

# Wisdom Psalms

Psalm 1  
August 4, 2019



Please read Psalm 1 before going any further in this transcript.

Even though Psalm 1 never actually uses the word wisdom, it is indeed a Wisdom Psalm. In fact, even you just read it, it had a very “Proverbial” ring to it. A Wisdom Psalm is characterized by things like:

- Highlighting the contrast between the ways of the righteous/wicked
- By its extremely practical advice for everyday living, and
- By its clarion call, to pay attention to the teaching of God’s Word.<sup>1</sup>

When we think of the psalms though, we usually think of a songbook, not a teaching book. However, Psalms is also a book of Torah; it’s a book that teaches God’s Truth. We see this explicitly in verse 2, which specifically mentions, “the law of the LORD.” That word “law” in English is the Hebrew word “Torah.” Torah can be translated “instruction” or “direction.” Therefore, the law of the LORD should be understood as His instructions. God is giving direction to His people on the wise way to live their lives. This explains why Psalm 1 begins with the illustration of walking. Our daily walk is not about getting enough physical exercise, it’s about how we live out our lives.<sup>2</sup>

While initially, it might seem odd to mix singing with teaching, upon further reflection, we realize that’s it’s actually a brilliantly strategic mix of the two. Teachers have been doing this for years. A song is how most of us first learned our “ABCs” or what animals sound like on “Old MacDonald’s Farm.”<sup>3</sup> Last Sunday, in both services, we enjoyed Psalm 23 put to various music. Music helps us to learn, to remember and to meditate more deeply on God’s instructions.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it shouldn’t surprise us at all, that Psalm 1 kicks off this collection of 150 psalms, with a focus on Wisdom and delighting in the LORD’s instruction.

In Psalm 1, Wisdom has 3 things to teach us:<sup>5</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> thing that Wisdom teaches us is...

**1. How sin can progress.** Psalm 1:1 begins, “Blessed is the one who does not **walk** in step with the wicked or **stand** in the way that sinners take or **sit** in the company of mockers.”<sup>6</sup> These 3 words walk/stand/sit give us a word picture of progressively getting more and more enmeshed with bad company.

So it might look something like this. You are walking along enjoying the Christian life, living for God, when someone walks up next to you. At first you don’t realize that they are wicked, you just know that they aren’t following God. Maybe you figure you can witness to them, maybe you are just curious what they are like, or maybe you’re just being polite. So, you strike up a conversation with them as you walk along side-by-side. As you are walking along together, perhaps you just aren’t paying close enough attention or maybe you are just distracted by the conversation or by something else. Whatever the case may be, before you know it, you are no longer walking. You are now standing still. Standing somewhere you didn’t think you’d end up standing. You find yourself “in the way that sinners take.” It’s not that you yourself aren’t a sinner or that you have never sinned.<sup>7</sup> It’s just that it’s been a while, since you’ve walked over and stood in a sinful place. And yet there you are,

<sup>1</sup> Other Wisdom Psalms might include Psalms 19, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 128. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1019.

<sup>2</sup> By the way, the law here likely refers to more than just the 10 Commandments or the books of Moses. It refers to all the instruction we find throughout the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole. See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> Some people prefer the game Snorta to learn their animal sounds 😊. One of my favorite learning songs would have to be, “Conjunction Junction, what’s your function? Hooking up words and phrases and clauses.”

<sup>4</sup> In other words, “the psalms were not simply read, but sung, they penetrated the minds and imaginations of the people as only music can do.” Timothy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus*, Viking, New York, NY, 2015, p. vii.

<sup>5</sup> Back on May 26, 2019, we began this Summer Psalms sermon series with Psalm 8, “Creation Psalms.” It’s available at [www.efcbemidji.org/media](http://www.efcbemidji.org/media) We learned, in that introduction to the Psalms, that the Psalms are at least 3 things: they are songs, they are prayers, and they are teachings. Psalms is very much a book of teachings. Psalms is packed with historical accounts of God’s activity among his people as well as theological teaching about who God is and what he is like.

<sup>6</sup> See Proverbs 1:10-19.

<sup>7</sup> Consider 1 John 1:5-7.

right in the thick of it. You've progressed from walking in step with the wicked, to now standing in the way that sinners take. It's not a good way. It's not the narrow way. It's the broad road that Jesus warns us about, the road that leads to destruction.<sup>8</sup> We'll come back to this in verse 6.

The final progression of verse 1 is to SIT DOWN in the company of mockers. This is likely one of two foolish errors. One possible error is...

**1) Foolishly thinking that we can sit in the company of mockers and change their mind about God.** It's a noble effort to reach out to the lost and to share Christ with them. And we are supposed to be salt and light in this world. But usually, once someone has gotten to the point of mocking God and mocking God's people, it's because they have rejected God. The reason that they are all sitting together in one another's company is that they have all made a willful choice to go their own way. This is why they show such bitter contempt for anyone who follows God's way. So, it's very possible that you are throwing your pearls to pigs. In other words, you may not only be wasting your time, you may be putting yourself in a dangerous position. They may turn on you and tear you to pieces.<sup>9</sup> The other possible error is...

