



**H.B. CHARLES, JR.**  
Pastor-Teacher

1118 W Beaver Street  
Jacksonville, FL 32204  
tel. (904)353-8829



Visit us online:  
**HBCHARLESJR.COM**

# WHICH WAY ARE YOU GOING

PSALM 1

*By: H.B. Charles, Jr.*



# SERMON MANUSCRIPT

Psalm 1 is more than just the first psalm. It is an introduction to the Psalms. It is the preface of the Psalter. It is the psalm of Psalms. In Medieval copies of the Psalms, this first psalm was written in red ink with no numerical reference. Psalm 2 was considered the first psalm. Psalm 1 was viewed as the gateway into the Psalms. So it is.

Psalm 1 is categorized as a WISDOM PSALM. In this regard, it would fit perfectly in the Book of Proverbs. Psalms are about prayer, praise, and testimony. Proverbs are about practical wisdom for godly living. Yet this is what we find in this Psalm 1. It pictures life as a journey with only two paths. There is God's way and the sinner's way. There is the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. There is the way that leads to blessedness and the way that will perish. There is no third way. Each of us is on one path or the other. Which way are you going?

Psalm 1 bids us to consider the path we take and the final destination it will reach. Moreover, it challenges us to take the right path. There are no commands in Psalm 1. Yet it reads with the force of an exhortation that can be stated in three words: Choose God's way. In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says, *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."* This is the message of Psalm 1. Choose God's way. *What does it mean to choose God's way?*

## I. CHOOSE THE WAY THAT IS BLESSED.

The theme of Psalm 1 is stated in the first word of verse 1: "Blessed." But it has a distinctive understanding of what it means to be blessed. We think of blessings in terms of physical health, material prosperity, and favorable circumstances. Psalm 1 views blessedness as something internal, not external. It is a spiritual condition. The word "blessed" means good fortune, true fulfillment, or supreme happiness. And it is plural, which denotes multiplied blessings: "O the blessedness of the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked." Do you want to be blessed? Verses 1-2 teach us two essential characteristics of the blessed life.

## A. THE BLESSED LIFE REJECTS THE WAY OF SINNERS.

Verse 1 describes the blessed life in negative terms. It tells us what the blessed man does not do. Early church Fathers read this verse as a prophetic description of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not walk in the counsel of the wicked. He did not stand in the way of sinners. He did not sit in the seat of scoffers. And all who would be blessed must follow the righteous path Christ established.

**DO NOT WALK IN THE COUNSEL OF THE WICKED.** Proverbs 15:22 says, *"Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."* But be careful who you receive counsel from. You cannot be blessed if you walk in the counsel of the wicked. You cannot be happy if you take advice from ungodly people. You cannot be fulfilled if you listen to those who reject the ways of God. Psalm 33:10-11 says, *"The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever; the plans of his heart to all generations."*

**DO NOT STAND IN THE WAY OF SINNERS.** Our words, conduct, and attitudes can bloc the sinner's path to God. We can chase people away from God, rather than drawing them to him. But this is the point here. This word is about those who stand the way sinners stand. They stand like them and with them. It is to take a settled position on the side of sinners. Walk denotes one's conduct. But Stand denotes one's character. You cannot be blessed if you stand in the way of sinners.

**DO NOT SIT IN THE SEAT OF THE SCOFFERS.** The words wicked and sinners are synonymous. These are they who miss the mark of God's righteous standards and are guilty of rebellion against God. But scoffers depicts something worse. It is one thing to disobey the law. It is another thing to mock it as unworthy of your obedience. Proverbs 21:24 says, *"Scoffer' is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride."* There may be hope for the person who sins and is ashamed of it. But woe to the person who sins is proud of it. Galatians 6:7 warns: *"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."* The one who mocks God is speeding down a path of destruction. So is the one who sits in the seat of scoffers. You cannot be blessed if you fellowship with those who mock the ways of God.

