

PERSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 2018



FRIENDSHIP
EVANGELISM

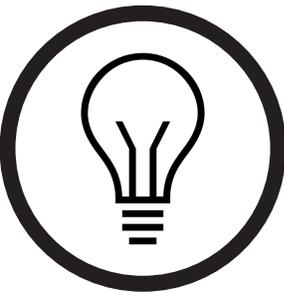
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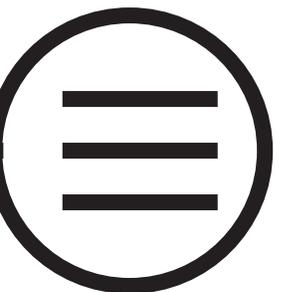
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Friendship Evangelism

Before Billy Graham, there was Reuben Archer Torrey. Torrey graduated from Yale in 1875 and, after graduate studies in theology, served what is now Moody Bible Institute. He pastored a church in Chicago for a number of years before leading the Bible Institute of Los Angeles.

However, we remember Torrey most for his evangelism. Like D. L. Moody before him and Graham after him, Torrey traveled the world, sharing the gospel by calling sinners to repentance and faith. Scores of Christians looked to him for counsel, and he had plenty to offer. In his book, *Personal Work in Soul Winning*, he exhorted Christians to take the gospel everywhere. He prescribed certain techniques to improve the chances of success: speak to people your own age, deal with people alone, be courteous, and try to get the person to pray on his knees.¹

We should be thankful for brothers and sisters laboring to see sinners saved, but looking back, Torrey's methods were manipulative. Whatever his intentions, he portrayed people as projects to be completed instead of image-bearers to be known. The reality of hell should cause us to pursue unbelievers with a sense of urgency. But the kindness of God should lead us to relate to unbelievers as friends.

CAN WE BEFRIEND UNBELIEVERS?

The answer must be yes. Consider the work of Christ, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 13:36). Jesus befriended unbelievers. Paul goes out of his way to note that Christ did not die for us because we were *already* his friends. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). In other words, Christ came to us, warts and all, bestowing grace on us through the work of the cross, that we might be his friends.

As a pastor, I regularly hear how people came to saving faith. For some it was during an evangelistic rally. Others believed during a sermon or a Sunday school class. Many recall to the faithful witness of a parent or family member. But quite a few have told me God saved them through the love, perseverance, and boldness of a friend.

The church today needs believers with the margin and the mindset to befriend non-Christians.

This requires an understanding of friendship, both inside and outside the church. The past few years, several authors have published excellent books on friendship.² They are worth a close look. Though all of them target the Christian, even these books on Christian friendship can teach us a great deal about how to apply the kindness of God to our relationships with unbelievers.

Let's take a look at friendship in general, with these authors as our guide. As we do, we can think more carefully about how to appropriately cultivate friendships with unbelievers for the sake of the Great Commission.

FRIENDSHIP AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

Each of these authors see biblical friendship as an extension of Christian discipleship. Jonathan Holmes in his book, *The Company We Keep*, presents friendship as the fruit of union with Christ. Friendship, he argues, is more than fellowship. Christian fellowship can be called "biblical friendship" when it "has been given added depth, refinement, and detail through active investment in one another's lives"³

Similarly, Joel Beeke and Michael Haykin argue friendship is a means of living out the scriptural command to be the church. Friendship "is a vital way that God works in the lives of His children to help them grow in grace and stay true to Christ."⁴ Likewise, Vaughan Roberts in *True Friendship*, insists that because Christians share the priceless gospel, we have the capacity for the spectacular intimacy known as friendship:

Christians have the ultimate common passion and shared goal, which encompasses the whole of life. We have been called, as brothers and sisters, to belong to Christ's family, as we travel along the way of the cross throughout our lives, with our eyes fixed on the destination of the new creation to come, which Christ will introduce when he returns. It is a long journey, with many challenges along the road. We will often fall and need someone to pick us up.⁵

The believers there to pick us up are called "friends."

Each of these authors strives to make a distinction between being merely a brother or sister in Christ and being a friend. Holmes, perhaps most helpfully, notes that Jesus had physical limitations which limited him to twelve disciples and, of the twelve, three with whom he stayed particularly close. If Jesus could only maintain a few, deeper relationships, we shouldn't expect to be

friends with everyone in our church.⁶ Again, church fellowship and Christian friendship aren't exactly the same thing.

