

Christian Education



Bible 419.001: Psalm 1

A Discipleship Ministry of East Side Baptist Church¹

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Choices. So many choices. What am I going to do? I would like to do this; but, that seems good, too. Maybe I will do what my heart leads me to do. But what if I am wrong? Maybe I should do the opposite of what my heart is telling me to do. That does not make any sense. I think I will do what feels right. Can I trust my feelings? There has to be an easier way of making choices. Perhaps I should consider the end result of my choices. If I make this choice, then I end up with that. But if I make the other choice, I end up with something else. Some choices seem easy. Other choices seem so right, but have terrible end results or consequences. And then, the right choice may seem difficult, not as fun, or too safe. Some choices have minor differences whereas other choices can have drastic differences; so different, the end result could be life or death.

We are blessed with the freedom to choose. What a privilege! With the privilege comes responsibility. Whatever choice is made, the one making the choice is responsible for the outcome or the end result. Can we makes choices that always have a good end result? Might some choices be the better of two evils? What if the best choice will result in some type of personal hardship or embarrassment? Should we always choose what is right for ourselves without regard for other people? Can we know which choice is right and best?



Yes, we can! Getting to that final decision is sometimes easier than other times. Sometimes, knowing the final decision to be made requires time and effort, maybe even some research. If one of the choices has gotten other people into some type of trouble, that is probably a choice to be avoided. If the right choice is taken, then we should expect some type of progress or advantage, even if the end result is not exactly like that of other people who have made the same choice. Making the right choice is the main concern of Psalm 1.

Psalm 1 is the first of 150 psalms. The Psalms are a hymnbook about life and living life in relation to God. Individual psalms are not positioned in a chronological order. Psalm 1 is not considered the oldest of the psalms. But as the first of the psalms, Psalm 1 declares the belief there are really only two paths available in life. A dear friend and brother in Christ, Phillip E. Smith, Sr., used to quote his Dad as saying, “There is no place for Mug-Rumps.” Mug-Rumps sit on the fence with their *mug* on one side and their *rump* on the other side. Choices have to be made. While the choice of which path to travel is an individual one, the final destination of those paths has already been determined by God.



Stop here and read Psalm 1 in your Bible. Check the box when done.

How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path of sinners, or join a group of mockers!
(Psalm 1:1, HCSB²)



“*How happy*” can also be translated as “*Blessed*”. The Hebrew word, *esher*, literally means happiness, blessedness³. *Esher* comes from *ashar*, meaning to go straight, go, advance. To go straight means to go in the same direction without any curvatures⁴. That which is straight is not crooked. In a moral sense, to be straight means (1) honest, (2) upright, (3) heterosexual, and (4) not under the influence of drugs or alcohol. To advance in life by going straight, living straight, means progressing in life with consistency and stability. This brings the satisfaction of accomplishment and that produces serenity, calm, and peace of mind. This rock solid steady approach, rather than the hectic pace of going in many directions, will produce happiness. The blessed life is a straight life that also gets to enjoy the adventure and variety that accompanies God’s plan for life.

By going straight, the psalmist states the happy man, the blessed man, will avoid three things that require taking a crooked or curved path. First, a person will be happy or blessed if he “*does not follow the advice of the wicked*”. The word translated as *follow* can be translated as to go, come, or walk. The word translated as *wicked* can be translated as criminal. The advice or counsel of a criminal is going to be crime related, either how to carry out a crime against society; or, if once caught by the law, how crime does not advance one in life. But the advice of the wicked is more consistent. The wicked person is morally bad or wrong, crooked and not straight. The wicked act with evil intent. This person is not a godly person; he is ungodly. Following the advice of such a person will cause one to walk a crooked path. And to stray from the straight way is to reduce one’s happiness and blessings. The farther one takes this curve, happiness will turn to sorrow, grief, and heartache.

At some point in life, everyone comes across the advice of the wicked. Such advice may come as an invitation or a temptation. Complete the following verses that identify the wicked.

Psalm 5:9a, HCSB: *For there is nothing _____ in what they say...*

Psalm 36:3-4, HCSB: *“The words of his mouth are _____ and _____; he has stopped acting _____ and doing good. Even on his bed he makes _____ plans. He sets himself on a path that is not good and does not _____ evil”*

Blessed are those who do not follow the wicked. Blessed and happy is he who is following the counsel of the godly! The godly are counseled by the Word of God.

