

# The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

Our study is the first chapter from the book of Psalms. Psalms is a favorite book of the Bible for many Christians. It is quoted one-hundred and sixteen times in the New Testament. That is more than any other Old Testament book.

The English title of Psalms comes from the Greek word *psalmos*. The word means “Songs” or “Praises.” The Septuagint (LXX), a Greek translation of the Old Testament, titles it “The Book of Psalms.” This Septuagint title refers to the “plucking of strings or twanging of strings.” This title fits the book well because many of the Psalms were sung along with musical instruments, choirs, and soloists. Maybe my favorite title for the book comes from the Hebrew title which means “Book of Praises!”

The book of Psalms is divided into five books. Each one ends with a doxology (Psalm 41:13; 72:18-20; 89:52; 106:48; 150:6). Jewish tradition claims the five divisions correspond to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. Consequently, chapters 1 to 41 are sometimes referred to as Genesis and end with a doxology in Psalm 41:13.

The book of Psalms was written over a span of nine hundred years, from 1410 B.C down to the sixth or fifth century B.C. The primary author of the Psalms was King David. He wrote seventy-three of the one hundred and fifty Psalms. Most of chapters 1 to 41 were written by him. That is the first

book within the Psalms. Asaph wrote twelve. The sons of Korah wrote ten of the Psalms. Other authors include King Solomon, Moses, and Heman.

**Study In Psalm 1.** Our study is the first chapter of the book of Psalms. The chapter is not just a random one. It intentionally introduces us to the theme of the entire book of Psalms. It is also the first chapter of the Genesis section. That is, Psalm 1 corresponds to the place to start just as Genesis 1 introduces us to the Bible. In some ancient Hebrew manuscripts chapters 1 and 2 are combined.

Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm. It provides wisdom about the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. This theme is repeated throughout the entire book of Psalms. Psalm 1 can be outlined as the way of the righteous (v. 1-3), the way

of the wicked (v. 4-5), and the end result for both the righteous and the wicked (v. 6). The Psalm compares the moral character of the righteous and the wicked, and then the consequences—the final judgment of the righteous and the wicked. Psalm 1 reads as follows.



**How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners,  
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!**

But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of  
water,  
Which yields its fruit in its season  
And its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.  
The wicked are not so,  
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.  
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1:1-6  
(NASB)

**Way of the Righteous (v 1-3).** Verse 1 introduces us to the first of two types of people described in this psalm. He is the righteous person. But we will not be told that until we arrive at verse 5. Verse 1 just starts describing the person who is blessed. The Psalm wants to capture our attention. It wants us to start wondering who is the blessed man? The first thing English readers need to understand is what is the meaning of the word “blessed.” The answer is in the Hebrew word that is translated as “blessed.” It also means “happy.” It refers to,

A heightened state of happiness and joy, implying very favorable circumstance and enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

There is another curiosity about this word “blessed.” It does not refer to a single blessing or state of happiness. The Hebrew word is actually plural. This suggests multiple blessings. So, when we are told “How blessed is the man,” the message is the righteous man receives many blessings.

Next, it is important to know that there are two Hebrew words that are often used for the word “not.” One refers to potentially or maybe being “not.” But the Hebrew word that is used here is *lo*. This word means absolutely not! That is, there is no room for exceptions.

Then we are told the person who is blessed does not do

three things. First, this person absolutely does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. Second, this person does not stand with sinners. Third, this person does not sit in the seat of scoffers.

