

Tree of Life

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Summer is a time people plan vacations, trips. Some even summer—as a verb. And if you can't travel, you might feel like you're missing out. Maybe pin a dream getaway. Why? To escape stress, to counterbalance work with play, to have a more balanced, satisfying life. *But is this the key to a truly good life? How do we flourish?* This is the meta question of the Psalms. Whether lamenting the joylessness of life or being so satisfied they break out in song, the psalmists seek an answer to how do I flourish? Psalm 1 gets right to it. Want to flourish? Then you have to discern *the way of the wicked, rhythms of the righteous, and both trajectories.*

Way of the Wicked

According to the psalm, it's the righteous who flourish; the wicked do not (1,6). Blessed are the righteous. Now when we hear these categories, most of us don't see ourselves in either one. We think: I've probably done some righteous things, and maybe wicked stuff, but I don't *fit* into either category. And honestly, I wouldn't even use the words. They're too binary, too hard and fast. We want to ask the question—how do I flourish—but *we also want to be the answer*, to determine flourishing on our own, to find contentment on our own terms. But you can't fulfill you; we're made for more. Watching a film recently a guy asks a hacker if "she" would do a job. The hacker retorts, Yeah, but why do you have to be so binary? The camera pans out and you realize "she" is androgynous. Non-binary hacker, ironic for someone whose livelihood relies on binary code, 1s and 0s. What's the point? We can't escape binary, righteous and wicked, right and wrong in a moral universe. In fact, as much as we may not like binaries, we all insist on them. We want courts to come down hard in favor of *our view, the right view*. All those social media rants? Binary convictions. See deep down, we know righteous and wicked are real categories. And Scripture confirms our suspicions. The "**wicked**" person is someone whom a court determines guilty. The term assumes a vantage point outside the Self. Flourishing isn't determined by the individual *but the Creator of the individual*. So which are you—wicked or righteous? It's uncomfortable isn't it? Perhaps that's because we *also* know the line between the two is awfully thin and easily crossed. Isn't that why the psalm exists? To warn the righteous from being lured by the wicked, and to invite the wicked into the blessing of the righteous? It's here because we do cross the line. God wants more for both of us. If you want to flourish, you have to open yourself up to the wisdom of the psalms, refuse small-mindedness and insular thinking, *and get real with God*. Verse 1 shows us how: **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.**" It's a parallelism, meaning the three lines are reinforcing the same idea with different words. What's the idea? The person who flourishes is a person who avoids the counsel of the wicked. This is the governing idea. There is counsel, life advice, calendar-shaping values floating around everywhere. It's often absorbed passively. Take the idea *faster is better*, in ads, apps all the time. Who would debate that when it comes to a laptop or phone? And shouldn't we cut down commute time as much as possible? And the sooner I get done with work, the quicker I get home. And the faster we get the kids to bed, the sooner I can watch Netflix. This inner psychology of speed—faster is better—is counsel that can distract you from the things that matter most. Prayer in the car, closeness with the kids, but we've become

so accustomed to faster is better, we don't even realize the extent of its impact. If a person isn't immediately engaging, we begin to judge them and look for someone or something else. We rush through everything to get to something: fast shopping, fast sex, fast prayer, fast relationships. Any wonder we're *not* content? The counsel of the wicked.

Rhythm of the Righteous

The rhythm of the righteous is different: but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night (2). Notice the righteous are also governed by a source of counsel—the law, also translated *instruction*, of the Lord. An infallible source: the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul (19:7). The righteous person is open to this counsel, not just open, *hungry* for it. They know it's not enough just to read; they slowly *meditate* on his Word. The word “meditate” means to mull, chew, linger. When eating something you really like, we chew slowly. Why? To savor the taste. If you really like a drink, you might roll it around in your mouth *to soak up the flavor*. Want contentment? Soak in God's counsel. Now sometimes Christians will say, I just need to spend more time in God's word. As though spending *time* doing the task is what it's about. But the goal of meditation isn't to get into the Word; it's for the Word to get into you. That's how it revives the soul. We have to allow the counsel to roll over us, soak in. How do you do that? 1) Instead of reading volumes of Scripture, **focus on a discreet passage**. I typically read and reread the same passage over and over. If I'm in a psalm, I read it for several days before moving onto the next one. 2) While reading, **ask the Spirit of God to draw your attention to a word, phrase, promise, challenge**. When you find that bit, read it slowly over and over to understand it, soak it in. 3) Once you've got the meaning, **ask the Spirit to apply it to you**. Why did he draw your attention to this? What does he want: repentance, celebration, encouragement, obedience? 4) Then, **turn it into a prayer**. Respond to God with it. All this moves you closer to flourishing, closer to God. Once the counsel is in you, you can take it with you to counter wicked counsel. Memorize a phrase or verse so you can **delight** “day and night.” Why go to the trouble? *Blessed* is the person who delights in God's law. Every morning I have to reset my delight. My desires slowly shift away from God to getting stuff done, faster is better, and the movie or book waiting on the other side. So I say, forgive me Lord for delighting in X more than in you. Renew my affection for you, give me delight as I meditate on your Word. When the psalm says blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord, its not saying delight in God and you'll get some blessing. Lydia Brownback says, delight in God is the blessing, the flavor of his presence saturating your soul.

Two Trajectories

And that's why *slower can be better*. Because the counsel of the wicked, and the law of the Lord have two very different trajectories. One will make you like a **tree**; the other like chaff. The tree is fruitful. It's not barren come harvest time. It's lively and nourishing to others. And when its winter it doesn't shrivel up. Its leaf doesn't wither. Why? Look where its planted—by streams of living water, not puddles of shallow counsel. The word planted is actually *transplanted*, which means blessing comes to a person *who makes a decision* to plant roots in God's Word. And as a result, that person bears the fruit of righteousness. God knows that person, the righteous. He knows them intimately. He delights in them. But **chaff** is blown away. The disposable husk around an acorn or fruit. It doesn't last. It's rootless, easily blown away from God's counsel, God's people, and God himself. And come judgment

day, when the wicked are judged, they won't have a leg to stand on. Don't be the chaff. Be the tree. These trajectories are forever separated, leading two very different destinations. In Revelation 22, the tree reappears. Instead of bearing fruit in season, it's omni-seasonal. And the leaves don't just not wither, they heal. You know why? They are fed by the river of life. It flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb (1-2). *Jesus is the Lamb* led to the slaughter to refresh us with his never-ending life. Will you summer with Christ? Let's plant ourselves in the water of life, and bear fruit that nourishes others, leaves that extend healing.