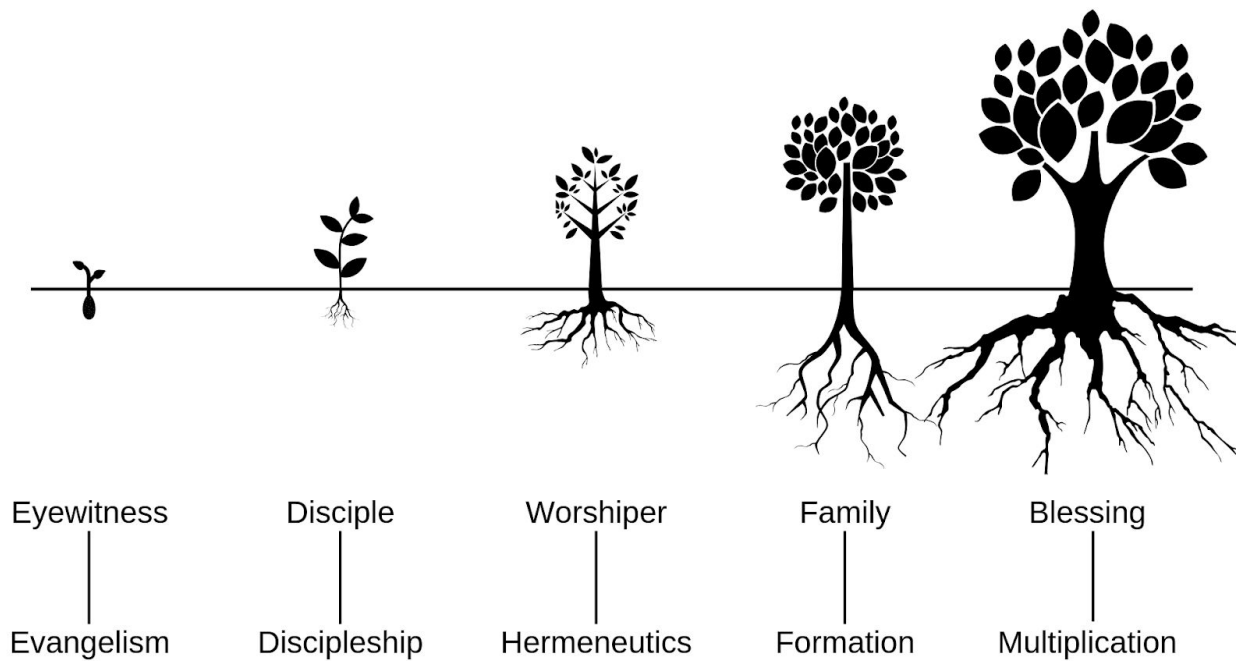


**Two Ways Before Us, Psalm 1**  
**Bradley Bell**  
**September 8, 2019**

**Introduction**

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Today is a big deal because we're kicking off two things at the same time. First, a three-month emphasis on one of our five identities as a church: Worshiper. This is the third identity emphasis, following Eyewitness in the Fall of 2018 and Disciple in 2019.



The trainings (one for men and one for women) that are associated with this emphasis is hermeneutics, which is not only how we interpret Scripture, but the lens through which we view all of life—and thus learn to worship God in all of life. Hence, the symbol of glasses for the Worshiper identity.

Second, today begins a new sermon series in the book Psalms titled, “Seeing All of Life Through the Lens of the Gospel”. Although we won’t be going through the Psalms in a linear way, we are going to begin in Psalm 1, which you can find on page 448 if you’re using one of the Bibles in the chairs. The title of the sermon is “Two Ways Before Us,” and the breakdown of the passage simply lays out those ways:

- 1) The Way of the Righteous - vv. 1-3
- 2) The Way of the Wicked - vv. 4-5
- 3) The Parting of Ways - v. 6

The main idea that will then come to the surface throughout the psalm is this: A happy, fruitful, enduring life is built on the word of God. With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Psalm 1. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

*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;  
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  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.*

*4 The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

*5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

*6 for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1*

In light of our sermon series, today I would like to introduce a new liturgical movement following the reading of the text. It goes like this: I will say, "The Lord has spoken to us." This is our way of declaring and reminding ourselves that listening to the word of God is how we hear the voice of God—not just when the sermon gets really good or when we're looking for a sign. The congregational response is then, "Thanks be to God". So, let's try this:

The Lord has spoken to us—*thanks be to God*. You may be seated.