Second, the happy man is blessed when he does not “*take the path of sinners*” (Psalm 1:1, HCSB). This could also be translated as “*take one’s stand in the manner of sinners*”. The path of sinners is very much like the advice of the

wicked. This too is a crooked way. In this case, the word translated *sinner* comes from *chata*, which means to miss, go wrong, sin. A sinner is a wrong doer. An unrepentant sinner has chosen the wrong morals, morals that are offensive to God. He does not live life by the teachings of God. Joining and participating in such a stand against God is foolish. This is outright rebellion against God.

Does one really *stand a chance* by taking a stand in opposition to God? Sooner or later, God will have the last word. Writing about nations that rebel against God and people who plot against God, the psalmist writes, *The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them. Then He speaks to them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath* (Psalm 2:4-5, HCSB). Are you dug in, taking a stand against what you know God stands for? This is not the way of the blessed. The crooked way leads to sorrow, grief, and heartache.

Proverbs 15:10, HCSB: *Discipline is _____ for the one who leaves the _____; the one who hates correction will _____.*

Romans 6:23, HCSB: *For the wages of sin is _____, but the gift of God is _____ life in _____ our _____.*

Third, a person is happy and blessed if he does not “*join a group of mockers*” (Psalm 1:1, HCSB). The NASB⁵ translates this more literally as “*sit in the seat of scoffers*”. The Hebrew word *lits* translated as mockers and scoffers means to scorn. The idea of outright mockery, scoffing, and scorning is a flippant attitude of disregard, disrespect, and ridicule of what another believes, holds to, or lives for. The one who so mocks another has deemed such a person or thing as foolish; and in this context, he mocks what is good and right. Thus, he mocks the things of God; and thereby, he mocks God. Such an attitude does not produce peace, contentment, and a happy life.



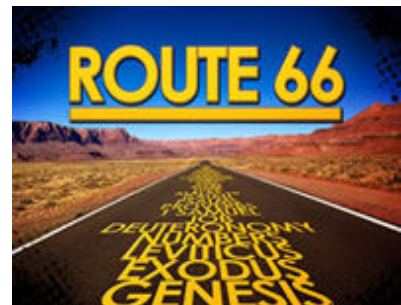
Charles Spurgeon wrote, “The seat of the scorner may be very lofty, but it is very near to the gate of hell; let us flee from it, for it shall soon be empty, and destruction shall swallow up the man who sits therein.⁶”

Regarding the person who is choosing the crooked road, Fred Wood wrote that this verse shows “a gradual moving toward a habitual style of living. First, the unrighteous person adopts the principles of wickedness as a rule for life; then, he persists in following the practices of notorious offenders; and finally, he becomes fixed in his evil ways.⁷”

Answer the following questions with sincere evaluation of your life. What choices have you been making? Is your life on the road to sorrow, grief, and heartache? Or, are you steadily progressing down the straight road that leads to life, happiness, and blessings from God?

Instead, his delight is in the LORD’s instruction, and meditates on it day and night. (Psalm 1:2, HCSB).

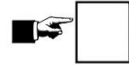
The psalmist identifies two things that the happy and blessed person does. Durham stated he has found a better counsel⁸. First, the happy and blessed person delights *in the LORD’s instruction*. The NASB states *his delight is in the law of the LORD*. The law of the Lord, in the psalmist’s day, was found in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. The psalmist states that the law brings the blessed person delight. To delight in something means that something brings great joy and pleasure, thus, happiness. Yes, reading and learning from the word of God can bring delight. God’s Word can make a person happy. His Word gives guidance for life. His Word reveals Himself. The Scriptures are not burdensome. The Scriptures are thrilling. The blessed person reads and studies the law of God, all 66 books.



Second, the happy and blessed person meditates on God's Word day and night. The word *meditate* has been associated with a cow chewing her cud. To meditate is to ruminate or continue to toss an idea around, to ponder or reflect, until a satisfaction is gained. To think or dwell on God's Word gives God's Spirit the opportunity to teach. The greatest understanding of Scripture comes when God teaches His Word. One can certainly learn from godly teachers; but, the best Teacher is the Author. To meditate day and night means to study the Word consistently every day. By starting the day with the Word of God, one has the opportunity to reflect on that passage during the day. The study of God's Word is a daily event which will capture the attention of the heart and soul of the reader, producing a delight and a blessing. This is not casual reading. The implication of delighting in and meditating on the Word of God is that the person doing this will observe the teachings therein. After all, these are *instructions* for life. They equip the reader with godly knowledge and understanding which enables the reader to make wise choices. Making the wise choice is the will of God.

