

Practical Advice For Sound Living

Psalm 1:1-6

With a new year beginning, people are all too willing to give you some advice they think might be helpful for you to apply. **So, what is the best advice you have ever been given?** The better question is what you did with it. Here are some to consider.

“You can’t control people’s reactions, but you can control your reactions to them.”

“There’s more than one way to do something.”

“If you ever get caught sleeping on the job, slowly raise the head and say in Jesus name, Amen.”

“Never walk on the ice with your hands in your pockets.”

“Never trust a dog to watch your food.”

“When your mom is mad at your dad, never let her brush your hair.”

Our passage today is advice from an unknown author, but the advice is worth heeding. Turn to **Psalm 1** in your Bible where we discover some practical advice for sound living.

If you were to pick up a handwritten copy of the Psalms during medieval times, you would discover that **chapter 1** is written in red ink and not showing any numbers. No, it’s not the words of Jesus in red. Scholars in that era thought **Psalm 1** was a preface introducing the book to readers looking for divine guidance and wisdom. If they meditated on the psalms, they would help determine one’s destiny.

Psalm 1 is considered to be both a wisdom psalm and a Torah psalm. As a wisdom psalm it points out two ways of life with two entirely different destinations – righteousness or wickedness. The wisdom choice is preceded with the word “blessed.” As a Torah psalm, it focuses on the centrality of the law of God and obedience to it, pointing to how blessed a person is who will adhere to what it says.

This psalm lays out two choices or two paths every person is faced with in life. The wise person will choose one path, while the wicked person will

choose the other path. Throughout the Psalms and including the rest of the wisdom books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Solomon, we are given sound advice to follow if we want to be a righteous person. Psalms, and this Psalm in particular, gives compelling reason why the path leading to wisdom is the best path to take, but again, the life traveler must decide which one should be taken. This psalm is an exhortation to consider carefully how you will travel through life. Today, we want to consider the path of the wise man and the path of the wicked man.

I. THE PATH OF THE WISE MAN – vv. 1-3, 6a

There wasn’t a whole lot to do in the little town of Black River in upstate New York where my mom grew up. Except for the nearby Army base two miles outside of town, the town itself was insignificant and non-descript. The town wasn’t very big, but like most towns, it had its share of characters. That’s a nice way of saying that they were the kids who didn’t need a lot of encouragement to get into trouble. My mom’s brother was in that group. He wasn’t a bad kid as far as really bad kids go, but he wasn’t a good kid. I’m sure he added to the challenge my grandma had in raising six kids by herself. She had five girls and then Uncle Mike.

They lived in the last house on a dead-end street that only had four houses. Across the road was the Black River. It was a dead-end street from the standpoint that the part they lived on was plowed even though it turned into a two track that meandered alongside the river. Grandma did her best to keep him in line. She took him to the little Baptist church in town but that didn’t seem to have much impact on him. He was more likely to be a stand in for James Dean’s character in *Rebel Without a Cause* than to dress up on a Sunday and sit still during a church service singing Amazing Grace or some other hymn. If he wasn’t spending time out in the woods sleeping in his makeshift tree fort for days at a time, you could find him hanging out with a bunch of other guys pitching pennies, the teenager’s mode of gambling. The kids he hung around with weren’t much of a positive influence on him. The only male he really looked up to was my dad. That’s why one summer when I was 7 or 8 Mom and Dad decided they would bring him back to Michigan to see if Dad’s

influence could help straighten him out some. But it didn't take long for him to find the same kind of guys he hung around with back in Black River and get into more trouble.

Life is about choices, and you live with those choices. The psalmist begins by noting that if you make the right choices, you will be blessed, leaving the reader to understand that if you make the wrong choices, you won't be unhappy.

These opening verses tell us that if we are to be wise there are certain people we need to avoid that leads to happiness.

A. The People He Avoids That Leads to Happiness – v. 1

The word 'blessed' can also mean happy or content. In the Hebrew it's plural so the literal reading would be 'O happy, happy is the man.' Or in other words, he's really, really happy. And why not? He's avoided certain things that would keep him from flourishing, things that ultimately are destructive. First off, he avoids the counsel of the ungodly.