**2) Foolishly thinking that we can sit in the company of mockers and NOT become like them.** You convince yourself that you are somehow impervious. "It won't happen to me." Until, of course, it does!<sup>10</sup> There is a strong warning in 1 Corinthians 15:33-34, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame."<sup>11</sup> By the way, this same progression of walking, standing, and sitting could be easily applied to the steps we take online. It's not a perfect analogy but our fingers "walk" us to various places on the web, which are either good or bad. If we are not careful, we can end up sitting in the online company of those who mock God. Wisdom teaches us to pay attention to how sin can progress in our lives! The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing that Wisdom teaches us is...

**2. How to grow in righteousness.** The other half of the thought, that begins in v. 1, is now completed in v. 2, "[Blessed is the one]...whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night." What a contrast! Rather than delighting in sin, this person delights in God's law. He or she sees the beauty and goodness of God's loving boundaries. They recognize that our Creator has lovingly given us His instructions, for how to make the most of this life. How to become the people that He has designed us to be. It worth noting that this word "Blessed" is often translated as "happy" or "fortunate."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, we are fortunate to have God in our lives!<sup>13</sup> Our lives will be much happier WHEN we walk in God's ways. Verse 2 talks about meditation, which is not just for Eastern Religions. This word "meditates" just means to think through the implications of God's instructions for our lives. To "delight" in the law of the LORD means NOT merely to COMPLY, out of some sense of duty, but rather to LOVE what God commands."<sup>14</sup> Day and night, we are to think about God's direction for life.<sup>15</sup> To think deeply and let God's truth soak in. And to apply these Truths to our lives in such a way that they make us wise. We read about this in Deuteronomy 6 where parents are told to, "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."<sup>16</sup> It is wise to go to God's Word and seek guidance for life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Matthew 7:13-14.

<sup>9</sup> See Matthew 7:6.

<sup>10</sup> See Proverbs 6:27-35, especially verse 27.

<sup>11</sup> Consider Galatians 6:1 "...But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted." Read Proverbs 7:1-27. Verse 7 says, "...I noticed among the young men, a youth who had no sense." He is progressively being led astray. By the time we get to verse 22 we read that he is "...like a deer stepping into a noose." Verse 23 says it plainly, "...little knowing it will cost him his life." Verse 27 concludes, "Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death."

<sup>12</sup> *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 977.

<sup>13</sup> This makes me think of the song by Ira Stanphill, "Happiness is the Lord." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ira Stanphill>

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus*, Viking, New York, NY, 2015, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Consider Deuteronomy 17:18-20 and Joshua 1:7-8.

<sup>16</sup> "In the ancient world, reading was done aloud, so to 'meditate' meant to read aloud and ponder." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 977.

<sup>17</sup> See *The NIV Study Bible* footnote on Psalm 1:2, p. 857 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011).

The Psalmist gives us a word picture for this in Psalm 1:3, “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.”<sup>18</sup> Every day, the righteous drink up God’s Word like a tree drinks up water.<sup>19</sup> Over time, this yields spiritual fruit in our lives. In other words, the tree isn’t just drinking up water because it’s thirsty or because it’s hot out. It’s not just piping water from one place to another.<sup>20</sup> It is using that water along with the sunshine and the CO2 and the nutrients from the soil, to make something useful. It’s good stewardship of God’s blessings. I can still remember the words of one of my old professors from NW College. He liked to say to us freshman, “this college is not here to make you into a bunch of SPIRITUAL FATHEADS!” What he meant by this was that if we don’t have a ministry outlet, then our study of God’s Word just causes our heads to swell. We become a bunch of spiritual “know-it-alls” who just want to impress people with our knowledge of the Bible. Sure, we are being nurtured in our own personal faith; but we are not passing that blessing along as God intends.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, too long without water and a plant will wither. Too long without God’s Word and our faith will wither. We need daily input from God to sustain our spiritual health, keeping us “green and leafy.” The more we can keep ourselves spiritually rooted, the more we will spiritually thrive and prosper. By the way, “prosper” here isn’t so much about FINANCIAL prosperity, as it is about SPIRITUAL prosperity. It’s about living out an abundant life with God.<sup>21</sup> A tree that is located right next to a stream or river, literally has its roots constantly saturated in water. Bros/Sis in Christ, may that be the reality in each of our lives; may we be thoroughly saturated in God’s Word. It’s wise to position ourselves strategically for our own spiritual growth and development. So, we probably shouldn’t take a job that pulls us away from God. We shouldn’t put ourselves in any situation that makes it difficult for us to participate in church and small groups and the like. If there is something that is hindering us from our time with God, we need to consider how we can change that. It’s wise to structure our lives, in such a way, that it is easy to make consistent, daily withdrawals from God’s vast resources. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it well, “every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God’s Word...is a lost day for me.”<sup>22</sup>

