



“Wisdom for the Wavering”

Psalm 1:1-6

January 8, 2023

One of the gifts that I was given this Christmas is a book titled *Trails of the Angeles: 100 Hikes in the San Gabriel Mountains*. I look forward to digging into that book and to exploring as many of the trails as possible. But the author of that book opens it up by letting his readers know that the 100 trails described in his book are just the beginning. He points out that there are really countless trails that lead to the various peaks all throughout our local San Gabriel Mountains.

Thinking about that introduction, I am reminded of a certain proverb that defines the mindset that is pervasive in our day and in our land when it comes to the thoughts that are prevalent in relation to God and faith and religion and spirituality.

That proverb is: “There are many paths to the top of the mountain, but the view is always the same.”

So the wisdom of the age informs us that there are many roads that lead to God and that there are many paths of spiritual blessing and enrichment in this world, and we need to recognize and honor the validity of them all. That is the spirit of the age that we are dwelling in. As common as that sentiment has become, I need to inform you that such a sentiment flatly contradicts the teaching of the Bible, and the Bible opposes such instruction.

According to Scripture, there are two paths of life in this world. There is a path of blessing under the grace of God, and there is a path of judgment under the curse of God. Those are the two options.

Christ Himself, our Lord and Savior, declared:

¹³For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. (Matthew 7:13-14)

The Scriptures boils it down to these two realities. There is no middle ground. There are no shades of grey. There are no other options. It is either one or the other—the path of blessing or the path of curse.

To keep the people of God from wavering, and to keep them immersed in the truth of the Living God and to keep their feet planted firmly on the path that leads to life and blessing, the first Psalm is given from the heart of God to us.

Let’s take this in as we read what it has to say in Psalm 1:

**¹Blessed 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;
²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

**³He 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.

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

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

**⁶for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

And because the Lord of Life has spoken to us, we say AMEN. May God bless the reading of His Word.

As we look into this Psalm this morning, let's start by recognizing that no author is listed in its heading. It does not tell us that David wrote it, so we do not know the human author that had the stylus in his hand laying out these words on the page.

However, we do know that ultimately the Lord God Himself is the author. The Holy Spirit inspired it and through this text, the Living God continues to speak and to edify His people with the revelation of its truth.

Here in this text, the Lord is persuading us to put full confidence in His Word and the path of life that His Word sets us upon as we see that path of life referred to as the way of the righteous that the Lord knows with intimacy and care, and that He watches over with love.

This adds contrast to the way of the wicked, which will perish as we see in the sixth verse. This portion of Scripture is given to the people of God to help them and to keep them from vacillating when it comes to the truth that God has laid out in His Word.

We need this so badly because if you just do a short survey of the history of God, you can see that all throughout biblical revelation into the modern day, people have struggled with such wavering.

You can go back to the Garden of Eden where we have the first human beings. God had given them very clear instruction as to what His will is. God gave them clear instruction about the tree of knowledge. There was the serpent also with his guidance. There stood Adam and Eve vacillating between the two and in the path they chose, they took us all in a direction that was tragic.

You can go back to Elijah's infamous showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel as revealed in 1 Kings Chapter 18. We remember the boldness and maybe even the snark with which Elijah confronted those prophets.

But I wonder if you recall that the whole episode began with Elijah confronting the people of Israel. Confronting them, declaring, "How long will you go limping between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him. If Baal, follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. They were sitting there wavering in their hearts.

You can even go into the life of the early church. Simon Peter our brother, the rock! But we are reminded in Galatians Chapter 2 of the sad occasion when he was vacillating between the Gospel of Grace and the Gospel of Works, even to the point that the Apostle Paul recognized it and had to rebuke Peter publicly, saying, "What are you doing consorting with Judaizers? It is all grace, brother Peter, not works. Grace."

So we all must have humility in our hearts because in the remaining frailties of our flesh, there are still things that can be entering into those who looking to Christ that vacillates and wavers. We need to ask God for strength.

We come into our day and we come to a generation of Christians that are wavering between the Word of the Lord and the spirit of the age. We are living in a day that is ripe with apostacy; that is rife with drifting. People in churches are drifting and even denouncing the plain teaching of the way of salvation and the instructions and commands that God gives in the pages of Scripture.

The Bible warns that false teaching will advance and apostacy will increase as the return of Jesus draws near. So the church of God needs to place itself under the teaching of God, saying, "Lord, help my feet to be firm in the way of truth and blessing that is revealed to us from Your heart in the authoritative pages of Scripture. O Lord, make us strong."

