

STANDING ON THE WORD IN A SHAKY WORLD
PSALM 1

What's on your **music playlist** today? Or better yet, what kind of playlists do you have on your music app?

If you're like me, you have different playlists for different times of the day and different activities:

- ✓ I have a list of quiet instrumental hymns for when I read my Bible in the morning
- ✓ I have a variety of lists for reading and studying at the office
- ✓ I have a sermon writing playlist
- ✓ I have several "it's been a full day and I need to disengage my brain on the drive home" playlist
- ✓ I have an "I finished writing my sermon playlist" (Scott Joplin, piano rags)!
- ✓ I have two primary "get ready for worship on Sunday morning" playlists
- ✓ I have a bunch of yard working playlists
- ✓ I even have an "I'm going to the ballpark" playlist.
- ✓ (I don't have any workout playlists because that's when I listen to books)
- ✓ And I have variations of most of those for the Christmas season, too.

I use music to orient my mind to various tasks and to stimulate me to finish various tasks (or to enjoy the finishing of those tasks). The Lord has given us music to help us think (and to calm our hearts, 1 Sam. 16:23). And He has given us music to conform our minds to *Biblical* truths. When we are joyful, or discouraged, or suffering, or in physical pain music can direct us to right thinking and restful attitudes.

So what is on your go-to playlist? We've spoken much this year about remaining steadfast in a turbulent world. For a few weeks, I want to direct you to **some songs to sing** that will give you courage to be steadfast in the shaky world. You won't find these songs on Spotify or Apple Music, but you will find them in God's Word. I want to start this series in the Psalms, and in the beginning of those Psalms, Psalm 1. This is a well-known psalm that affirms the power and importance of God's Word in the midst of the pressures and temptations of this world.

The psalmist says it this way —

BE STEADFAST IN THIS SHAKY WORLD BY FOLLOWING THE PATHWAY SET BY GOD'S WORD.

To be steadfast in this world, sing the song of God's Word, reminding yourself of **the two pathways of life**:

1. **RIGHTEOUS Road: the Pathway of the Godly Man (vv. 1-3)**
2. **EVIL Avenue: the Pathway of the Ungodly Man (vv. 4-6)**

Context:

- ✓ The book of Psalms is divided into five books; most of the psalms in the first two books (1-72) are written by David. But there is nothing to indicate that David wrote this psalm.
- ✓ There is nothing in the psalm that provides a historical background.
- ✓ It seems most likely that this was written in the era of Solomon and perhaps by him because it is written in the style of wisdom literature and no other psalm uses the word **scoffer** (v. 1), but Proverbs (written by Solomon) uses it 14x.
- ✓ This psalm was also probably placed first because it sets the tone for all the psalms — the troubles and temptations of life, righteousness v. evil, blessing v. judgment, and the wisdom of God's Word.
- ✓ Specifically, the psalm emphasizes the two pathways of life: the psalmist uses the word **path** in both the first and last verses creating "brackets" on the psalm; he wants us to understand that is his emphasis. There are two ways to live in life: which way will we go?
- ✓ While the psalm is wisdom literature and is designed to teach, it is also a song to be sung. What song should the follower of God sing as he chooses and walks on his pathway?

BE STEADFAST IN THIS SHAKY WORLD BY FOLLOWING THE PATHWAY SET BY GOD'S WORD.