Nonetheless, even though we can't be friends with *everybody*, the question remains: are we truly friends with *anybody*? God has given us local churches full of people who love Jesus and, in Christ, love us, too. We should be actively praying for and pursuing friendship within the local church.

FRIENDSHIP DESERTS

Sadly, the twenty-first century landscape is something of a friendship desert. From air-conditioning that keeps us off the front-porch to Facebook that keeps us glued to our screen, the kind of friendships described in the Bible seem all-too-rare. Proverbs 18:24, "A man of many companions comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Are you experiencing this kind of relationship?

Many are not.

Sociologist Shelly Turkle points to our smart phone as a friendship killer.

We let phones disrupt the conversations of friendship in several ways: By having our phones out we keep conversations light and we are less connected to each other in the conversations we do have. And we rarely talk to friends about how we feel when they turn away from us to their phones. This behavior has become a new normal.⁷

If Turkle is right, fewer and fewer believers are engaging in thoughtful, fruitful conversations with their non-Christian neighbors. Tragically, this is even true within the church.

Holmes points out several enemies to authentic friendship in the church today. First, social media friendships which aren't really friendships at all and actually pull us away from crucial, face-to-face encounters. Second, specialized friendships which revolve around a stage-of-life or a common interest. Such relationships don't go deep. Sports are fun, but are not the means God uses to knit people together. Sharing parenting woes is important, but is no guarantee of deep community.⁸

According to Beeke and Haykin, the chief antagonists in the war against friendship are schedules and greed: "Early twenty-first century Western culture emphasizes extreme busyness and, as a rule, promotes receiving and possessing more than sacrificing and giving." And the vice of the culture has become the sin of the church: "What is especially disturbing is that the values of Western Christianity often appear to be similar to those of the surrounding culture."⁹

A number of years ago I visited overseas with a missionary reaching out to Central Asian Muslims. During my trip, we went to a grocery store and bumped into a young man he'd recently met. They greeted one another, he introduced me, and they proceeded to engage in small talk. A few moments later, I felt like it was time to get home, but my missionary friend just stood there, in silence, with his new friend. I didn't understand what was happening. From my perspective, the conversation had clearly ended, and it was time to move on. But from their perspective, taking a moment simply to be together, even without talking, was a normal part of building a relationship. After a minute—which seemed to me like a year—the conversation picked up again and my friend turned the conversation to the gospel. I stood amazed.

Can we learn something from their interaction? I'm sure we can. There are moments when it's appropriate to push into the awkwardness—at least what we *think* is awkwardness—and wait. With our phones on silent and our hearts eager to connect with an image-bearer, we need to learn how to be with others.

Vaughan Roberts points out one other reason so many of us live in a friendship desert. He calls it "the idolatry of eros." The married and unmarried alike have wrongly assumed an erotic relationship is the key to happiness. It's not.

The Bible certainly has a very high view of marriage, but it is not designed to bear the weight that is placed on it when a husband and wife expect all their relational needs to be met by one another. The result is that they not only put impossible burdens on each other, but also give insufficient attention to other friendships. Single people suffer from the same delusion, too often believing the lie that they are bound to experience miserable, isolated lives unless they can find a spouse.¹⁰

Long story short, the world has never been more connected, and yet we have never felt so disconnected.

That's the bad news. What's the good news? Christians know God can make it rain in the desert.

PURSUING FRIENDSHIP—INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

Admittedly, there is no silver bullet to finding a good friend. Friendship, like marriage or anything else, can be idolized. I know I've done this in the past. I've complained about a lack of meaningful friendships in my life when, truth be told, I had such a high standard of friendship nobody could meet it. I wanted friends to be what only Christ could be to me. I needed to pursue Christ more.

Faithful friendships should come after the faithful pursuit of Christ.

All of these authors rightly prioritize a relationship with Christ above community. "Most importantly," write Beeke and Haykin, "you must receive a new heart and live a daily life of faith and repentance in order to *build your relationship with God* through Jesus Christ as your covenant-establishing and covenant-keeping Redeemer."¹¹ Roberts asserts the gospel is the driving-force behind good relationships. Befriending others "is not something we can do by ourselves, which explains the mess we so often make of relationships. But, wonderfully, God is determined to change us by his Spirit so that we are transformed from being turned in on ourselves to reaching out in love to him and others."¹² At the heart of biblical friendship, writes Holmes, is a commitment to Christ: "Biblical friendship exists when two or more people, bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ, pursue him and his kingdom with intentionality and vulnerability."¹³

Clearly, the best friends will be those who have experienced the undeserved love of Christ and know how to share that love with others.

