

Choose Wisely
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Allen Power

What do Robert Frost; Frank Sinatra; George Jones; and the writer of Psalm 1 have in common? You'll find out by the end of this lesson.

Let's turn to Psalm 1

- Psalm 1 is a great introduction to the HYMNAL of the Bible...The Psalms
- This Psalm points the way to blessing and warns us about the way to judgment
- It contains:
 - Six little verses
 - Two different ways
 - & Two BIG choices

- Let's start with a little discussion.
- CHOICES!
- What are some of the BIG CHOICES we make in life?
 - Marriage
 - Career
 - To have children
 - Where to live
 - To follow Christ
- What are some LITTLE CHOICES that can have BIG CONSEQUENCES?
 - Choosing to drive drunk
 - Choosing to run a yellow light
 - Choosing a promiscuous sexual lifestyle

It has been said that our life is the SUM OF OUR CHOICES – some of our choices are BIG...some of our choices might seem SMALL. But they all add up in some way.

Let's look at this LITTLE PSALM with a BIG MESSAGE

Psalm 1 (New International Version)

- ¹ Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
- ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
- ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season

and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

- What would you say is the key word in verse 1?
 - BLESSED
 - What does it mean to be blessed?

BLESSED

ashre (אֲשֶׁר, 835), “blessed; happy.”

Basically, this word connotes the state of “prosperity” or “happiness” that comes when a superior bestows his favor (blessing) on one. In most passages, the one bestowing favor is God Himself.

- We all want to be BLESSED by God
- This verse shows us some things NOT TO DO in order to be BLESSED
- What does it tell us not to do?
 1. walk in the counsel of the wicked (Taking advice from evil people)
 2. stand in the way of sinners (Considering the path suggested by someone who “defies” God)
 3. sit in the seat of mockers. (What do “mockers” do? Make fun of the things of God.)
- If you were going to sum up those three things NOT to do in your own words how would you say it?
 - Don’t HANG WITH THE WRONG CROWD!

Proverbs 13:20 says:

20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise,
but the companion of fools suffers harm.

The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version. 1989 (Pr 13:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

The Word in Life Study Bible frames it up this way:

The question is, which road are you taking? If you find yourself ...

- *paying more attention to the advice of those who do not believe in God than of those who fear Him;*
- *behaving pretty much as unbelievers do; or*
- *making cynical statements about God and the things of God... then beware!*

Word in life study Bible . 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Ps 1:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- So verse 1 tells us what NOT to do if we want to be BLESSED BY GOD
- Look at verse 2...what is the first word in verse 2?
 - “But” or “Instead” – meaning “on the other hand...”
 - So THIS is THE WAY we SHOULD CHOOSE

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

- What are the two ACTION WORDS in this verse?
 - DELIGHT
 - MEDITATE
- How do you define DELIGHT?
 - What you take PLEASURE in or DESIRE
 - So the Psalmist says the BLESSED person takes PLEASURE in God’s WORD
- Look at MEDITATE the word translates:

1:2 meditates, *hagah* (hah-gah); Strong’s #1897: To reflect; to moan, to mutter; to ponder; to make a quiet sound such as sighing; to meditate or contemplate something as one repeats the words. *Hagah* represents something quite unlike the English “meditation,” which may be a mental exercise only. In Hebrew thought, to meditate upon the Scriptures is to quietly repeat them in a soft, droning sound, while utterly abandoning outside distractions. From this tradition comes a specialized type of Jewish prayer called “davening,” that is, reciting texts, praying intense prayers, or getting lost in communion with God while bowing or rocking back and forth. Evidently this dynamic form of meditation-prayer goes back to David’s time.

- Let’s change some letters around in this word MEDITATE to make a point

M E D I T A T E

M A R I N A T E

- Okay, all you expert cooks, what is MARINATE?
 - It means to SOAK
 - What happens when we MARINATE a piece of meat?
 - The flavor gets into every part of it
 - If I just put the sauce on top of the meat after I cook it you COULD easily scrape it off and all the flavor is gone...but if I MARINATE the meat in the sauce the flavor becomes a PART OF THE MEAT

David McCullough is one of my favorite authors and a wonderful historian. I heard him say in an interview that when he’s doing research for one of his books on a historical subject like John Adams or Truman or The Brooklyn Bridge he tries to absorb that subject so thoroughly that as he put it:

"You've got to marinate your head, in that time and culture. You've got to become them." (Speaking about researching, and reading, and immersing yourself in History)" — David McCullough (John Adams)

- Get that picture clearly in your mind's eye!
- What if you and I literally SOAK OUR MINDS in the Word of God!
- So that it seeps into every part of our mind!

Jonathan Scott writes:

When someone tells me that they can't meditate, I have learned to ask them if they have ever worried. When they answer that they have, I tell them that if they can worry, they can meditate! Worry is focused thinking on problems or circumstances in such a way that affects your mind and heart and, eventually, your behavior. Scripture meditation happens when a student of the Scripture, humble and open, takes the time, to come to the Word of God and engages it with their mind and heart as they read and study for the purpose of deeper fellowship with God and nourishment to their soul. Meditation enables Scripture to become the true soul food.

The Quest Study Bible Says:

“How Does a Person Meditate on God’s Word?”

Meditation [on Scripture] is a combination of reviewing, repeating, reflecting, thinking, analyzing, feeling and even enjoying. It is a physical, intellectual and emotional activity-it involves our whole being.

- Look back at verse 2...WHEN does the BLESSED PERSON MEDITATE?
 - Day and night
 - Does that mean once in the morning and once in the evening?
 - What does that mean?

Frank Sinatra had a big hit with a Cole Porter song: “Night and Day” Now I know you never thought there would be any good theological lessons from “Old Blue Eyes” but stick with me a minute.

