Believers should embrace godly wisdom because obedience to God’s Word is the path of true life.
WITH WHOM OR WHAT WOULD YOU CONSULT IF FACED WITH MAKING A DECISION ABOUT A ROAD THAT IS OFF THE MAP? WOULD YOU ADMIT THAT YOU NEEDED ANY HELP DECIDING WHICH ROAD TO TAKE?

THE ROAD FORKS, BUT YOUR GPS INDICATES NO SUCH FORK.

You are on your own for this decision. Do you go right or left? Sometimes the decision determines how long the journey will take. In some rare cases, the decision determines whether you will reach your destination. Either way, you have to make a decision.

The Bible repeatedly describes life as a journey. On this journey we face daily choices about which path to take. Do we follow God’s instructions, or do we listen to what the world says? Some people reject God’s way completely. Others constantly struggle to make godly choices. No one gets it right every time; nevertheless, we must always seek to choose correctly.

Psalm 1 describes two paths that people can select. One path leads to life, and the other leads to death. At the beginning of Israel’s history, Moses set two ways before the people. The Israelites had to choose the way of life and blessing or the way of death and adversity (Deut. 30:15). Later, Jesus likewise identified two ways—the narrow way that leads to life and the wide way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). These two ways are the only two options available. Everyone will decide which way they live. While the right choice seems obvious, most people make the wrong choice. Believers should embrace godly wisdom because obedience to God’s Word is the path to true life.
PSALM 1:1-6

1 How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! 2 Instead, his delight is in the LORD’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. 4 The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand up 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 leads to ruin.

Think About It

Observe the variety of imagery employed in Psalm 1. What do these assorted, real-life sketches suggest about the importance of making correct choices?

Notice the number of times that the word “wicked” occurs in Psalm 1. Why do you think the writer repeated this term so many times?
Psalm 1

Psalm 1 is commonly classified as a wisdom psalm. Wisdom may be defined as the appropriate application of knowledge. For example, understanding that a light socket conducts electricity is knowledge. Wisdom is keeping one’s finger out of the socket. On the other hand, screwing a light bulb into the socket in order to illuminate the darkness shows an even higher form of wisdom. Wisdom psalms present examples of human behavior to demonstrate that some behaviors are wise and some are foolish. These examples are intended to point the reader to choices that please God. Wisdom psalms tend to be proverbial. Indeed, many of the ideas in this psalm have parallels in the Book of Proverbs.

Psalm 1 must be viewed in relation to the entire Book of Psalms. This first psalm serves as an introduction to the entire psalter. In like manner, Psalm 150 functions as the conclusion to the book. In Psalm 1 the righteous are blessed by God, and in Psalm 150 the righteous bless God. Psalm 1 describes what God does for His people, and Psalm 150 instructs God’s people to bless God.

Psalm 1 divides easily into two parts—the path of life (vv. 1-3) and the path of death (vv. 4-6). The two lifestyles are contrasted in the first two verses. Then in verses 3 and 4 the nature and value of each lifestyle are sketched with a botanical analogy. The last two verses then disclose the ultimate fate of each lifestyle.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE PATH OF LIFE (Ps. 1:1-3)

1 How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers!

The righteous person, according to biblical standards, is the one who is in right relationship with God. This right relationship is achieved not by a person’s good works, but through faith in Christ. However, genuine faith generates good works.

The word happy is translated “blessed” in some translations (KJV, ESV, NIV). The term (Hebrew esher) is best understood as the sense of joy, blessedness, or contentment of those who faithfully walk in a right relationship with God. This state is the consequence of godly choices. The word essentially points to the best possible life that an individual may achieve. This Hebrew word occurs more than 40 times in the Old Testament, and at least half of these are in the Book of Psalms.

Take note in Psalm 1:1 of the progressive action from walking to standing to sitting. In the imagery of life as a journey down a path, the traveler stops to listen to the banter of bystanders. The unsuspecting journeyer soon joins the conversation and eventually takes a seat among these gabbers. The traveler in verse 1 does not do these things. He does not stop, stand, or become one of the wicked.

The words the psalmist used depict a progressive decline, but one that is avoidable. The negative construction of this verse warns the reader that each step is a choice. Therefore, the psalm encourages readers to avoid that choice. Do not be influenced by the wicked. Refuse to walk down the sinful path. Do not align yourself with those who scoff at that which is holy. The psalmist is not presenting a methodology for avoiding the wicked, but to serve as a warning to be careful about our close associations.

2 Instead, his delight is in the LORD’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

If certain behaviors must be avoided in order to attain biblical happiness, then what conduct is acceptable? The answer is not a catalog of activities but dependence on a single source that will produce appropriate behavior in any situation. Unlike a to-do list, this source alters the individual’s total perspective. The source is Scripture. Scripture transforms the nature of those who delight in it. Such people read the Bible because they hunger for God. They eagerly absorb its instructions and constantly seek to abide by them.

The righteous person not only reads the Bible, but he meditates on it. In order to understand the admonition of this verse, we first must know what the verb mediates means. Biblical meditation is not related to Eastern religions, transcendental meditation, or syncretistic
contemplation. The Hebrew verb means to make a low sound; here the sense is to read or repeat Scripture in an audible whisper. Clearly God does not expect people to read the Bible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, it does mean that the actions of the righteous are steered by the truths of Scripture at all times. Their conduct quietly reinforces truths from the Bible because God’s Word has become an integral part of their thinking.

