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General idea: This first Psalm gives us two ways to lead life: the way of the sinner, and the way of the righteous. A good Way that gives us hope, happiness, and purpose is contrasted to a bad way that leads to self-destruction, sadness, and hopelessness. Which do we choose to pursue? God calls us to pursue godly piety, a response we make from God's revealed precepts.

Because His Word contains the directives for a life of real meaning and purpose, we can make good decisions and lead godly lives. This enables us to honor God and lead healthy and well-balanced lives because we are making those good decisions from His precepts. Then, we will receive His blessedness. God bluntly tells us the godly will prosper in Him and in life and the wicked will be scorned in life and judged in death. This is all about what we choose to do and be in life that affects our future here and in eternity and those around us, too.

It may seem that only the most dimwitted person would choose the ungodly life, but the reality is that most will choose this way, even those who claim Christ as Lord. God desires us to love the significant life—a life that is pleasing, fruitful, faithful, purposeful, a life of distinction, value, and righteousness! He is hurt and disappointed when we choose to sin or hang with bad people and allow them to influence us. Yet, He does not force us to the righteous life. We have the choice to go our way or His Way, to live with honor and renounce sin or to indulge in sin and be dishonorable to self, others, and God. Beware! We will be held to account for our actions and decisions!

Contexts and Background:

This Psalm has no recorded author or date of origin. It, perhaps, dates back to the early years of the Hebrews' wandering in the Desert, as they were beginning to learn how to worship this Mysterious, Astonishing, and Powerful God who delivered them from slavery and was mostly new to them. This Psalm also serves as an introduction to this book of Psalms, as it gives us a template of what it means to be faithful and a blessing to God and others contrasted to what it means to be sinful and perishing. It tells us how and why we should make decisions and follow God's will. This is a contrasting of sin and righteousness and how God desires us to come before Him in our worship and daily life—and the cost when we refuse (Psalm 15; 24; 34:19-22; 37; 73; 111; 112; 119; 127; 128; 133).

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

Verse 1-2: God is joyful when we follow Him! When we choose to base our significance and attitude on who we are in Him and not on the ways of the world, God blesses and judges us in the manner in which we put our faith, trust, and obedience in Him. Yes, we have grace now—Praise God! But, what good is faith if nothing is done with it (James 1)? So, why miss out? God actually desires to and enjoys blessing us; but, there is a catch: we must be worthy of the blessings He has for us, or they would just be wasted and empty. He gives us the call; we must respond in faith and obedience and not fall to apathy or indifference or conform to bad cultural or peer pressure!

- *Blessed.* A plural word that means to be deeply happy and content because we are enjoying God and His special favor. God desires to bestow upon us significant favor and grace! There is a direct correlation between following Him and receiving blessedness as well as contentment, and following ourselves, pride, and evil to be self-destructive and miserable (Deut. 27:11-28:6; Matt. 5:3-11).
- *Walks not.* God's desire is that we seek wise counsel and produce good character and do not run off course from His good plan and purpose for us! It is not just what we do as Christians; it is also what we do not do that causes people to notice and point to Christ. We can take our cues from those who are evil or who conform to others who have malevolent intentions. Righteousness is as much about what we do not do as what we do, thus what we avoid shouts volumes about our character and contentment. This means we will refuse to be prejudicial, engaging in gossiping, being indifferent, or desiring to sin or causing others to sin. If so, we too will catch those intentions and apply evil to our direction in life causing us to move away from God in a downward spiral, bringing about our eventual

loss of control, affecting us and all those around us. We will come to a dead end road in life, discontent and disillusioned (Psalm 9:7; 15:12; Prov. 1:10-19).