The lyrics read like this:

*Like the beat beat beat of the tom-tom
When the jungle shadows fall
Like the tick tick tock of the stately clock
As it stands against the wall
Like the drip drip drip of the raindrops
When the summer shower is through
So a voice within me keeps repeating you, you, you*

*Night and day, you are the one
Only you beneath the moon or under the sun*

*Whether near to me, or far
Its no matter darling where you are
I think of you, night and day*

- When does he think of her?
- Just at 8 in the morning and 9 at night? NO!
- ALL THE TIME. ALL DAY LONG.
- This is what the writer of Psalm 1 is saying we have to do if we want to be BLESSED. Meditate on God's Word ALL THE TIME.
- If we do that what will we be like?
- Here's another SOAKING metaphor...look at verse 3:

³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

- What's the most important part of the tree?
 - The roots...the PART THAT IS HIDDEN

I read a great illustration of this verse this week.

Ray Stedman tells the story of counseling a young student once as they stood in a beautiful national park surrounded by huge trees:

"Pastor, I don't know what is the matter with me. I want to be a good Christian, and I try hard, but somehow I just never seem to make it. I'm always doing the wrong thing. I just can't live like a Christian."

I said to him, "Well, there may be several reasons for that, but, first of all, let me ask you this: What about your private life with the Lord? How well do you know Him? How much do you delight in reading His Word and then spending time talking to Him? Because, after all, it's not the time you spend in reading the Word that's important, but it's the time you spend in enjoying the presence of God that strengthens you."

He hung his head and said, "Well, I admit I don't do very much of that."

Just then this very phrase from the Psalms flashed into my mind: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water." I stepped back and said to him, "Look at this tree we're under. What does it remind you of? What are the qualities this tree suggests to you?"

He looked at the tremendous Douglas fir, towering up into the heavens above, and said, "Well, the first thing is, it's strong."

I said, "Yes, anything else?"

"Well," he said, "it's beautiful."

I said, "Exactly! Beauty and strength. Those are the two things you admire about this tree. And those are exactly the two things you want in your own life, aren't they? Beauty and strength?"

He said, "Right."

"Well," I said, "tell me this: What makes this tree beautiful and strong? Where does it get its beauty and its strength?"

He stopped for a moment and looked at the tree. Then he said, "Well, from the roots, I guess."

I asked him, "Can you see the roots?"

"No," he said, "you can't." Then he said, "I get it! That is the hidden part of life, but it is the secret of this tree's beauty and strength, isn't it?"

That is exactly what this psalmist is saying. Those who are godly have learned, in the hidden inner parts of their life, to draw upon the grace and glory and strength of God. Their roots run deep into rich and moist soil, and this is what makes them beautiful and strong. And they are fruitful: "He ... yields its fruit in season." That is probably a reference to the fruit of the Spirit, which is described for us in the New Testament. It is the character of God, and that is always the same in either the Old or the New Testament: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and the rest of the qualities listed in Galatians 5:22.

- How is YOUR ROOT SYSTEM? How is MINE?
- What happens if you cut the tree apart from the roots?
 - It can't soak up the water and nutrients and dies
- Look at verses 4 and 5:

⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

- What is CHAFF?

CHAFF, the husk of corn or wheat which was separated from the grain by being thrown into the air, the wind blowing away the chaff, while the grain was saved. The carrying away of chaff by the wind is an ordinary scriptural image of the destruction of the wicked and of their powerlessness to resist God's judgments. Ps. 1:4; Isa. 17:13; Hos. 13:3; Zeph. 2:2.¹

¹Smith, W. (1997). *Smith's Bible dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- Not many “wheat farmers” in our class so picture this...got any leaves in your yard? When they die and separate from the trees what happens with every wind? What do you do with all those dead leaves...throw away or burn them!
- Turn to Matthew 3:11-12 (Words of John the Baptist right before baptizing Jesus):

Matthew 3:11-12 (New International Version)

¹¹"I baptize you with^[a] water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

- Verse 5 makes it plain: “The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment.”
- The first five verses have shown us two paths:
 - The path taken by the one who is BLESSED: God’s Way
 - The path taken by the one who is WICKED: The Other Way
 - Now, verse 6 presents TWO OUTCOMES

⁶ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

- It all comes down to CHOICES
- Remember I promised to explain how Robert Frost and George Jones fit into this lesson?

In his poem “The Road Not Taken” Robert Frost wrote about a man on a leaf covered road who comes to the crossroads and has to choose which road to take:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.*

And he concluded by writing:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

- Robert Frost was no Theologian and it's doubtful he was talking about taking the road to Salvation, but his poem makes the point
- Are you and I choosing to take the road that is easier and more traveled...or the one that's tougher but **MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE?**
- Maybe you're not a Robert Frost fan...maybe your choice of poetry is more earthy.
- That leads us to George Jones...also not a Theologian
- He had a song a few years ago that summed up all the problems he's been famous for. The title was simply **CHOICES**. Listen to these words:

(Chorus)

I've had choices

Since the day that I was born

There were voices

That told me right from wrong

If I had listened

No I wouldn't be here today

Living and dying

With the choices I made

- We all have **CHOICES** every day
- If you've never trusted Christ as Savior, you can make that choice today and there are people in this room who would be thrilled to help you
- Those of us who have made that choice have more choices daily
 - Do I hang with the wicked; Do I do what they recommend; Is it hard to tell the difference between me and them?
 - Do I **MEDITATE** night and day soaking up the Word of God so that the **TREE** of my life is green and strong with the **FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**
 - Do I need to **REDEDICATE** my life to have my **SPIRITUAL ROOT SYSTEM FULLY CONNECTED** to Christ each and every day?
- We all have **CHOICES**