But once saved, there are practical steps we can take to become better friends. Holmes encourages us to live lives of constancy, candor, carefulness, and counsel. Constancy implies a commitment to being a friend for the long haul. Candor means speaking what your friend *needs* to hear and not merely what they *want* to hear. Carefulness means knowing what not to say and when not to speak. Counsel means working hard to provide sound wisdom to a friend-in-need.¹⁴

Holmes focuses his writing on friendships between believers, but each of these marks of good friendships could easily be applied to an unbeliever in your life. Picture a co-worker you've gotten to know over lunches the past few years. Are you willing to be a fixture in this person's life (constancy)? Will you be honest when the time is right (candor)? Will you say enough to be clear about where you stand without leaving him or her constantly feeling judged (carefulness)? And will you give wisdom as your "friend" experiences the trials of life (counsel)? I hope you would! It is quite possible God put you in this person's life for that very reason.

Beeke and Haykin have some simple suggestions to be a good friend: talk, listen, serve, enjoy life, think, be, trust, pray, repent, and hope together.¹⁵ It is hard to truly trust someone who isn't leaning on Christ. You can't pray, repent, and hope with an enemy of the cross. But look at how many of these practical steps could be used to bless unbelievers. So many of our neighbors are lonely. You can give them the gift of speech, listening, serving, enjoying life, thinking, and being together.

Roberts expected non-Christians to pick up his book, though he wrote with Christians in mind. His tips on friendship apply to more than the church. Common grace implies unbelievers can also experience genuine friendship, too—even if it is only a taste of the real thing. "I hope," Vaughan writes at the introduction of his book, "that some of you who would not call themselves Christians will also read this book. If that is you, I trust you will find some insights that will help you in your friendships."¹⁶

We can hope our unbelieving friends will pick up his book, but we wouldn't we rather they get a taste of friendship with us? Perhaps over time, as they come to see the gospel at work in us, they'll realize there is a far better friend to be had in Christ. Christians may make the best friends, but the best Christians can make friendships with people outside the church.

A WORD OF CAUTION

We should pursue friendships with non-Christians; both because they are made in God's image and because they need to be re-made in the image of Christ. But we must be careful. The pursuit of friendships in the world should not come at the neglect of basic and important scriptural principles:

✦ "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” (Psa. 1:1).

✦ “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Prov. 13:20).

✦ “Do not be deceived, ‘Bad company ruins good morals’” (1 Cor. 15:33).

Every human heart longs for friendship. This longing can blind us, leading us to lock arms (and even hearts) with people who are not good for our spiritual health. “Those who are lonely and feel isolated,” Roberts counsels, “are in danger of rushing into any friendship that is available without thinking about the possible consequences.”¹⁷

By all means, be careful. It’s utter foolishness, for example, to dive into a dating relationship with an unbeliever with the hope he or she will one day be converted. It’s unwise to wrap your life around someone who will work relentlessly to drag you away from Christ and his body, the local church. Discernment is the order of the day.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

It can be daunting to find non-Christian friends, especially if you are already having trouble keeping Christian friends. What can you do to grow in this area?

✦ Ask yourself if you are convinced you ought to welcome unbelievers into your life. If you aren’t convinced of this biblically, you won’t act practically.

✦ Think about the biblical mandate to be hospitable. Though elders are uniquely charged to open up their homes (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8), this is a field of ministry for every Christian. Read Rosaria Butterfield’s *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* and *The Simplest Way to Change the World* by Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements.

✦ Consider the neighbors and co-workers already in your life, and pray God would give you wisdom to know whom it would be wise to pursue into a deeper friendship. Take the first step by inviting them to share a meal.

✦ Be thankful Christ befriended you! The best friends don’t ever get over the grace God has lavished on them.

“WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS”

Holmes, Roberts, Beeke, and Haykin are good guides to the topic of biblical friendship. They accurately diagnosed a pattern of loneliness *within* the church and put pen to paper to help us embrace the importance of friendship. If you are struggling in this area, their work will be a deep encouragement and practical help.

But consider this: we live in a world filled with people who may know the gospel, but who haven’t seen it lived out. So many are longing for company, but don’t know where to find it. They need a friend who will lovingly, honestly, gently, and boldly point them to Christ. Remember, their biggest problem isn’t the absence of a friend, it’s the lack of a Savior. The Irish poet, Joseph Scriven, knew full well that all friends, except Christ, disappoint:

Are we weak and heavy-laden
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He’ll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.¹⁸

– Aaron Menikoff

¹R. A. Torrey, *Personal Work in Soul Winning: 15 Chapters by one of the greatest soul winners who ever lived* (Wheaton, Ill.: Sword of the Lord, n.d.), 171–79.