The stark contrast to a flourishing tree comes in Psalm 1:4, “Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.” Chaff is not something that you and I think about all that often.<sup>23</sup> Frankly, there’s not much to think about because there’s nothing to it! Chaff is less valuable than dirt. Nobody uses chaff for anything. It’s not even useful for filling holes in your back yard. Chaff is the stuff that farmers have to sift out of the good part of the crop. Out of the wheat or corn or whatever else it may be. I found a short video that illustrates this, for those of us who are not farmers. It’s called “Wheat Threshing and Winnowing by Hand.” It’s less than 1 minute long and can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjLCqahK2XY> Chaff is the shell or the husks around a seed that is separated out and thrown away. It’s probably best depicted by the process of winnowing grain. For thousands of years this was done by hand. After the wheat has been cut down it is piled up and then lifted up and turned over with a winnowing fork. “The light husks from the wheat and other fine particles are blown away by the wind in the form of fine dust. The broken-up pieces of straw fall on the edge of the threshing floor. This straw can be fed to the animals as roughage. But the chaff has no purpose; it’s just blown away and forgotten about.”<sup>24</sup> What a stark contrast! A well-rooted tree can withstand even the strongest wind, but the chaff is blown away, by even the slightest breeze.<sup>25</sup> “Poof” it’s gone!

This begs the question, how strong of a breeze would it take to blow you away? Is YOUR faith well-rooted enough, so that it will endure? The 3<sup>rd</sup> thing that Wisdom teaches us is...

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<sup>18</sup> See Joshua 1:8.

<sup>19</sup> I’m a “Tree Guy,” so I am particularly drawn to the imagery in this verse. In fact, I may even put this verse up in my office here at church.

<sup>20</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> *The Zondervan NIV Study Bible* summarizes Psalm 1 this way, “The Key to Success: Stay Rooted in God’s Word.” Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 977.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Patterson, *God’s Prayer Book*, Tyndale, Carol Stream, IL, 2008, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> See *The NIV Study Bible* notes on Ruth 1:22, p. 396 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/chaff/>

<sup>25</sup> Consider 1 Corinthians 3:12-13.

**3. Why we must consider eternity.** Psalm 1 concludes by fast forwarding to the final judgment. Psalm 1:5 says, “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.” This word, “therefore,” makes it clear that the judgment of the wicked is the result of the way they have been living.<sup>26</sup> Despite the wishful thinking of some, everyone in this world does not live happily ever after.<sup>27</sup> There will be a reckoning for all of the wickedness in this world: For sinners, who choose to continue in their sin and do not repent. For mockers, who spend their days sitting around together, making fun of God and His righteous followers.<sup>28</sup> In one sense, this is clearly a fitting end. We can rejoice that God does not allow evil to go unchecked. And yet, in another sense, it is a very sad and sobering end. We must realize, that if someone is not gathered together with us, in the assembly of the righteous, then there is only one other place where they can be. Psalm 1:6 states it plainly, “...the way of the wicked leads to destruction.” This is the brutally honest truth. Psalm 1 begins with the hopeful word “Blessed” but ends with the dire word “destruction.”<sup>29</sup> As one author puts it, “So the two ways, and there is no third, part forever.”<sup>30</sup> This reality motivates us to do 2 things:

**1) To keep growing in our own walk with God.**

**2) To embrace evangelism.** As we mentioned earlier, there are some who have chosen to reject God in this life. They have stubbornly committed themselves to walking in their own wicked ways. But, there are also some who still need to hear the name of Jesus. They have not rejected God but they have also never heard about God. They don’t know about His love and forgiveness. They need someone to explain the Good News to them >>> that’s our job. It’s why we are still here and not already in heaven.

Author Ben Patterson calls the Book of Psalms “God’s Prayer Book.” In his book, he suggests that “By praying the Psalms back to God, we learn to pray in tune with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>31</sup> He is on to something here. So I tried re-writing Psalm 1 in my own words, the way I might pray it to God. It goes like this:

“Heavenly Father, thank You for the blessings in my life. Help me to be careful who I walk with and where I walk to. Protect me from ungodly influences and evil temptations. Give me the strength to resist falling in with the wrong crowd and joining them in their sin. Give me a heart that delights in Your Truth. Help me to be diligent in meditating on Your Word, day in and day out. May I become like a strong, majestic tree that spreads its branches wide and has its roots planted deep. May my life yield fruit for you and may I prosper as you nurture me. Lord, help me not to waste my life with worthless things. May I not be among those who are blown away like chaff. God, I praise You for rescuing me from the path that leads to destruction. Help me to do my part in telling others about You. I will love them and pray for them and share Your truth with them. I trust you to deal justly with the wicked. Lord, thank You for watching over me. Thank you for patiently making me into the righteous person that you want me to be. I pray this in Jesus’ Name, amen.”

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
on August 4, 2019 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

<sup>26</sup> Derek Kidner states it concisely, the wicked don’t have “a leg to stand on.” (*Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 65).

<sup>27</sup> God is not fooled. He has heard the mocking of these unrepentant sinners. He will not forget or lose track of who is who. His final justice is unavoidable.

<sup>28</sup> See 1 Peter 4:2-5.

<sup>29</sup> See *The NIV Study Bible* footnote on Psalm 1 on p. 857 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> Ben Patterson, *God’s Prayer Book*, Tyndale, Carol Stream, IL, 2008, p. 1.