Though the Holy Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in this verse, the Spirit and the Word are inextricably connected. The Spirit was responsible for the writing of the Bible (2 Pet. 1:20-21). He likewise abides permanently in the life of every believer. Consequently, the Holy Spirit implements this continuous application of the Word, recalling for Christians the applicable passage or appropriate biblical principle at the moment it is required. His participation enables the righteous to avoid the influence of the wicked by embracing the power of Scripture to live.

3 He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

The psalmist compared the person who follows God’s counsel to a productive tree planted near a river or irrigation canal. The tree did not sprout in this location by chance. God set it in this place. The flowing streams are essential to life. The analogy points to the Bible as God’s resource for living in a manner that keeps an individual right with Him.

God declared that the person who follows the counsel of His Word would flourish and produce fruit. Therefore, God’s Word supplies everything necessary for living a fruitful and rewarding life. This does not guarantee financial prosperity or career advancement. Rather, because this person follows the counsel of God’s Word, his or her ambition is to glorify God, not to obtain monetary or personal reward. We are saved by grace alone, but grace never stands alone. Grace produces confirming works. Belief will be succeeded by godly behavior. Fulfillment in life is found though faithful obedience to God and His Word (Jas. 1:22-25). So this promise points to success in honoring the Lord through our behavior.
What is the godly fruit that God desires for His followers to produce? How can worldly wisdom hinder growth? How does reading the Bible nurture the development of this godly fruit?

THE PATH OF DEATH (Ps. 1:4-5)

4 The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.

The wicked are the opposite of all that was said about the righteous in the previous three verses.

In ancient Israel, harvested grain stalks were laid out on a threshing floor to dry. The threshing floor commonly was a shallow pit cut in the stone bedrock of a hilltop. After the stalks dried in the hot sun, the grain was beaten on the rock surface either with a large stone or with the hoofs of animals walking on the grain. In the evening, the wind normally blew harder across the hill. At that time, the farmer used a winnowing fork to toss the beaten crop up into the evening breeze. The heavy kernels of grain dropped back into the stone depression. In contrast, the chaff was blown away.

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

Listening to the deceptive advice of the wicked leads to instability and destruction. The psalmist warned his readers that the wicked face sure judgment and eternal separation from God’s righteous people. The fate described here is the direct consequence of a wicked lifestyle.

Standing is a posture of confidence. In an ancient trial it signified the validity of one’s testimony. When the wicked are brought before the Almighty in judgment, they will not be able to maintain their erect posture. The facts will condemn them, and they will be humbled by their guilt. They will be unable to defend the choices that produced their lifestyle. God’s verdict will result in eternal separation from Him.

How should God’s warning about the future of the wicked affect you? How should you feel? What should you do?
THE CONCLUSION (Ps. 1:6)

6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

The psalmist stated that God protects the righteous while allowing the wicked to move toward disaster. It must be noted that ultimate collapse and expulsion take place at the final judgment, but divine judgment is a present reality. Regardless of the effort, any attempt to refute God is futile and ultimately will fail. Likewise, estrangement from God’s people is in reality the manifestation of that failure. It should always be remembered that condemnation is not a future fate but a present reality.

God’s knowledge of the righteous is a present reality. God’s knowledge of His people is not intellectual knowledge but knowledge that is derived by walking with His people.

In addition, God is identified by the divine personal name. The word Lord is the Hebrew Yahweh. This is the name God used in His covenant with Israel and therefore indicates that the relationship is an intimate one. The intimacy of God’s knowledge guarantees His presence to secure His people. Believers can live with confidence, knowing that God guarantees His protection to the obedient.

Again, the righteous are those individuals who are right with God. Their way is a lifestyle of faith. They have been saved by faith and live by faith. Faith is not merely saying words but is a trust that produces obedient acts that develop the believer into the likeness of Christ.

While the lifestyle of a godly man or woman reflects growth toward being Christlike, the lifestyle of the ungodly ultimately leads to ruin.

What does this verse teach about the security of those who follow God? How does this security impact our behavior?
OBEY THE TEXT

- Fulfillment in life is found through faithful obedience to God and His Word.
- We have been warned that falling for the deceptive advice of the wicked leads to instability, worthlessness, and destruction.
- Believers can live with confidence, knowing that God guarantees His protection to the obedient.

What is the role of the Bible in your life? How much time would you say you spend reading and studying the Bible on a weekly basis? What actions can you take to increase that time?

As a group, list ways ungodliness is promoted in our world today. How can your Bible study group help one another not be influenced by this misinformation?

What are some situations in your life in which godly living is difficult? How do you determine what God wants you to do in these situations? What are some Bible verses that can provide you with confidence to do what God wants?

MEMORIZE

For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to ruin. —Psalm 1:6

SESSION 1: THE PATH 19
Use the space provided to make observations and record prayer requests during the group experience for this session.

**MY THOUGHTS**
Record insights gained and questions to discuss during the group experience.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**MY PRAYERS**
List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**MY MISSION**
Acknowledge ways you will obey God’s Word this week.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

20  EXPLOR E THE BIBLE | YOUNG ADULTS