This verse warns us to avoid guilt by association. You must be careful who you befriend, embrace, and listen to. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says: *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’* If you stand in a chair and I stand in front of you, it is easier for me to pull you down than for you to pull me up. That is the gravity of life. Do not let people pull you down into their foolishness. Of course, this does not mean you should have no association with those who do not share your convictions. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus calls his disciples the salt of the earth and the light of the world. To be light and salt, you must make friends with the ungodly. But you must not make friends with their ways. WILLIAM MCDONALD comments: *“The happy man is a real friend to the ungodly, but he is not a partner with them.”* You must reject the way of sinners.

#### B. THE BLESSED LIFE EMBRACES THE WAY OF SCRIPTURE.

Verse 1 describes the blessed life in negative terms. Verse 2 describes it in positive terms. Verse 1 is what the blessed man does not do. Now we see what he does. But it is not an exact parallel. The psalmist does not say the blessed man walks in the counsel of the righteous, stands in the way of the godly, and sits in the seat of the reverent. Instead, verse 2 characterizes the blessed life by its relationship to the word of God. This WISDOM PSALM can also be categorized as TORAH PSALM, like Psalm 19 and Psalm 119. In a real sense, Psalm 1 is the first TORAH PSALM. It teaches us about life in the word. This is the way to true blessedness. You must embrace the way of scripture. According to verse 2, this involves a twofold devotion to scripture.

HE DELIGHTS IN THE LAW OF THE LORD. This is provocative terminology. One may obey or respect the law. But who delights in the law? The blessed man does. Psalm 119:14 says, *“In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches.”* Psalm 119:16 says, *“I will delight in your statutes, I will not forget your word.”* Psalm 119:35 says, *“Lead me in the path of your commandment, for I de-*

*light in it.”* Psalm 119:92 says, *“If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.”* The blessed person delights in the law of the Lord.

This is a statement about the nature of scripture. It is law. It commands, forbids, and directs. Yet it is more than law. It is story. The law is based on story. In Exodus 20:2, the Lord prefaces the TEN COMMANDMENTS by declaring, *“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”* The basis of the law is the story. The story defines us. It tells us who God is and what God has done for us. Moreover, if we do not have the law, we would not have the gospel. We would not know the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the law that leads us to the knowledge of the righteous life, atoning death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus. So the godly delight in the law of the Lord. They take pleasure in the word. They rejoice in the scriptures. Blessed people do not view the Bible as outdated, irrelevant, or tyrannical. Blessed people delight in the law of the Lord.

HE MEDITATES ON THE LAW OF THE LORD. The Hebrew word for “meditates” is used in Psalm 2:1, which asks, *“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?”* The word “plot” in Psalm 2:1 is the word “meditates” in Psalm 1:2. The wicked plot in vain to break free of divine authority. The righteous continuously meditates on divine law. Biblical meditation pictures a cow chewing the cud. He chews, swallows, and digests. Then he regurgitates the food and chews it some more to get maximum nutrients from it. It also pictures an animal growling over its prey. In his classic, *Knowing God*, J.I. PACKER writes: *“How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God? The rule for doing this is demanding, but simple. It is that we turn each true that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God.”*

#### II. CHOOSE THE WAY THAT BEARS FRUIT.

COTTON MATTHEW was consumed with a passion to live a fruitful life. His signet ring had a fruit-bearing tree and the words of Psalm 1:3 inscribed beneath it. As he laid dying, his son and successor asked him for a word to remember when he was dead. Mather feebly whispered one word: *“Fruitful.”* This is the heart desire of the godly. Righteous people desire to be fruitful. Why should you choose the way that bears fruit?

## A. THE RIGHTEOUS ARE LIKE A TREE.

Verse 3 says, “He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yield its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” This verse describes two practical benefits righteous people enjoy.

THEY HAVE STABILITY. The righteous are like a tree. They are strong, stable, and secure. Jeremiah 17:7-8 says: *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”* The righteous are like a tree planted. It is not a wild plant that grows strong. It is planted on purpose. It is transplanted from one place to a special location. He is like a tree planted by streams of water. It is planted near the nexus of rivers. There may be no rain from above. But there are streams underneath. It has a constant supply of water to feed its roots, even when drought comes.