1. **RIGHTEOUS Road: the Pathway of the Godly Man (vv. 1-3)**

- **The untraveled road (v. 1)**: There is a road that the righteous man won't travel. He's opened Google maps, seen the accidents and construction that are on the road, and while it looks like a comfortable road, he knows it won't take him where he wants to go.
 - ✓ This **man does not walk** on the evil man's road — he avoids it; his pattern is to go a different way; he never goes down that road. He has a well-worn pathway home, and it's never on this road.
 - The road he avoids is **the counsel of the wicked**... We say that we are always counseling — but this verse says that the world is also counseling. The world is always giving instruction and advice about the way to live. And it's not a good way.
 - It's the way of the **wicked**. The word is often translated, "evil." You might conjure up an image of a red devil with a forked tail and pitchfork in his hand. You might think of the worst kinds of sin — and while the word can be used that way, it also has another sense. It can refer to those who are guilty (before God). They are "wrong-doers" and "sinners." They are against God in every way — in the most heinous ways and in every subtle way. They just don't want God.
 - And this mention of the sinfulness of sin is another theme of the psalm (also **vv. 4, 5, 6**). And it is a theme of the psalms (82x), which makes Psalm 1 an appropriate "starting point" for Psalms.
 - The mindset and thinking of the righteous man is not towards evil and sin. He understands the nature of sin, is not attracted to it, and does not make plans for it (**Rom. 13:14**).
 - It's worth asking ourselves: "Am I training my way to follow the world's counsel in any way?"

- ✓ He also does not ***stand in the path of sinners***.
 - He is now standing — even “taking a stand” in the pathway of sinners. He is defending sinful thinking and sinful living. He is becoming an advocate. What is he advocating?
 - ***The path of sinners*** — he advocates for a sinful way to live. These ***sinners*** miss the mark and intent of God’s commands; they are obviously *guilty* and *culpable* for sin. And this man won’t travel that road and he certainly won’t stand in the road pointing others down its pathway.
- ✓ Finally, he does not ***sit in the seat of scoffers***.
 - These ***scoffers*** are not only people who have chosen rebellion over the Redeemer, but they mock and deride God and His people. They are defiant and ridicule what is righteous.
 - He will not sit with scoffers, colluding with them and planning evil with them (like **Prov. 1:10ff**).
- ✓ Did you notice that the psalmist uses three figures and they are progressive: walking, standing, and sitting. They picture a movement towards and a gradual hardening in sin and sinful thinking. Lot exemplifies that pattern (Gen. 13:12, 14; 19:1). Unrepented sin always moves one downward in sin.
- ✓ The three responses to evil in this verse also remind us that the world system is not neutral; it is always after us to shape us and conform us and change us and move us away from the Lord. Satan is like a roaring lion seeking to devour souls; he wants to keep the unrighteous as his and he wants to lead believers away from contentment in Christ. We need to constantly watch the road signs to see if we are on the world’s roads or the Lord’s roads. *So where should the godly person go?*

- **The traveled road (vv. 2):**

- ✓ ***His delight is in the law of the Lord***. He takes pleasure in the Word of God. He *longs* for it. He enjoys it and he must have it. He can’t live without it (which also implies that he *obeys* the Word of God).
- ✓ His longing is not just for the “laws” but for everything in God’s Word — “Torah” is often used cumulatively for all of God’s revealed Word, and that is the most logical sense here.
- ✓ Because he delights in the Word, he ***meditates*** on the Word.
 - “Meditation” means “to mumble, speak inarticulately, murmur aloud.” It is talking and reciting.
 - Biblical meditation is not emptying one’s mind of everything, but filling one’s mind with Scripture and then mulling over it and contemplating it — “what are the implications...?”
 - And his meditation is ***day and night*** — just like praying without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), the Bible is always on his mind. Whenever he is awake, his mind is gravitating towards, “what does God think?” [Aside: one value of memorizing and meditating is not just that you are memorizing a particular verse for a particular problem, but you are training yourself to always think, “what would God have me do in this circumstance?”]
- ✓ We know, believe, and act on the truth that God’s Word will guide us in every temptation, trial, and circumstance of life (Ps. 19:7-14)
- ✓ And without the Word of God, we are susceptible to every evil influence and every evil doctrine. There is no wisdom and no discernment apart from the Word of God. Which leads us to its blessings...