Psalm 119:1-2, HCSB: *How _____ are those whose way is _____, who live according to the _____ of the LORD! Happy are those who _____ His decrees and _____ Him with all their heart.*

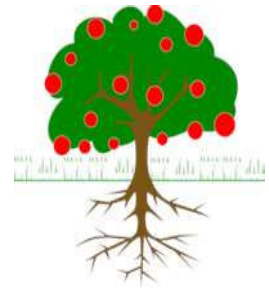
Are you starting your day in God's Word or drifting off the blessed path? Read Psalm 119:97-105 and be amazed! Check when finished.



He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. (Psalm 1:3, HCSB)

The psalmist compares the happy and blessed person to a fruit tree firmly planted by streams of water. The picture is of a very healthy tree someone planted. Water provides the nutrients necessary for life. With roots that run to

the water, this tree is well nourished. This tree will yield fruit at the appointed time and remain alive, meaning not wither and die. This tree bears fruit in season and is prosperous. Another benefit of good roots is when the winds begin to blow and the storms grow in intensity, the blessed tree will bend, but the tree will never break⁹.



This illustration teaches that to be happy and blessed, people must be firmly rooted in the Word of the LORD. The blessed person is a stable person with deep roots, a solid foundation, consistent in character and conduct. God's Word supplies the nutrients necessary for a person to be fruitful and prosperous. The person who receives the blessing of God through His Word will mature, will produce fruit at the proper time, and will never wither and die but have everlasting life. Paul described the maturing fruit, "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law*" (Galatians 5:22-23, HCSB). Only in God's Word does one truly prosper and receive the blessings of life that produce a deep and lasting happiness and peace.

After the death of Moses, God encouraged Joshua as the new leader. He instructed Joshua about many things, but especially about His law. Find the following verses and fill-in the blanks to learn what God said to Joshua. Note also, this passage encourages the straight way, no crookedness, no curves, no turns.

Joshua 1:7-8, HCS: *Above all, be strong and very _____ to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the _____ or the _____, so that you may have _____ wherever you go. This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth, but you are to recite it _____ and _____, so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will _____ and _____ in whatever you do.*

The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away. (Psalm 1:4, HCSB)

The psalmist declares the wicked are not prosperous like the fruit tree planted by the water. The wicked are not like blessed people. The wicked do not meditate on and delight in the Word of God day and night. The wicked *are like chaff that the wind blows away*. Chaff is worthless “refuse of winnowed grain, consisting of husks and broken straw¹⁰.” The wicked do not have a deep root system that provides a solid foundation. The wicked do not look into the Word of the LORD for advice and counsel. One day, the wicked will simply blow away. Since they are not prepared for the strong winds of change or hardship they get tossed around in life. There are never satisfied. They drift here and there in search of lasting happiness, but apart from the Word of God, they will never find what they are looking for. Rather than looking to God, they search in all the wrong places. The wicked are not blessed with happiness. The wicked are not prosperous because of character and conduct. They do not produce quality fruit in season. What they gain will soon rot away, even as their soul rots apart from the Word of God.

Jesus is identified as the Word of God (John 1:1). One day, Jesus was speaking with a woman who had been married five times and was currently living with a sixth man out of wedlock. He made a comparison between the water we drink from a well and the water He offers to mankind. He said, *Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life* (John 4:13-14, HCSB). Are you watering your soul with a temporary drink or an eternal one? _____ The Word of God is offering that which is eternal. When a person receives living water and eternal life, he receives a blessing from God and a new way in life that produces a lasting, even eternal, happiness! The choice to follow Jesus is the best decision a person can make! You can make that choice even right now.

Jesus said, *I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life* (John 5:24, HCSB).

Therefore the wicked will not survive the judgment, and sinners will not be in the community of the righteous. (Psalm 1:5, HCSB)

Therefore says the psalmist. Since the wicked, the ungodly, the criminal, do not have the Word of God as a foundation upon which to stand, they will not survive the coming judgment. Their mind is focused on the *here and now* and not on that which is yet to come. And because the wicked have chosen to not associate with God's people in worship and service to the Lord, they will not be part of the eternal community of the righteous. The wicked and the sinner are one and the same person. He who is wicked is sinful. The judgment is a reference to God's judgment. This judgment can refer to God's judgment which can come upon a person at any time as a form of discipline or corrective punishment. However, this judgment could also refer to the final "history-ending time of eternal judgment"¹¹ by God. Ultimately, on that Judgment Day, the wicked will reap all that they have sown. Revelation 20:13 states *all were judged according to their works* (HCSB). And Revelation 20:15 states *anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire* (HCSB). The wicked will not be blessed on Judgment Day and will not gain a place among the righteous.



Stop. Pause. Reflect. Are the choices you have been making more for the *here and now* or with thought of the future? _____ Some people have had the experience of standing before an earthly judge to give an account of their lives. This is one form of God's discipline. Are you ready to stand before the Almighty God and give an account of your life? _____ Know this: God does not compare good deeds and bad deeds to determine which there are more of. He is looking at the type of relationship one has with His Son Jesus.

Complete the following verses.

Acts 4:12, HCSB: *There is _____ in no one else, for there is no other _____ under heaven given to people by which we _____ be saved.*

Ephesians 2:8-10, HCSB: *For by _____ you are saved through _____, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's _____--not from works, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation--created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.*

John 3:16, HCSB: *“For God _____ the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that _____ who believes in Him will not _____ but have eternal _____.”*

Romans 10:13, HCSB: *For _____ **who** _____ **on the name of the Lord will be** _____.*

Mark 1:15, HCSB: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. _____ and _____ in the good news!”*

You can have a right relationship with God through His Son Jesus right now. He is ready to forgive your sin. The decision to repent is the decision to renounce sinful behavior and a life lived without Jesus. The decision to believe is the decision to invite and welcome Jesus into your life as Lord and Savior coupled with the desire to learn from Him and His Word and start living a godly life. Call out to God in prayer and ask Jesus to forgive you and become your Lord today.

For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin. (Psalm 1:6, HCSB)

The psalmist concludes by making two statements. One concerns the righteous, which are the blessed. The other statement concerns the wicked. The HCSB has *the LORD watches over the way of the righteous* while the NASB has *the LORD knows the way of the righteous*. A marginal reading in the NASB states *knows* can also be *approves* or *has regard to*. He knows the way and approves the way because the way is based upon His laws and His Word. The blessed are living life according to the Word of God. The wicked do not have the Word of God as their foundation for living. In the end, the righteous and the blessed will stand in the judgment and will survive. They will survive because of their faith in the Lord. The blessed are blessed with life everlasting.



The wicked are not blessed. The way of the wicked, the way of the ungodly, will perish. Their lifestyle will not endure the judgment. Their lifestyle is a dead end street. If they stay on their current course, the wicked will come to ruin. By the choices they make, they ruin their own life. The wicked are responsible for their own destructive choices. In the end, they will perish with their ways. To perish means to be removed permanently. This is eternal death and separation from God. The wicked are not blessed by God.

Everyone chooses a lifestyle; and thus, everyone chooses their own destiny. God has made clear there are two distinct ways in life: godly and ungodly. God's way results in a blessed life. The ungodly way ends in ruin. Choose wisely.

Find and complete the following verses.

Psalm 32:8, HCSB: *I will _____ you and _____ you the way to go; with My _____ on you, I will give _____.*

Psalm 32:10, HCSB: *Many pains come to the _____, but the one who _____ in the _____ will have faithful _____ surrounding him.*

Proverbs 3:5-6, HCSB: _____ in the LORD with all your _____, and do not rely on your own understanding; think about Him in all your ways, and He will _____ you on the _____.

The choice to follow Jesus and live by His Word is life changing. Man first chose sin. But Jesus has offered a better way. The choice that remains is whether or not to trust Him. The Choice is yours! Choose wisely. Choose life. Choose Jesus!

Lord Jesus, today I realize I have been living life apart from You and in sin. I no longer want to live this way. I believe You are God's Son who died for me and rose up to new life on the third day. Please forgive me. Come into my life and be my Lord and Savior. Guide me with Your Word. Thank you for saving me.

End Notes

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³ All Hebrew word definitions are from *Hebrew--Aramaic Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance*. Updated Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998.

⁴ All English word definitions are from *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. Fourth Edition. Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2004.

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⁶ Spurgeon, Charles H. *The Treasury of David*. Volume 1 of 3. McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, page 1.

⁷ Wood, Fred M. *Psalms: Songs From Life*. January Bible Study. Nashville, Tennessee: Convention Press, 1984, page 6.

⁸ Durham John I. "Psalms." *Esther-Psalms*. The Broadman Bible Commentary. Volume 4 of 12. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1971, page 172.

⁹ Lee, Jerry W. *Old Testament Study 102*. Florida Baptist Theological College. Graceville, Florida: Spring Semester, 1990.

¹⁰ Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Third Edition. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966, page 186.

¹¹ Cranford, Lorin L. "Judgment Day." *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991, pages 825-826.

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