

Counseling with Psalm 1

By Wendy Wood



Psalm 1 talks about two different types of people and where true happiness (blessedness) is found. The way of the wicked is contrasted with the way of the righteous. As you first sit down with a new counselee, keeping Psalm 1 in mind can be a helpful way to assess the needs of the person in front of you. If your counselee is primarily coming in for a sin issue, how far into their sin are they? If they are primarily coming to counseling as a sufferer, where are the “roots” of their life planted?

Psalm 1:1

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;

This first verse describes the way of a wicked person. It's easy to remove ourselves from the category of “wicked”. There are so many other people who sin worse than we do, after all! But God's definition of wickedness is simply listening to the way of the world. Wickedness is allowing the news, social media, entertainers, friends, teachers, and youtube to be your source of information. Every single one of us needs to take this Psalm seriously.

First of all, the wicked are not blessed. “Blessed is the man who.....” Blessed is another way of saying happy. Sin entices us and lies and tells us that we will be happy if we sin. Sin does bring momentary happiness, at times. Sin may be fun for the moment, but then guilt and difficulty set in. God is clear that choosing to sin and go our own way will not be blessed. Proverbs 13:15 and 21 confirm that “the way of the treacherous is hard” and “disaster pursues sinners”. The negative consequences of sin may be delayed, by God’s word is clear that God will not bless those who choose sin.

Psalm 1 uses three verbs to describe the progression of a sinner choosing sin. And this is where it can be helpful to assess where your counselee is with their own sin patterns. The first description is one who is “walking” among the counsel of the wicked. This person is listening to the “counsel of the wicked” or allowing godless and worldly ideas to be a big influence in his life. This person is passing by where sin is happening. They are “dabbling” in sin and checking out what others are involved or maybe seeing how severe the consequences might be. This person is entertaining thoughts of a sinful lifestyle but it still seems wicked in their mind to some degree. “Walking” implies that they are casually hanging around for periods of time with sinners and listening to sinful ideas. It may seem tantalizing to hear about sin that is happening but they are not quite involved themselves. Is your counselee spending a lot of time with unbelievers or watching tv shows that encourage sin? Is your counselee reading worldly books or being influenced by worldly social media more and more? A person who is walking among the counsel of the wicked is being influenced by ungodly and unbiblical ideas.

Psalm 1 continues with a second verb that shows a deepening level of involvement with sin. This person has progressed to “*standing* in the way of sinners”. The implication of “standing” is that this person is now spending longer periods of time with sinful influences. This person has become comfortable with sin and is “welcomed” by the sinners in the group. Picture someone who is walking by a group of people on the street and greets them but keeps moving. That’s the first category of being a passerby of the counsel of wickedness. But this person is standing. They have joined the group and are beginning to participate more and more with sin. This person is now engaging in unwholesome talk (Eph 4:29) or is lying or gossiping among others. They may be sneaking a few looks at pornography. They may be trying to fit into the group more by engaging in sinful behaviors. This person is probably still feeling pangs of guilt and shame over the sin, but they are in danger of continuing on further into more evil. The time spent in the “counsel of the wicked” will continue to influence their thoughts, desires, and actions.

The third verb is “sitting”. Psalm 1 says that a person will not be blessed if they “*sit* in the seat of scoffers”. This person is fully involved in sinful actions. They have become

comfortable with their sin to the point where it no longer is bothering them. This is a huge concern. The sinner has sinned so frequently that their conscience may not be alerting them anymore to guilt and danger. Picture the proverbial frog that starts sitting in a pot of cool water on the range burner that is heating up to boiling. As the water heats up, the frog doesn't notice that the water is getting hotter, and continues to stay in the pot as it begins to boil. The frog dies in the boiling water because it got used to the water each degree that it increased. Sinners do the same thing. As sin continues to get worse and worse, often the person will not notice how severe the problem is until it is too late and they are fully engaged in a sinful lifestyle and have become enslaved to the sin. This counselee may be shocked to hear that you believe the sin is that serious. Radical amputation of sin is a must. It's tempting for a counselee to want to manage sin, rather than slay it. One who is "sit[ting] in the seat of scoffers" needs to take drastic measures to be free of sin.

Psalm 1a, 2-4: "Blessed is the man who... delights in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He 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." This blessed man is meditating on God's law day and night. Unlike the unblessed man who is listening to the counsel of the wicked, this person is *delighting* in God's word and *setting his mind to study and devour* the truths of God. God tells us in Proverbs 4:23 to guard our hearts. What we allow to influence our thoughts matters greatly! The key to happiness is listening to and meditating on God's word. As we see the beauty of Christ in the scriptures, delight grows in our hearts. Meditating is much more than walking by God's word. Meditating is spending time mulling over, praying over, pondering and considering God's word and seeing who God is revealing Himself to be. Does your counselee spend quality time in God's word? Does your counselee filter all decisions through the lens of what God says in scripture or are they more influenced by how other people do things? Does your counselee have a "the end justifies the means" mentality? Are they looking for the practical end they want more than seeking to honor God in the process? A blessed man is rooted or planted in trust in the Lord and His word. Help your counselee learn to love and meditate on God's word with specific scriptures to emphasize the beauty, goodness, holiness, majesty, mercy, justice, and truth of God.

This blessed man yields fruit. Happiness is found in becoming more and more like Christ. As a person spends time with God, His Spirit grows love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. The fruit of repentance grows as a person delights in the grace and goodness of God. This is "in season" meaning the growth is steady, not all at once, and in God's timing of whatever "season" He has us in. Can your counselee look back over the last year and see growth? Are

their sins that they have become aware of and are repenting of? Does your counselee have a growing desire for holiness? Are they hating their sin more?

This blessed man “does not wither”. A counselee who knows and trusts God’s word will be able to withstand the storms of life. When trials come, a person who knows God’s word through mediation and knows the God of the bible will endure well. This is one of our goals for counseling! Typically a counselee is coming in during a trial needing to learn and grow in how to stand firm in the situation. Perhaps they have been listening to the “counsel of the wicked” and have tried to do things their own way and that has led to more difficulty. Isaiah 40:8 reminds us that “the word of the Lord stands forever”. As we guide our counsees to depend on and trust God’s word, the surety of Truth provides firm ground to stand on.

Psalm 1:4 concludes with “In all that he does, he prospers”. This “success” or “prosperity” refers to the difference between the blessed and the wicked. The wicked will be “like chaff that the wind drives away”. The temporary happiness of the wicked will give way to an eternity of suffering. The wicked are not able to endure trials. Picture the parable of the soils mentioned in Matthew 13. The rocky soil and the thorny soil represent the wicked person who is not rooted in God’s word and therefore his faith withers and dies and gets choked out by the trials of life. The prosperity promised to the blessed man is the ability to withstand this life with the joy of salvation and the joy of the Lord. The blessed man will stand in judgment and be declared righteous by God because of the word of Christ on the cross. How does your counselee view prosperity? Does your counselee have an eternal perspective that allows them to count the trials of this life as “momentary afflictions”? 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 reminds us that “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” Will your counselee delay momentary happiness for the eternal weight of glory promised to those who delight in the Lord and meditate on his word? As counselors, we need to hold out the scriptural truth of the future grace that is coming in God fulfilling all his promises.

Psalm 1 concludes with the judgment. “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” The Lord “knows” his own. He is intimately familiar with all his sheep. Our counsees need to find hope in being known by God. There is no greater delight than to know God.

Psalm 1 is a helpful contrast of the wicked man and the righteous man. Lead your counselee through this Psalm and paint a clear picture of the blessings that come from delighting in God's word and the difficulty and suffering that are in store for the wicked.