## Exposition

Throughout this series, the way I'd like to begin each sermon is with what's called a "cultural liturgy". According to Christian educator, James K.A. Smith, who coined the term, cultural liturgies are "cultural practices, institutions, rituals, routines that really shape what we love." The way he came to understand this wasn't through academic research but in raising four teenagers. He says,

*[In] having kids and recognizing all of the cultural pressures on them, I started to realize that our ideals about discipleship [and] Christian formation all were targeted on putting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into their heads. But that's not what the culture was trying to do; the culture was trying to get hold of their gut, their longings, their loves—their heart...When I have conversations with my teenagers that give me pause, it's not usually because they say, "Well, I think so and so"—it's usually a sentence that begins, "I want..." Those wants have been implanted in them through cultural practices, not so much through cultural messages.<sup>1</sup>*

What he means is this: what we worship doesn't just flow from the information we consume (marketing, media, writing), but the routines our culture defines as normal and good. They involve our heads and hands (remember, we are embodied souls), but they ultimately capture our hearts. They become like a lens through which we interpret all of life.

When Lynn and Suzanne were walking Katie and I through premarital counseling, one of the things they told us about was how they would give each of their children a quarter every time they recognized an example of false advertising. This way it taught them not to just be consumers of culture.

And that's why I want to begin each sermon with a cultural liturgy, or lens. Because I want to contrast its form of worship with the form of worship called for by God in each psalm. I want to challenge you during this series to look for cultural lenses that grasp at your heart, so you can take them to Jesus and receive something far better.

That said, here's our first example: the Coca-Cola Freestyle. You know what I'm talking about—the touch screen soda fountain that put all other soda fountains to shame. Why? Because you can create your own unique drink from over 100 different options. (Dude, the only alternative drink option I had growing up was making a "suicide".) Now,

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<sup>1</sup> James K.A. Smith, "What is the Cultural Liturgies Project?"  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=168&v=iyVs0kW7QWU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=168&v=iyVs0kW7QWU)

inevitably someone is going to walk away from this sermon and say, “My pastor thinks Coke machines are from the devil”—but that’s not the point. What I want you to consider is the liturgy involved using these machines, and how it subtly informs your heart. Think about how you use your hands...what we’re talking about here is the world of “create your own”. It’s Squarespace and Cafe Press and Build-a-Bear. All around you on a daily basis, it has become normal and expected to put aside the general options of something and create your own. As a consumer, this works because it feels good; it puts you in control according to your preference. It teaches your heart to see life through this lens: “If you don’t like something, create your own.”

Now, let’s begin to contrast that with the lens given to us by the Psalms, especially that of Psalm 1. We can think of the Psalms as the hymnbook of God’s Old Testament people—what they believed in the form of poems and songs. Pastor Trey helped me to make the connection to our Genesis series in this way: the Psalms were intertwined with the Old Testament temple, which was meant to be a microcosm of the entire universe, *the* one place on earth that was supposed to resemble creation as God intended it. Thus, they tell the whole story of God’s people—people worshiping from their whole person (meaning every emotion you can imagine) and from their whole life (meaning every situation you can imagine). John Calvin called the Psalms “an anatomy of all parts of the soul”. When we read them with faith, we come away not simply informed, but changed.<sup>2</sup>

As the “hymnbook” that it is, we might be tempted to think there’s not a lot of order to Psalms, like it’s just a playlist on shuffle. But it’s clear that Psalms 1 and 2 were selected, perhaps were even written, specifically to introduce the rest of the book.<sup>3</sup> One of the early church fathers has said of it,

*What the foundation is to a house, the keel to a ship, the heart to an animal, the same is this Psalm to the whole book.*<sup>4</sup>

But instead of giving us inspirational emotion or instagrammable quotes, the tone of Psalm 1 sounds more like the book of Proverbs. That’s because it’s a wisdom psalm, and it sets two ways before us: the way of the righteous, the way of the wicked, and where those paths lead.<sup>5</sup> So from the very beginning of this book, we’re confronted with

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<sup>2</sup> Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 12-13

<sup>3</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 63

<sup>4</sup> W. S. Plumer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series Commentaries (Chelsea: Sheridan, 2016), 27

<sup>5</sup> Kidner, 63; Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 58

the reality that worship isn't just a matter of 10:15 on Sunday mornings, but a moment by moment battle within our deepest desires. Psalm 1 greets us with a crisis of decision, a decision that is summed up well in the book of Joshua (which we began today's gathering by reading):

*<sup>14</sup> "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*  
Joshua 24:14-15

It is a decision to choose the way of life set before us by God, or, to create our own. Let us choose wisely, church!

