

Psalm 1  
June 13, 2021

Life is a journey and the road is often grueling. At times, we find our travel shrouded by a thick fog of confusion. Sometimes the road we must travel is littered with boulders of anxiety. Sometimes, we stroll through a stretch of road regaled with the gentle breezes of contentment. Sometimes we face a section of road full of twists and turns with the villains of leukemia, miscarriages, Alzheimer's, and COPD lying in wait. Other times the underbrush of despondency is so thick you can't see where the road goes. Other times, you experience the gentle reviving rain of good times with good friends.

Wherever the road of life takes you, the Psalms serves as a guidebook for the journey. In the Psalter, we have the songs and prayers of the saints who have traveled this same road we are on now. This book records the songs and prayers of saints ashamed, afraid, isolated, grateful, bored and besieged.

The Psalms are their songs and prayers.

Our goal in this series is that their songs and prayers become ours.

Luther, who loved and lived in these Psalms describes how they can help us all:

*"The human heart is like a ship on a stormy sea driven about by winds blowing from all four corners of heaven. The Book of Psalms is full of heartfelt utterances made during storms of this kind. Where can one find nobler words to express joy than in the Psalms of praise or gratitude? In them you can see into the hearts of saints as if you were looking at a lovely pleasure-garden, or were gazing into heaven. How fair and charming and delightful and the flowers you will find there." Martin Luther*

Today, we start at the beginning. We start our journey in the Psalms for this summer by considering Psalm 1. Interestingly, Psalm 1 is neither a song nor a prayer. Instead, Psalm 1 is an introduction to the whole book. The introduction is a little different than we might be used to. Instead of telling introducing us to the book as a whole—Psalm 1 seeks to introduce us to ourselves.

In other words, this Psalm is going to tell us that there are ONLY two kinds of people who read these songs and prayers and will implicitly ask the question—which are you?

Two kinds of people

NOT

Extrovert & Introvert  
Old & Young  
Cynical & Naïve  
Republican & Democrat

American & Everyone else  
Poor & Rich  
Intelligent & Dullard

No, the Psalms consistently divides humanity into TWO groups—

The righteous & The wicked

Those are the only two kinds of people. Or we might say that there are only two roads to travel upon, the road of the righteous and the road of the wicked. Those on the road of the righteous are not perfect but they trust God most of all. Those on the road of the wicked are not as bad as they can be but they trust themselves most of all.

Psalms 1 calls to us with from ages gone by to any who will listen saying,

PROP: Entrust yourself to Jesus and be happy.

[1] 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;  
[2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
    and on his law he meditates day and night.

[3] 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.  
[4] The wicked are not so,  
    but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

[5] Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
    nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
[6] for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
    but the way of the wicked will perish. (ESV)

PRAY

Two points as we consider this road to happiness—

Your Guide (on the journey)  
Your End (of the journey)

### **1. Your Guide: Instruction (Psalm 1:1-4)**

Your guide to happiness is the instruction of the Lord. This comes directly from verse 2,

[2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

When we hear the word “law” we are apt to think “the opposite of grace.” That is generally NOT the case in the Bible—and especially NOT here. The delight the Psalmist is referring to is the instruction of the Lord.

Laws just tell us what we CANNOT do.

The instruction of the Lord directs us both in how to live and what to love; in what to avoid and what to cling to; in how to think and how not to think. The instruction of the Lord is our guide through life.

What is the effect of this sort of guidance?

Happiness.

Look at verse 1,

[1] 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;

Blessed is a churchy word that doesn’t often seem to intersect with normal life on forgettable Tuesday afternoons, but the idea here is happiness in life. The Psalmist stands here at the beginning of this book and essentially says, “I know what you want, because it is what everyone wants, you want to be happy.”

Don’t you want to be happy? I do.

I long to be happy and not just distracted or constantly looking ahead to the next thing that might strike my fancy. I want to be happy and not escape reality. I want to be happy and not go through the motions of life.

I want to be happy—and I know you do too.

How?

First, what not to do.

The happy man/woman is first marked by what they DO NOT DO. What is that?

[1] 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;

Walks NOT.

Stands NOT.

Sits NOT.

- Walks NOT in the counsel of the wicked

This means the righteous ones do not live by the counsel/wisdom/advice/ conventional wisdom of the fallen world. This does not mean that unbelievers have no wisdom to offer, rather it means that the system they adhere to is broken and fallen.

