

**What Do You Do When You Come
To A Fork In the Road?
Psalm 1**

Introduction

1. Lawrence Peter “Yogi” Berra is one of the greatest catchers of all time in Major League Baseball. Elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972, he was a 15 time All-Star, American League MVP 3 times, played in 14 World Series with the New York Yankees, and is a member of baseball’s All Century Team. He also joined the Navy at 18 and participated in the D-Day invasion at Omaha Beach in World War II.

Yogi Berra is deservedly known as a great baseball player, but he is equally known for his famous “Yogi-isms,” becoming one of the most quoted personalities of the 20th century. It is Yogi Berra who said,

- It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.
- I really didn’t say everything I said.
- Never answer an anonymous letter.
- I usually take a 2-hour nap from 1 to 4.

And perhaps his best of all:

- When you come to a fork in the road ... take it!

2. It is that last sentence I want us to examine, for it is certainly true that when you come to a fork in the road you must take it. In fact life confronts us with a number of forks in the road.
 - Where will I go to school?
 - Will I marry or remain single?
 - Who will I marry?
 - Will we have children?
 - How many children will we have?
 - Will I put my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior? And related to this ...
 - When I die, will it be heaven or hell?

These are important and significant questions, indeed, they are inescapable forks in the road.

3. Graduation brings you to a fork in the road. You have invested a number of years in study and preparation for the rest of your life. Now what? What is next on the agenda? Where will my life go from here? Each of you will answer those questions differently when it comes to the specifics and the details. However, in Psalm 1 God gives us a compass that can guide all of us so that when we come to a fork in the road we will choose the right road, the road that is best.

Transition

When you come to a fork in the road:

I. Reach after the life that pleases God. (1-3)

- Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to the entire Psalter.
- Its tone is reminiscent of the wisdom of Proverbs as it draws a contrast between 2 approaches to life, 2 roads we can travel. One way is the blessed road of those who follow after God. The other is the miserable road of those who follow after the ungodly, the sinners, the scornful (or mockers).

1. Know what to say “no” to. (1)

Wisdom is as much about knowing what to say “no” to as it is what to say “yes” to. It’s knowing when to walk away, to go against the tide, to not follow the crowd even when they laugh at you and call you a fool. This Psalm highlights 3 areas where we must learn to say “no.”

a. Don’t walk with the wicked.

- × Blessed (pl) – blessedness, happy, how rewarding is the life ... Luther said, “...seeing that such persons are few upon earth [and they are], [the psalmist] breaks forth suddenly and says, “Blessed is the man.”
- × What kind of person lives the blessed, rewarding, meaningful life? The psalmist answers in terms of 3 negatives of descending tragedy (the person who moves from association to identification to fixation).
 - walk → stand → sits (habits of life)
 - counsel → path → seat (people you listen to)
 - ungodly → sinners → scornful (company you keep)
- × First, don’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly (the wicked, mentioned 4 times in the Psalm). Where you walk will shape your conduct. Calvin said, “It is difficult for us to separate ourselves from the wicked with whom we are mixed up ... how men are [inclined] to turn aside little by little from the right way.” It starts with a walk, a mere association with people for whom the things of God matter little, if anything at all.
- × Be careful where you go. Be wise concerning the people you listen to. Not all advice (counsel) is good advice. Don’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

b. Don’t stand with sinners.

- × Stand – idea of staying a while, stopping to look and listen, hanging around or hanging out with.
- × Path – way, manner of life, the way one lives.
- × Sinners (*hattaim*) – those who miss God’s mark, and since it is their path it is their habit of life. They are in the habit of standing on the opposite side from God.
- × Rather than taking a stand for Jesus that all can see, you take your stand with those who oppose Him. Their priorities become your priorities. Their way of life is more important than Christ’s way of life. Sin becomes your pattern and sinners your partners. Instead of imitating Christ (1 Cor. 11:1), you imitate sinners.

c. **Don't sit with fools.**

- × **Sit** – you move from thinking like the wicked, to living like the rebellious, to ridiculing like the cynic. This way of life is now your home. This is where you sit. You are comfortable here. The things of God not only do not matter, you mock as fools those who think they do.
- × **Scornful** – mockers, scoffers, it describes the self-sufficient who pridefully say, “I don't need God, I will live my life my way.” They laugh at and look down on those who live for God.
- × The person with a quick wit and a sharp tongue.
The person who lives for this life and says forget the life to come.
Proverbs 21:24 – “A proud and haughty man – “Scoffer” is his name; He acts with arrogant pride.”
Proverbs 15:12 – “A scoffer does not love one who corrects him, nor will he go to the wise.”
Proverbs 3:33-35 – “The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just. Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble. The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools.”

Peter Kreeft well says, “We are whatever we love.” The psalmist warns us, be careful what you love. Know what to say “no” to.

2. **Know what to say “yes” to. (2-3)**

The psalmist now presents the positive case for the righteous, God-honoring life. Contained in these 2 verses is both a plan and a promise for those who reach after the life that pleases God.

a. **Say “yes” to God's Word. (2)**

Delight – take joy, that which gives one pleasure.

Law (torah) of the Lord – synonym for the Word of God. This person loves the Bible, the Word of God. It is a joy not a burden to learn it and live it. Such a person will accept no shallow imitation or deceptive counterfeit, seductive though they may be. One such counterfeit was recently featured on the cover of “Inspiring Words Catalogue,” which is marketed to Christian schools. Along with books like *The Prayer of Jabez for Kids*, the book *Conversations with God for Teens* was spotlighted. Listen to *World Magazine's* (May 11, 2002, p. 7) “quick take” on it.