1. He avoids the counsel of the ungodly

Let's begin by understanding that the person who is ungodly is. Your translation may use the word wicked. Now don't think of them only as people like Hitler or Idi Amin, or Osama bin Laden. In our vernacular we would say they are not saved. They are people who are separated from God. This separation is due to sin which every person is born into. We can't avoid it. It's an inherited trait passed on from one generation to the next. We don't get to choose another way. We're all sinners. *We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we're sinners.* It's our nature and it's caused us to be separated from God. A person may be good as gold, but if they aren't saved, they are still ungodly because they are still sinners. Being ungodly is to act in a way that is contrary to God's nature. God is holy. We are not. GotQuestions says that to be ungodly is "to actively oppose God in disobedience, or to have an irreverent disregard for God. Generally speaking, the ungodly are those who do not know God through Jesus Christ. They have rejected God's Son and remain in

their sins." That's a good description.

Now there are lots of decisions that occur during any given day in which we may ask the advice of someone who isn't a Christian.

Can you tell me where the best steak restaurant is?

What do you think about this shade of paint?

What is the fastest way to get to the airport?

We're traveling to Miami. Where would you recommend that we stay?

I need a new lawnmower, what would you suggest?

There may be any number of decisions we face for which we look to others for advice, the outcome of which has no real bearing on our character or the direction our life may take. The psalmist isn't suggesting that we should never associate with people who are not saved. But he does tell us there are certain people we should avoid. The word 'counsel' helps us understand what he means. It means something that provides direction or advice as to a decision or course of action.

He wants us to avoid those whose advice would influence us toward godlessness by making wrong moral decisions that turn us from God or go against what His Word says.

Proverbs 1:10-19

An unbeliever may give advice that is contrary to what the Bible teaches.

For example, if you're married and having some trouble, spice up your life a little and have an affair. It will do you both some good.

When doing your taxes, it's okay to fudge the numbers a little bit to make your return a little better. If you get pulled over for some traffic violation, go ahead and lie a bit.

The happy person does not listen to the kind of advice that an ungodly person suggests which goes against principles outlined in Scripture. The psalmist refers to it as walking. Walking is a term used in Scripture to describe our conduct or way of life. When Scripture tells us to walk circumspectly, it means to be cautious and deliberate about how we live: what we say and what we do. In other words, don't walk with those who tell you to live like the world.

Who you get advice from matters and Paul is very clear when writing to the Corinthians in which he says **“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” (I Corinthians 15:33)**

From the wisdom of Solomon, we read in **Proverbs 22:24-25 “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.”**

Some things are okay to get advice from a person who is not saved like how they get their lawn to look so nice or who they recommend to service your car or the best store to buy a suit. But when it comes to advice that goes against godly principles, they are to be avoided. We aren't to walk in the counsel of the wicked.

The psalmist tells us of another type of person the happy man avoids.

2. He avoids the course of the sinner

Sinner refers to someone whose sin is habitual. Wickedness is a way of life. To stand is to station oneself alongside. It literally reads “and in the way of sinners, do not stand.” Ray Stedman suggests that “the wicked stand for the things of the world.” Where at first, he was walking, now he is standing. It's the picture of someone walking along and then stopping to take it all in, pondering, contemplating a decision. The happy man avoids stopping with the sinner. If he does stop, it's an indication that he is giving serious consideration of the advice the person is offering. But the man is blessed because he doesn't linger and allow the advice to take root and grow.

If you have read John Bunyan's classic work *Pilgrim's Progress* you know the types of characters that came alongside Christian on his journey to the celestial city. They were men who tempted him to take short cuts which really delayed his journey and got him into trouble by listening to them. Men like Worldly Wiseman who tries to urge Christian to give up his religious foolishness and live a contented secular life and Demas who tries to tempt Christian with silver and dreams of wealth.

“Happy is the man who does not stand in the way of sinners.” He is not enticed, nor does he submit to the sinners path. The happy man avoids such a person.

The psalmist gives a third type of person whom the happy man avoids.

3. He avoids the contempt of the scornful

I hope you notice the progression, or should I say regression, in the types of men and their sins. A scorner is someone who mocks God and laughs at those who follow God. A scoffer ridicules the beliefs of others and gets people to agree with him. He has nothing but contempt for God and Christians and proudly expresses his opinion with open mockery. **Proverbs 9:7** – Scorners cause trouble for those who try to point out the truth.

Proverbs 9:8 tells us that a mocker is unteachable.

Proverbs 13:1 – Scorners refuse to listen to rebuke or admit their mistakes and resent correction.

Proverbs 14:6 – Scorners seek wisdom but can't find it because they already have a biased opinion.

Proverbs 15:12 says it's useless to try and show the scorner the error of his ways.

Proverbs 19:25 – Scorners don't learn from trials.

Proverbs 21:24 – Scorners are filled with arrogance.

Proverbs 22:10 – Scorners are the source of contention and strife. When scorners are removed, there is peace.

