under the Word, if you're able to, and see what it would teach us. That is not a solution to the idea that, oh, I need to meditate on the Bible.
In fact, we're not really looking for solutions. We need a way of life. But it might be part of a picture. Deliberately on a Sunday, weeknights get very full.
The Sunday's the Lord's Day. If a little bit more like we can ask you, when do you come to this? When we put a new thing on a Sunday. But do consider it. It's a few weeks off. Do you look at your diary. Do you think, could I make that? Would that work?
Why don't I try it? And let's kind of figure out together exactly how that's going to look. But we should be mutters of the Word. We do need to live cross-shaped lives.
[23:37] We should be planted and rooted in community and in the Bible and in habits. Now, I said earlier, that can all sound an awful lot like resolutions.

And I said, it's not really. And then I probably said more things, that sound like stuff you need to do. Now, I'd just like to show you something that might help us see why this is not quite the same thing as just get some discipline.
Discipline's good. But on its own, it kills. The question I'd like us to ask of this passage that I've read and that we should always ask when we encounter this kind of thing in the Bible is, who's the he? Who's the man that it's talking about? I've clearly throughout said, whether it's you. There's some truth to that. But any time, and the Old Testament, but in fact, both Old and New Testament usually use the masculine to refer to all people.
But any time that we find a kind of a singular he, we should ask, just who is this? Who's the one who's blessed, who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked?
[24:46] Who's the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night? That's verse 2. That helps us because that's an allusion to Joshua chapter 1, verse 8, which says, the book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

For then you will make your way prosperous and you will have good success. The psalmist is deliberately pointing to that. We're actually going to spend quite a bit of time in Joshua a little bit later on this year, but he's saying you need to be a man like Joshua.
Okay. And you won't have noticed this, but the structure of the psalm is the same structure as Deuteronomy 17, which is the instructions given to kings. So he's actually saying you need to be a king like Joshua.
Interesting. A king like Joshua. Some of you will know that Joshua in Greek is the easis, which in English is Jesus because Jesus' name is Joshua. They both mean Yahweh saves.
So this, the writer of this psalm is saying what we really need is a king like Joshua. And right in the middle there is a tree and he says that's where we should look for him.
[26:04] The psalms are always about Jesus. But this one that opens up the whole book of the psalms which has a plot and a story which mirrors Jesus' life deliberately and then the church's life after that in books 4 and 5.

But it's saying this is Jesus. Jesus is the righteous man who is calling us to live like him. Jesus is the one who's blessed.
Jesus walks not in the counsel of the wicked. Jesus does not stand in the way of sinners and Jesus does not sit in the seat of scoffers. Jesus' delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law Jesus meditates day and night.
Jesus is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither. In all that Jesus does he prospers and on it goes.
What Jesus is saying is not just buck up your ideas it's come and live in me. Life comes from Jesus.
[27:11] What we often call grace which just means gift is the idea that yes discipline is good but ultimately you're rescued by the fact that Jesus reached out and takes your hand you didn't do it yourself.

It is the same with our discipline we have to do something yes but when we do it rooted in Christ we find that he's the one where life comes from. We don't do it because we think we'll be able to figure everything out.
We don't do it because we think oh I'll become big and strong and be able to walk on my own. We don't do it because somehow we'll be able to justify ourselves or look good in the eyes of God.

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You can't but Jesus does and he invites us to stand in him. You still have to do stuff but you do it with a big old smile on your face that you couldn't make the Lord love you more if you tried.
You know what if you don't read your Bible at all this whole year will Jesus love you any less? No. Probably not supposed to tell you that am I? But no.
[28:16] He won't. He won't love you a jot less. If you don't pray all year will he love you any less? No. Here's the thing you will love him less if you don't pray.

You will love him less if you don't read your Bible. But he isn't going to change how he feels about you he adores you he's for you and he's rescued you if you know him and are following him and trust him.
Which I think actually makes me a lot more motivated to do the things he suggests might be a good idea. He's the righteous man he calls us to live like him I'm probably talking for too long but I did just want to highlight forgive me for putting all these notices in the middle of my message but we have again a time of prayer and fasting we're calling it rooted and fruitful again like we did in the autumn in the start of February when we're going to have the details about what events and what time and the rest of it will come out in due course but we will have time together together to pray we're inviting people to fast if you'd like to try to fast it if you've never fasted before try missing a meal if you've done more try a little bit more than you have before if you reckon you can do all three days we'll just go for it but it is again a chance to be well rooted and fruitful we're deliberately using this kind of language from Psalm 1 time to spend time together in prayer to encounter Jesus he won't love you anymore if you don't eat for three days but you might find you love him more than food which sounds impossible at this time of year doesn't it it is possible so we're asking we're trying this year to be rooted in the word trying to be fruitful in the kingdom trying to get into his presence by giving thanks as Katie was encouraging us to earlier friends let's take Jesus seriously this year church isn't a thing you come to
Christianity isn't an add-on and Jesus does change everything what we're going to do now is the band are going to come and we are going to praise this Jesus who is the blessed man who delights in the law and offers us life why don't we stand together I'm going to pray and I'll lead us in a song
Lord Jesus we are thankful that you are rooted in your father's love so that we can look at you and learn how to do it we're thankful that you love us whether we do the right things or not we're thankful that you are the one who came to take away the curse of the tree and bore it on yourself so that we can eat freely of life and wisdom forevermore we're thankful that you've given us your words in a book not always easy to understand do help us
Lord but given us your words so that we know what you think about the world so you know what you think about us so that we know what you think about life and we can know how to follow you we're thankful that you love us so much you want us to grow up big and strong like trees planted by streams of water we're just really thankful you love us Lord help us feel that if we're not if we're all kind of cold and new yeary and a bit tired and help us encounter again by your spirit the fact that you're for us and you delight in us thank you amen thank you Thank you.

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