*Pattern of Developing Relationships.* There are two patterns the Holy Spirit warns us to avoid in verse 1. The first pattern is one of behavior. Notice the blessed person does not walk in the counsel, stand in the way, or sit in the seat of the ungodly. The word “counsel” refers to receiving advice. That is, the person who is blessed avoids the counsel of the wicked. He does not follow the counsel of the ungodly. Why would anyone listen to the counsel of the ungodly when Proverbs 1:1-6 reminds us that Scripture gives us wisdom, knowledge, understanding, discretion, and guidance? Proverbs 1:7 reminds us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, and the ungodly reject God. So, what is the meaning of the expressions, “standing in the way” and “sitting in the seat?” Dr. J. Vernon McGee makes this helpful comment,

Blessed is the man, or happy is the man, who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. The person who does these things is not a happy person. He goes through three stages. First, he associates with the ungodly, then he gets in with sinners, and finally he joins in with the scornful.<sup>2</sup>

There is a regression of behavior described in this verse. The happy person avoids walking in or accepting and following ungodly counsel, and ultimately, spending a great amount of time with the ungodly. He does not walk, stand, or sit with the ungodly and joining in with their ungodly behavior and activities.

*Pattern of Association With the Ungodly.* The second pattern in this verse is that the blessed person is careful with whom he or she associates. Why should the blessed person avoid the wicked? Proverbs 3:33 gives us a good reason. It says,

1. James Swanson, Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament) (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

2. J Vernon McGee. Joshua through Psalms. Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1982. vol. 2. p. 661.

The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked,  
But He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Proverbs  
3:33 (NASB)

Here we are told the LORD has cursed the wicked. Therefore, why would a blessed person seek counsel from someone who is cursed? Do you seek counsel from the wicked? The message of Proverbs 3:33 is that the ungodly counselor has a major disadvantage. This also raises the question as to why a Christian counselor would use the advice of the ungodly, even if they do have the title or credentials of a psychologist after their name!

Psalm 5:4-5 adds this about the wicked.

For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness;  
No evil dwells with You.  
The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes;  
You hate all who do iniquity.  
Psalm 5:4-5 (NASB)

In this passage King David states that God does not like wickedness. The last line of verse 5 says God hates all who sin. That is, God hates the ungodly as compared to His love for the righteous. So, why seek counsel from those whom God hates in comparison to His love for believers?

Psalm 11:5-7a echoes the same truth. It says,

The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked,  
And the one who loves violence His soul hates.  
Upon the wicked He will rain snares;  
Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup.  
For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness;  
Psalm 11:5-7a (NASB)

This Psalm teaches us a truth we often miss. God reveals His righteousness by punishing the wicked. The wicked have more problems than is revealed to us. Proverbs 11:18 says,

The wicked earns deceptive wages,

But he who sows righteousness gets a true reward.  
Proverbs 11:18 (NASB)

The wicked are manipulative, but that is not true of the blessed person. Consequently, Proverbs 10:16 states,

The wages of the righteous is life,  
The income of the wicked, punishment.  
Proverbs 10:16 (NASB)

Now, who are the sinners? They are those who “miss the mark.” They fail to measure up to God’s moral standard in many ways. They willingly violate God’s standards. They miss the mark God has set.

The scoffers are those who reject or mock God. Listen to these statements about the scoffer from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 9:8 says,

Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you . . . Proverbs 9:8 (NASB)

Proverbs 13:1b states,

. . . but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. Proverbs 13:1b (NASB)

Proverbs 1:22 and 14:6 reveal the scoffer hates knowledge. That means the scoffer hates biblical wisdom. Scoffers include the atheists, and anyone who rejects the teachings of the Bible.

*Summary of Verse 1.* In all three descriptions, the wicked, the sinners, and the scoffers are always in the plural in the Hebrew, but the blessed man is only in the singular. So the picture that is painted of the blessed person is a single person who resists associating with many different ungodly people. Also, the words “walk, stand, and sit” are in the imperfect tense. This implies the blessed person repeatedly chooses to not spend time with the ungodly. Sadly, some Christians urge us to make close friends with the ungodly, or spend time with scoffers such as those from cults. Their goal is to make friends in order to eventually share the gospel. But this verse

warns the blessed to not seek such friendships. Yet, it does not prohibit spending time with them to share the gospel. We are commanded to share the gospel but not to join in ungodly behavior. There is a fine balance. We must remember that the apostle Paul warns us to avoid bad company in 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 when he wrote these words,

**Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good morals.” Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame. 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 (NASB)**

He echoes the message of Psalm 1:1. This gives us our first principle. Blessed is the man who avoids forming close relationships with the ungodly. There is no good reason to constantly spend time with the ungodly. The only purpose for

spending time with the ungodly is to share the gospel, or if they are in our family. We cannot avoid our families. We are warned against seeking to establish friendships. Verse 1 is like one of the ten beatitudes found in the Sermon on the Mount. It teaches us who is blessed.