It is clear from what the Bible says that we are not to keep company with those who would ridicule God and our faith and passages like **II Peter 3:3** and **II Timothy 3:1-5** tell us that in the last days there will be an increase in scoffers, which is quite evident if you watch the news at all.

You can see the obvious progression of following the wrong counsel, standing with the wrong companions, and sitting with the wrong crowd. If you follow them, you gradually move further into disobedience and sin. One author put it this way: the happy man **“doesn't listen to the ungodly man, he doesn't linger with sinful men, and he doesn't laugh with scornful men.”**

Proverbs 13:20 “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.”

“People who walk in the counsel of the ungodly listen to worldly advice, make plans with the wicked, and willfully participate in the sinner’s way of life.”

Romans 8:5-7 tell us that such people “have their minds set on what the flesh desires.”

Their advice can influence your decision to choose what goes against God’s Word. Let’s heed the advice of Paul who says in **II Corinthians 10:5** “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Let me say here that the scoffer may think he has won the day, but **Proverbs 3:34** says that God scoffs at the scoffer.

According to **Phil. 2:10-11** there is coming a day when scoffers will no longer scoff at Christ but will bow their knee and acknowledge Jesus Christ is Lord.

If you want to be a blessed and happy person, avoid these three types of people who would lead you away from God. We cannot hope to progress as a Christian if we follow these characters.

Let me ask you: **is that the kind of company you want to keep, the kind of people you want to hang around with, the kind of people you want to influence your decisions by pulling you away from God?**

Next, the psalmist tells us how we can avoid them by what we should aspire to.

B. The Principle He Aspires That Leads to Helpfulness – vv. 2-3

Psalm 119:9, 11

The psalmist lays out two helpful principles that are important for the person who wants to be happy and blessed. First, he delights in God’s Word.

1. He delights in God’s Word

“But His delight is in the law of the Lord.”

The word ‘**delight**’ expresses the idea of extreme pleasure, satisfaction, or joy. I delight in my wife, the result of which is wanting to spend time with her and she feels the same way about me. To delight in the Word is to love the Word and want to spend time reading it, getting to know it, doing what it says.

Psalm 119:97 “Oh, how I love your law...”

Jeremiah 15:16 “When Your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight.”

Job 23:12 “I have not departed from the commands of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my daily bread.”

Delighting in God’s Word means cherishing it and obeying it. Delighting in God’s Word means we make it a daily part of our lives. We mine it for treasures that we can apply that show we love the God who wrote it. We read it and become captivated by its freshness, by the comfort it gives, the strength it provides and the encouragement it offers. It truly is a lamp that guides our steps and a light that guards our path (**Psalm 119:105**). By it we mature in Christlikeness and in obeying it, we can keep from sinning (**Psalm 119:9, 11**). Obeying it brings good to us and glory to God. If we want to be blessed, we will delight in God’s Word.

There is a second helpful principle to follow for the person who would be blessed or happy.

2. He deliberates on God’s Word “on His law he meditates day and night.”

Meditating on God’s Word is another way of delighting in God’s Word. If we love it, we’ll want to think about it all the time.

By meditation, I’m not suggesting that we begin the practice of emptying our mind of distractions, freeing ourselves of thoughts in order to find inner peace. Biblical meditation is taking a portion of Scripture and mulling it over and over and in it finding real and lasting peace. **Meditation has been likened to a cow that chews the cud. A cow will eat some grass and later on bring it back up and chew on it some more. He will swallow it, and bring it up again and chew on it some more. He wants to get all**

the nutrients from what he has eaten. It's the same with meditation. We take in some of God's Word and then later bring it back to mind and think on it. We bring it up later and chew on it some more.

In **Joshua 1:8**, Joshua was commanded to meditate on God's Word in order to obey it. Meditation isn't for knowledge. It's for application. It's for obedience. Meditation helps us know how to live according to what the Bible teaches us. It has a way of turning what we think into action (**Philippians 4:8**). It has a way of changing the way we live (**James 1:22-25**).

When we meditate on God's Word, take a particular passage and roll it around the noodle and think about what it says. We ask what it is saying about what we're going through right now or what it says about God or what I should start doing in my walk with Christ or stop doing that is hindering my walk with Christ. Meditation helps me communicate with God in prayer and it helps God communicate with me through His Word. Secular or other religious meditation attempts to give peace and truth from within. Biblical meditation has its focus on God and His Word from which we find real truth and peace through obedience.

Psalm 119:15-16 "I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways. I delight in Your decrees; I will not neglect Your Word."

Psalm 77:12 "I will consider all Your works and meditate on all Your mighty deeds."

