

THE GOOD LIFE // PSALM 1

From the series, Summer in the Psalms

Psalm 1 is a picture of two paths—the way of the righteous and godly and the way of the wicked. Jesus Christ is the true blessed man described here—only he fully lives out the model provided in this passage. But, in him, the believer can pursue this good life.

Three Marks of the Godly Man

1. Separation from the world (v. 1) “Blessed” means happy—emphatically happy. It is a happiness stemming from the pursuit of holiness. How does one obtain this kind of happiness? The psalm begins with the negative—what not to do. The thing to avoid is intimacy with the ungodly. We notice a progression from walking to standing to sitting—an increasing entrenchment in moral depravity. We also notice the movement from counsel to way to seat, showing the progression from advice to association to sitting among.

2. Meditation on the word (v. 2) The second verse moves on to the positive—what are we to do? Love the Bible. We understand that a love for God’s word is not a natural tendency for anyone and that we should praise God for giving us a heart for his Word. In the psalm, we see a picture of a man trained to delight in the Word. It is the pattern of his day, and he takes it in as spiritual food—smelling it, tasting it, chewing it, swallowing it. It is a feast for the soul.

3. Vegetation for the Lord (v. 3) The third verse points to the result of combining separation from the world and meditation of the Word: vegetation. Fruit is produced in the life of this blessed man. This is actually a picture of passive reception—he is planted; it is done to him. The streams (plural) of water can point to the abundance of the grace received by the blessed, but an even more fundamental implication is that of a diversification of water supply. In the arid geography of Israel, water was seasonal. In the picture of the blessed man, regardless of season or circumstance, he has access to what he needs. The fruit produced represents a multiplication of life. This fruit comes in its season—it may not show up when we want, but we must remain faithful. The blessed man is evergreen; his prosperity is inward and a result only of the work of God.

Three Marks of the Wicked

1. They are dry (v. 4) In contrast to the righteous, the wicked are not represented by fruitful vegetation. Rather, they are dry. When harvesting wheat, farmers would toss the grain into the air—the wind would blow away the dry, light chaff, leaving the valuable wheat to fall back to the ground. The wicked are like the chaff—dry, insubstantial, and useless.

2. They are done (v. 5) The wicked will not stand in the judgement, and they also will not stand in the rest of the psalms. This gatekeeping passage indicates that they should go no further in this hymnbook.

3. They are dead (v. 6) The way of the wicked will perish. The only way to avoid perishing and to have eternal life is through Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Can chaff become wheat? Through the transformative work of Christ, the dry and dead can be brought to life and led through green pastures and by still waters. They can be planted by streams of water.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which path are you on? The way of the righteous or the way of the wicked? Or do you recognize yourself in Paul’s lament that “I do not do what I want, but the very thing I hate?” (Romans 7: 15).
2. What might tempt a believer to walk in the counsel of the wicked? How does walking lead to standing and then to sitting?
3. Have you ever been discouraged that you don’t seem to be producing fruit? How can this psalm’s focus on seasons be an encouragement?