“The book features several hundred questions a thoughtful teenager might pose to God – along with the author's altogether too imaginative version of what he claims God would say in response. So, for example, one teenager asks, “Some of the kids are cheating in class, and on tests. They want me to join them. But I know that cheating is wrong...” “God” responds: “There is no such thing as ‘right’ and ‘wrong,’ as we discussed earlier. There is only what ‘works’ and what ‘doesn't work’ given what you are trying to do.”

Jenny a 16-year-old from Miami, asks, “Why am I a lesbian?” God replies, “Go now, out into the world, and celebrate who you are.”

The person who says “yes” to God’s Word will recognize a fraud when they see it, and dismiss it for the destructive lie it really is.

b. Say “yes” to God’s wisdom. (2)

He meditates – lit. thinks over by talking to himself.

Day and night – continually.

Joshua 1:8 – “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

Here is the person who is preoccupied and consumed with the Word of God. It is his priority, it is her passion. He knows what he believes and why he believes.

- What do you think about when you daydream?
- What do you sing about when you take a drive or go on a walk?
- What comes to your mind and fills your heart when tragedy strikes and disappointment comes?
- In a 24 hour day, 10,080 minutes week, 2,592,000 seconds month, how much time do you give to memorizing and meditating on God’s Word?

Proverbs 23:7 – “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

c. Say “yes” to God’s will. (3)

- Romans 12:2 says God’s will is good, acceptable and perfect.
- The psalmist says God’s will is fruitful and prosperous.
- In the arid desert of the Middle East, the picture of a beautiful, fruit-bearing tree located by streams of water would have been striking.
- This life is healthy, fruitful and successful; not in man’s eyes but in God’s! This life is worth living, it means something, it matters!

* It trusts God to plant it! It trusts God to prosper it!

This is a happy man because the road he travels is the road that pleases God.

- He walks in the counsel of the godly.
- He stands in the path of the righteous.
- He sits in the seat of the hopeful.
- He studies the Word.
- He acts with wisdom.
- He is devoted to God’s will.

Transition

Reach after the life that pleases God.

II. Run from the life that displeases God. (4-6)

Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.”

Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14 – “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

What is the way that leads to destruction? What is this road that I do not want to travel?

1. Stay away from the useless life. (4)

- Lit. “not so the ungodly (wicked).” A stark contrast with the man of verses 2-3.
- Unlike a strong fruitful tree by rivers of water, the ungodly are chaff, straw, “dust in the wind.” Kidner: “Chaff is ... the ultimate in what is rootless, weightless ... and useless” (p. 49).
- It is the life of a spiritual lightweight. There’s no there, there! No roots, no foundation, no substance. You lack the real stuff that gives meaning to your existence. It is the useless life (to God and others). The word-picture was familiar to the contemporaries of the Psalmist; every harvest-time they saw the corn being threshed and winnowed on the local threshing floor situated on some open, elevated site. During the winnowing, the corn, still mixed with broken straw and chaff, was thrown into the wind, which separated the heavy grain from the lighter straw, while the chaff was blown far away. Thus ‘chaff’ provided a good description of all that was passing and useless.

2. Stay away from the senseless life. (5)

Not stand in the judgment – When it comes time to stand before God and give an account, something we will all do, they will not have a leg to stand on.

Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous – nor will there be a place for them among God’s people. They decided sometime back, when they came to that fork in the road, which way they would go, little realizing that on THAT DAY they were sealing their eternal destiny. “Go to the left, go to the right ... what difference does it make? Run with those who draw me closer to God or run with those who push God aside ... it’s not that big a deal is it?!”

* The time is always right to do the right thing and choose the right road. Today is such a day. Don’t play the fool. Don’t choose the senseless life.

3. Stay away from the hopeless life. (6)

- This verse summarizes the end of every life.
- Only 2 roads to take when you come to that fork in the road: 1) the righteous road or 2) the ungodly road.
- The righteous road is God’s road. Jesus stands at its beginning with a cross by His side. He knows and cares personally and intimately every traveler on it. He sees. He watches. He cares. He knows. He will walk that road with you.
- The ungodly road is the devil’s road. He and his demons stand here promising life to the fullest here and now. But he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). What he promises he cannot deliver.

Jesus said in John 10:10, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”
 The devil’s road is the road of death and destruction, of sorrow and regret.
 Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Application / Conclusion

1. Choose good friends to whom you make yourself accountable, because you will become like those you walk, stand, and sit with. Howard Hendrick’s says a good friend looks like unconditional love (commitment/confrontation) and uncompromising loyalty.
2. Memorize and meditate continually on God’s word as necessary nourishment for your soul. In the book, *Men’s Secret Wars*, author Patrick Means notes, “64 percent of pastors or church staff struggled with sexual addiction or compulsion. Twenty-five percent admitted to having sexual intercourse with someone besides their wife while married, and after they had accepted Christ. Another 14 percent admitted some form of sexual contact short of intercourse.”

A related survey noted that among more than 200 fallen ministers very little was found in common except 2 things: 1) none had a regular quiet time with God and 2) none had an accountability relationship with a friend who could ask them the hard questions about anything and at anytime. You need that. I need that, if we are to go the distance and finish well for our Lord.

“A Real Friend”

When things don’t come out right, he comes right in.
 When none of your dreams come true, he is.
 He never looks for your money except when you’ve lost it.
 He never gets in your way except to clear it for you.
 Nothing is more important to him than making you important ...
 He is in your corner when you’re cornered.
 He turns up when you get turned down.
 All he wants in return for his helping hand is your handshake or hug.
 He raps your critics when they’re wrong and takes the rap for you when they’re right.
 You can do anything you want to with his friendship except buy it, sell it, or betray it.
 He makes you realize that having a real friend is like having an extra life.

What a friend we have in Jesus. What a friend we need to be to one another.