- *Walks*. This refers to considering to sin; *stands* refers to contemplating sin, and *sits* refers to being comfortable in sin! This is the slippery slope; one step leads to the next, and one bad decision can lead to another and so forth. So watch where you step or you will go from bad to worse (Deut. 6:7)!
- *His delight*. God's concern for us is that we follow His will with our obedience, faithfulness, and trust. And to follow means to be dependent upon Him, receive His love, and love Him back so our roots grow deep. In so doing, we will desire to respond to His Word and thus conform to His call of character and faith development over all else we may think is important, such as our will, work, desires, and "things." (Psalm 112:1; Jer. 15:16; Matt. 6:10)
- *Law*. This does not mean the rules of the *Law of Moses*; rather, this refers to the entirety of Scripture—God's principles and instructions. We need to desire His precepts, seek His guidance, and mediate on the Bible (Josh. 1:8)! How can we do this? By being willing and able to respect and learn His Word, contemplate it, reflect, internalize, and apply it, by desiring Christ's working in us above all else (Duet 4:9-10; 6:6-7; 11:19; 30:9-14; Psalm 63:6; 77:12; 90: 14-17; 143:5; Ezek. 47:12; Acts 8:30).

We need to make every decision based on "how can I please God?" not "how I can please myself or others?". Life is about Christ, what He did and what He can do in you. If we do neither, we become lukewarm and become calloused and indifferent in life (Rev.3:14-22).

Verse 3: Christians who stand in truth will develop the maturity and character that will build them up and influence others for Him! Joseph prospered in Egypt even though he was enslaved, then imprisoned. God blessed and restored him because he held on to character above all the enticements around him.

- *Like trees/like a tree*. This is an analogy of growth and blessing from being responsible and bearing the fruit because we are being fed from the never-ending supply of His Word and Truth. A good, strong tree withstands the trials of life, gives comfort and nourishment to others, and is pleasant to have around. Our waywardness will disappear when we fill ourselves up in Christ (Isa. 61:3; Jer. 17:8; Matt. 15:13; Gal. 5:16-26).
- *Fruit*. This is the work of God within us; it is the proof of our genuine faith and the application of His Truth. This is the prime quality that we produce from His indwelling that proves His presence. Our walk is what points others to Him. Our prime Fruits are holiness and righteousness that also display His wonder and grace (Jer. 6:19; Matt. 4:4; John 15; Rom. 7:4-6; 8:14; Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 4:17; Eph. 5:9; James 3:17-18; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

God wants us to be concerned with His concerns, to be productive and good. We do this as we seek Him, as we place Him first and foremost in pursuing His will and Fruit. This is how a great tree grows and prospers and bestows blessings to others. We can do the same (Matt. 6:33).

Verse 4-6: Whatever causes the righteous to prosper, the wicked will hate it! They will hate God and truth; they seek to distort His Truth and get as many people as possible in line with their evil thinking and ways. Evil is habitual; it starts small and builds until it is out of control until it is lived as a "natural" way of life. There is nothing natural about a sinful life. There is no reward for the wicked—only the eternal judgment that they seek for themselves.

- *The ungodly/wicked are not so*. This refers to wickedness, people who ridicule God, blame others for their lack of responsibility, exploit others, and reject relevant and/or Godly Truth (Prov. 1:22). This is a vast contrast of good versus evil. Those who follow evil are dead to real life and significance, just as a tree is when its roots are dead and can easily be toppled. Those who do not rely on God make bad decisions and are easily strayed because they have no root of Truth to hold them steady.
- *Chaff*. Refers to what is easily blown away--the husks from the wheat that turn to dust as the wheat is shaken from it. It is worthless and is easily blown away by a small breeze. Likewise, we will fail and even perish when we do not trust and heed God's principles. Chaff is extremely annoying and gets in all orifices of the body. When the wind removes it, it brings cleansing and happiness (Ruth 1:22).

- *Judgment.* Meaning to rise up and be a witness for God; here, it refers to the reward for the godly that the wicked will not receive. They have no defense for their actions and cannot blame others; those who do evil are purely responsible for their own actions. Some translations state plainly that they will be condemned. The wicked will not be able to survive God's wrath (Deut. 19:15; Psalm 27:12; Mal. 3:2; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 6:17).
- *In the congregation.* There will be only good in Heaven and only evil in Hell. Sinners have no place in Him. Fortunately, since we all are sinners, we are saved by His grace and declared clean. So, in God's sight we are clean! Also, the opposite is true that the good will not belong to the evil one.
- *Righteous,* refers to those who honor God and live their lives faithfully, in all that they do, according to His precepts (1 Sam. 26:23; Psalm 82:1; Isa. 40:13-14; 1 John 3:7-12).
- *Knows the way.* God watches over us in our course of life, not just as Judge, but as our Friend, Mentor, Guide, and LORD, too. Jesus fulfills this Psalm by being our Fullness and LORD (Deut. 30:19; Jer. 21:8; Mal. 3:18; Matt. 7:13-14, 23; 2 Tim. 2:19).
- *Wicked will perish.* All will be held to account; all will be held responsible for their course in life!

