

Natalie W. Bell
 August 4, 2024
 The Psalms

Live Like That
Ephesians 4:1, Psalm 1

Happy are those

*who do not follow the advice of the wicked
 or take the path that sinners tread
 or sit in the seat of scoffers,*

²*but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.*

³*They are like trees
 planted by streams of water,
 which yield their fruit in its season,
 and their leaves do not wither.*

In all that they do, they prosper.

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 watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.*

I love trees. They are such a beautiful part of God's creation.

I love to sit under their canopy down by the lake.

Trees grow, change, and put down roots,

And they offer so much to us beyond what they are—

they provide shade, beauty, the sound of the wind whistling through the leaves,

They provide comfort, like when we plant a tree in memory of a loved one.

Do you have a favorite tree? A favorite wooded place to visit?

I was reading about ***a Jewish blessing*** for the time “when someone catches sight of a particularly beautiful tree.” The prayer is: *baruch atah Adonai elohenu melek ha-olam shekakhah lo beolamo*. Which means: ***“Blessed are you, O LORD our God, King of the universe, who has something like THIS in his world.”***

Kathryn M. Schifferdecker, Workingpreacher.org, May 9, 2021.

Isn't that a beautiful prayer?

***The Bible is full of references to trees.
It all begins with the tree of life in the Garden of Eden!***

Jeremiah also echoes Psalm 1, in Jeremiah 17:7-8:

*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
 ⁸ They shall be **like a tree planted by water,
 sending out its roots by the stream.***

*It shall not fear when heat comes,
 and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
 and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

Isaiah talks about the ***unjust as trees whose leaves wither*** (1:30).
And the Psalmist often speaks about people as trees that grow and flourish.

Trees have meaning
because they are such ***a good image for the life of faith.***
It's no coincidence that the whole Psalter—
the Bible's prayerbook or hymnbook—
begins with this image of a tree planted by streams of water and bearing fruit.

God wants us to be like that tree—connected to God,
Growing because our roots are getting water from a stream,
of God's Word and grace.
We are meant to be like trees,
with our roots deep into God's Word and God's presence.

And August is the perfect time to talk about this imagery,
Because it's the Green season—also known as ***Ordinary Time*** in the church
calendar, which actually is anything but ordinary.
It's meant to be a time of growth, like a tree!
THAT'S the "Ordinary" life God intends for us, ***constant growth!***
Think about that this week!

So today, as we think about living like a tree, and the growth in our spiritual lives,
Ask yourself this---***If I am a tree, what color are my leaves*** right now?
How deep are my roots? Are they going deep into relationship with God?
And where is the stream of life-giving water?
Are my roots reaching that stream of life?
Or not quite?

Maybe you want to draw a picture of your life as a tree when you get home.
Ask your kids to do this as well.

The Psalmist says that when we are like trees planted by streams of water,
we are Happy.

But the Hebrew word doesn't correspond with our idea of fleeting happiness,
but rather with *blessedness, or joy*.

Those who live like trees are *Blessed*.

This word is used again and again in the Psalms.

“Happy” sounds great to us.

We are people who feel *entitled to the ‘pursuit of happiness’, right?*

And yet we are often not so happy,

Even when we get all the stuff that’s supposed to make us so.

We spend a lot of time and money pursuing happiness.

When what we really need, is joy, or blessedness.

And, what if true Joy, comes from being connected to God,

And planted by God’s waters of life?

*The Psalmist would say that true joy
also comes from following the right path.*

And in this life, there are ONLY two paths—

making the right decisions or making the wrong ones.

At first it looks like the world is *divided between the good people and the wicked*.
But as we keep reading, it’s really talking about *ways of living—decision-making*.

Which makes more sense,

because we all know that life is not as black and white

as some people are good and some are bad.

Some of those bad people act good sometimes,

and some of the best Christian act horrifically.

People are Imperfect.

But decisions—they are important.

And they diverge into good ones and bad ones.

And the problem with us is that if there are two roads to choose,

the right way and the wrong way, *we often think we can have BOTH*.

Robert Frost once said in a famous poem, “*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
and sorry that I could not travel both*”...so he takes the road less traveled.....

Notice what Frost admits?

That we would LIKE to have both paths.

We would like to make good decisions, AND act out of our worst inclinations.

We want BOTH paths.

James Howell, workingpreacher.org, October 23, 2011.

But there is really only GOD'S path, or our OWN.

God's way of living, or our way of life.

Or as Rev. Joan Gray puts it,

we can either be sailboats filled with the power of the Holy Spirit,

or we can be rowboats trying to do life on our own power.

One is the better way.