### **1) The Way of the Righteous - vv. 1-3**

This brings us to the first way before us, that of the righteous. Read with me in verse 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; Psalm 1:1*

The first thing we learn about the way of the righteous is that it's a "blessed" way. Perhaps a better way to translate this is a "happy" or "flourishing" way. Don't take that to mean prosperity gospel. What's being expressed isn't "do this and God will make you happy," but the natural result of living these ways is a happy state of soul. It's not that you won't suffer or struggle, but that your sin won't twist you in knots that you can't undo.<sup>6</sup>

And we might think, "Well, this is just Old Testament legalism—do this + don't do that = you're good to go." But not only does the Psalms begin its teaching this way, so does Jesus Christ. In his very first sermon recorded in the Gospel of Matthew we read,

*<sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:*

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<sup>6</sup> Kidner, 64; Craigie, 60

<sup>3</sup> *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...”* [And he goes on from there with nine more statements that begin with “Blessed,” better known as the Beatitudes.] *Matthew 5:2-3*

This way of teaching is significant, and rightly so, as Martin Luther said, “It is the practice of all men to inquire after blessedness, and there is no man on earth, who does not wish that it might go well with him, and would not feel sorrow if it went ill with him.”<sup>7</sup> So, here you go, here’s the way to a happy life. It means avoiding knots like:

- 1) walking in the counsel of the wicked - This is thinking according to what the world says is true versus what God says is true.
- 2) standing in the way of sinners - This isn’t just *thinking* according to what the world says is true; it’s taking the next step of joining in their ways.
- 3) sitting in the seat of scoffers - This isn’t just thinking and acting according to the ways of the world, but fully embracing their posture, which condemns those who submit to God and encourages those who rebel against him.<sup>8</sup>

You see the progression here. This shows us how important it is to address our dislikes and misunderstandings of God and his ways, even small ones. They can easily become little corners we cut that eventually cut us; they fester into a root of bitterness that lead us to identify more with the way of the wicked than the way of the righteous. So how do we avoid these knots? Verse 2 tells us:

<sup>2</sup> *but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night. Psalm 1:2*

The way to the blessed, happy life isn’t just in running *away* from something, but more so in running *to* something, something delightful. That something is identified as “the law of the Lord”. This isn’t just one particular law, but all the instruction which God had given to humanity as a guide for life. In our age, this means all of Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

Now, remember today’s cultural lens of “create your own”? Note the contrast here. The delight of the blessed man isn’t in what he can create of the word of God, but—flip the script—what the word of God can create of him. His delight is to soak it in and submit himself to it. This is why he meditates on it day and night—not because he’s a scholar, but as C.S. Lewis puts it,

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<sup>7</sup> Plumer, 34

<sup>8</sup> Kidner, 64; Plumer, 27, 32

<sup>9</sup> Kidner, 65; Craigie, 60; Plumer, 28

*It is the language of a man ravished by beauty. If we cannot at all share his experience, we shall be the losers.*<sup>10</sup>

You know, the times in my life where I have grown the most and felt the most alive, have been when I have feasted on the word of God (high school, first year in Africa, post-seminary)—not out of obligation, but delight. Think about today’s new liturgical movement after reading the text—this is how we hear God speak to us with certainty; in a world without the physical Person of Jesus, this is how we see his face; in a relativist world that holds to tolerance as the highest form of love, this is how we know what’s actually true love. This is what divides the two paths before us.

But not only does the blessed man find himself on the right path and happy about it, but also

*<sup>3</sup> 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. Psalm 1:3*

There is an enduring fruitfulness that comes from his adherence to God’s word and ways instead of his own. Again, this isn’t the prosperity gospel, but the natural results of being planted by a constant source of nourishment. This is life within the guidelines that God intended. It ought to take our minds to John 15, where Jesus teaches, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>11</sup> As the word of God flows freely into our lives, no matter the season of feast or fallow, in the proper time you’ll still see the fruit of love, joy, peace, obedience, endurance.<sup>12</sup> This is the way of the righteous.

## **2) The Way of the Wicked - vv. 4-5**

Now the psalmist turns to the other way set before us: that of the wicked. In verse 4 we read that compared to the fruitfulness and endurance and prosperity of the righteous,

*<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,*

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<sup>10</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1958), 60

<sup>11</sup> John 15:5

<sup>12</sup> Kidner, 65; Craigie, 60-61; Plumer, 29

*but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Psalm 1:4*

Chaff is the husk of a grain of wheat that's discarded in a process called winnowing. Basically, the grains are tossed into the air, and the chaff is so light that even just a gentle breeze blows it away. It's worthless, so there's no reason to keep it; and it's rootless, so there's no life in it. Severed from the authority of the word of God, the prophet Jeremiah describes the wicked in the complete opposite fashion of the righteous:

*<sup>5</sup> Thus says the Lord:*

*“Cursed is the man who trusts in man  
and makes flesh his strength,  
whose heart turns away from the Lord.*

*<sup>6</sup> He is like a shrub in the desert,  
and shall not see any good come.*

*He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,  
in an uninhabited salt land. Jeremiah 17:5-6<sup>13</sup>*

Because this path is a choice to “create your own” law, you're left to feed on your own nutrients like a desert bush that barely survives. Because of the severe contrast set up by the author here, it's also fair to read the psalm just the opposite: “Unhappy is the man who walks in the counsel of the wicked and stands in the way of sinners and sits in the seat of scoffers; his delight is not in the law of the Lord, but in his own, and on his own law he meditates day and night.”<sup>14</sup>

