

People for Whom Jesus Prays 2021
 Psalm 1 John 17:6-11, 14-21

Psalm 1 (New Revised Standard Version)

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; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night. 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. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

John 17:6-11, 14-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

It's my belief that **John the Gospel** was written by **John the apostle**,
 and that he was a very old man when he wrote this gospel,
 along with the book of Revelation and the 3 epistles of John,
and that after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus,
he had spent his life preaching and teaching about the Lord.

John was writing quite a bit later than Matthew, Mark or Luke,
 and he does more than simply describe the events that happened.
 He goes deeper and explains what they mean theologically,
 how it all connects to what God was up to in sending Jesus,
and how that truth changes everything about a believer's life.

We know that the gospel of John,
 emerged from a very difficult time in the life of the Church.
 It was during a period of the most extreme and severe persecution,
 when it felt like the very existence of the Church was at risk,
... and that the future itself seemed to be in doubt.

John chose particular stories and events from the ministry of Jesus,
 and retold them to encourage, support and speak to the needs
 of that struggling and discouraged early faith-community.

It was a strengthening word of hope encouraging them to persevere.

It was into that context of a hostile and threatening environment that John remembers and writes about the prayer Jesus prayed the night he was betrayed, before Jesus was arrested & crucified,

when the disciples were heading toward what would be the worst and most terrible experience of their lives.

The prayer Jesus prayed that night makes it very clear that he was fully aware of the pain suffering ahead for him, and that it was all a part of God's plan he was sent to accomplish.

Jesus came to bring hope, healing and salvation from sin and death, God's refusal to reject or abandon the world that had turned aside.

It was important for John's struggling faith-community to understand **and trust** that the terrible suffering and death of Jesus, was a part of God's gracious plan and intention to heal, and through which God's saving purpose was fulfilled.

So too, even the struggles that John's community was enduring, these were not a waste, not an accident or someone's mistake, **but that God was up to something good and gracious, even if they didn't understand what it all meant...**

... and that just as Jesus was sent by God the Father **into the world to accomplish God's will and purpose,** so too Jesus sends his disciples **into the world also according to God's purpose, will and plan...**

... and so Jesus explains and prays for them, and for us, vs. 11, 20

And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, **protect them** in your name that you have given me, so **that they may be one, as we are one.** I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of **those who will believe in me through their word,** that they may all be one.

Jesus, soon to complete his earthly mission would be leaving. He prayed for his disciples and for us who would follow in faith, to be protected, **and be one** as Father, Son and Spirit **are One.**

That is a critical and reassuring message for us to hear and trust because **it's not easy to live as a faithful Christian in this world.**

Not really, not if you truly let God's Word and way guide you.
Not if you allow Jesus to influence every aspect of your life.
Not if you let God's grace guide all that you do and say.

It's way more than just wearing a cultural Christian façade.

And for the most part, and for most of us, the real challenge & danger to our faith, and to our faithfulness, doesn't come as open hostility, threat or even ridicule.

But it's far more subtle, as we compromise and absorb from the ordinary influences and enticements of our culture, that can attract, distract and derail our spiritual life.

There are dangerous and destructive influences in our world, values and viewpoints quite at odds with God's Word, grace & ways that can draw us in, almost unaware of any change, pick up from culture without really even noticing...

... often times in our earnest desire to fit in and appear successful.

Jesus is describing the clash between living a biblical perspective and the enticing ways and values so pervasive in our culture, the corrupt viewpoints of those **estranged from God's truth & grace**, opposed or indifferent to things of God embodied in Jesus Christ.

We are always in danger of **becoming tangled & caught up in the world**, and thereby compromising or losing **our Christian distinctiveness**.

It's deciding between two fundamentally different ways & life-goals—
choosing to follow God's guiding presence in our lives,
or choosing to follow worldly influences and values.

Some try to resolve this by absolutely rejecting the world & culture, and isolating themselves from any outside corruption & temptation.

But the problem is, evil isn't just out there in the world around us, no, **the real battles are those within**, our own wants and desires, **selfish & subtle motivations that lead us away from God's call**.

We are not taken out from this world, or removed from its temptations but we are here to engage and converse with the world, and to reflect God's love & purpose out into the world, to serve in God's name, **empowered by God's presence among us**, and invite the world God loves into relationship with God –
--- **for that is our calling and our purpose...** vs. 18
As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

So how do we faithfully go out into the world as Jesus has sent us, how do we stay on track and not fall prey or succumb to the pervasive influence of the world around us?

How do we live into God's grace and blessings as Jesus intends for us?

I believe God clearly answered that question in Psalm 1, vs. 1-2

Happy (blessed) 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; but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law they meditate day and night.