- **The destination of Righteous Road (vv. 1a, 3)**

- ✓ When he gets to the end of the road of righteousness, what does this man find? Stability (v. 3).
 - Now the psalmist switches to another word picture — from travel to trees and vegetation.
 - The one who travels the road of dependence on the Word of God is like a ***firmly planted tree*** by ***streams*** (irrigation ditches) of water. The roots have gone deep and the tree is firm. And the obvious inference is that it can withstand the gales of wind that come in life's storms. This man's life is "rooted," "stable," and "unshakable" in an instable and shakable world.
 - But not only is the life stable; it is also ***fruitful*** and ***prosperous***.
 - ... Like flowers that bloom at the right time and trees that produce fruit, the person who is in the Word of God is bearing fruit at appropriate times and seasons.
 - ... Don't you love this time of year in Texas? The flowers are magnificent. Even as a non-gardener, I can appreciate what my Master Gardner wife has produced **in our yard**.
 - ... When you and I live in the Word of God, that's what happens to us. We are fruitful.
 - ... Now in about two months all our flowers will be gone because of July/August. But even though hardships come to life, the one who sticks to the Word of God won't ***wither*** and die off or die back. There may be drought and wind and storms, but this man persists because he is by the streams of the water of the Word and he is constantly taking nourishment from it.
 - ... In fact, in every way, ***he prospers***. He has quality of life and "success." [Don't confuse this prosperity with physical prosperity. The righteous man still lives in a fallen world and may still suffer difficulty and hardship. However, he still prospers because he perseveres ("lives above the circumstances") with peace and contentment in spite of his situation.]
 - ... This success is only attainable through conformity to the Word (**Josh. 1:7-8**).
- ✓ **He also finds *blessedness*** (v. 1).
 - The word is a plural — there are an abundance of blessings awaiting the godly man.
 - It is sometimes translated "happy" but that is short of the sense of the word; it is joy, contentedness, and satisfaction in every situation. It's not happiness because of the ease of good things, but a settled contentment because of right relationship with God.
 - Vance Havner, a preacher from the last generation, said, "One frequently meets passersby with music emanating from transistor radios on their persons. Lacking music in our hearts, we carry it in our pockets!" In this broken world, we need new songs to sing to make us rest in the Lord.
- ✓ The way to joy is to learn the song of delight in obeying the Word of God and traveling Righteous Rd.

2. EVIL Avenue: the Pathway of the Ungodly Man (vv. 4-6)

- We don't *have to* travel down righteous road; there is another possibility (though it's bad!). The psalmist reminds us of the vanity of the other pathway — Evil Ave.

- ✓ Notice that he doesn't explain what Evil Ave. actually looks like — he already told us when he described what the godly man does not do in v. 1. He only says **they are not so...** (like vv. 2-3).
- ✓ But he does emphasize the wickedness of the ungodly, referring to their wickedness in all three verses. The ungodly man is **wicked** (opposed to God in every way), sinful, and scoffing.
 - As mentioned earlier, **wicked** does refer to sins called abominations; but it is also more generic, of all who are guilty of violating God's commands — those who do not seek or love God. They may do kind and charitable deeds, but God's evaluation is "Unrighteous. No merit." It's tragic.
 - To paraphrase another writer, evil frightens us — and it should. It is meant to. We are meant to be humbled by supernatural evil so we know it is both too strong for us and disastrous to us.
- ✓ Instead of reiterating what evil is like, these verses focus on **the destination of Evil Ave.** — where will this road take him?
 - Their end is **not so** — not like the righteous (v. 3). Instead of being **firmly planted** and **fruit-bearing** (v. 3), they are like **chaff**.
 - To separate a grain from its husk, someone would get in an open place where the wind would blow, put the grain that was reaped in a basket and toss the grain up and down in the air so that the husk would loosen and when it did, it would blow away in the wind.
 - There is no value in the husk (unprofitable) and it is impermanent (unstable).
 - In the end (and even along the way!), the wicked person's life is evaluated as chaff — empty, weightless (without substance), empty, and vanity. Without using the same word, Solomon affirms the same idea in the opening chapters of Ecclesiastes — worldly wisdom (1:12-18), pleasure and possessions (2:1-11), work (2:18-23), oppression (4:1-3), competition and rivalry (4:4), riches (5:10-17) are all empty and folly. They will all dry up and blow away.
- ✓ The life of sin and rebellion looks enticing and exciting. Like saltwater to a dehydrated man, there will be no ultimate satisfaction — and it will leave him in worse condition than before he drank.
- He is in worse condition because his ultimate destination is that **the wicked will not stand in the judgment.**
 - ✓ The **wicked** and ungodly stand in the streets (v. 1) compelling others to follow them. But when it counts, at the end of time, they will **not be able to stand**. The word "stand" is actually "rise up" — they won't stand up; they will bow down (Phil. 2:11-12). They will be crushed in the judgment. (Think about the warning for Israel after the sin by Achan at Ai, **Josh. 7:12-13**).
 - ✓ While there are judgments from God all through life on ungodliness and wickedness (Rom. 1), this phrase points to the one final judgment of all the ungodly (Rev. 20:11-15). And this is *God's* judgment.
 - ✓ Additionally, **sinners** [will not stand] **in the assembly of the righteous** — they have no fellowship or help now, either. "They have no justification; they 'will not stand in the judgment' (5a); they have no communion; 'nor will sinners stand in the congregation of the righteous' (5b) — they are cut off, outside the community of God's flock; and they have no hope..." [Davis, 22.]

