

# Hope in Troubled Times

## The Right Path

*Psalm 1:1-6*

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# The Right Path

## Scripture

I came across a poem that I believe is titled, “Don’t Grieve for Me.” It reads as follows:

When I’ve been to my last service, / And fades softly  
on the air, / The notes of the last song for me, / And then  
the final prayer.

When friends arise and slowly walk / Down the long  
church aisle, / For that last look at my cold corpse, / As they  
pass in single file.

There may be words of flattery, / And some may even  
sneer, / Some may sob, and some may cry, / Some may not  
shed a tear.

But be what may, this much I know, / I will no longer  
care; / No earthly voice can reach my ear, / As I climb that  
“Golden Stair.”

Now, pen in hand, I’m writing you / This is my last re-  
quest, / Don’t grieve for me; don’t wish me back; / For I am  
one most blessed.

I have a hope beyond the grave; / I am secure in God’s  
great love. / I leave this world with all its cares / For a man-  
sion up above.

Though it be hard, please wear a smile; / Rejoice, and  
praise our God! / ’Tis only this old shell of mine / You place  
beneath the sod.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 311.

The line that caught my attention was this one: “For I am one most blessed.” The author of this poem is most blessed because he (or she) is in the presence of the Savior. That will be true for every believer when he or she dies and passes into the presence of Jesus.

But, for the believer, that blessedness does not only begin in glory. It begins here on earth. It begins the moment we trust Jesus to be our Savior. We who know Jesus are blessed.

Today, I want to look at Psalm 1 because this psalm shows us the path of blessing and fulfillment in life.

Please follow along as I read Psalm 1:1-6:

**<sup>1</sup>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;  
<sup>2</sup>but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

**<sup>3</sup>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.**

**<sup>4</sup>The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.**

**<sup>5</sup>Therefore the wicked will not stand in the  
judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the  
righteous;**

**<sup>6</sup>for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

(Psalm 1:1-6)

## Introduction

There are 150 psalms in the book of Psalms. There are different types of psalms. *The ESV Study Bible* categorizes the different psalms as follows:

- *Laments*, whose primary function is to lay a troubled situation before the Lord, asking him for help....
- *Hymns of praise*, whose primary goal is to call and enable God's people to admire God's great attributes and deeds....
- *Hymns of thanksgiving*, which thank God for his answer to a petition....
- *Hymns celebrating God's law*, which speak of the wonders of the Torah (the Law of Moses) and help worshipers to aspire to obey it more fully....
- *Wisdom psalms*, which take themes from the Wisdom Books (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) and make them the topic of song....
- *Songs of confidence*, which enable worshipers to deepen their trust in God through all manner of difficult circumstances....
- *Royal psalms*, which are concerned with the Davidic monarchy as the vehicle of blessing for the people of God....
- *Historical psalms*, which take a lesson from the history of God's dealings with his people....
- *Prophetic hymns*, which echo themes found in the Prophets, especially calling the people to covenant faithfulness.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 940.

Psalm 1 is of course the first psalm in the book of Psalms. It is a *wisdom psalm*. “But,” as one commentator says, “Psalm 1 is more than this. It is the father of all the wisdom psalms.”<sup>3</sup>

We don’t know who wrote Psalm 1. Some scholars say that Solomon wrote Psalm 1, and he intended it to be placed at the front of the entire book of Psalms.

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, called Psalm 1 “The Preface Psalm,” adding, “It is the psalmist’s desire to teach us the way to blessedness, and to warn us of the sure destruction of sinners. This then, is the matter of the first Psalm, which may be looked upon, in some respects, as the text upon which the whole of the Psalms make up a divine sermon.”<sup>4</sup>

So, with that as an introduction, let us turn to our lesson.

## Lesson

Psalm 1:1-6 shows us the path of blessing and fulfillment in life.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. There Are Two Contrasting Ways (1:1-2)
2. There Are Two Contrasting Fruits (1:3-4)
3. There Are Two Contrasting Ends (1:5-6)

### I. There Are Two Contrasting Ways (1:1-2)

First, there are two contrasting ways.