*Blessed Man Delights in the LORD (v 2).* So, verse 1 taught us what the blessed or happy person does not do. Now verse 2 teaches us what the blessed or happy person does do. Verse 2 says,

**But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
Psalm 1:2 (NASB)**

The Hebrew word for “delight” is *hepes*. It means “joy” or “pleasure.” The blessed person enjoys the law of the LORD. Notice the strong contrast between verses 1 and 2. In verse 1, the blessed man avoids the wicked, the sinner, and the scoffer; but in verse 2, he takes great pleasure in the law of the LORD. That is, he delights in what God has written. He enjoys the Bible or the Scriptures. This describes the heart attitude of the blessed person.

The Hebrew word for “meditates” is *hagah*. It is an onomatopoeic word. It mimics the sound of an animal such as a lion roaring over its food or a dove moaning. The word is translated as “murmur” in Psalm 119:11. Because many believers

are confused about the meaning of meditate, we will examine a few verses to help us understand its meaning. The first verse is Joshua 1:8. It says,

**This 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 then you will have success. Joshua 1:8 (NASB)**

This is a great verse. While it is spoken to the nation of Israel, it also applies to us as we will soon discover in verse 3. Here Joshua urged the people to meditate on the law so that they would be obedient. In Deuteronomy 17:18-20, the king of Israel was to read the law every day of his life so that he would be careful to be obedient to the LORD and not become proud.

Psalm 63:6 tells us that meditation also includes God.



Here is the verse,

**When I remember You on my bed,  
I meditate on You in the night watches,  
Psalm 63:6 (NASB)**

David said that he meditated on God in the night hours while lying on his bed. Have you ever gone to bed in the quiet of the night and just thought about God and what He has done? That is what David did. Psalm 71:24 adds this,

**My tongue also will utter [or meditate upon] Your righteousness all day long. . . Psalm 71:24 (NASB)**

That means meditation includes thinking on and speaking of God's righteousness or His attributes. Psalm 77:12 adds,

**I will meditate on all Your work  
And muse on Your deeds.  
Psalm 77:12 (NASB)**

Now meditation includes the works of God. Psalm 143:5 states,

**I remember the days of old;  
I meditate on all Your doings;  
I muse on the work of Your hands.  
Psalm 143:5 (NASB)**

Now we can summarize meditation as thinking upon Scripture for the purpose of being obedient or being righteous. But meditation also includes thinking about God Himself, His righteousness, His works, His deeds, His doings, and the works of His hands. Meditation then is much more than striving to be holy. Meditation includes a pursuit to deeply know God.

So, what is the message of Psalm 1:2? With whom does the blessed person want to spend time? The second principle is that the blessed person delights in the Word of God more than the ungodly on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, television or in a secular novel. The blessed person takes plea-

sure in the study of Scripture more than in spending time with the ungodly.

Notice the Holy Spirit is not telling us that the blessed man meditates in the Word because of some duty. He does it because he or she loves the words of the Lord and in the Lord Himself. It is the LORD who provides counsel in Scripture. The blessed person would rather stand or sit in a seat in order to read and study what the LORD has said. He seeks a relationship with Yahweh. This gives us the third principle, the blessed meditates on the Word of God.

*Blessed Man's Reward (v 3).* Verse 3 introduces us to the reward the Lord gives to the blessed man.