That is why this Psalm is given to us. It starkly presents two paths—a path of blessing that is under the favor of God and a path of cursing that is so very common in this world. This is a very broad road that many people are upon. So to keep our hearts from wavering we have this text.

All throughout this Psalm, there is a word that is used repeatedly of the wavering and ultimately the movement away from the unique authority of God's Work. It is a word that is used to describe that and it is a word that is given great emphasis in this Psalm.

That word is one of two words that I want to focus on this morning as we receive the message of this text that God is speaking forth to us. In this Psalm, God gives us two pieces of profound and essential wisdom to keep our hearts from wavering, one piece of wisdom for each of those words are emphasized here.

To keep your heart from wavering:

1. Beware of the way of wickedness

What is the first word that we see in this text that speaks of the questioning of and even the denial of the binding authority of God's instruction in Scripture? What's the word that is used four times in this text to describe those who take such a path?

**⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

It is the word *wicked*! It is used four times in this short Psalm in Verses 1, 4, 5, and 6. Understand that in Hebrew literature, the use of repetition is one of the devices for emphasis.

So this text is giving us this profound wisdom from the heart of God to keep us our hearts from wavering. It is telling us to beware, beware, beware of the way of wickedness. Watch out and be warned.

Let's understand this carefully. When we think of someone who is wicked, we think of the vilest of the vile. If someone is wicked, we are talking about somebody who is a mass murderer, or somebody who is pushing dope on children, or somebody who is making sport of maiming puppy dogs. Wicked!! And that is true. Such things are wicked. But the language here has something broader in its view when it is speaking of the wicked.

The word "wicked" comes from a Hebrew term that in its nuance means "that which is lax or lose," and the idea is that it is something disconnected, being disconnected from God. The King James Version translates the same term as "ungodly."

**¹Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly**

So the term wicked or ungodly refers to the person who does not recognize the Living God, the One Lord of all Creation and His authority not only over all the earth, but their lives as well. That is what wickedness is.

We are talking about someone who does not have the fear of the Lord in their hearts; a person who decides that they are going to be an authority unto themselves and this wickedness lives in a life that is contrary to the revealed will of God in Scripture.

So that is what we are talking about when we have this word “wicked,” and it is used repeatedly in this Psalm from the Lord, from the Throne of Heaven to us. It is saying to beware the counsel of the wicked. Beware. Watch out, because there are all kinds of false teaching as it relates to spiritual and moral matters that is plaguing this planet that we live on.

To keep your heart from wavering, beware the way of wickedness. That means that we must call on the Lord to make our hearts discerning. This does not mean that we totally separate ourselves from the world, by the way.

It is not that we go and live off in some enclave all by ourselves because if we are going to carry out the mission of Jesus to make disciples of the nations, we have to be in the midst of those who are in the darkness. Just in the same way that Jesus was perceived to be a friend of sinners, so do we need to be those who are engaged with people who are lost.

We just need to make sure that we are being salt and light unto them, and they are not having the influence on us. Scripture gives us these warnings because our hearts are so easily those that waver. So we must pray that the Lord will make it clear what His truth is and make us bold to stand in it.

We are going to be in the midst of people fallen in sin who are pushing false spirituality. Every single day. There is a lot of instruction and technical things that we can receive from people. We just can't receive spiritual and moral instruction from those who don't walk with God.

Let me give you an example of this from my life. I found this example as I was reviewing some notes that I had done for some teaching years and years ago on Psalm 1. Back when I was a student at Long Beach City College, I took tennis classes as my physical education requirement. Loved tennis. Still love tennis!

I so enjoyed one of the instructors. I considered her my coach. She taught me a really good serve, and a really good topspin forehand. I even learned a good and effective backhand slice. That was really cool. But I remember one time we were lingering after practicing tennis. There were a handful of us there, including the coach.

We were talking about life and about our lives. I took a deep breath and gathered the strength and gave my testimony. I shared the basics of the Gospel and that following Jesus makes me tick. I told them that Jesus came into the world to save sinners like us.

The coach very sweetly said, “That’s very nice, Jeff. That is good for you. I’m glad that you find meaning in that.” But she used the exact language that I opened up with. She said, “But let’s also recognize that there are many paths that lead to God and there are lots of religions that are equally valid, and we need to respect the validity of them all.”

