



# SUNDAY SCHOOL FEBRUARY 15, 2026

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## Old Testament: Psalm 112:1-9

*Context: Psalm 112 paints a portrait of the “blessed” life - not as luck or comfort, but as steady courage, generous hands, and a faith that holds firm when the news is bad.*

### BLESSINGS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Praise the Lord!

Happy are those who fear the Lord,  
who greatly delight in his commandments.  
Their descendants will be mighty in the land;  
the generation of the upright will be blessed.  
Wealth and riches are in their houses,  
and their righteousness endures forever.  
They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright;  
they are gracious, merciful, and righteous.  
It is well with those who deal generously and lend,  
who conduct their affairs with justice.  
For the righteous will never be moved;  
they will be remembered forever.  
They are not afraid of evil tidings;  
their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.  
Their hearts are steady; they will not be afraid;  
in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.  
They have distributed freely; they have given to the poor;  
their righteousness endures forever;  
their horn is exalted in honor.

### OVERVIEW

Psalm 112:1-9 is a wisdom-style psalm that describes what a life shaped by reverence for God looks like over time. It is practical and earthy: character, money, reputation, fear, family, and community impact.

#### Key themes:

- **Blessing** as stability and integrity, not flash.
- **Generosity** as a lifestyle, not an occasional donation.
- **Fearlessness** rooted in trust, not bravado.
- **Righteousness** expressed in justice, mercy, and long-term faithfulness.

It is also intentionally “structured” - almost like an A-to-Z poem in Hebrew (an acrostic), suggesting a complete, well-ordered life.



## BIBLICAL CONTEXT

### What comes right before: Psalm 111

Psalm 111 celebrates **God's character and works**: faithful, just, gracious, compassionate, providing for God's people, keeping covenant. It ends with: *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."*

Psalm 112 then answers: "Okay - what does that wisdom look like in a human life?"

- **Psalm 111 = Who God is**
- **Psalm 112 = Who we become when we take God seriously**

They're a matched pair: God's righteousness in 111 is mirrored by human righteousness in 112 - not as "we become God," but as "we become like the God we worship."

### What comes right after: Psalm 113

Psalm 113 opens the "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118), often associated with Israel's worship and (later) Passover praise. Its focus shifts to God's **highness and nearness**: exalted yet attentive to the poor and barren, lifting up the lowly.

So, Psalm 112's portrait of generosity toward the poor flows naturally into Psalm 113's praise of God who raises the poor.

### The broader narrative and theology of the Book of Psalms

Psalms is Israel's prayer book - poetry that gives language to faith across the full range of life: celebration, grief, anger, doubt, confidence, repentance, hope.

Theologically, Psalms holds two truths together:

- **God reigns** (even when life feels chaotic).
- **The righteous life matters** (not as a transaction, but as alignment with God's way).

Psalm 112 sits in the "wisdom" stream inside Psalms (along with Psalm 1, 37, 73, 119, etc.), describing the **shape** of a faithful life - especially how faith touches daily decisions and relationships.

## HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Psalm 112 reflects a world where:

- Households were economic units (land, livestock, labor, extended family).
- Communities depended on trust, reputation, and mutual responsibility.
- There were no modern safety nets; poverty could be sudden and devastating (crop failure, illness, debt).

So, phrases like "wealth and riches are in his house" and "he has distributed freely to the poor" land in a real social setting:

- **Wealth** is not automatically condemned or praised; what matters is **how it is held and used**.
- **Righteousness** includes ethical economics: fairness, honesty, generosity, and protection of the vulnerable.



There's also a subtle "public life" angle: "He conducts his affairs with justice... he will be remembered... his horn is exalted... the wicked sees it and is angry."

In other words, righteousness is not just private virtue - it becomes a witness in the public square, and it will create pushback from people who benefit from cynicism, exploitation, or fear.

## HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Pinning down a single date for Psalm 112 is tough because many psalms were used and reshaped in worship across generations. But most scholars place this style comfortably in Israel's **post-exilic** or **late monarchic to post-exilic** worship life (roughly **700-300 BC** as a broad lane).

What we can say with confidence:

- It's part of Book V of Psalms (Psalms 107-150), often associated with restoration themes and community formation after national trauma.
- Its wisdom/acrostic form suggests it was crafted for teaching and memorability - something you'd want sung and learned.

## BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

### Original language and form

- Written in **Hebrew poetry**.
- Likely an **alphabetic acrostic** (each line/half-line begins with successive Hebrew letters). That matters because it signals intention: "Here is a complete A-to-Z portrait of the righteous life."

### Major stages of English translation (quick, practical summary)

- **Early**: Latin tradition (Vulgate) shaped Western Christianity's reading for centuries.
- **Reformation-era English**: translations like **Tyndale** influenced later English Bible wording.
- **KJV and its legacy**: the King James tradition carried Psalms into English worship language.
- **Modern translations**: draw from broader manuscript evidence and aim for clarity (some more word-for-word, some more thought-for-thought).

### Theologically significant word choices in Psalm 112

Here are a few "layered" terms where English can flatten meaning:

#### 1. "Fear of the Lord" (v.1)

- Not terror. More like reverent awe, loyalty, "God is God and I'm not."
- In a rural-church setting, this is a key clarification: *fear* here produces **steadiness**, not anxiety.

#### 2. "Righteous" (vv.4, 6, 9)

- Not just "morally correct."

#### 3. It includes **right relationships**: fairness, integrity, faithfulness, generosity, justice.

- Notice: the psalm defines "righteous" with actions: lending, giving, conducting affairs with justice.

#### 4. "Gracious / merciful / compassionate" (v.4)

- These are often words used for **God** elsewhere - here applied to the righteous person.
- Translation matters because some versions stack these as separate traits; the point is that righteous living **mirrors God's character**.



5. “He is not afraid of bad news” (v.7)

- “Bad news” is literal - rumor, report, threat, economic uncertainty.
- The righteous person isn’t naive; they’re anchored.

6. “Horn” (v.9)

- An ancient symbol of strength, honor, dignity - not aggression.
- Think “head held high,” not “showing off.”

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

A helpful metaphor: Psalm 112 is a portrait of a community’s “human infrastructure.”

We talk about infrastructure as roads, bridges, water lines. But towns also run on invisible infrastructure:

- trust
- honesty
- neighborliness
- steady leadership
- generosity when someone’s in a bind

Psalm 112 says the “blessed” person becomes a **load-bearing beam** in that invisible structure.

Bringing it down to modern life (and Grant County vibes)

- “Wealth and riches” doesn’t have to mean being rich. It can mean: the household that’s stable enough to help someone else - even in small ways.
- “Not afraid of bad news” is the opposite of being driven by the outrage cycle, fear-based politics, or rumor-as-fact.
- “Conducts affairs with justice” looks like fair dealing in a small town:
  - honest work
  - paying people what you said you would
  - refusing the “good ol’ boy discount” if it harms someone
  - not exploiting someone’s desperation
- “Distributed freely to the poor” can be literal giving, but also:
  - rides to appointments
  - a meal train
  - covering a utility bill quietly
  - helping someone find work
  - showing up when someone’s overwhelmed

The “pushback” line (v.10)

*“The wicked sees it and is angry.”*

*In plain terms: generous steadiness exposes selfishness. A person who won’t panic, won’t cheat, and won’t hate on command makes certain systems look silly - so they get mocked.*

The “they” refers to **the steady, generous person** — not the systems.

In other words, when someone refuses to:

- panic when everyone else is panicking,



- cheat when everyone else is cutting corners,
- hate when outrage is expected,

... that person quietly exposes how much the surrounding culture runs on fear, greed, or tribalism.

And when that happens, people who benefit from the system often respond by mocking the righteous person.

Think of phrases like:

- “You’re naive.”
- “That’s not how the real world works.”
- “You’re too soft.”
- “Nice guys finish last.”
- “You’ll learn.”

The mockery is a defense mechanism. If I can belittle your integrity, I don’t have to examine my compromise.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

- **Redefine “blessed”**
  - Not “everything goes my way.”
  - More like: I’m becoming the kind of person who can be trusted when life gets hard.
- **Be a non-anxious presence**
  - **“Not afraid of bad news”** does not mean uninformed.
  - *It means you don’t let fear drive your ethics.*
  - *A great spiritual discipline here: pause before sharing the headline, the rumor, the outrage.*
- **Do justice in ordinary transactions**
  - Your “righteousness” shows up in how you hire, pay, tip, loan, forgive, and speak.
  - In other words: holiness has **receipts**.