As a result, this righteous tree has ample fruit. It *“yields its fruit in its season.* Righteous people bear fruit. And they bear it in season. In the ancient Near East, the early rains would fall and water the earth. Then the scorching heat of the sun would dry up everything. If the later rains did not fall, nothing would grow in season. This is the tension of the fruitful life. Growing fruit requires both days of sunshine and nights of rainfall. There is a name for a place where the sun never shines and the rain never falls. It is called a desert. And nothing grows in a desert. To yield fruit in your season, the storms must come. Likewise, *“its leaf does not wither.”* D.L. MOODY said it well: “All the Lord’s trees are evergreens.” Psalm 92:12-14 says: *“The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”*

THEY HAVE PROSPERITY. Verse 3b says, *“In all that he does, he prospers.”* This is not prosperity theology that guarantees health and wealth. JIM BAKKER, the founder of the PTL Ministries and early champion of prosperity theology, wrote an autobiography after being released from prison for mail fraud and conspiracy, appropriately entitled, *“I Was Wrong.”* So is everyone who teaches that a righteous life guarantees success. We must avoid the dangerous extremes of prosperity theology. Yet we must not avoid the biblical truth that God blesses the righteous. Indeed, there are those who mishandle the word of God and take the promises of God out of context. But there are also those who ignore the word of God and do trust his faithful promises. But do not rush to one extreme to avoid another. In Joshua 1:8, the Lord instructs the successor of Moses, *“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”* This is a promise to all who live by the word of God. In all he does, he prospers.

## B. THE WICKED ARE LIKE CHAFF.

Verse 3 is a beautiful picture of the practical benefits of the godly life. Verse 4 is an abrupt contrast: *“The wicked are not so.”* It is a sharp, emphatic negation: “No so, the wicked! No so.” The psalmist does not give a detailed description of the wicked. He simply says that the life and destiny of the wicked are the opposite of the righteous. He is not blessed. He does not delight in the law of the Lord or meditate on it. He is not like a tree. He is not planted, has no fruit, no season. He does not prosper.

Verse 4 says, *“The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.”* Chaff is the outer shell or husk that covers the kernels of grain. At harvest time, the farmer would cut the grain and take it to the threshing floor. The stalks of grain would be crushed under the weight of an ox-drawn sled. Then the farmer would sift the wheat by tossing it into the air. The good grain would fall back to the earth. But the slightest wind would carry the chaff away. This is the peril of the wicked. They are not planted trees that bear fruit. They are unstable chaff that is easily blown away. The ungodly are at the mercy of forces he does not see and cannot control. Psalm 37:10-11 says, *“In*

*just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.*” The world views meekness as weakness. And it seems that the only the meek inherit is a place at the end of the line. But in a little while, the meek will inherit the earth. But the wicked will be no more. They will be like the chaff that the wind drives away.

### III. CHOOSE THE WAY THAT LASTS.

Verses 1-2 describe the spiritual fulfillment of the living God’s way. Verses 3-4 describe the practical benefits of living God’s way. Verses 5-6 describe the final destiny of living God’s way. This is the ultimate reason why you choose God’s way. It is the only way that lasts. It may seem the wicked are like trees and the righteous are like chaff. But don’t be deceived. It will not last.

- Immorality may gratify you for a while, but it won’t last.
- The nightlife may excite you for a while, but it won’t last.
- Strong drink may stimulate you for a while, but it won’t last.
- Ungodly companions may please you for a while, but it won’t last.
- Foolishness may interest you for a while, but it won’t last.
- Filthy greediness may thrill you for a while, but it won’t last.
- Worldliness may satisfy you for a while, but it won’t last.

Proverbs 14:12 says, *“There is a way that seems right to a man but the end therefore is death.”* Mark it down. God’s way is the only way that lasts. Verses 5-6 make this point by predicting the destiny of the wicked.

#### A. THE WICKED WILL BE SEPARATED FROM THE RIGHTEOUS.

The message of Psalm 1 is found in the tension between verses 1 and 5. Verse 1 says the blessed person separates himself from the wicked. Now we see that the wicked will be separated from the righteous. Verse 5 says, *“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.”* In verse 1, we are warned

not to stand in the way of sinners. But verse 5 makes two statements about where the wicked will not stand.