I told myself to take another deep breath, then I responded respectively, “Jesus Himself does not allow that option. Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.’” I am sure I pointed out the use of His repeated use of the definite article, “the” way. Not a way, but the way, the truth, the life.” And she came back with her opinion.

But do you see what happened right there? Suddenly the tennis coach was becoming my spiritual advisor. She was teaching and instructing me with falsehood. So at that moment I had to decisively filter out what she was telling me about the things of faith because if I would have followed her teaching, I would have been placed on the broad road that leads to destruction, because Jesus said:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

This is what we need to be discerning of, brothers and sisters in Christ, every day of our lives. We tend to think of the wicked in terms of ghouls and goblins and orcs and witches with green skin from the east. But Scripture has a much broader understanding of who the wicked are.

The multiplies verbs and nouns in Verse 1 suggest that the wicked with their counsel are found everywhere. They have all kinds of advice, all kinds of instruction, all kinds of policies, all kinds of laws. They are found in the classroom. They are found in the breakroom. They are found in the courtroom. They are found on Netflix, over the airways, in the story hour, and they are even found in many pulpits. They are even found in the house of congress. The wicked are found everywhere.

So this Psalm is giving instruction and wisdom from the heart of God to keep us fully planted on the path of life, that we will not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of scoffers. There is going to be discernment in relation to the truth about who God is and the way of salvation, and in relation to His will for living in this world.

Whenever a voice from the world teaches us anything contrary to the Scripture, we reject it. If marriage is taught to be anything other than one man and one wife for life, even if they say that there are new ways in which we need to respect marriage, we need to respect marriage as what God has given it to be from the beginning of Scripture to the end.

One man, one wife joined in the bond of covenantal love for life as a picture of Christ and the church. This is where we stand. All throughout the pages of Scripture, whatever the Word of God teaches us, that is where we take our stand in what God has revealed.

We must be careful to filter out anything that does not accord to the Word of the Lord. We see how crucial this is when we see the descriptions of the wicked and their lot intensified throughout this portion of Scripture. It starts by talking about the fact that they will have a whole lot of counsel and a whole lot of moral persuasion for us. That is in Verse 2.

But in Verse 4, it goes on to reveal the frailty of the wicked ultimately, giving us the imagery of chaff. They are like the chaff that is going to be blown away. Verse 5 indicates that the wicked will not have a leg to stand on when the time of accountability comes in the judgment. Then Verse 6 teaches us that the path of the wicked, along with everybody on that path will ultimately be destroyed.

**⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

So we have this teaching and it gets our attention. Brothers and sisters, in reading this let us pray that the Lord will fill our hearts with compassion for those walking in the way of wickedness. And let us pray that the Lord will fill our hearts also with humility because close inspection will reveal that we have had plenty of wickedness in our own hearts. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

We read earlier in this service Jeremiah Chapter 17 and Verse 9.

**⁹The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?**

That speaks to all of our hearts. Some translations have it “desperately sick,” and others “desperately wicked, who can understand it?” We have all had within us the tendency to alter course; to twist things up; to deny God’s authority and make laws unto ourselves. So we say, “Lord, humble us under Your perfect authority as revealed in Your Word. Teach us the path of life. Teach us the way of blessing.”

Let us be humbled under it. Compassionate and bold in it as we proclaim the One who is the way, the truth and the life. Jesus said, “Go now. Disciple all the nations teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.”

Given this reality of wickedness covering the earth, wickedness even in our own hearts and lives, praise God that there is second word that is emphasized in this Psalm. There is another word that indicates God’s grace for sinners like us.

Repetition is one device for emphasis in Hebrew. We saw the repetition of a certain word, didn’t we? But another device for emphasis is placement! The placement of words is another wonderful way of emphasis. Who can remember what the very first word of Psalm 1 is? Blessed!

So not only is blessed the first word in this Psalm, it is the entryway into the entire Psalter. That is what they call the 150 Psalms that were compiled as a hymn book for the people of Israel that we are blessed by into our day as those who are the chosen of God.

This word blessed points us to the path of favor and vitality and grace lived in the mercy and in the power of the one Living God of all Creation.

2. Pursue the path of blessedness

So we read in Verse 2:

**¹Blessed 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;
²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

With this picture of blessing, the Lord is giving us the wisdom that we, by His Spirit, are to be those pursuing the path of blessedness in this life as God is opening that path to our eyes.