- Stands NOT in the way of sinners

Here the image goes from walking to standing. At first, there is a walking by and overhearing the counsel of the wicked that comes from their corrupt system. Here we have a standing on the path of sinners considering their ways, though the system is broken and fallen.

- Sits NOT in the seat of scoffers

Here the image moves from walking by overhearing, standing and considering, to sitting and participating with the wicked. Here we have someone sitting amongst the scoffers and scoffing against the Lord just like anyone else.

What might this look like? Let's try and take an example of an overriding philosophy of our fallen world that people live by and apply it to what we just read. It is too easy to say, "I would never be tempted by the counsel of the wicked much less participate in it with them."

Really? We are not as strong as we think.

We must remember that the world's system is fallen and runs counter to the word of God. Here is an example of this deadly counsel the fallen system of the world offers: Do what you think is right.

This bit of counsel is as omnipresent as it is deadly. "Do what you feels right" is packaged in a variety of ways including:

- Do what feels good.
- You only live once, have fun.

- Do what feels good.
- Be your authentic self.
- Follow your heart.
- You do you.

The “Do what feels right” counsel might saturate our culture more than any other. So, how does Psalm 1 help us?

Walks NOT.  
 Stands NOT.  
 Sits NOT.

The wicked to the opposite.

They DO

Walk, Stand, Sit in the counsel of the wicked.

- Walks counsel of the wicked

What feels right is often not what is right. Obedience to the Lord will often feel wrong and much too difficult. What feels right is often easiest and moves away from the Lord. The happy one knows that they will not always feel like being faithful to their spouse, but walks by the counsel, “do what feels right.” The happy one knows that it is easy to speak spiteful words as a way of venting and getting things off their chest because ‘that just feels right,’ but the happy one walks past that advice.

Sometimes the counsel of the wicked gains a bit of purchase in our hearts and we are tempted to—

- Stands in the way of sinners

When someone stands in the way of sinners—he/she starts to seriously consider how much happier they would be if they just did what feels right. Instead of considering God’s word, thoughts like “how could this be wrong? Everyone else seems happy. Could they all be wrong?” And so instead of remaining faithful to spouses, they instead become faithful to their fleeting feelings of what feels right. Words. Easy to consider just blowing up in anger to others to ensure they understand—this is standing in the way of sinners—thinking about adopting their lifestyle.

When you consider this advice—then adopt it.

- Sit in the seat of scoffers

Adopting the worldview of 'do what feels good' causes someone to become a scoffer. Scoffers do not curse God and says that Jesus is a farce. They say—there are other ways to be happy. They say, I have never been closer to the Lord even though their lives have never been marked by more disobedience. They sit in the seat of scoffers and say, "if your spouse is not meeting your needs" do what feels right for you. They say, "who cares what anyone thinks?" say what feels right.

This is the one who sits comfortably in the seat of scoffers. Scoffers say things like:

- You can drink to excess if you just need to escape if it feels right.
- You can live to make money and buy what you want if it feels right.
- You can love a man and be a man and be a Christian if it feels right.
- You can trust yourself even if all the Christians you know say the opposite if it feels right.

But the righteous

Walks NOT.

Stands NOT.

Sits NOT.

What do they do?

[2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Delight, enjoy the instruction of the Lord. The happy ones are happy because they listen to the Lord's instruction for their lives. See?

What is the effect?

[3] 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.

He/she is like a strong tree that is firmly planted by 'streams of water.' A better way to render this is a tree planted by irrigation canals. In the desert, as we know, rivers and streams can go dry. We desert dwellers know this just like the Israelites did. If you drive down to Tempe right now and cross over the salt river, you will just see a bunch of dirt.

It flows when only flows when it rains.

But on the other hand, the canals that interlace the whole valley never go dry. I have a canal behind my home that is always full of water.

The righteous—the ones on the road of righteousness—are a like a tree planted by ever flowing irrigation canal.

that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers

That almost sounds too good to be true.

Consider this.

The fruit that the righteous bear is not always constantly but only 'in its season.' The Lord is the one who determines the season of our fruitfulness. It may be that our season of bearing fruit come after decades and decades of finding happiness in the word of God.

In the meantime, its leaf does not wither.

This just means that Christians may not always be bearing fruit, but we are constantly alive. The signs of life is the desire to please the Lord.

