

“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; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

Wouldn't that be nice to be that guy? 1. (oops!) I certainly don't seem to fit the bill of the blessed man! Psalm 1 acts as the introduction to the rest of the Psalter: one hundred and fifty Psalms describing the whole range of the human experience. This Psalm sets out the ground rules. The way Psalm 1 lays it out, it would seem the ground rules are, do good, have good happen to you. Do evil and be blown away in the day of judgment. Simple enough, right?

All too often, I find myself hanging out with the wrong crowd. I hardly meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. Rarely do I delight in it! It seems more like a vitamin to swallow to then get on with the rest of the day.

The Psalmist even throws another wrench into the machine. We read in verse 3, in all that he does, this blessed man prospers. 2. (ugh!) I must not be blessed because of my sins and sufferings.

Lord, as I look at this Psalm, Psalm 1, the introduction to the rest of the Psalms, you seem to be mocking me. My life isn't always prosperous. My life isn't always blessed. It has challenges. It has tragedies. It has hardships. I sin. I fall short of the glory of God. I have bad habits that are hard to break and good ones I just can't seem to get into.

There can be days when I seem to do everything right, and yet things blow up in my face. Days when I'm on cloud nine and then problems at work, problems at home, or problems with friends bring me back down to earth. There's no way that I'm this blessed man, Lord. If you only knew the things I go through!

On those good days when I avoid the wrong crowd, when I start the day right on time and spend time in devotion and prayer. Even those blessed days that start with delight in your word and meditating on your commandments—those good days can end badly. They can end with me feeling like chaff in the wind, a fate that is no different than the wicked described in verse 4. It just takes one bad phone call, one angry email, one guy cutting me off in traffic before it all falls apart. There's no way that I'm that blessed man. How could I be?

Lord, isn't it funny that those days that I forget you exist, that I live life like you're not there, that I'm gossiping with the wicked around the water cooler, having yet one more with the sinners at the bar, or sitting scoffing at the latest Netflix special—that that's when I seem to have my best days. That that's what the blessed life feels like?

Because no matter how hard I try, no matter how many times I redouble my efforts to avoid the wicked, the sinners, the scoffers. No matter how many chapters of the Bible I read or the number of sermons I watch, I still don't feel like this blessed man described in Psalm 1. Why even bother? I feel like I've put my coins

in the vending machine, but the candy bar is lodged between the metal and the glass. No amount of tapping or shaking will get it free.

Yet your words come to me. Like a tea bag slowly steeping in a mug or a seed that finally sprouts up out of the ground after seemingly nothing happens for days, your words from Psalm 1 shout out: “[The blessed man] **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.**” In the midst of frustrating circumstances and when a Christian’s life seems no different than an unbeliever’s, you gently whisper to me: “3. (Aha!) The blessed are planted by someone else!”

God, I remember in second grade, our teacher had us plant locust tree seeds in a milk carton for a class project. The seed did nothing. She picked it up from her house. She distributed the seeds to us little second graders. We planted the seeds, we watered them. We saw them grow. I took the plant home and planted it in the front lawn. To this day when I visit dad’s house, what grew from a seed is now the tallest tree in the yard.

“**A tree planted by streams of water**” did nothing to deserve such prime real estate. The tree simply has the farmer to thank. Father, your Son Jesus is the vine, and you are the farmer. In you alone we bear much fruit. In you alone are we planted, watered, and grow.

I remember, it was a day like today. I didn’t choose my outfit. I didn’t buckle myself in and drive the car. I wasn’t much more useful than a locust seed. Mom set me down, that’s where I stayed. All I could do was cry until somebody figured out what I wanted.

Yet in the streams of the waters of Holy Baptism, you planted me in the true faith. You grafted me into the Branch, Jesus Christ Himself. You made me blessed because of *the* blessed man, Jesus Christ. And like a tree on the river, there I stayed ever since.

THE BLESSED ARE PLANTED THROUGH TRUST IN THE LORD. 4. (Whee!) We are blessed as the Lord remains with us. I thank you Lord, that you have made us, your Church, an orchard, your pleasant planting of blessed men and women. Blessed not because of anything we have done but blessed because of *the* Blessed One. You’ve planted us there, and here we are.

Who walked not in the counsel of the wicked, who stood not in the way of sinners, who sat not in the seat of scoffers more than your Son, Jesus Christ, the blessed man? Who delighted more in your law than Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh? Who meditated on your Word more than He who said to the tempter, “**Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.**”

What was the reward for His efforts? This blessed Man was planted on *the* tree and from His veins flowed rivers of living water that yields its fruit in season,

and its leaf does not wither. You left your Son Jesus to die on the cross, yet from the cross flows water and blood. This water reminds us of the baptismal waters in which you've planted us, and this blood feeds us as we eat the fruit of this Blessed Man in the bread and wine and body and blood of this Blessed Supper.

And you knew the way of this Righteous Man. He was not consigned to the fate of the wicked: blowing away like chaff, forgotten like last year's football champions. Even despite the hardships, even despite the suffering and the pain. The way of your Son led from death to life, from judgment to vindication, from loss to victory. Despite Satan hacking away at your Son, Jesus sprung forth on the third day.

So maybe that's the key to all of this! 5. (Yeah!) The righteous never lose faith in the rightness of the Lord's path. **“for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”** Heavenly Father, when I look in the mirror and ask myself, “Am I blessed?” It's never because of my ability to avoid the wicked, the sinners, or the scoffers. It's never in proportion to how many chapters of the Bible I read or how enthralled I am with learning your precepts.

God, you keep telling me, “Don't look at the bathroom mirror. Take a left out of the bathroom and stare at the wall of crosses in the hallway. Look to Jesus, that blessed man who has lived a blessed life for you. Look to Jesus, who through baptism has planted you by streams of water.”

There may be days when I take a page from Erma Bombeck and ask, “If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits?” Yet the Blessed Man tells me, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** Only from the pits do we grow cherry trees.

Psalm 1 is the introduction to the rest of the Psalms, and just like Jesus' life, the Psalms take some twists and turns. The Psalmist shouts. The Psalmist curses. The Psalmist sings for joy. The Psalmist cries alone in his bed at night. Things don't always go according to plan for the Psalmist, and neither do things go according to my plans, do they, Lord?

Yet the righteous never lose faith in the rightness of the Lord's path. Lord, I believe, help my unbelief! Let me know that even when bad things happen to good people, that you're still leading me besides still waters. Let me know that when the wicked prosper, you're setting them in slippery places. Let me know there's a plan, even when I don't feel it in my devotions, even when I skip over the daily Bible reading. Let me know that I have a firm foundation planted by streams of water, even when I feel like chaff in the wind.

Hold me in your arms, Lord, and called me blessed, not because of my outstanding righteousness, but because you have made me blessed in the Blessed One. Let me delight that you have a right path set out for me. Amen!