²Vaughan Roberts, *True Friendship: Walking Shoulder to Shoulder* (Leyden, England: 10 Publishing, 2013); Jonathan Holmes, *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Cruciform Press, 2014); Joel R. Beeke and Michael A. G. Haykin, *How Should We Develop Biblical Friendship?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage, 2015).

³Holmes, *Company We Keep*, 18.

⁴Beeke & Haykin, *Biblical Friendship*, 44.

⁵Roberts, *True Friendship*, 21.

⁶*Company We Keep*, 84.

⁷Shelly Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 157.

⁸*Company We Keep*, 33–38.

⁹*Biblical Friendship*, 1.

¹⁰*True Friendship*, 35.

¹¹*Biblical Friendship*, 20.

¹²*True Friendship*, 17.

¹³*Biblical Friendship*, 27.

¹⁴*The Company We Keep*, 45–59.

¹⁵*Biblical Friendship*, 26–44.

¹⁶*True Friendship*, 13.

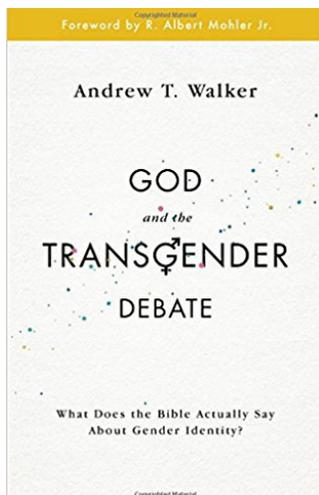
¹⁷*Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁸Joseph M. Scriven, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” 1855.

God & The Transgender Debate

Written by Andrew T. Walker

Bookstall Price: \$14



It does not take a keen cultural observer to realize that Western society is undergoing a profound moral change, one that is largely defined by changing attitudes over sexuality and increasingly, gender. The pace of this change has been rapid, and unfortunately, the church has often been left uncertain how to respond—“playing catch-up in the culture” (17), rather than leading with biblical truth and grace. *God and the Transgender Debate* by Andrew Walker is an effort to equip the church to think biblically about the issue that has seemingly taken center stage in the drive for moral change, transgenderism, so that

the church corporately and Christians individually are properly prepared to respond as they engage friends, neighbors, and the culture at-large.

Walker rightly recognizes that a biblical response starts in the heart of every Christian, and therefore, he begins the book by reminding readers of the compassion that Jesus had for sinners during his time on earth. He then encourages readers to model that compassion and grace to those who are struggling with issues of gender identity. This is a compassion that Walker himself models in his writing even as he clearly and boldly argues that transgenderism is incompatible with both God’s Word and his created order. Walker builds his argument by constructing a biblical theology of gender that not only displays how God speaks to this issue, but also points readers to the hope of the cross and the promise of eternity.

The book is not simply a theological treatise, however, it is also an immensely practical guide. Walker understands that many Christians are confused by the debate over gender identity. Perhaps the most helpful features of the book are the chapters he devotes to explaining the cultural trends and ideologies that spawned the transgender debate—simply defining the terms and explaining the language of the movement. He also spends the bulk of the book applying the Bible to the practical questions of the transgender debate: How do I love my transgender neighbor without compromising truth? What does it mean for someone struggling with their gender identity to take up their cross and follow Jesus? How should we think about pronouns? How should we speak to our children about issues of gender identity? Transgenderism is an issue many in the church are already encountering, and that all will be forced to confront. *God and the Transgender Debate* is an excellence resource to equip Christians to rightly apply God’s Word and to appealingly model his grace.

– RECOMMENDED BY JESSE BRANNEN

Excerpts From the Book

1

“The God who creates is the God who assigns to humans what humans are, what humans are supposed to do, and how humans are to do it. Being creatures means that our highest calling and greatest pleasure is found in living in line with how God designed us.”

– Well Designed, p.52

2

“To see the full dignity of a transgendered person means to abhor or reject any mocking humor that would demean them. It means to stand up and defend them against bullies or abuse. Dignity demands that we speak up in the defense of someone’s worth, even when we disagree with their way of life.”