When we think of people, we tend to think that there are

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<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 14.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, vol. 1 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 1.

as many kinds of people in the worlds as there are individuals. After all, each one of us is unique. Just look at the people you can see right now. There are men and women and children. There are people dressed up and others that are dressed down. There are smiling people and frowning people. Yes, we are each unique and individual, and there are billions of people in the entire world.

When we examine the Bible, God says that all the individual people in the world fall into one of two categories. Yes, there are only two categories of people as far as God is concerned. There are those who belong to God, and there are those who do not belong to God. There are believers and unbelievers. There are Christians and non-Christians. There are righteous people and there are wicked people.

One commentator puts it this way, “Psalm 1 deliberately places an important question before us by drawing two portraits in our minds: the portrait of the wicked man and the portrait of the wise man. The question then is posed: Which are we? As we enter the sanctuary of the Psalms to worship and petition the Lord, which side are we on?”<sup>5</sup>

First, there is the way of the wicked person.

Verse 1 says, **“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.”** The psalm begins with the words, **“Blessed is the man....”** One expects a description of the person who is blessed. But the psalmist describes something that is not true of the person who is **blessed**. Instead, the psalmist describes the wicked person.

The way of the wicked person is described in three sets

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<sup>5</sup> Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 45.

of parallels: “walks,... stands,... sits”; “counsel,... way,... seat”; and “wicked,... sinners,... scoffers.” Moreover, there is a downward progression: first, the person **walks**, then he **stands**, and, finally, he **sits**. The wicked model their conduct on the advice of bad people. Then, they linger in the company of persistent evildoers. Finally, they remain permanently among the cynical who openly scoff at God.

One hears more and more of people who grew up in evangelical churches but are now “deconstructing” their faith. The things in the Bible about God, Jesus, atonement, faith, and so on are all being questioned and are in various stages of rejection. My dear friends, there is truth and there is error. When you experience doubt, take your questions to mature Christians who can help you find answers. Don’t seek counsel from non-Christians for answers that one finds only in the Bible.

And second, there is the way of the righteous person.

Let me return to the very first word of the psalm, “**Blessed.**” The psalmist is showing us the path of blessing and fulfillment in life. It is important to note that the psalmist is not speaking of “happiness” but of “blessedness.” John Blanchard helps us understand the difference, “When the Bible tells us that someone is ‘blessed,’ it is not telling us what they feel but what they are.... Happiness is a subjective state, whereas blessedness is an objective state.”<sup>6</sup> John Stott puts it this way, “Jesus is making an objective judgment about these people. He is declaring not what they may feel like (‘happy’), but what God thinks of them and what on that account they are: they are ‘blessed.’”<sup>7</sup>

Verse 2 then describes the practice of a person who is

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<sup>6</sup> John Blanchard, *The Beatitudes for Today* (Surrey: Day One Publications, 1999), 54.

<sup>7</sup> John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7): Christian Counter-Culture* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 33.

blessed, **“...but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.”** The expression **“the law of the Lord”** is a reference to the word of God, not only the legal code that is found in the Bible.

Before I became a Christian at the age of nineteen, God’s word did not make sense to me. But, when I became a Christian, one of the first things I noticed about my new life in Christ is that God’s word came alive! I found delight in God’s word. John Stott notes that this delight “is an indication of the new birth, for ‘... the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so’ (Rom. 8:7). As a result of the inward, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, however, the godly find that they love the law of God simply because it conveys to them the will of their God. They do not rebel against its exacting demands; their whole being approves and endorses it.... Delighting in it, the godly will *meditate* in it, or pore over it, constantly, day and night.”<sup>8</sup>

This was my experience, and it is the way of every righteous person.

## II. There Are Two Contrasting Fruits (1:3-4)

Second, there are two contrasting fruits.

In the next two verses, the psalmist describes two contrasting fruits.

First, there is the permanent fruit.