Do we want to please the lord enough? No.  
Is there room to please the Lord more? Yes.

Because we are indwelt by the Spirit of God we are going to be alive. When we sin—and we do sin—we will be grieved that is a sign of life.

When we are blessed by God—and we are blessed—we will be grateful.  
When we hear of people who meet God—we will be moved.  
The sign of life is that we might want to please the Lord more.

In all that he does, he prospers

This sort of prospering may not be with what a fallen world considers prosperous—we may not have:

- All the money we want
- The perfect body
- The perfect job
- The perfect house
- The perfect mental state
- The perfect reputation

But prosperity is not measured by those things. We are prosperous when we strive to please God—even when we obey and don't feel like it. Even when we walk this road of affliction knowing that the Lord sees and knows and cares and helps us.

The righteous—those who walk the road of righteousness—are like a tall, well-nourished tree.

The other kind of person? The wicked:

[4] The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

One problem we have when we come to the Bible is that none of us are farmers. None of us have to separate the wheat kernel from the chaff to be able to ground the wheat into flour and then into bread to eat. We got to Costco or Fry's to get bread.

The original audience had to harvest the wheat and separate it from the chaff. The way they did this was by throwing the wheat up in the air and letting the chaff be carried off in the wind.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMa7I28uFyQ>

Play: 3:07 – 3:30

All that stubble that is blown away—that is chaff. That chaff is carried out and on by the wind never to be gathered again. It tumbles about carried upon the wind with no weight, no substance in itself.

That, the Psalmist says is the wicked.

Blown around.

Blown over.

Blown from here to there.

Blown about.

Blown away.

And that is the contrast.

Tree vs. chaff

Which would you rather be?

Which are you?

Those that traverse the righteous road will be like trees always green and bearing fruit. Those that go down the road of wickedness will be blown around with no root in themselves.

Do you see?



What road are you on?

If you are not following Jesus—you will be blown about here, there and all over the place. You will be searching for happiness and meaning and all the while just get blown around. You will move from one thing to another. You will find that what you thought could give you happiness—

- All the money we want
- The perfect body
- The perfect job
- The perfect house
- The perfect mental state
- The perfect reputation

Does not.

Genuine happiness does not come from anything that this broken system has to offer. You were made by God to want eternal, lasting things.

PROP: Entrust yourself to Jesus and be happy.

This is where Jesus comes in.

He was the blessed man who—

NEVER walked in the counsel of the wicked  
NEVER stood in the way of sinners  
NEVER sat in the seat of scoffers

He always delighted in the instruction of the Lord.

But he is a tree planted by streams of water that everyone can take shade in.

The message of this Psalm is NOT just try and change roads by coming to church or resolving to be different. Rather, the message is that you need something outside yourself to really be happy. You cannot trust yourself to bring yourself happiness.

Entrust yourself to Jesus and be happy.

Or be blown about.

We've seen that OUR guide to happiness starts with the instruction of the Lord.

From there, the Psalmist gives us a glimpse of the end of the road.

## **2. Your End: Judgment (Psalm 1:5-6)**

It would be foolish to consider this road we are on without thinking about where it ends up. One prominent author says,

“When all’s said and done, all roads lead to the same end. So it’s not so much which road you take, as how you take it.”

He could not be more wrong.

The road to happiness guided by the instruction of the Lord—leads to ultimate happiness. The road to futility guided by our own sensibilities of what seems right—leads to death.

Look at verse 5,

[5] Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
[6] for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. (ESV)

Do you see the difference?

One road leads to—a gathering of the righteous.  
Another road leads to—death.

Christians—

Understand this. You will not always feel happy, but if you are following Jesus you are on the right road. How do we know?

for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,

The LORD is not just aware of you, he knows you. This means that he cares for you and watches over you and protects you. He sees your thoughts. He sees you as you fight not to internalize the counsel of the wicked.

He knows and rewards you.

You might wonder—what if I am not righteous enough?

That is the wrong question. You are not righteous enough. You sin, I sin, we all sin. What we must believe is that ONLY Jesus is righteous enough. We can be faithful because Jesus was more than just faithful, he was righteous.

The only reason we will be able to stand in the congregation of the righteous is because Jesus was struck down though he was righteous. He had every right to expect only a happy life, but he was a man of sorrow well-acquainted with grief so that we might not die, but live.

PRAY