In everyday language, when someone says “I’ve got receipts,” they mean:

I have evidence. Proof. Documentation. This isn’t just talk.

So applied to Psalm 112, the idea is:

- Holiness isn’t vague.
- It isn’t just a feeling.
- It isn’t just saying “I love God.”

It shows up in actual transactions:

- how you lend money
- how you pay people
- how you speak about someone not in the room
- how you treat someone who can’t benefit you
- whether your generosity is measurable



### In Psalm 112:

- “He conducts his affairs with justice.”
- “He distributes freely to the poor.”
- “He is not afraid of bad news.”
- “His heart is steady.”

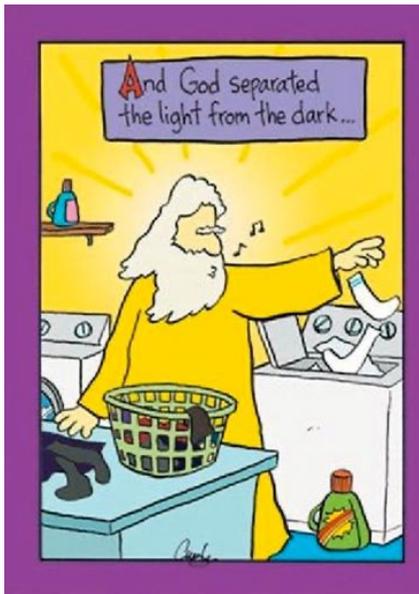
Those are observable. They leave traces.

That’s what “receipts” means — the evidence of a life aligned with God shows up in real-world patterns.

- **Expect that integrity may irritate people**
  - If you live steady and generous, some folks will call you naive or “too soft.”
  - Psalm 112 says: that reaction is not your alarm bell - it’s sometimes your confirmation.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Verse 7 says the righteous person is “**not afraid of bad news.**” What kinds of “bad news” most easily hijack your mind: money, health, family, politics, the future?
- Psalm 112 links **righteousness** with generosity and justice. Why do you think the Bible ties those together so tightly?
- “He conducts his affairs with justice” (v.5) - what does that look like in everyday life: work, shopping, borrowing/lending, gossip, social media?
- The psalm suggests a person’s life leaves a **legacy** (“remembered forever”). What do you hope people remember about you - and what daily habits would actually produce that?
- Verse 10 says the wicked get angry at this kind of life. Have you ever experienced pushback for doing the right thing? What helped you stay steady?
- If our church tried to live Psalm 112 more intentionally for one year, what would change in how the community experiences us?
- What is one small, concrete practice you could start this week that aligns with Psalm 112 (a giving habit, a fairness habit, a “non-anxious” habit)?





## Gospel: Matthew 5:13-20

***Context: Jesus tells His disciples who they are meant to be in the world: salt that preserves and light that shines, not hidden faith. And He clarifies that He is not canceling the Law, but fulfilling it - calling His followers into a deeper righteousness.***

### SALT AND LIGHT

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

### THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

“Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

### OVERVIEW

Matthew 5:13-20 is the "you are" section of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus moves from blessing (Beatitudes) to vocation: His people are to live in a way that flavors, preserves, illuminates, and points others to God. Then He addresses a likely misunderstanding: His message is not anti-Scripture or anti-tradition. Instead, He claims He fulfills the Law and the Prophets, and He raises the bar from rule-keeping to heart-level faithfulness ("righteousness" that exceeds the scribes and Pharisees).

### BIBLICAL CONTEXT

#### **Immediately Before (Matthew 5:1-12)**

- **The Beatitudes** describe the kind of people who belong to the kingdom: humble, merciful, pure-hearted, peacemaking, able to endure pushback.
- That matters because "salt and light" is not a generic moral pep talk. Jesus is saying: *people shaped like the Beatitudes are exactly the people through whom God blesses the world.*

#### **Immediately After (Matthew 5:21-48)**

- Jesus gives the "You have heard... but I say..." teachings (anger/murder, lust/adultery, truthfulness, enemy-love, etc.).
- That section is basically a worked example of verse 20: righteousness that goes beyond external compliance into internal transformation and practiced love.