– Love Your Neighbor, p.96

3

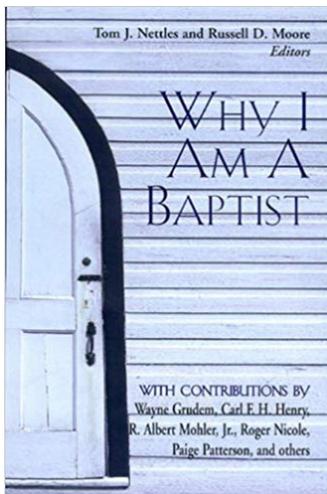
“Real people live in our neighborhoods, sit in our church buildings, and talk with us after our services, and they have real struggles. And the question is: in our churches, do they hear their struggles spoken about kindly, carefully, by someone who has tried to understand them?”

– Challenging the Church, p.124

Why I Am A Baptist

Edited by Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore

Bookstall Price: \$13



Anyone born and raised in a Baptist church in the American South will likely be familiar with the common stereotypes of committees, avoiding dancing, and loud preachers. While these are common features in some churches, it is actually Baptist convictions that form the bedrock of Baptist identity. Unfortunately, aspects of its culture and tradition seem to be many Baptists' answer to the question, "Why are you a Baptist?". This apparent misapprehension of what it means to be a Baptist has led professor Tom J. Nettles and theologian Russell D. Moore to publish *Why I am A Baptist*. In it, they invite a

variety of Baptist leaders to share their theologically rich answers to this foundational question.

In this book, Baptist characteristics are explained in an effort to deepen the reader's understanding of how theologically rigorous Baptists have been and continue to be. The writers work to introduce readers to the doctrinal history of Baptists beliefs like the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, soul competency, and believers' baptism.

This book is a great resource for Baptist church members because it lays out Baptist convictions from a variety of different perspectives. It includes personal stories of the impacts of Baptist convictions on professors, mothers, early Baptists, evangelical leaders, and more. The writers show that no matter how long you have been a Baptist, or what your experience of Baptist culture has been, Baptists are Baptists because of biblical truth. Our insistence on congregational governance, personal holiness, and passionately making the gospel known throughout the world are all on the foundation of biblical truth.

– RECOMMENDED BY DANNY SANDERSON

Excerpts From the Book

1

"What makes Baptist identity truly distinctive is the unique manner in which we hold these truths together in symphonic wholeness and seek to apply them to our congregational life. Baptist identity is rooted in the Baptist congregation."

– R. Albert Mohler Jr.,
Being Baptist Means Conviction, p.62

2

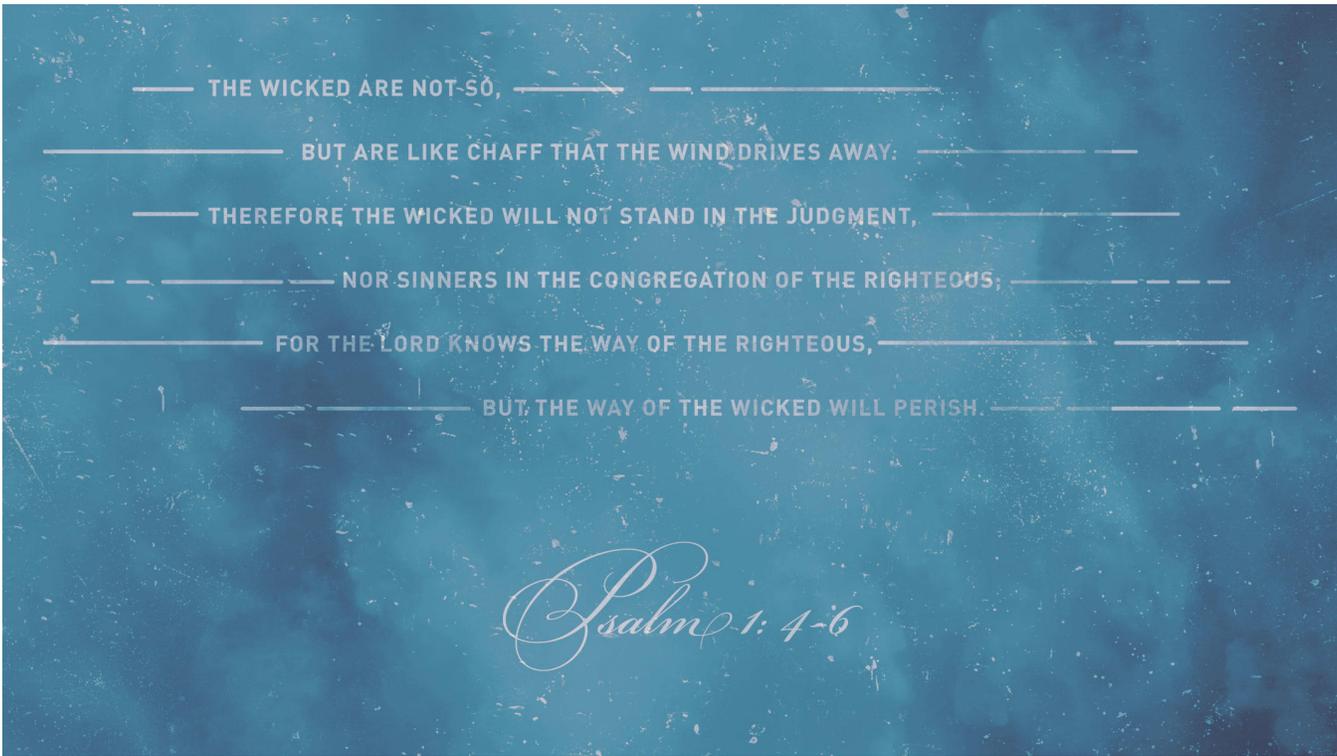
"Baptists are people of the book and when they cease to be that, they will cease to be Baptists. In fact, they will cease to be... period"