One is God's way.

So what can we do?

The Psalmist says that we should follow the true path.

Happy are those

who do not follow the advice of the wicked

or take the path that sinners tread.....² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,

and on his law they meditate day and night.

We are called to follow the path of learning.

Did you know that's what it means to be a ***DISCIPLE of Jesus?***

He called his followers ***disciples***, which means ***student***.

And what were they constantly learning?

The Torah (the word for law in Psalm 1, which really means 'teaching')—
the books of Moses,

And most of all, how to live like Him.

They were constantly learning how to live like Jesus.

Disciples were people who followed a Rabbi—to ***become more like him!***

How are WE doing with this?

Are we life-long learners,

who want to become more and more like Jesus?

And what does this require?

It's not like we can meditate day and night—

we've got things to do, or so we tell ourselves and God...

***Well, we can be disciplined in how we
regularly study God's Word, pray, and come to worship!***

We can ***make time*** for these things—all the time!

Did you know that one Jewish group at the time of Jesus, the Essenes,
took this so seriously that they had people
writing and reciting and reading scripture, literally 24/7!

***Now the only thing I do even close to 24/7
is talk to myself, and a lot to God.***

But what if ***instead of talking to ourselves, we were talking to God?***
(I think we'd get better answers!)

***What if we opened the prayer channel of our hearts,
and kept that connection open to God, 24/7?
What would that look like in YOUR LIFE?***

This Psalm also begs the question—***what about the wicked?***

It says that those who keep choosing what is wrong
are like chaff that the wind drives away.

And the Psalmist goes on to say: ***but the way of the wicked will perish.***

Some read that as Judgmental on the part of God.

But what if those who keep choosing evil ***are separating themselves*** from God?
What if their separation is just a ***consequence*** of bad choices?

And before we start thinking in our heads about who those evil people are,
And pointing fingers, ***let's look at the other fingers pointing at our own hearts!***
We are ALL tempted to make bad choices, right?

Like maybe even this morning before church?

We are also tempted with money, power, or influence.

We are tempted to mistreat people, and think better of ourselves.

We are tempted with pride, and idolatry.

Like all, all the time.

But there is a WAY OUT of this mess.

Live like a tree.

Be a tree—not anything or anyone else.

Live connected to God---the source of life,

And near those ***streams*** of God's Word, love, and grace.

What about some practical guidelines for living like a tree?

While I don't think of the Bible as a youtube video or an instruction book,
It sure ***does contain wisdom*** that we desperately need in life.

Like in Matthew 22 when Jesus sums up the law this way:

Love the Lord your God....and your neighbor as yourself.

Or Micah 6:8:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good,

and what does the Lord require of you

but to do justice and to love kindness

and to walk humbly with your God?

Or Romans 13:8: Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Or I John 4:7-8: Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God....God is love.

Are we getting the gist of living like a tree?

And could this be what Paul is ultimately saying in Ephesians 4:1-3:

I, beg you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...

Friends, this is Good News.

We want to ***be like trees***—planted by streams of water, bearing fruit.

We want that ***power of the Holy Spirit*** guiding us, filling us.

We want our ***roots to be deep*** into God's Word,

We want a ***24/7 connection*** to God.

We want to follow the ***wisdom of James 2:26:***

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

NOT because we earn our way to God,

Not because making right choices ***gives us material*** gifts or rewards,

But because doing these things—***helps us become more like Jesus.***

Isn't that the goal?

Isn't that the thing ***we hope people say*** after we're gone?

That we loved God?

That we lived a little bit like Jesus?

What if we could live by what we sang first thing this morning?
 That song by the band *Sidewalk Prophets*?
 The band says their name comes from wanting to be like Jesus—
 ordinary people on a sidewalk, but prophets—people who share the love of God.

And they wrote the song called, *Live Like That*,
 Listen to the first lines again:

Sometimes I think--What will people say of me
 When I'm only just a memory,
 When I'm home where my soul belongs
 Was I love? When no one else would show up
 Was I Jesus to the least of us? Was my worship more than just a song
 Am I proof, That You are who You say You are?
 That grace can really change a heart?
 Do I live like Your love is true?
 People pass, And even if they don't know my name
 Is there evidence that I've been changed, When they see me do they see You?

*I wanna live like that, And give it all I have
 So that everything I say and do, Points to You
 If love is who I am, Then this is where I'll stand
 Recklessly abandoned, Never holding back
 I wanna live like that.*

https://www.newreleasetoday.com/article.php?article_id=808

I DO want to live like that.
 What about ***YOU?***

For the gift of living like that, all God's people can say together, Amen.