Psalm 1 – Planted to Prosper
Dr. John Carmichael

[Psa 1:1-6 NASB95] – 1 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! 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 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. 4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.

- Everyone wants to live a blessed life. People pursue happiness, prosperity, security, success, and fulfillment. Yet Psalm 1 begins by telling us that the truly blessed life is not determined primarily by what we possess, but by the path we choose.
- Psalm 1 serves as the gateway to the entire Psalter. Before the Psalms teach us how to worship, pray, lament, or celebrate, they teach us how to live.
- The Psalm presents a series of contrasts: Two ways: the righteous and the wicked. Two influences: the counsel of the wicked and the instruction of Yahweh. Two images: a flourishing tree and wind-driven chaff. Two outcomes: a way known by Yahweh and a way that perishes.
- The opening word, ashrei (אַשְׁרֵי), commonly translated "How blessed," describes a condition of genuine well-being or flourishing. It is more than a temporary emotional feeling.
- The blessed person is not necessarily someone without difficulties. Rather, the blessed person enjoys the favor of God and lives according to His instruction.
- A Spirit-empowered life must also be a Scripture-governed life. The Holy Spirit never leads believers away from the truth He inspired (2 Timothy 3:16; John 16:13).

How can we live a blessed, fruitful, and spiritually flourishing life in a world that constantly pulls us away from God?

Psalm 1 answers this question by revealing four characteristics of the blessed life and the ultimate difference between the righteous and the wicked.

I. **The Blessed Life Rejects Ungodly Influences**
   a. [Psa 1:1 NASB95] – 1 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!
   b. The blessed person refuses ungodly counsel. The Hebrew verb halak (הָלַךְ), "walk," describes movement or conduct. In this context, walking in someone's counsel means allowing that person's perspective to influence one's decisions and direction.
   c. The Psalmist identifies three kinds of people whose influence must be resisted: the wicked, sinners, and scoffers.
      i. These terms are not necessarily three entirely separate groups. Together, they describe people whose attitudes and behavior oppose God's instruction.
      ii. [1Co 15:33 NASB95] – 33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."
      iii. Application: Examine whose advice shapes your decisions. Are you being directed by Scripture or by social media, popular culture, ungodly friendships, and worldly philosophies?
      iv. You cannot consistently follow ungodly counsel and expect to arrive at a godly destination.
   d. The blessed person refuses to become established in sinful patterns

i. The progression from walking to standing to sitting is a vivid literary picture of increasingly settled participation in an ungodly way of life.
ii. We should not force every verb into a rigid chronology, but the cumulative picture is clear: the righteous person refuses to make a home in rebellion against God.
iii. [Jas 4:4 NASB95] – 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
iv. Application: Sin often becomes normalized through repeated exposure. Guard what you watch, listen to, celebrate, and allow to influence your thinking.
v. Holiness is not merely separation from sinful behavior. It is a life consecrated to God and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16; 1 Peter 1:15–16).

e. The direction of your walk eventually determines where you stand.

II. The Blessed Life Delights in God's Word

a. [Psa 1:2 NASB95] – 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.
b. The blessed person loves God's instruction
   i. The Hebrew word torah (תּוֹרָה) means instruction or teaching. While it can refer specifically to the Mosaic Law, here it emphasizes the instruction of Yahweh as the guiding authority for life.
   ii. The contrast between verses 1 and 2 is important. The righteous person does not merely reject ungodly influences; he replaces them with God's instruction.
   iii. The word translated "delight" communicates pleasure, desire, and genuine affection.
   iv. God's Word is not simply an obligation to endure. It becomes something we treasure.
   v. [Psa 112:1-2 NASB95] – 1 Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly delights in His commandments. 2 His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed.
   vi. Application: Develop a relationship with Scripture that goes beyond occasional reading. Approach the Bible expecting to hear God's truth, encounter His character, and receive instruction for daily life.
   vii. The Word you delight in will shape the life you live.
c. The blessed person meditates on God's Word continually
   i. The Hebrew word hagah (הָגָה) can refer to murmuring, speaking softly, or pondering. In Psalm 1:2, it describes sustained reflection upon God's instruction.
   ii. Biblical meditation is not an attempt to empty the mind. It is the intentional filling of the mind with God's truth.
   iii. The phrase "day and night" expresses continual engagement rather than a requirement to read Scripture every waking moment.
   iv. [Col 3:16 NASB95] – 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms [and] hymns [and] spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
   v. Application: Read Scripture daily, reflect on a passage, speak it in prayer, memorize key verses, and deliberately apply what you have learned.
   vi. Pentecostal emphasis: The Spirit illuminates and applies God's Word to believers (1 Corinthians 2:12–13). Illumination does not replace responsible interpretation; it enables believers to receive and respond to revealed truth.
d. That continually occupies your mind will eventually influence your life.