**He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,  
Which yields its fruit in its season  
And its leaf does not wither;  
And in whatever he does, he prospers.  
Psalm 1:3 (NASB)**

Now we are told the blessed man will be like a tree planted next to many streams of water. He will produce fruit in season and never, ever wither. He will always prosper even in the winter or the drought of the summer. The blessed person is not like the wicked, sinners, or scoffers. The Hebrew word that is translated as prosper does not necessarily mean money.

The message of this verse is that God has planted the blessed person. He is blessed because God has made it happen and sustains him or her. There is a hint of eternal security in this verse. It reminds me of Philippians 1:6 which says,

**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6 (NASB)**

Verse 3 gives us another principle. The blessed person has spiritual life and produces spiritual fruit. His or her relationship with the Almighty is why this person is blessed.

**Way of the Wicked (v 4-5).** Verse 4 now describes the wicked. It says,

The wicked are not so . . . Psalm 1:4a (NASB)

The message is simple. The wicked are not like the blessed person. Again, the Hebrew word lo is used for not. The wicked are absolutely not like that. The wicked want to associate with other wicked people. Romans 1:32 states that the wicked want the righteous to join them in committing sin. And 1 Peter 4:3-4 reveals the Holy Spirit warns us to avoid being pressured to commit sin. It says,

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a

course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and

they malign you . . . 1 Peter 4:3-4 (NASB)

When verse 4 says, “The wicked are not so,” we are to understand that the wicked do not delight in reading Scripture either. Nor do they meditate day and night on God and how to be righteous. That is the first principle of the wicked or the ungodly.

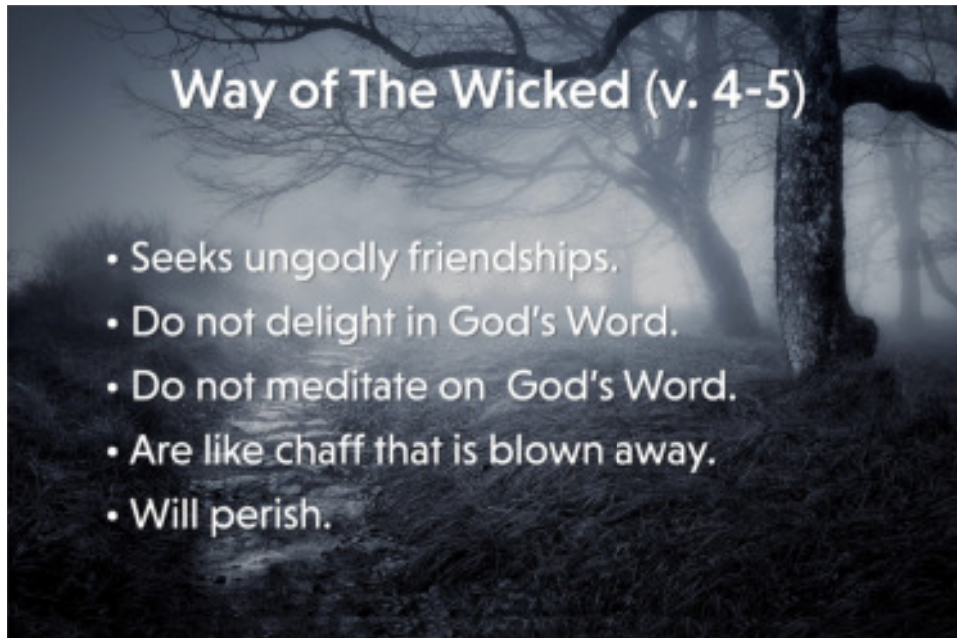
Then the last line of verse 4 tells us the wicked are not like the righteous in verse 3. They are not like a tree that God has planted by many streams of water. The last line of verse 4 says the wicked are like chaff,

But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

Psalm 1:4b (NASB)

That is, the blessed man is like a firmly planted tree, but the wicked are like chaff that the wind drives away. That is the second principle of the wicked. The wicked are unstable, and unhappy. We do not understand how miserable and unhappy the ungodly truly are. In fact, they cannot understand how much God has blessed the righteous and how much He has made us happy.