Now, this word blessed and blessing is one of the great biblical words. This term is literally found from the first chapter of the Bible and into the final chapter in the Bible. It is found all the way through the Bible. It is a wonderful concept and experience. It is something even more than a concept, it is something very, very real.

I want to give you a little bit more definition of what the blessing of God is, but let's begin by noticing how this experience of blessing is tied to "the Law of the Lord," and the practice of meditation upon "the Law of the Lord."

¹Blessed is the man

Then going into Verse 2:

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

So blessing is connected to God's Law. This word "Law" translates the familiar Hebrew term, "Torah." The basic meaning of the word "Torah" is "instruction." It is often used in reference to the Five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch—the first five books in Scripture, which contains the Mosaic Law.

But this word "Torah" is also used of all of the instruction that comes from God in Scripture in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. So when Jesus called forth for the Great Commission and He said, "Go out into all the nations teaching them to obey all that I have instructed you." The instruction of Jesus is Torah. It reveals the good and perfect will of the Lord

According to this text, there is blessing in the meditation upon the Law of the Lord. Meditation is the diligent and careful attention to the details of God's commands. It involves careful thought and consideration and contemplation of the content of Scripture. That is what meditation is.

It is very interesting to find that the Hebrew term for "meditate" has the nuance of murmuring and muttering. I think that when they were reciting all of the Scripture that they had committed to memory, they were speaking it under their breath as they were reciting and thinking about the meaning of it.

This practice of meditation is really a kind of concentration that emits sounds of understanding and conviction and delight. That is how tuned in and focused you are. Have you ever been reading and learning something, and you find yourself making sounds? This happened to me yesterday as I was reviewing some things I had written down for this message. I was reading through it and it was getting inside of me, and I was like "Mmmmmmm, yes, MMhm."

This does not only happen when we are reading, but when we are just thinking and we are hearing the truth taught. Last week I was sitting up front when Doug was preaching, and behind us were two dear friends that visited Bethel Grace. And as the Word was being delivered, I heard my friend behind me going, "Mmmmmmm. MMhm." He was dialed in! So it is the kind of concentration that emits itself verbally.

Sometimes we are even muttering to ourselves. I remember about a month ago, we are driving here to church. I was concentrating on the sermon. Jonny began chuckling and said, "Dad, you are whispering to yourself again. Your lips are moving and you are whispering and muttering." I responded, "I am?!" I didn't even realize it, because I was just dialed in.

That is what we are talking about here. There is a focused attention. We go to the Lord and say, "In this world where distraction is so very easy to come by, Lord, help me to concentrate on the wonderful words of life," because in such concentration with the Spirit humbling us under the Word of God, there is life and blessing from God as we walk on this one path with Christ that leads to the Father's house.

As you have the practice of mediation and the Spirit of God is working, understand that your experience with that mediation is going to be essentially twofold. When you are in mediation on the Torah, the instruction of God which proceeds from the holiness of God—His perfect will for this world and for the human beings that He has created—when you are in the Spirit meditating on the text, the first experience that you are going to have is conviction.

You are going to be reading these commands that come from the Lord and you will be thinking, "Broke that one. Haven't obeyed that one. Broke that one. Broke that one! I'm guilty. I have broken all of them." Because the Spirit's work is to convict us under the Law of the Lord. It is to help us understand that we fall short of the glory of God. There is the work of conviction with the Spirit revealing that God is holy and we are not, and we are accountable to the God who has created us. This is the work of conviction.

Now in the days when this Psalm was written with that work of conviction, the people would remember the animal sacrifice that God gave as provision of the temporary work of atonement that pointed to the ultimate atonement that would come in Christ. In this practice of mediation when more and more of the people of Israel were meditating on the Torah, I wondered if there was a positive correlation between that practice of mediation and the practice of sacrifice in the temple, realizing they needed a substitute.

As we praise God for this day of full redemption and grace, this day that all the Old Testament Scriptures were pointing us to all along, as we are meditating on the Law of the Lord and the Spirit is bringing conviction, He is also going to bring us to the Messiah, the Lamb of God slain for sinners. He is going to bring us to Jesus, helping us to see and know and rejoice that Christ is the Word of God, aka the Wisdom of God, the Instruction of God, the Torah of God incarnate

The very Author of the Law came into the world in human flesh. He lived it out flawlessly to perfection. This same One who was the Unblemished Lamb, the Word of God Incarnate, He was nailed to the cross, crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem where He paid the price for all of our daily, repeated infractions of the Law. He paid for all of our transgressions!