III. The Blessed Life Produces Lasting Fruit

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a. [Psa 1:3 NASB95] – 3 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.
b. The blessed person is planted near a dependable source
    i. The Psalmist compares the righteous person to a tree planted beside streams of water.
    ii. The Hebrew expression translated "streams of water" can describe irrigation channels. The picture is of a tree with a dependable source of nourishment, not one relying entirely upon occasional rainfall.
    iii. The image communicates stability, provision, and sustained vitality.
    iv. [Jhn 15:4-5 NASB95] – 4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither [can] you unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.
    v. Application: Establish spiritual habits that nourish your relationship with God: Scripture, prayer, worship, fellowship, and obedience.
    vi. A tree's strength is determined by what sustains its roots, not merely by what appears above the ground.
c. The blessed person produces fruit in the proper season
    i. The Psalm says the tree yields fruit "in its season."
    ii. Fruitfulness does not mean constant visible productivity. The image recognizes the importance of seasons, growth, maturity, and timing.
    iii. A tree may be alive and healthy even when it is not currently producing visible fruit.
    iv. [Gal 5:22-23 NASB95] – 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
    v. Application: Do not measure spiritual health exclusively by immediate results. Remain faithful in prayer, service, generosity, and obedience even when progress is difficult to see.
    vi. Spiritual gifts demonstrate the Spirit's empowering activity, while spiritual fruit demonstrates His transforming activity. Both matter, but gifts must never become substitutes for character (1 Corinthians 12–13).
    vii. You cannot control every season, but you can remain faithful to the One who sustains you through every season.
d. The blessed person flourishes through obedience
    i. The statement "in whatever he does, he prospers" must be understood within the Psalm's wisdom framework.
    ii. The Hebrew verb tsalach (צָלַח) communicates success or advancement. In this context, it describes the flourishing of a life aligned with Yahweh's instruction.
    iii. This does not promise that every believer will become wealthy, avoid suffering, or succeed in every personal ambition.
    iv. Rather, Psalm 1 presents the enduring value of living under God's favor and according to His purposes.
    v. [Mat 6:33 NASB95] – 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
    vi. Application: Redefine success according to God's standards. Faithfulness, holiness, obedience, love, and eternal fruit matter more than temporary recognition or material possessions.

e. Biblical prosperity is not merely having more; it is becoming who God has called you to be.

IV. The Blessed Life Recognizes the Danger of the Wicked Way

a. [Psa 1:4-5 NASB95] – 4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
b. The wicked lack the stability of the righteous
    i. The phrase "The wicked are not so" marks a dramatic contrast.
    ii. The righteous are compared to a living, fruitful tree. The wicked are compared to chaff, the lightweight husks separated from grain during threshing.
    iii. Chaff has no roots, no lasting stability, and no ability to resist the wind.
    iv. [Mat 7:24-27 NASB95] – 24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and [yet] it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall."
    v. Application: A life built upon temporary pleasures, cultural approval, or personal ambition cannot provide the lasting foundation found in God.
    vi. The righteous are rooted; the wicked are scattered.
c. The wicked cannot withstand God's judgment
    i. Verse 5 moves beyond the present condition of the wicked to their ultimate accountability before God.
    ii. The Psalm's contrast is not simply between successful and unsuccessful lifestyles. It concerns two ways with different eternal destinations.
    iii. [Rev 20:11-15 NASB95] – 11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one [of them] according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.
    iv. Practical application: Encourage the congregation to examine its relationship with God. Religious activity, church attendance, and outward appearances cannot replace genuine repentance and faith in Christ.
    v. The Spirit convicts the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).
d. A life without roots in God cannot withstand the final judgment of God.

V. The Blessed Life Walks in the Way Known by Yahweh

a. [Psa 1:6 NASB95] – 6 For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.
b. Yahweh knows the way of the righteous

i. The Hebrew verb yada (יָדַע), translated "knows," can communicate more than intellectual awareness.
ii. Within this context, it suggests Yahweh's attentive recognition and care for the righteous.
iii. God is not indifferent to those who belong to Him.
iv. [Nah 1:7 NASB95] – 7 The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him.
v. Application: Even when your faithfulness goes unnoticed by others, God sees your obedience, perseverance, and devotion.
vi. You may be overlooked by people, but you are never overlooked by God.

c. The way of the wicked ultimately perishes
i. Psalm 1 concludes with a decisive contrast.
ii. The righteous are known by Yahweh, while the way of the wicked ends in destruction.
iii. This conclusion reinforces the Psalm's opening emphasis: the path we choose matters.
iv. [Mat 7:13-14 NASB95] – 13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.
v. Application: The invitation is not merely to adopt better habits. It is to turn to Jesus Christ, trust Him for salvation, and follow Him through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

d. The blessed life is not simply about choosing a better path; it is about belonging to the Savior who is the Way.

- **The blessed life is cultivated by rejecting ungodly influences, delighting in God's Word, and remaining rooted in Him so that we bear lasting fruit.**
- Psalm 1 began by asking us to consider the blessed person. It concludes by revealing two very different destinations.
- Declaration: I am rooted in God's Word. I will not be directed by ungodly counsel. I delight in the instruction of Yahweh. My life is established in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is working in me. I will bear fruit in my season. I will remain faithful in every season. I am rooted in the Word and alive in the Spirit!