

My passion is music and it has been for as long as I can remember. There are times when I have been obsessive about music, and it's one of God's greatest gifts. Of all the arts and crafts that human kind has learned over the last several thousands of years, the only one we are told specifically in the Bible that we'll take from earth to heaven is music.

We begin a series of sermons on the Psalms, which can be described as soul music because the Psalms were written as song lyrics. The word Psalm means song and they are songs that come from the soul and speak to the soul. It's appropriate that we start at the beginning with Psalm 1, which gives us a song for tomorrow. This psalm tells us how to approach tomorrow successfully, whatever that means; for what the world calls success is not necessarily success in God's terms. The first psalm was written to give us God's blueprint for blessing and happiness. The word blessed in Hebrew is plural and it refers to the intensity and the multiplicity of the blessings that await anyone who applies the teaching that psalm 1 offers.

If we are to be successful tomorrow we should be prepared and the psalmist tells us exactly how to do that. The first lesson is to avoid bad company: ***Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers (v1)***. The psalmist describes three groups of people that you could call the wicked, the sinner and the scornful and they're all very different.

The wicked can be described as un-godly, which means they have no room for God in their lives. Very few people are anti-godly, they don't actually hate God, they just don't have room for God in their life. The word ungodly literally means wicked and we tend to exaggerate the meaning of the word.

Then we move to the sinner which probably applies to all of us, unless we are exceptionally godly. However, the sinner in the context of Psalm 1 is someone who not only lives their lives as if there is no God, but know that they live that way. They're aware of their sin and it doesn't bother them.

Finally, we come to the scornful or the mocker. They are the people that I find most difficult because they are often Christians. They criticise everything and they can't wait to tell you of someone's misfortune. If they are Christians, they will regale you with stories of how bad their minister is, and how awful the people in their church are. Such people are dangerous because they only focus on the negative, and the reason I find them difficult is because their nature is infectious. We can find ourselves joining in with them.

The church is the Body of Christ and we are called to build it up, not tear it down from the inside by constant carping and criticising. Now in case you misunderstand what I mean here, I am not suggesting that if you have a grievance with your minister or someone in the church that you suffer in silence; but speak to the minister or the person causing you grief instead of telling everyone else but the people concerned. Build up God's church, don't tear it down!

If we want to be successful, stay away from the bad company represented by these kinds of people. Do not listen to their counsel for it's said that the world is the devil's psychiatrist, and we don't need to be lying on their couch! Think about it, why would we listen to a sinful world for advice on how to deal with sin? It's like the farmer who had a sick cow and he went to his neighbour and said *my cow is ill. When your cow was ill what did you do for it?* His neighbour said *I gave it a pint of paraffin.* The man went home and gave his cow a pint of paraffin and the cow died. He came back and asked: *Neighbour, didn't you tell me to give my cow a pint of paraffin?* Yes, he replied.

The man said *I did that and my cow died*. The neighbour said; *don't feel too bad, my cow died too!* There are people caught up in addiction, in prison or struggling with life because they listened to the wrong crowd. The psalmist tells us that not only should we not to listen to bad company, but we're not hang around with them. ***Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers (v1).***

Do you see the progression here? Once we begin to believe bad company, we begin to behave like bad company for action always follows advice. What gets into our head gets down to our hearts! This is why I said that the group I fear most in the cynics, the critics. We start of listening to their criticisms and after resisting the temptation to join in for a while, we find ourselves joining in. This is when we're fully trapped with the wrong crowd and we imitate their action and adopt their attitude. That is exactly how the wrong crowd gets into a person's life. First they entice you, then they engage you and then they embrace you. The psalmist is telling us what we already know. The best way to deal with a potential problem is to stay away from it. There's an old saying, *bad company corrupts good morals*, so stay away from bad company.

After warning us to stay away from bad company, the Psalmist tells us to ***Study God's Word***. The Bible clearly teaches that God blesses directly and in proportion to our relationship to God's Word. ***Blessed are those whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on His word day and night (v2).*** That word *delight* literally means pleasure. When we're close to God it's a pleasure to read His Word. One of the things I pray for every day is that I have a hunger for God's word.

King David wrote many of the Psalms and he loved God's Word. David wrote: ***I delight far more in what You tell me about living in Your Word than in gathering a pile of riches. On how I live Your Word, I meditate on it daily.***

*I hunger with open mouth because I long for your commands. (Ps 119).* Do we have that same desire and dedication? It's not enough just to read the scriptures, we're told to *meditate on His Word day and night* (v2). That word *meditate* literally means *to speak inwardly* to ourselves. Have you ever listened to a tune that sticks in your mind and you find yourself humming the tune throughout your day? That's the picture that is painted here. We should be constantly be thinking about God's Word; meditating on it like a tune you can't get out of our minds. It's not easy and I don't pretend that I manage to do this.

So often we read the Bible and then forget about it. For some of us, reading our Bible is just another thing we check off our to do list, and forget what we've just read. Let me give you an example: Have you ever thought about John 3:16? **Look it up in the pew Bible now.** *For God so loved the world.* Wait a minute, this means that God loves me! It not only means God loves me but it means God loves everyone else, regardless of whether they believe in Him, regardless of whether they accept Him. That means that I am to love other people just like that! *He gave His only begotten Son.* If God loved me so much that He gave His Son for me, and if I really love God, shouldn't I give my time, my talents and my money to Him? *Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.* All that's necessary to receive eternal life is to believe in Jesus and commit my life to Him? Wow!

I believe in Jesus Christ and I've committed my life to Him and God says I have eternal life. This means I am certain I'm going to heaven, because God loved me so much that He gave His Son for me. And this ought to fill my life with joy no matter what else is going on. Do you see the awesome power of mediation? That is why success of tied to God's Word and it is not enough just to stay away from bad company; we must study God's Word.

Third and last: *Stand for what is right*. When we avoid bad company and meditate on God's Word, we will be like: *A person who is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither; whatever they do prospers (v3)*. Why did the Psalmist compare successful people to trees? A healthy tree stands firm. When we are planted by God beside the river of His truth, we'll be unshakable in our belief and unwavering in how we behave. Jesus made a statement that really makes sense in this context. He said: Every plant which my Heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted (Matt 15).

A study of history shows that people who have truly moved this world have been people that world could not move. Moses, Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandella! These people moved nations because their nation could not move them. The mark of a tree is that it stands firm. A tree also bears fruit and every life is a fruit bearing tree, and there are two kinds of fruit bearing trees in this world, trees that bear good fruit and trees that bear rotten fruit. That's why we do on to read: *The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away (v4)*.

The truly successful person bears fruit that lasts. Jesus said; *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last (John 15)*. A successful person will bear fruit that remains fresh because this tree has *A leaf which does not wither (v3)*. This tree is always green and its roots are always fruitful, which is how God wants us to be; fruitful in all seasons. In our world we strive for success, and on the outside many people look happy. They look healthy and may be healthy, but spiritually they're as dry as dust and as dead as a graveyard. And it doesn't have to be that way: Psalm one gives us a template for real successful living and the most important thing money cannot buy, which is a relationship with God, a home in heaven and a purpose to life that will outlast us all. Psalm One in truly soul music and it's a song for us! **Amen.**

*(1894 words)*