– Al Meredith,
A Baptist – Tested By Fire, p.147

3

"But in my heart and mind I am convinced that overall the best fruit of the Reformation and of Evangelicalism is found upon the Baptist branch of Christ vine"

– Donald S. Whitney,
Blood Is Thicker Than Water, p.197



“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 1:4–6

.....

Psalms were the prayer book and songbook for Israel, Jesus, and the early church. They have been central to the life and worship of God’s people for centuries teaching people to how to worship God in song and prayer mingling the mind and heart.

Psalm 1 provides the central theme of wisdom that runs throughout the psalter. If we are going to be wise we must understand the fundamental way to have a blessed, happy, life favored by God. It is to choose the life of the righteous that “delights in the law of the Lord.”

In the second half of Psalm 1, the psalmist contrasts the wicked with the righteous. Unlike the blessed man who delights in the law of the Lord and is like a strong tree, the wicked are like “chaff.” They are not deeply rooted or fruitful in their life. They are made for threshing, which is what they will experience at judgment. They will not be able to stand before the Lord nor counted a part of the “congregation of the righteous.” The outcome of the wicked will not be pleasant. They will “perish.”

But it will be different for the righteous. The “LORD knows the way of the righteous.” This is an intimate knowledge of love and affection God has for his people who have been made righteous by Jesus Christ (see Rom. 5:6-11).

At times, the Christian life is about fixing our eyes on the end. We have to keep a perspective that goes beyond our immediate circumstances. It even has to go beyond our current difficult situation getting better. Life may be going well for you right now. But it is nothing compared to the joy and life that awaits. The gifts of this earthly life can be so sweet. They come from the hand of our heavenly Father. But they are, as a pastor once said, only bread crumbs leading us to the meal that awaits.

Psalm 1 is a reminder that those who are righteous in Christ have the hopeful outcome of being welcomed into the presence of their majestic Creator God and loving heavenly Father. Until that day, they live wisely in the fear of the Lord. They hear his word and obey it. And they live a life that is fruitful and encouraging to others.

– BRAD THAYER

SEPTEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

September 1	Psalm 76	September 16	1 Thessalonians 1:1–10
September 2	Psalm 76	September 17	Acts 1
September 3	1 Corinthians 15:1–10	September 18	Acts 2
September 4	Genesis 12:1–9	September 19	Acts 3
September 5	Isaiah 2:1–5	September 20	Acts 7:54–8:3
September 6	Matthew 28	September 21	Acts 8:4–25
September 7	Romans 4	September 22	Isaiah 55:1–5
September 8	Romans 5	September 23	Acts 8:4–25
September 9	1 Corinthians 15:1–10	September 24	Hebrews 1:1–2:4
September 10	1 Thessalonians 1:1–10	September 25	Hebrews 2:5–18
September 11	Isaiah 6:1–7	September 26	Psalm 2, 8
September 12	Jonah 3:1–10	September 27	Psalm 45
September 13	Romans 10:1–13	September 28	Psalm 102
September 14	Romans 10:14–21	September 29	Philippians 2:1–11
September 15	Ephesians 4:1–16	September 30	Hebrews 2:5–18

*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ





Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH