Psalm 1 Bible study

Psalm 1:1-6. 3 sessions of about 45 minutes, or one longer session. For small groups and personal study.

Psalm 1 contrasts a life shaped by the LORD's instruction with a path that ends in judgment. A person who delights in that instruction is like a tree planted beside water. The wicked are like chaff blown away. The final verse names the difference: the LORD guards the righteous path, while the wicked path perishes. Read the images as wisdom about a whole life before turning them into promises about next week.

READ TOGETHER: PSALM 1:1-6

1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or set foot on the path of
sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers. 2 But his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and on His law he
meditates day and night. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding its fruit in season,
whose leaf does not wither, and who prospers in all he does. 4 Not so the wicked! For they are like
chaff driven off by the wind. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the
assembly of the righteous. 6 For the LORD guards the path of the righteous, but the way of the
wicked will perish.

Scripture from the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain.

BACKGROUND

Read the whole contrast

Psalm 1 opens the collection of Psalms. Verses 1 and 2 name influences and delight. Verses 3 and 4 compare a tree with chaff. Verses 5 and 6 look toward judgment and the outcome of each path. Keep all three pairs together.

The psalm does not name its author in a heading. Do not assign it to David simply because many other psalms bear his name. Start with what this poem actually gives you: two ways to live and two outcomes.

Wisdom beside honest lament

The tree bears fruit in its season. The image suggests rootedness and a sustained source of life, rather than an immediate result from every good choice. Jeremiah 17:7-8 uses a similar tree image and explicitly includes heat and drought.

Psalm 73 provides a useful conversation partner. Its speaker struggles because the wicked appear to prosper. Read his question in verses 1 to 3, the turn in verses 16 and 17, and his confidence in verses 23 to 26. Psalm 1 is not a formula for diagnosing a suffering person as unfaithful.

> *But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him. He is like a tree planted by the waters that sends out its roots toward the stream. It does not fear when the heat comes, and its leaves are always green. It does not worry in a year of drought, nor does it cease to produce fruit. (Jeremiah 17:7-8)*

TWO PATHS, THREE COMPARISONS

Draw two columns. Fill them with words from the psalm before adding examples from your own life.

Counsel, path, and seat (1:1)

The opening verse names advice, conduct, and company. Its three verbs make the pattern memorable. Notice the pattern without assuming it gives a timetable for how every person falls into wrongdoing.

Delight and meditation (1:2)

The alternative is positive: delight in the LORD's instruction and return to it day and night. Here meditation means sustained attention to the instruction in view. Begin by rereading the six verses and explaining them in your own words.

A planted tree (1:3)

A tree receives water and yields fruit in season. Ask what the image shows about the source, timing, and durability of a fruitful life. Do not turn the line about prosperity into a guarantee of wealth or protection from illness.

Chaff in the wind (1:4)

Chaff is pictured as something wind carries away. The point of comparison is its lack of the tree's stability. The psalm does not ask readers to rank other people by their visible success.

The end of the path (1:5-6)

The judgment and the LORD's care give the comparison its horizon. The ending asks where a path leads, not only how pleasant it looks at the moment.

SESSION 1 OF 3

What shapes a life?

Read Psalm 1:1-2. Separate the influences the poem refuses from the delight it commends.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What are the three actions in verse 1? What people or influences accompany them?

2. What does verse 2 put in their place? Notice both delight and repetition.

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Why is avoiding bad counsel an incomplete summary of these verses?

4. How would you explain meditation here using verse 2 itself?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

5. Choose one source of advice you use this week. How will you evaluate it against the passage?

6. Reread the psalm slowly. Write one observation before writing a personal response.

SESSION 2 OF 3

Tree and chaff

Read Psalm 1:3-4. Compare the two images without making prosperity a promise of wealth.
Also read: Jeremiah 17:7-8.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. List what happens to the tree and what happens to the chaff.

2. What phrase in verse 3 tells you that fruit has a season?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Read Jeremiah 17:7-8. What difficult conditions can the tree face?

4. How does that comparison keep us from treating an easy week as proof of faithfulness?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

5. What would a small, sustained habit of attending to Scripture look like in your actual week?

6. What kind of fruit could you seek that is different from money or public recognition?

SESSION 3 OF 3

Where does the path lead?

Read Psalm 1:5-6. Read the conclusion alongside a psalm that admits the wicked can appear successful. Also read: Psalm 73:1-3; Psalm 73:16-17; Psalm 73:23-26.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. What happens at judgment in verse 5?

2. What does verse 6 say the LORD does, and what happens to the other path?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. Read Psalm 73:1-3 and 16-17. What difficulty does its speaker bring to God?

4. How do Psalm 73:23-26 help explain a good life when circumstances remain hard?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

5. What quick judgment about someone else's circumstances should you stop making?

6. Pray using one line from Psalm 1 and one from Psalm 73, allowing both to shape your response.

ONE-SESSION PATH

Psalm 1 in one evening

Read all of Psalm 1:1-6. About 45 to 60 minutes.

Observe: what does the text say?

1. Read the psalm aloud. Fill two columns with its descriptions of the righteous and wicked.

2. Where do the images change from people to tree and chaff, then back to people?

Interpret: what did it mean then?

3. What is the difference between avoiding harmful advice and delighting in instruction?

4. Read Jeremiah 17:7-8. Why does a fruitful tree not mean a trouble-free life?

5. How does the judgment in verses 5 and 6 affect the way you read prosperity in verse 3?

Apply: what does it mean for us?

6. Choose one passage-reading habit and one source of counsel to examine this week.

7. Write a prayer that responds to the whole psalm, including its warning.

FOR THE LEADER

- For session 1, look for both halves: refusing destructive counsel and delighting in the LORD's instruction. If answers stop at avoiding bad people, return to verse 2.
- For session 2, the text names water, fruit in season, and an enduring leaf. Keep the comparison tied to these features. Speculation about a particular species of tree does not help answer the question.
- For session 3, Psalm 73 names the difficulty of apparent wicked prosperity. Let that text challenge quick explanations of suffering. Neither study gives permission to blame a person for illness or loss.
- Do not require anyone to identify who in the group is righteous or wicked. Invite each participant to examine their own influences and response. The psalm supplies a warning, not a social ranking exercise.

WHERE CHRISTIANS READ IT DIFFERENTLY

Does prosperity mean material success?

A material reading can point to the broad wording of verse 3. This guide reads the statement within the poem's final judgment and beside Psalm 73, where the wicked can appear materially successful. That combination does not support promising wealth to everyone who reads Scripture.

Is the opening verse a sequence of worsening behavior?

The movement from walking to standing to sitting can be read as a deepening pattern. It can also be read as parallel descriptions of a settled way of life. The poem does not explicitly narrate stages, so use the pattern to notice influence without making it a universal psychological rule.

SOURCES

Psalm 1, Berean Standard Bible. Berean Bible. Public domain. Primary passage for the two paths, tree, chaff, and judgment.

Jeremiah 17:7-8, Berean Standard Bible. Berean Bible. Public domain. Comparison tree image, including heat and drought.

Psalm 73, Berean Standard Bible. Berean Bible. Public domain. Verses 1-3, 16-17 and 23-26 qualify simplistic readings of prosperity.

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