

*Psalm 1. Life has two paths—one that pleases God and one that doesn't. Regardless of the path you're on, no doubt you're convinced it's the right one. The first of the psalms calls us to humbly question this.*

Ponzi Schemes. You've heard of them, but how much do you know about Charles Ponzi? He was a highly charismatic swindler utterly consumed with getting rich quick. His most well-known scheme involved international reply coupons, a kind of stamp. He said he could make a profit by buying and selling thousands of these each day between Italy and America. A small profit was possible, but Ponzi boasted that he could generate a 50% ROI every 45 days.

The claim was absurd, but when Ponzi started paying as promised every 45 days, his scheme grew like wildfire. Soon, no one cared where he came from, and for a time no one questioned his integrity or his credentials. In fact, at its height in July of 1920, investors were pouring an additional \$250,000 per day into Ponzi's scheme. People waited in lines practically begging him to take their money.

The scheme didn't last even a year, and when truth came to light, some 17,000 people swallowed staggering losses. Not only were their returns meaningless numbers on paper, most of their original investments had been wiped out. Ponzi never invested in anything, nor had he ever purchased a single coupon. It was all a game of moving money around to build the impression of real returns and a financial genius.

Ponzi attempted countless schemes, and like this one, each failed. He served time in prison on-and-off throughout life and then died in 1949 without a penny or even a friend who trusted him. Life is a gift from God, and those who walk in the way of the wicked waste it. They do leave something behind that's of great value though—a warning. When we look at their lives, we should be able to see the ominous words: "Do not follow."

Scripture often tells us about two paths in life. When the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, Moses said, "See I have set before you today life and good, death and evil" (Deut 30:15). When Israel had taken the land, Joshua urged the people, "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh 24:15). At Samuel's death, he reiterated this charge (1 Sam 12), and as we come to the ministry of the Lord, we find something similar. He spoke of two gates, two roads, two houses, and two trees bearing two kinds of fruit (Matt 7:13-20).

## THE BLESSED

*Psalm 1:1-3—"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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. 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."*

"Blessed" (*ashrai*) means "happy" in Hebrew. When we say that someone is lucky, fortunate, or doing well, the Hebrew equivalent would have been to say that person is *ashrai*. The first psalm could open with these words, "Oh, how happy is the man who..." If you want to know how to live a happy life, here's the secret. The psalmist is saying: *Pay attention!*

The man who is blessed by the Lord refuses to walk, stand, or even sit with wrongdoers. In other words, if you want a life blessed by God, don't spend your time with those who aren't. The wicked may not see themselves as evil, but their plans are filled with moral compromises or worse. A truly blessed person refuses to listen to this kind of counsel. Why? Because, "His delight is in the law of the Lord."

A person blessed by God is passionate about God. He loves the things that God loves and hates the things that God hates. He isn't mean or rude to the ungodly—he just has no interest in what interests them. As like attracts like, how often do you see good money managers fellowshiping with those who squander wealth? Is it common to see peacemakers enjoying the company of peace-breakers? Do those with self-control gravitate towards those with little to none of it? Wisdom delights in wisdom; folly delights in folly. The blessed man delights in being with others who are blessed, others who know, love, and worship God.

As opposed to the wicked, the one who is blessed regularly fills his mind with Scripture. He's made a choice to "meditate day and night" upon it. "He is like a tree planted by streams of water." Scripture is the life-giving stream that pulsates throughout this man's being. Thus, he grows stronger, happier, and wiser from year to year.

Storms are part of life (Job 5:7), and some storms can destroy all a person holds dear. When winds of that magnitude strike, one's foundation becomes immeasurably important. The blessed man is able to stand, because like a great tree, he has roots.

# Two Roads Diverged

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Part of the reason people look at this man and exclaim, *asbrail!*, is because they've seen him endure a storm. When the winds of life howl he's able to cope, able to stand, even able to flourish once again. What about the wicked? The psalmist says they're like chaff. Even the slightest breeze wreaks havoc upon their lives.

## THE WICKED

*Psalm 1:4-5—“The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”*

The “wicked”, “sinners”, and “scoffers” from verse 1 are broad categories that encompass many people. By contrast, the psalmist writes of a specific kind of man. He's one of the few who hears, “wisdom crying aloud in the streets” and actually stops to listen (Prov 1:20). He isn't common, but an outlier in society.

“Wicked” is a strong word, but Scripture doesn't reserve it for the worst of the worst. Anyone who knows what God has said and in his own wisdom disregards it is called wicked (Psa 36:1-2). Those who live as if God does not exist, scoff at wisdom, or refuse to be corrected are said to be wicked (Prov 9:7, 10:4).

As opposed to the one who delights in the law of the Lord, the wicked “meditate day and night” on lesser things. Their delight is worldly. Does it really matter what a person delights in? Well, it's been said that as a man thinks, so he is. According to the psalmist, the one who thinks upon the things of God becomes like a strong and healthy tree; the one who thinks or upon or delights in worldly things becomes like chaff.

Grain was once harvested in a two-step separation process. It was threshed to loosen the outer, scaly shell. The harvester would then winnow the grain and chaff by lifting it into the wind with a fork. Grain had weight and always fell back to the ground; chaff was near weightless. A slight wind was all the harvester needed to separate the two.

This is the picture painted by the psalmist. He says that the wicked will be separated from “the congregation of the righteous” like chaff is separated from grain. One is of great value to the Lord; the other isn't. And once the two are separated, the two shall never meet again.

## AN EVALUATION OF THE TWO PATHS

*Psalm 1:6—“for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”*

The blessed person is happy not because of a sudden feeling, but because he has lived well. As one reaps what is sown, blessing is the harvest of living according to God's Word.

Why is this so? The psalmist says it's because, “the Lord knows the way of the righteous.” God created their path, and He walked it perfectly while on earth. If He is blessed, then treading a path in life that aligns with His ways should also be blessing.

*Proverbs 14:12—“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”*

Psalm 1:3 tells us that: “In all that [the blessed man] does, he prospers.” The Hebrew verb for “does” is causative indicating that God causes this man to prosper. God honors those who honor Him. The path of their lives grows more blessed, whereas the path of the wicked is self-destructive.

The wicked are left to themselves in life, and if given enough time, theirs is a path that always leads to ruin and misery. Their path looks appealing, but all that glitters isn't gold. Not all paths lead to blessing, not all roads end in happiness, not all ways will take you to God or end with Heaven.

In “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost, he suggests that we choose our path wisely...

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

According to Scripture, the road less traveled by was the one walked by Jesus Christ. Turn to Him, and live in a way that honors God. Such will make all the difference to you throughout time and well into eternity.