**THEY WILL NOT STAND IN THE JUDGMENT.** The first psalm makes it clear that a day of judgment is sure to come. Acts 17:30-31 says, *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”* Every person has a date with destiny. Hebrews 9:27 says, *“It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.”* Every one of us will have to answer to God for how we have lived our lives. But the unrighteous will not stand in the judgment. They may stand firm in their wicked ways now. But they will not be able to withstand the wrath of God when judgment comes. God punishes all sin. Either Christ suffers punishment for you on the cross or you will suffer punishment in hell. All who are not covered by the blood of Jesus are doomed. They will not stand in the judgment.

**THEY WILL NOT STAND IN THE CONGREGATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS.** The unrighteous think the assembly of God’s people is a big waste of time. You cannot get them to come to church. If they do come, they ridicule the worship and fellowship of the saints. But the day of judgment will change their minds. They will desire to join the assembly. But they will not stand in the congregation of the righteous. This is why you should guard your attitude toward the church of Jesus Christ, which is the hope of the world! Hebrews 10:24-25 says, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”* As you see the day of the Lord drawing near, you need to be marked present when God’s people meet together as often as you can. But don’t follow any person who neglects the church. They are going in the wrong direction. And they will not stand in the congregation of the righteous.

## B. THE WICKED WILL PERISH IN THEIR WAY.

Psalm 1 ends with a final contrast. But it is not between the righteous and the wicked. It is between the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked.

THE RIGHTEOUS WAY IS COVERED. Verse 6 is the first mention of the Lord in this psalm. But he does not show up to do anything. Verse 6 simply tells us what he knows. Of course, the Lord is omniscient. God knows everything known, unknown, and knowable. In this sense, the Lord also knows the way of the wicked. But the Lord knows the way of the righteous in a personal and intimate way. The Lord watches over the way of the righteous. CHARLES SPURGEON said, “Walk with God, and you cannot mistake the road; you have infallible wisdom to direct you, permanent love to comfort you, and eternal power to defend you.” Following the way of the righteous does not guarantee that the way will be easy. But it is to live with the blessed assurance that the Lord is watching over you. Job 23:10 says, “*But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*”

THE WICKED WAY IS DOOMED. Verse 6 says: “*for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*” Look at the bookends of Psalm 1. It begins with the word “blessed” and ends with the word “perish.” These are the two ways of life stated in the clearest terms. Those who follow the way of God are blessed. Those who follow the way of the wicked will perish. The word “Perish” is refers to described eternal judgment. We think that when something perishes that’s the end of it. But in scripture, to perish is to spend eternity under the judgment of God. The Bible does not teach annihilation, which claims the wicked will cease to exist. It does not teach reincarnation, which claims the dead will come back to life in another form. And it does not teach purgatory, which claims sinners are purged from their sins to be made fit for heaven.

The Bible teaches that there are two paths with two distinct destinations. In Matthew 21:46, Jesus says, “*And the se will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*” The word “eternal” is used twice in that statement. And it means the same thing in both instances. Eternal punishment is just as long as eternal life. Mark it down. Everyone will spend eternity somewhere – in heaven or hell. And the path you take will determine the destiny your reach. Which way are you going? If you are going in the wrong direction, I have good news for you. You can make a U-turn. Confess your sins. Run to the cross. Receive the forgiveness of God through faith in the blood and righteous of Jesus Christ.

Police officers discovered a lost little girl in the streets of London. They tried to help her find her way home. But she did not know her phone number or her address. “Is there anything you can tell us to help you get home,” the asked. She informed them that she lived near the Charing Cross. “Get me to the cross,” she said, “and I can find my own way home.”

ALAS, INDEED, MY SAVIOR BLEED  
AND DID NOT SOVEREIGN DIE  
WOULD HE DEVOTE THAT SACRED HEAD  
FOR SUCH A WORM AS I

AT THE CROSS, AT THE CROSS, WHERE I FIRST SAW THE LIGHT  
AND THE BURDENS OF MY HEART ROLLED AWAY  
IT WAS THERE BY FAITH I RECEIVED MY SIGHT  
AND NOW I AM HAPPY ALL THE DAY