*Wicked Man’s Punishment (v 5).* Next, the Holy Spirit announces the ultimate destiny of the wicked. We are told that on the day of judgment they will not stand.



Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. Psalm 1:5 (NASB)

Nor will the sinners be allowed to associate with the righteous.

Now we discover the identity of the blessed person. The righteous are the opposite of the wicked, the sinners, and the scoffers. Malachi 3:18-4:3 summarizes verses 4 and 5. It says,

“So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and

skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 3:18-4:3 (NASB)

The implication of Psalm 1:5 and Malachi 3:18-4:3 is that the wicked will try to survive judgment. They will long to be with the righteous, but God will not allow it. At the White Throne Judgment, described in Revelation 20:11-15, we are told their deeds will be reviewed as proof they deserve the Lake of Fire. Matthew 7:21-23 suggests that on that day they will tell Christ about all the good things they did in His name. They will say they prophesied, cast out demons, and did many miracles. But Christ will say, “I never knew you.” Their deeds will demonstrate that they enjoyed receiving counsel from other wicked people.

They enjoyed standing and talking with sinners. They enjoyed sitting with those who scoffed at God and the Bible. They did not delight in the Word of God and did not enjoy meditating on Scripture and on God Himself. Psalm 1:5 says they will not stand in the day of judgment. This means they will try to defend themselves, but they will not succeed. They will not be allowed to live forever with the righteous.

Consequently, they will be like chaff. Malachi 4:1 says they “will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze.” This gives us the next principle of the wicked. They will be condemned.

### **The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked.**

Finally, verse 6 summarizes the chapter with this,

**For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1:6  
(NASB)**

This is a warning that Yahweh knows what every person is truly like. God knows your every deed, whether it is in public or in the privacy of your home. God knows your thoughts, and your heart’s desire. He knows if you are a righteous person or a wicked person. He knows your way. He knows if your way

is like that of the righteous or that of the way of the wicked. The wicked will perish. They will be burned like chaff and set ablaze. That is the concluding principle of the ungodly. But the righteous will receive blessings in this life and in eternity. That is the concluding principle for the



righteous person. It is a warning. The wicked will perish, and it is a call to be righteous.

**Conclusion.** I was thinking about this passage of Scripture. One might say I was meditating on this passage of Scripture. What is the message of this passage of Scripture? What is the point of this passage? We are told who the blessed person is. He or she is the righteous person. Is it not interesting that we were repeatedly told this is the blessed person, but we ask ourselves, “Who is the blessed person?” The wicked person, the sinner, and the sinner are not difficult to understand. Then in verses four and five, we are told who they are like. Our question is, “What is this psalm all about? What is the

message or the point of this psalm?” This is not a psalm for the non-Christian or the unbeliever because this psalm was read or sung in the temple.<sup>3</sup> This was for the nation of Israel to sit and enjoy together. This was for the believers. This is for us, if you are a Christian.

So, what is the message of the psalm? It is, “Do you want to be a righteous person?” That is the purpose of the psalm—to ask the question, “What do you want to be like?” The message of the psalm is that there are blessings for those who are righteous persons. There are great blessings. This is a call to delight in wanting to be holy. It is a call to know our God, and enjoy a relationship with Him. That includes righteousness and it comes from the pages of Scripture. So, what is your heart’s desire?

Father, we thank you for this call to be holy, to be righteous, to evaluate our behavior, our relationship with you, and to evaluate our heart’s desire! Father, please help us to honestly evaluate our heart—to look at our heart! Help us to compare what we think of ourselves to how we have been behaving. Help us to ask ourselves if we are truly interested in being holy and in knowing You. May that be the question we ask ourselves! May You move in the hearts of all of us that we who call ourselves righteous would truly desire to be holy and to know You! Amen.

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3. Walvoord and Zuck. Psalms. The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985. p. 782.