Verse 3 says, **“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.”** The psalmist is picturing a tree in a hot and arid country. It is planted by a

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<sup>8</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Favorite Psalms, Selected and Expounded* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 8.



stream, and its roots go deep down and draw life-giving water from that stream so that it flourishes, like a tree at an oasis. But, the tree does not exist for its own sake. It exists to provide fruit. This is what makes the tree a blessing. The psalmist's point is that we do not simply take in God's word for ourselves. We take in God's word so that our lives are a blessing to others.

In her famous "Golden Speech," her last speech to Parliament, given in 1601, Queen Elizabeth I sought to reassure her people that she was neither selfish nor greedy. In one memorable line, she said, "What you bestow on me, I will not hoard it up, but receive it to bestow on you again." Whether Elizabeth was sincere or not is open to question, but that should certainly be our attitude as Christians. What God bestows on us, we are not to hoard up or hold in tight-fisted selfishness.<sup>9</sup> The righteous are blessed to be a blessing to others.

And second, there is the perishable chaff.

Verse 4 says, **"The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away."** The psalmist pictures a threshing floor that is used for the grain harvest. The threshing floors in Israel were on hills that caught the best breezes. Grain was placed on the threshing floors and then crushed by animals or threshing instruments drawn over the grain. Then workers with pitch forks would toss the grain into the air. The heavier grain would drop back on to the floor but the lighter chaff would be blown away by the breeze. The grain would be collected and used. And the chaff would be collected and burned.

"The wicked are like chaff in two senses," says James Montgomery Boice, "Chaff is worthless, and chaff is burned. This pictures the futile, empty, worthless life of the godless, as

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<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook*, 2002 Edition. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 273.

well as their inevitable judgment.”<sup>10</sup>

### III. There Are Two Contrasting Ends (1:5-6)

And third, there are two contrasting ends.

The righteous and the wicked have different destinies.

First, there is the end for the wicked person.

Verses 5 and 6b say, **“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;... but the way of the wicked will perish.”** I don’t know for sure if Solomon wrote Psalm 1, but I do know that he did write Proverbs 14:12, where he said, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

The first word of Psalm 1 is “blessed” and the last word of Psalm 1 is **“perish.”** The tragic end of every unbeliever, every non-Christian, every wicked person is hell for all eternity.

And second, there is the end for the righteous person.

Verse 6a says, **“...for the Lord knows the way of the righteous....”** The idea is so much more than an intellectual acquaintance with the righteous person. Warren Wiersbe rightly says, “The word *know* is used, as in Amos 3:2, to mean ‘to choose, to enter into covenant relationship with, to be personally acquainted with.’”<sup>11</sup> The righteous person has a personal relationship with his Creator and Savior.

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of blessing in Psalm 1:1-6, let us be sure that we are on the right path.

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<sup>10</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 1–41: An Expository Commentary*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Worshipful*, 1st ed., “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2004), 15.

Let me close with this story. The Bible teacher Harry Ironside told of a visit to Palestine years ago by a man named Joseph Flacks. He had an opportunity to address a gathering of Jews and Arabs, and he spoke on Psalm 1. He read it and then asked the question: “Who is this blessed man of whom the psalmist speaks? This man never walked in the counsel of the wicked or stood in the way of sinners or sat in the seat of scoffers. He was an absolutely sinless man.”

Nobody spoke. So Flacks said: “Was he our great father Abraham?”

One old man said, “No, it cannot be Abraham. He denied his wife and told a lie about her.”

“Well, how about the lawgiver Moses?”

“No,” someone said. “It cannot be Moses. He killed a man, and he lost his temper by the waters of Meribah.”

Flacks suggested David. It was not David.

There was silence for a long while. Then an elderly Jew arose and said, “My brothers, I have a little book here; it is called the New Testament. I have been reading it; and if I could believe this book, if I could be sure that it is true, I would say that the man of the first Psalm was Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>12</sup>

Yes, indeed! Jesus is the only perfect man who ever lived. He is the perfect description of the blessed man in Psalm 1. It is Jesus who is pictured in Psalm 1. And when you put your trust in Jesus, you are united with him. You are “in Jesus” so that you too can live knowing God’s blessing on your life.

My dear brother and sister, are you on the right path? Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Studies on Book One of the Psalms* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1952), 9–10.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
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