So mediation on the Law ushers us into the presence of Christ Messiah, who came on this mission of grace and mercy to live the Law for us; to wash our sins away. And then we say, "There is such great blessing in this mediation as Spirit has opened our eyes to these awesome realities." That is the first of the twofold work of the Spirit as the people of God are mediating on Scripture.

Second, as we are brought to our Messiah, there is the experience of delight. First the Law condemns us then once we are saved and redeemed in Christ, the Law delights us.

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nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
²but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

There is a transformation, a work of grace that occurs. As the Spirit is anointing and we are concentrating, the Word of God tastes like honey. So we are reading the will of God in Scripture and we say, "Yes, Lord, I fall short but I am forgiven in Christ and I want this because Your Spirit is in me." Life responds to life. Spirit responds to spirit.

All throughout the pages of Scripture, there is the testimony of the people of God delighting and being lit up through the Scriptures, the Law of the Lord! I pray that this is the collective experience of the people at Bethel Grace.

We must ask the Lord for help in this. We are like people who go chasing squirrels. Two minutes into our reading of the Bible, a video game distraction pings up. Lord, dial us in to the practice of meditation on Your truth, because there is such great blessedness in the experience.

¹Blessed is the man

Blessed is the man, blessed is the woman, blessed is the child of God.

This doctrine of blessing is one of the pervasive teachings of the Bible. The word blessed is used from cover to cover. The word bless is used 120 times. Blessed 288 times. Blessing is used 76 times.

In the Hebrew writings, there were two words for blessing that are translated into the one word “bless” in the English. This is such great terminology.

The Hebrew terminology of blessing

Barak – fruitful, effective, prolific

Ashar – happy, joyful, contented

Barak tends to be used in the writings of Moses. Ashar is used along with Barak throughout the Psalms and the wisdom literature. We have these two words for blessing in the Hebrew language.

The word Barak has the nuance of fruitfulness and being prolific. You see the meaning of it in its first usage in Genesis Chapter 1 when God was speaking to the people He created, saying, “He blessed them and said, ‘be fruitful and multiply.’”

Being blessed of the Lord is being made effective in the calling that He places upon our lives. It is His empowerment to do what He calls us to do, and what we can only do with His supernatural power anointing us. This is the first aspect of blessing.

Next is Ashar. That means happiness, joy, gratitude, contentment. It is translated in the Beatitudes as Makaria. That is the New Testament word that is parallel to this one and has the nuance of relief and happiness and the lightness that comes. Ashar is the word that is used at the opening of Psalm 1. This fits right in with the meaning and the imagery running throughout the Psalm of the two paths, and you wanting to be on the right path.

To understand this language of blessed in terms of Ashar, just imagine going hiking somewhere deep out in the woods. Then you decide that you are going to do some off trail. You go way off trail and your interest keeps pursuing you further and further off the trail, and finally you realize that you are lost. You feel like you are walking around in circles, not knowing where you are any longer.

Then that dreadful feeling starts to rise up in your heart and you realize that you are in trouble as night falls. The weather is getting cold, and you don’t know where you are. You fear the wild animals attacking you!

But then as you continue to press on, you see a road mark. You see a sign. You see the path ahead and realize that you are going to be okay. You say, “Glory, glory, glory!” There is such relief. That is kind of happiness and joy that speaks of being on the path of safety. That is being spoken of here in this Psalm and throughout the Scripture.

This is the blessing that we desire as the people of God. This is the blessing that we want to encourage one another in. This is the blessing that we want to lead others to as we share the good, glorious Name of Jesus Christ our Savior.

You are living in a world that will tell you that there are multiple paths to spiritual blessing and there are a whole array of paths that are going to lead to God in the end. That is false teaching. Scripture brings us to the feet of Jesus; it brings us to the foot of the cross; it brings us to the empty grave.

It all culminates in Christ, who declared with authority:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

So with all of this, let’s pray that the Lord will give us ongoing grace to reject the way of wickedness and to pursue the path of blessedness. Let’s pray that as He does this work in us, He will keep our hearts humble. Humble under His Law, leading us always to Jesus who alone is our righteousness. Humility in relation to others who need His saving grace.

May God give strength to stand your ground in the Law of the Lord and may the Lord give each one of us ongoing discernment that we may walk with our feet firmly planted on the path of life, the only path of blessing, the path that is Jesus our Lord.

Let’s close in prayer.