*<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; Psalm 1:5*

Now, in its immediate context this had application to the wicked not being able to participate in the government and assembly of the people of God.<sup>15</sup> And, if a church today upholds the truth of the word of God, then likewise those outside of Christ are welcomed to hear and receive the truth and experience some of the sweetness of community, but they cannot wholesale enjoy all the benefits of God's church. That's why we have things like a membership process to help determine who is in Christ and living according to his way. Because apart from him, the way of the wicked does not lead to

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<sup>13</sup> Kidner, 65; Craigie, 61; Plumer, 30-31

<sup>14</sup> Plumer, 30

<sup>15</sup> Craigie, 61



standing in the congregation of the righteous—not only in this life, but as we’re about to see, in the life to come.

### 3) The Parting of Ways - v. 6

This brings us to the final reality about these two ways: they part forever. The wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous, because

*<sup>6</sup> the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish. Psalm 1:6*

Dude, the Lord knows. Not just the path you take and the actions that follow—he knows your heart, your deepest thoughts. But there seems to be something more at play here than the Lord’s all-encompassing knowledge. The language describes the Lord caring about and identifying with those on the righteous way.<sup>16</sup> After all, they are on a path *to him*, and so he is intimately involved in that journey, making sure that no matter what craziness happens along the way, he’s also with us at the end. It’s like the dad who doesn’t just wait at the finish line, but runs alongside his child the whole race.

Meanwhile, the way of the wicked will perish. It’s a road that leads to nothing but ruin. At death, what power or effect does your own word have? More than that, how will your own word stand (going back to verse 5) when you face God’s judgment? Jesus says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”<sup>17</sup> What does that mean for people who have chosen their way on the basis of their own words, not God’s?! It means they will finally submit, finally become the worshipers they were made to be, but it will be too late. What the wicked does in the end, the righteous does in the beginning.

And so Psalm 1 leaves us confronted with the parting of these paths. The words of Jesus echo in our souls:

*<sup>13</sup> “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. <sup>14</sup> For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. Matthew 7:13-14*

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<sup>16</sup> Kidner, 65-66

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 24:35

## Conclusion

We began today's sermon by talking about the cultural lens of "create your own". This is not a new phenomenon, and one of the most confronting examples comes from the Bible itself. In Jeremiah 36, during the time of a King named Jehoiakim, the Lord told his prophet Jeremiah to write down on a scroll all the judgment to come so that the people of Judah "may turn [every one] from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin." This scroll with the word of the Lord was eventually given to the king, who was in his winter house sitting by the fire. And each time a portion was read to him, he would cut it off with a knife and throw it into the fire, until the whole scroll was burned.

Surely today people aren't commonly burning Bibles or, like Thomas Jefferson, literally cutting out the parts they don't like to create their own version. However, when we choose to set aside the authority of God's word, or even just parts of it, we might as well be sitting by a fire with knife in hand. In doing so, we are giving in to a lie we've been told, that simply says, "If you don't like something, create your own." But the lie goes even further than that! It also says that creating your own is the way to be blessed and happy.

Jesus Christ teaches a far different way. At a time when his closest followers were far less than happy about life, and were struggling deeply with some of his words, he said this to them:

*"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. <sup>4</sup> And you know the way to where I am going." <sup>5</sup> Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:1-6*

How we're meant to digest the crisis of decision before us in these two diverting ways isn't just legal. It's not just, "This law or that law—choose!" No, it's remarkably personal. It's realizing that there was only one path before us, leading straight to death, until Jesus personally opened up the other path.

You see, he is the blessed man of Psalm 1. He walked not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of scoffers; but his delight was in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditated day and night. He was like a tree planted

by streams of water that yielded its fruit in its season, and its leaf did not wither. In all that he did, he prospered. And the Lord knew his way because he was righteous in every way. And yet, in order to open up that way to others, he became like the chaff that the wind drives away. If any of us is to one day stand in the judgment and join the congregation of the righteous, it's only because Jesus first fell under the judgment of God on the cross and was numbered with the wicked in the grave and was raised again to never perish.

So the decision is not “create your own Jesus” but—flip the script— “Jesus creating a new you,” who lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.<sup>18</sup> So that you may

*stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to **stand** before the Son of Man.” Luke 21:36*

And standing on *that* day, means standing on *this* day. One of the most significant ways we do that is by coming to this table with meditating hearts. On the night that he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, “This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ is the happy, fruitful, enduring life.**

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you’re a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you’re a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let’s pray.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4

<sup>19</sup> Today’s prayer was taken from Douglas Kaine McKelvey, “For One Battling a Destructive Desire,” *Every Moment Holy* (Nashville: Rabbit Room, 2017), 162-163

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