"Happy" is a far too weak and frivolous translation from the Hebrew.

It means more literally, to live within God's plan and intention, within what our loving Creator wants and desires for us.

The Psalmist is warning against absorbing the values of this world, which is to buy into advice of the wicked, path sinners tread and scoffers.

'the Law of the Lord' is more than just commandments & religious rules, but it's a life that seeks to know and obey God's will and ways that is lived within healthy and meaningful relationships.

'meditating day and night' is about having an unbroken relationship of a continuous walk with God, which is to have an authentic and on-going relationship with God, that's receptive to the Spirit's presence, comfort & guidance.

That means, we are to examine the events and the choices of our life
¹ by holding them up to the scrutiny of God through our prayer,
² by allowing God's Word to speak concerning our words and deeds,
³ and most significantly listening to other Christians in fellowship

placed in our lives by God to help nurture and strengthen our faith.

One time I was hanging out some guys I knew who played in a band.
 One of them started to whistle & strum, trying to work out a tune,
 then another guy joined in with some variations on the tune.
 The guy at the keyboard board began to play around with the tune,
 while the drummer kicked in and started tapping out a beat.

Gradually, listening to each other, and playing together,
 it was fascinating to follow as each one contributed their part
 while they **each continued working out the music together**
 that was way better than any one of them playing alone...

... which is a lot like the way our faith develops and deepens
 as we gradually work out our faith together in community,
 each bringing our part toward fulfilling our shared mission.
And that's what Jesus was praying about in our passage from John.

Continuing, we can restrain the influences of the world over us
 by placing ourselves actively-within a faithful community,
¹ where our faith is fed and sustained by God's word
² and by God's abiding presence among the people of God...

... which the psalmist compares to a tree planted by a stream of water,
 by an ever-flowing source of fresh nourishment and nurture. vs. 3
 like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither.

It's about choosing to receive God's guiding presence in our lives,
 a life-sustaining and healthy **deep-rootedness in Christ**
 that is able to withstand draught, hard times and adversity.

Our call is to choose with care and deliberation,
 where and how we plant our roots to feed our minds and souls,
 for that will determine how we grow as the people of God...
 ... **so that we can go out into the world in obedience to Christ,**
by living out the abundant life Jesus calls us to receive.

So specifically, how do we choose in favor of godly influence?
How do we stay planted by the flowing stream of God's water?

*1- Our friends and associates, by those we allow to influence us.
 We know some bring out the best in us, and others, our worst,
 so who am I choosing to spend my time with?

*2- Our choices in how we use our spare-time and our relax-time,
 any of it reading God's Word ? Bible devotions or prayer?
 or perhaps reading a Christian book or magazine ...
 and which TV, movies or Internet sites do we choose?
 It's feeding ourselves with inspiring and uplifting ideas.
It's choosing with care what we hang on the walls of our minds.

*3- Our active participation in church-life with people of faith,
 we do need the regular feeding of worship experience,
 to be around others trying to apply God's word
 as guidance for living our lives and situations,
 to feed our roots, our souls, our relationship with God,
 to develop our character, to transform and enlarge us,
 for us to learn to trust and let God be our strength...

... which might be having the courage to admit when I am off-track,
to ask what values or assumptions am I holding, that are wrong,
and consider that I might not be right and need to change ---

--- and as promised according to Scripture, **trust that God
will bring me to where and who God intends for me to be.**

And for us **as influencers of those whom God has put in our path,**
after a conversation, a message or time spent with us,
do they feel more valued, appreciated and blessed
by God's gracious love having flowed through us?
Am I a nurturing stream where others can plant & grow their roots?

John's purpose for including this passage and prayer in his Gospel
was to encourage his readers to stay faithful and trust God,
even amid their struggle, suffering and confusion.

Today we need to hear and receive that same hopeful message,
for many, our days are difficult, uncertain and challenging.
We are in a strange season of transition toward rebuilding,
which will require considerable patience, time & tenacity ...

... and above all, **our eyes and our hearts focused on Jesus Christ.**

And since God is wise, powerful gracious, able, and has it worked out,
our primary task and call is to trust God and listen, and obey.

**We are called and enabled to live out our Christian life faith-fully
in whatever environment, whatever circumstance or context
God has chosen to place us, for us to live, to grow & to serve,
holding each other up toward God's will for our lives,
together in tune and in harmony with the Lord God.**

No, we aren't taken out from this world, or removed from temptation
but we are here to engage and converse with the world,
and to reflect God's love and purpose out into the world...

... and to serve in God's name, **empowered by God's presence among us,**
to invite the world God loves into relationship with God
just as Jesus prayed back then for his people and for us--

--- **for that is our calling and our purpose:(Matt 10:16, Josh 1:9)**

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.
Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.