- ✓ The evil and ungodly proclaim happiness now and a party in Hell. There is only (ultimate) emptiness in their sin now and devastating and permanent (eternal) loss in the next life. It's disaster.
 - ✓ Imaginary evil the way the world portrays it in books, TV shows, movies, and advertisements, is romantic, exciting, and satisfying while righteousness is portrayed as boring and empty. In reality, real evil is gloomy, boring, barren, and eternally damning. And real righteousness is satisfying, fruitful (profitable), and eternally rewarding. (And the world has songs promoting its deceit.)
 - ✓ The world always gets the message wrong (and because we are always bombarded with that wrong message, we need the reminder of the reality from this psalm).
 - ✓ Not only does the Bible not give us permission to play with evil, this passage reminds us of the disastrous consequences of playing with evil. It will not end well. And that's the final message...
- **The end of the road for all men** — *the Lord knows...*
 - ✓ When the psalmist says "the Lord knows" he means more than just omniscience. He means, "the Lord sees all, knows all, and approves and cares for all His **righteous** people." He cares; they will not die.
 - ✓ And in the very same way, He knows **the way** [pathway/road] **of the wicked** and they **will perish**.
 - There is every protection from God for those who are His.
 - There is no protection for those who do not know God and are not known by Him.
 - ✓ Those who are wicked (guilty and unrepentant sinners) **will perish**. They will die on earth and always be dying in Hell without finally dying. It is a most tragic end.
 - ✓ So what road are you on? Look at your life — what do the road signs say? Do they say "Righteous Rd. — Following Christ Ln.?" Or do they say "Evil Ave. — Living for Self Ln.?"
 - ✓ Paul tells the Corinthians to "test yourselves to see if you are in the faith." Whether you are ten or eight times 10 today, look at your life. What road are you on? Only one road will lead to a satisfying end in eternity — and only one road will be profitable today. It is stormy in the world. But following God on the road of righteousness will lead you to safety. And the way to live on Righteous Rd. is not by trying harder to be perfect (you aren't!), but by trusting that Christ alone died for your sin and satisfied God's righteous wrath against your sin so that you could live now and later. And God will declare you to be righteous when you repent of your sin and turn to faith in Christ...

CONCLUSION: Jesus has a similar (shorter song) — **Mt. 7:13-14**. He reiterates what the psalmist has said: there are only two pathways to follow in life. One leads to safety and prosperity. The other leads to emptiness and destruction. One is attentiveness to God and His Word and one is a life of ignorance — ignoring God and ignoring His Word. And both those pathways have a soundtrack — a song that is calling you to follow and obey. Which song and which playlist is getting your attention today? Listen to the song of the Word so that you will be compelled to live your life on Righteous Rd.

BENEDICTION: **Joshua 1:8-9**