Those who are sinful do not make good decisions. They live for temporary pleasures or are anchored to apathy or indifference or are imprisoned in past hurts, disappointments, and anger and thus can't stand up to the storms of life or be at peace with God. They must let sin and hurt go and embrace God in order to excel in life and eternity.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

For the Christian, this Psalm reminds us of who we are to be in Christ. We are blessed in Him, which also means we are to be dependent on Him. Our roots must be nourished from His principles and not those of the world. Learn about the world but do not lean on the world; know how to defend His Truth, but not be negatively influenced by having to do so. Know where wisdom and thinking need to come from, and also where our ways will lead us astray and lead to eternal judgment. There is no mistake about what God desires us to be and do in life, and that is people of discernment and righteousness. He favors those who are sincere and focused on Him. God is a jealous God! He wants our attention and devotion. God does not want us to seek sin or self destruction. Is this fair? Oh, yes. It is only just and fair (God can be nothing else) since it is He who created us and sustains us, we are to belong to Him. This is His universe. His Way and plan are best; thus, our focus and purpose must be in His precepts and call. Remember: how you respond to His precepts in this life will echo throughout eternity!

It is always best that we guard ourselves as to how and with whom we choose to be friends and allow to influence us. We are to be salt and light in the world but not be in the world's influence. Befriend those who are ungodly as long as you can guard your heart and will from their influence! Perhaps your godly character will wake someone up; maybe your influence may help prevent their self destruction!

The bottom line is that the choice of how to live your life is yours; you have the choice to be *blessed*, as a *tree* nourished by His Living Water (John 7:37-39) or *perish* as the *chaff* that is worthless and blows away (Matt. 3:12; 10:34-39; 13:47-50). You can have the high road or skid row; to be blessed or seek self-destruction; to be in Him or to be away from Him! *How will you now live?* God has given you the abundant life, but you still have to reach for it and apply it by faith and obedience. The godly will always choose to allow God to direct their lives. He charts our course; it is the best course and plan conceivable, far beyond any hope we could have on our own. So, allow yourself to be directed by the God and Creator of the universe—not your feeble ways! Make God's Word a significant part of your life so you are infused with His Truth, and so the Spirit is firm and impacting in you! Then, you can impact others with His character and precepts.

Christian Life Principle: God loves to bless you; the caveat is, we need to be worthy of that blessing by being obedient, faithful and discerning and not sinning to receive it. You do not reward a child for being naughty, the same is with how God deals with us (Philp. 4:19).

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What are some things that make you happy? From the examples in this Psalm, which do you choose to pursue?
2. Have you considered that you can make God happy? How does this make you feel; how does it motivate you?
3. What does it mean to prosper in God's economy? How have you seen righteous people prosper?
4. Do you realize that when you honor God, you can also live a life of joy? How and why is this so? How has this been true for you and others around you?
5. How would you describe *Fruit*? What Fruits are you good at? Which ones do you need to work on (Gal. 5:19-22)?
6. Why would a child of God choose to make bad decisions and thus go astray? What can your church do to help him or her?
7. How can this Psalm help you make wise choices? What gets in your way of making good decisions? What do you need to work on?
8. Do you think you have what you need to make good decisions and lead a godly life? What more do you need to help you be a good decision maker? What can your church do?
9. How does honoring God help you lead a healthy and well balanced life? What can your church do to equip and spur you on?
10. How does this Psalm inspire you to *now live*? What do you think God's desire for you is? What can you do to prevent yourself from running off course from His good plan and purpose for you?
11. How have you experienced joy and contentment in Christ? How can you do more? What do you need to do?
12. What have you done to respond to God's desire that you come before Him in your worship and daily life? What could be the cost when you refuse? What could be the rewards when you do? What is stopping you? What will you do now?