

PSALM I

¹Blessed is the man
 who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
 or stand in the way of sinners
 or sit in the seat of mockers.

²But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.

³He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither.
 Whatever he does prospers.

ONE

FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

As leaders, we are success-driven. Whether we're seeking the advancement of our company and its products and services or seeking the success of those who work for and with us, we thrive on a positive bottom line.

How would you like to be successful in everything you do? How would you like to get up in the morning and know that no matter what you do, you will succeed? Your confidence level would soar like an eagle!

UNLIMITED HAPPINESS AND JOY

On top of an incredible success rate, how would you like to experience unlimited happiness and joy? Good days that would far outweigh your bad days? Enough strength for every task? How would you like to be truly blessed?

Do we have your attention yet?

You may be asking, "What is the formula?" Granted, there is no substitute for prayerful planning, hard work, and effective management. But there are biblical principles that can add spiritual fuel to the fires of your vision and effort.

Psalms 1 categorizes some basic rules of the road for your personal and corporate journey—rules that not only help make you a true success but also add personal joy. They consist of

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avoiding three things and adding one important thing on a daily basis.

The three things you must avoid are these:

1. Walking in the counsel of the wicked
2. Standing in the way of sinners
3. Sitting in the seat of mockers

GOOD ADVICE

Do you see the landmines those cautions are uncovering? Let's consider them. First, there is a caution against listening to "the counsel of the wicked." So what's wrong with gathering input from various sources? Isn't it wise to get counsel from several people before making a decision? Yes—to a degree. But let's face it. Not all advice is good advice. You learned that the first time you asked for directions and heard the words "You can't miss it."

The writer of Proverbs says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (14:12). Author G. K. Chesterton once said, "I owe my success to having listened respectfully to the very best advice, and then going away and doing the exact opposite." He wasn't saying that all advice is wrong. He was saying that advice coming from the *right source* is more valuable to him.

In the days before MRIs and virtual patients, nurses and doctors in training primarily used stethoscopes to listen to lungs in order to detect problems. How did they learn to hear the difference between healthy lungs and unhealthy lungs? They lis-

tened to the sounds of healthy lungs—lungs that were strong and clear. Then when they were with real patients and heard anything that didn't sound like healthy lungs, they knew there was a problem.

In the same way, usually the best advice comes from those who are spiritually healthy, who inhale and exhale the truth of God's Word—those who have a vital relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "The natural man doesn't understand spiritual truths" (1 Cor. 2:14, author's paraphrase). True success, then, comes from listening to persons who do understand such truths, who are led by the Spirit of God rather than just human instinct or experience. Psalm 37:30 states, "The godly offer good counsel; they know what is right from wrong" (NLT).

If you focus on hearing from those who obey God, follow God, and love God and you then hear something else, you'll know it is unhealthy and you can choose to ignore it. Those who want true success will reject "the counsel of the wicked."

The Wicked

Who are "the wicked"? Do they look like monsters? Are people afraid of them as they pass in the street? Not necessarily. They look like everyone else. Some are tall, some are short, some are handsome or pretty, and some are uglier than a rotting fencepost. Probably if you would look at them closely, you couldn't even spot their wickedness. Why? Because it's on the inside. The wicked have a hidden agenda that doesn't include God's advice.

It's a problem that goes all the way back to the beginning of time. Genesis, the first book of the Bible, describes them: "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). Likewise the wicked constantly seek their own pleasure rather than the goodness of God.

Oh, they may *look good* or even *do good things*, but their goodness is self-perpetuated. Their own counsel is their guide. They are inclined to do their thing rather than God's will. Consequently, they move farther away from God. If you want to walk in God's way, you'll choose His advice over the advice of the wicked.

The Sinner

The second caution is, Don't "stand in the way of sinners." It suggests not copying the life or lifestyle of others—especially if they are not people of faith. We are all imitators. As leaders, we follow the examples of those we admire.

You pick up ideas from many. You are constantly looking to others for effective ways to perform your duties. But if you are to have true success in life—personally or corporately—you'll avoid following the example of sinners, following those who ignore God. David practiced the principle: "I have followed your commands, which have kept me from going along with cruel and evil people" (Ps. 17:4, NLT).

Just who is a sinner? A sinner, by definition, is someone who disobeys God's law on purpose—who knows what is right and chooses what is wrong instead (see James 4:17). We speak

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of sinners as those who are lost. (As the great hymn “Amazing Grace” says, “I once was lost, but now am found.”) Why follow someone who is lost? It’s the old story of a passenger asking the driver if she knows where she’s going. The driver says, “No, but we’re making good time!”

Driving on the *fast track* doesn’t mean that a person is necessarily *on track*. Faith-based success adapts to meet society’s demands, but it doesn’t adopt its lifestyles.

The Mockers

Finally, we are told not to join with those who “sit in the seat of mockers.” There are many who seem to have it together like a computer network at Microsoft, yet they lack an inner desire for God. Their spiritual neglect mocks God. They are self-sufficient, not God-sufficient. They do not pray or search the Scriptures to seek His will; they do not acknowledge Him as their Father.

We are not to treat mockers as spiritual lepers, but in essence, we’re told not to join their country club. If you want to be blessed (spiritually happy), you will avoid going into partnership with the godless. The Bible warns not to be joined with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). It’s like putting a deer and a tiger on the same doubles team for a tennis match!

THE BOOK

You’ve seen three things to *avoid*. But what is the one thing you are to *do* in order to have personal or corporate success and happiness?

MAXIMUM INTEGRITY

According to this psalm, you must regularly turn to the principles of the Bible. Even before you talk to your associates, you should hear from God. Daily Bible reading is a means to spiritual success: “Study this Book of the Law continually. Meditate on it day and night so you may be sure to obey all that is written in it. Only then will you succeed” (Josh. 1:8, NLT).

That most wonderful and best-selling book of all time is the story of God’s interaction with His people. It lists spiritual laws and principles that, if obeyed, will result in inner joy—even when outward circumstances are discouraging.

The Bible has been described as a love letter from God. It’s full of God’s affirmation for those who have placed their trust in Him. And its pages are equally filled with life-giving resources that lead to a full, abundant life (see John 10:10).

Our foreparents, Adam and Eve, were offered eternal life from one tree in the Garden of Eden. Instead they chose the tree of knowledge and tried to be godlike in their wisdom. It resulted in banishment from paradise and death at the end of a hard life.

You don’t have to eat in some spiritual fast-food restaurant. You’re invited to a sit-down dinner in God’s five-star restaurant. Psalm 119:103 says, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

SECOND CHANCE

The Bible is also a book of second chances. It is like a global positioning satellite, pointing us back to God when we’ve

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strayed off course. Second Timothy 3:15 says that the Bible is able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Psalm I is a psalm of forgiveness, earthly understanding, and eternal and abundant life.

So, if you're facing life-changing decisions—decisions that will result in success or failure, happiness or sorrow, rest in God's advice. Take a *right turn* to the Word of God. You'll discover that it has been written with you in mind.

Follow its road clearly. You may not experience the good life financially, but you'll surely experience a great life spiritually! David likens that choice to becoming "a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season." It is a refreshing life that results in purpose and production: "whatever he does prospers."

What a life!