Psalm 19:14 "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to You, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

My friend and founder of Camp Barakel was losing his vision in which he could no longer read. He was asked about how he managed having devotions. He said he just sat and thought about Scripture.

If you lost your eyesight, would you know Scripture well enough to just sit and think about it?

In his meditation, we see his dedication.

a. His dedication – He thinks about it day and night. It was for him something that was habitual. Day and night he would give thought to some portion of Scripture he had read. It is a daily practice.

Psalm 63:6 "On my bed I remember You; I think of You through the watches of the night."

A temptation comes along and you remember **I Cor. 10:13** that reminds you there is a way of escape.

You're sitting in the doctor's office waiting for a test and you remember **Philippians 4:6-7** that there is nothing to be anxious about knowing God gives His peace when you pray.

Some tragedy strikes and you recall **Psalm 34:18** that the Lord comforts the brokenhearted.

Be dedicated to meditation. It can help you avoid the wicked and it can help you apply the Word of God.

The psalmist also notes his depiction.

b. His depiction – He is like a tree planted by the rivers of water. Notice three things.

1) He is planted. Planting is a deliberate act. It's not something that just randomly happened like an acorn dropping from a tree limb and taking root wherever it fell. That it is planted suggests that it was carefully planned. The location of its planting was deliberate and strategic suggesting that meditation on God's Word should also be deliberate as we carefully select the passages we want to mull over, passages related to something specific you are going through right now. Such a strategic location prepares it for being prosperous.

2) He is productive. The place where it is planted produces fruit. A tree planted there has deep and firm roots that keep it firm in strong winds and adverse conditions like drought. When we plant God's Word in our heart, it will keep us standing firm against all the challenges we face in life, and we will also bear fruit.

3) He is prosperous. Meditation continues to feed the mind and soul with what is necessary to flourish. Now I don't think that means the person who meditates will become wealthy in the sense of monetary prosperity, but rather he will prosper in the things that matter, in things that pertain to growing in the Lord. I think it's akin to what we read in **Psalm 37:4-6 "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your**

way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.”

When we meditate on God’s Word, His desires become our desires and in that we delight. The person who habitually meditates never has God far from his thoughts.

We gain happiness when we avoid people who would seek to pull us away from God.
We gain helpfulness when we aspire to the principles of delighting in and deliberating on God’s Word.
We gain hopefulness in the promise that awaits us.

C. The Promise He Awaits That Leads to Hopefulness – v. 6a

“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous.”

The KJV reads that **“the Lord knows the way of the righteous.”** It’s more than just knowing about someone. It refers to caring. Spurgeon states that God constantly has His eye on you, that He’s always looking your way.

Job 23:10 “But He knows the way I take...”

He knows when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

He knows when we are afraid.

He knows when we’re in the fiery furnace.

He knows when we’re in the lion’s den.

He knows when our boat is about to capsize.

He knows because He is right there with us.

My hope is in the Lord, who gave Himself for me.

The wise person avoids certain people, he aspires to certain principles, and he awaits certain promises. Now, let me close quickly by contrasting the path of the wicked man.

II. THE PATH OF THE WICKED MAN – vv. 4-5, 6b

First, according to **verse 4**, his problem is clear.

A. His Problem Is Clear – v. 4

Chaff is the worthless stuff that the wind blows away after the grain has been ground. Unlike a tree that

has strong roots and keeps it from blowing away, chaff is blown away by the slightest wind. Back in **verse 1** we see the clarity of his problem.

1. He rejects God

2. He rebels against God

3. He ridicules God

These people are not in a covenant relationship with God and want nothing to do with God. Like the wind that drives the chaff wherever it blows, the wicked man is driven to disaster.

I ask you if that’s how you want to end up?

Verse 5 tells us that his punishment is condemnation.

B. His Punishment Is Condemnation – v. 5

Romans 6:23 “The wages of sin is death...”

I John 5:12 “...If you don’t have the Son, you don’t have life.”

When judgment comes, he will not stand, nor will he be assembled with the righteous. He has been found guilty and the Lord will look at him and tell him to leave, because He does not know him.

C. His Peril Is Catastrophic – v. 6b

John 3:16 implies that if you don’t believe in Jesus as Savior, you will perish.

John 5:24 implies that if you don’t believe in Jesus for eternal life, you will be condemned to eternal peril.

II Peter 2:9 “The Lord knows how...to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment.”

Psalms 145:20 “...the wicked He will destroy.”

The word perish means complete ruin and destruction. It is eternal separation from God.

There are two paths, the way of the wise and the way of the wicked. You can be blessed, or you can be banished. You can experience the presence of God or be punished by God. **Which will you choose?**