### **Broader Narrative and Theology of the Gospel of Matthew**



- Matthew presents Jesus as Israel's Messiah and authoritative teacher, deeply rooted in the Old Testament story.
- Major themes: the kingdom of heaven, fulfillment of Scripture, discipleship, a righteousness that is real (not performative), and the formation of a community that embodies God's character in public.
- The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) is one of Matthew's central teaching blocks: it describes what kingdom life looks like in everyday relationships, ethics, worship, and public witness.

#### HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Roman occupation:** Jesus teaches under the shadow of Roman power (taxation, soldiers, political pressure). Public life is charged, and "kingdom" language is not neutral.
- **Jewish religious leadership:** Scribes and Pharisees (often respected local leaders) emphasize Torah faithfulness. Many ordinary Jews are trying to stay faithful in a world that feels spiritually compromised and politically controlled.
- **Honor/shame and community reputation:** "Let your light shine" is not private spirituality. In village life, public reputation matters - and hypocrisy is especially damaging.
- **Debates about the Law:** In Jesus' world, arguments about how to interpret commandments were constant. When Jesus says He "fulfills" the Law, He is stepping into a live controversy about authority, interpretation, and what obedience really means.

#### HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Setting:** Early in Jesus' public ministry in Galilee (Matthew 4-5).
- **Rough timeframe:** Commonly placed around the late 20s AD (often approx. AD 27-30), during the governorship of Pontius Pilate in Judea and under Roman rule broadly.
- **Matthew's writing:** Many scholars date Matthew to the later first century (often somewhere around AD 70-90), written to form and instruct Christian communities living in a complex Jewish-Gentile world after major upheavals in Jerusalem.

#### BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

##### Original Language and Key Terms

The passage is in Greek. A few words carry layers that shape interpretation:

- **"Salt":** More than taste - in the ancient world it can imply preservation, value, and even covenant imagery (salt as a sign of loyalty/faithfulness). When salt becomes "tasteless", the verb can also mean "become foolish." That is a subtle punch: useless discipleship is not only ineffective, it is foolish.
- **"Light" / "lamp":** Light is guidance and visibility. The issue is not "look at me," but "make God visible through your lived goodness."
- **"Good works":** "Good" here leans toward beautiful, admirable, compelling - the kind of life that makes others take God seriously.
- **"Fulfill":** Not "abolish and replace," but "bring to fullness," "complete," "fill up with meaning." Jesus is saying the Law reaches its intended goal in Him.
- **"Righteousness":** Not just private morality. It includes covenant faithfulness, right relationships, and justice-shaped living.



## Major Stages of English Translation (Very Brief)

- Early English was influenced by Latin tradition (and later Greek manuscripts): Wycliffe (from Latin), then Tyndale (from Greek), then major committee translations like the KJV, and later modern critical-text translations (RSV/NRSV, NIV, ESV, etc.).
- Translation differences that matter here:
  - "Fulfill" vs "complete" or "accomplish" changes how people hear Jesus (as anti-law or as the Law's true center).
  - "Least" and "great" in the kingdom can sound like a ranking system, but in context it is about seriousness of obedience and integrity in teaching, not spiritual elitism.

## SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

### Salt: Presence that preserves and heals

Metaphorically, salt is "quiet influence." It does not dominate a room; it changes what it touches.

- In a place like Grant County, this can look like stabilizing influence when people feel worn down: steady kindness, reliability, and neighborliness that holds a community together.
- Salt also stings when it hits a wound. Sometimes "doing good" includes hard honesty, accountability, or boundary-setting - but done in a healing way, not a humiliating way.

### Light: Visibility without performative faith

Light is meant to be seen, but the goal is not personal spotlight - it is so "they may glorify your Father."

- In small-town settings, people watch consistency. If faith only shows up in church talk but not in how we treat service workers, family members, or people we disagree with, the light gets hidden.
- Light is also directional: it helps others navigate. That can mean being the person who de-escalates drama, refuses gossip, and keeps showing up when someone is sick, grieving, or struggling.

## HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

- **Be salt before you speak:** Ask, "Does what I'm about to say preserve, heal, and build trust - or does it corrode?"
- **Make your faith observable through ordinary goodness:** Not flashy. Just consistent: showing up, serving, apologizing, forgiving, doing the right thing when it costs you.
- **Refuse performative righteousness:** Do you need to be seen as righteous? Are you beating your chest or gently pointing to God when no one sees you?
- **Treat Scripture as something to fulfill, not win with:** "Fulfill" means our reading should produce love of God and neighbor, integrity, mercy, and justice - not just arguments.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Jesus says to let our light shine so others glorify God. What is the difference between shining light and showing off?*



- *Where do you see the temptation toward "performative faith" in church culture today?*
- *In our community, what is one specific place that could use more "light" right now? What would it look like to bring it, practically?*
- *Is there a command of Jesus that you tend to treat as optional? What would it mean to take it seriously without becoming judgmental?*
- *Who has been "salt" or "light" to you in your life? What did they do that made it feel real?*





## Addendum

### “Fear the Lord”: What Are We Actually Talking About?

As an Addendum to this week's scripture and message, I'd like to dig into how people interpret the term "fear the Lord." To me, it's very Old Testament, where you fear that if you do something wrong, then you'll be punished. I'm not sure that's my theology. Jesus preaches forgiveness, acceptance and peace ... I don't get much “fear” in that.

But, are we saddled with: *Do something wrong* → *God gets angry* → *consequences follow*.

That framework *does* exist in parts of the Old Testament, particularly in covenant law and prophetic warning. But even there, it's often misunderstood.

#### **What “fear” is not**

- It is **not** constant anxiety.
- It is **not** cowering terror.
- It is **not** “God is looking for reasons to punish me.”
- It is **not** the emotional opposite of love.

If fear meant that, Psalm 112 would collapse on itself — because the person who “fears the Lord” is described as:

- confident
- steady
- generous
- not afraid of bad news
- peaceful

Fear that produces calm is clearly not terror.

#### **Old Testament “Fear”: Awe, Not Panic**

In Hebrew, “fear of the Lord” carries layers closer to:

- awe
- reverence
- deep respect
- moral seriousness
- alignment with reality

A helpful everyday analogy (especially for a rural or practical crowd): It's the kind of “fear” you have for fire, the ocean, heavy machinery, or electricity. You don't panic every time you're near them — but you **respect their power** and **don't treat them casually**.

So, in the Old Testament, “fear the Lord” often means: *Live as though God is real, powerful, just, and not manageable.*

That fear produces wisdom, not neurosis.



## *Where Jesus Changes the Emphasis (But Not the Foundation)*

Here's where my theology is:

Jesus does **not** erase reverence — but He **reframes the relationship**.

Jesus consistently moves people:

- from fear of punishment → toward trust
- from external obedience → toward internal transformation
- from anxiety → toward peace

Think about how often Jesus says:

- “Do not be afraid.”
- “Peace be with you.”
- “Your sins are forgiven.”
- “Come to me, all who are weary.”

*That is not a fear-based spirituality.*

**Old framework (that many people still carry):**

- If I don't obey, God will punish me.

**Biblical & Jesus framework:**

- God is the grounding reality of life. Ignoring Him has consequences, not because He's vindictive, but because reality always pushes back.
- God's love invites you into a life where fear no longer drives you — but reverence still guides you.
- Or even more simply: Fear of the Lord is not being scared of God. It is taking God seriously.

## *Why Psalm 112 Matters Here*

Psalm 112 shows us the fruit of proper “fear”:

- generosity, not hoarding
- courage, not panic
- justice, not exploitation
- peace, not paranoia

If someone's “fear of God” produces:

- harshness
- judgmentalism
- obsession with punishment
- constant anxiety

Then whatever that is — **it isn't Psalm 112 fear**



## *What Kind of Life does “fear the Lord” produce?*

Then let Psalm 112 answer:

- steady
- compassionate
- fearless in the face of bad news
- generous
- grounded

If our faith makes us more afraid, more angry, or more judgmental — are we sure we’re fearing the Lord... or fearing something else?

We’re not rejecting Scripture. We’re refusing a **fear-based caricature of God** that doesn’t look like Jesus.

**“Fear the Lord” doesn’t mean: *God is dangerous.***

**It means: *God matters.***

*And Jesus shows us that when God truly matters, fear gives way to love, peace, courage, and trust.*

