

“Default or Design”

Psalm 1

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First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

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Men and directions! All you have to do is say those two words and people smile! Well let me make that smile a little broader this morning by telling you a story.

It happened to a friend of mine and his adult son and it started when the son came to visit driving a brand new pickup. “Best thing about it” he said, “is the On-Star system. All you have to do is talk into a microphone in the rear-view mirror.” Then the son volunteered to show the father how it worked by driving him to out of town to go fishing.

They hadn’t gone far before they both started talking about getting some coffee. “Find a place and I’ll pay,” the father said. And the son responded by saying, “Hang on Dad. Listen to this.”

He pushed a button. A woman’s voice said, “Good morning. This is On-Star. How can I help?”

“Can you tell me where the nearest coffee is?”

“Of course ... right now you’re traveling north on 99. In two miles, you’ll come to an exit.”

“Excuse me,” the son interrupted, “but right now we’re on 120.

“No,” the voice said, “you’re on 99. And in two miles you’ll come to an exit. Take the ramp, go a quarter-mile and you’ll find a Starbucks on the right.”

“I looked over at my son,” my friend told me, “and just for a moment, I saw the same look on his face that I remembered on his face the first time I dropped him off at grade school. Would he trust the voice that was calling him forward, or follow his instinct?” It was only a moment. Then he made his decision. He went with the voice. And when we came off the freeway, my friend said, we realized that we missed the turn and were still on 99. So we had a cup of coffee and a good laugh and went on to the lake.

Now that's a good story on a couple of levels. On one level, it's just another story about men and directions. But on another level, it's a story about all of us and the times in our lives when we need to know where we really are and which voice we're going to trust to tell us.

You know, I believe most of us long for a better sense of direction in our lives. We long to know if the way we're going is the right way. We long to live a life that we can look back on and say, "I went the right way. I found the right path." But we're not sure how to do it.

So for the next two weeks, I want to talk about how to get there, how we can fulfill the desire we all have to find a better sense of direction in life. For just like the voice that spoke the truth to my friend and his son, there's a voice, Scripture says, that will speak the truth to all of us. It will help us discern where we really are, and design a route to get us where we really want to go.

But to learn how to listen to that voice we need to go back to the beginning of Psalm 1, "Oh the joys," David says, "of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with scoffers." It's interesting to me that this psalm about direction starts off with a clear sense of destination. The destination of our lives, the Psalm says, is joy.

But what kind of joy are we talking about? In Hebrew the word for joy in is the word *asher*. And it doesn't mean just plain joy. It means deep joy, intense pleasure, a satisfying sense of fulfillment.

In Psalm 1 the person who experiences that kind of joy is contrasted with another kind of person, a person whose life seems like 'dust in the wind.' It's been over 20 years now since a band called "Kansas" recorded the song. But I'll bet you'll remember it if I quote the lyrics for you.

*I close my eyes ... only for a moment, then the moment's gone.
All my dreams ... pass before my eyes, a curiosity.
Dust in the wind, all they are is dust in the wind*

*Same old song ... just a drop of water in an endless sea.
All we do ... crumbles to the ground, though we refuse to see.
Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind*

Powerful words, aren't they? And powerfully true! But long before Kansas' wrote their lyrics, David wrote his. He speaks about a wasted life, a life lived like "chaff scattered in the wind." And he describes that kind of life, a joyless life, by using three critical phrases. The first one talks about thoughts and the way they're shaped in a wasted life. It happens, David says, by listening to "the advice of the wicked."

Some time ago, a friend of mine told me he'd made a decision. He'd decided to purchase a life insurance policy to help protect his family. But before the policy went into effect "Somebody came out to my house," he said, "to do a blood test. They did the test, left me with a Band-Aid on my arm, and a little later, I was out walking around with one of my daughters. She pointed to the Band-Aid on my arm and said, 'Daddy, what's that?'"

"Now my daughter is a real sensitive soul," my friend said. So I thought to myself, "If I talk about the possibility of my dying and so on, she'll tear up. It'll be a tender moment. She'll tell me she loves me and hopes I'll never die. Then we'll walk back to the house holding hands."

So I started. "I had a blood test," I told her. And my daughter said, "How come?" And I said, "Because I've decided to take out a life insurance policy." And she said, "What's that?" And I said, "That's a promise that a company makes to Daddy in case something bad happens. If I die, you'll get a piece of \$500,000."

Well, my friend said at that point his daughter got real quiet. Then her eyes widened and she looked up. She said to him, "A piece? Just a piece? That's all I get?"

It's a true story. You see even as a little girl, she'd been exposed to the thoughts of the greedy, the counsel of the ungodly.

Turn on your TV, any channel you want and you'll see it. Pick up a newspaper and you'll read it. Listen to talk radio and you'll hear it. Listen to the way people around you are thinking. What do you hear? I need to get more. I need to get a raise. I need more time off work. I need a new house or a new car or a new something! I need something else, something more; then I'll be happy. It's the counsel of the ungodly.

All day long, we listen to it, all of us. We're bombarded by it. It's such a pervasive influence in our lives that we don't even notice it any more. But it's there. Just listen for it. Try it tomorrow. Take a day and just listen. Try to discern how often you're listening to the counsel of the ungodly.

I'll tell you the truth. You won't have to wait long. The message is monotonous. And it's not usually somebody saying, "God, who cares about what God says." It's not that blatant. It's more subtle; kind of like a serpent sliding across a path, your path. It's the counsel of the ungodly.

The problem is, once you let it into your thoughts, it starts to influence you and it's not long before you find yourself, "standing around with sinners." That's what the Psalm says. The idea here is that it's not just your thinking that's being influenced. Now it's your decisions, your actions your lifestyle.

And in order to try and tell you what he's talking about David uses this word "sinners." He's not using the word the way that most of us use it though. He's not using it to describe people who do things that are obviously morally wrong. He's using the word to talk about people who are trying to find joy in life but aiming the wrong way.

When you aim to find satisfaction by spending a day shopping at a mall ... when you aim to find wisdom to guide your life from Oprah or Dr. Phil ... when you aim to find joy and end up working a job you don't like, to buy things you don't need, to impress people you don't know ... you're aiming in the wrong direction. The wrong advice has turned into the wrong actions. Aiming for joy you're missing it because your orientation isn't right. You're standing with sinners and aiming your life in the wrong direction.

And this leads to the third phrase David uses to talk about a joyless life. He talks about "scoffers," people who become cynics. I wonder? Can you see a progression here? If you start by listening to the advice of the wicked ... if you take it to heart and aim your life in the wrong direction, standing with sinners ... if you end up still searching for joy and failing to find it, you'll eventually become a cynic, a jaded scoffer who says, "Joy? There's no such thing. It just doesn't exist!"

And what I especially want you to notice is the progression that's found in the first part of this Psalm, because it's the description of a kind of drift. David is describing a life lived by default. Nobody intends to live this kind of life. But somehow it happens.

When kids do something foolish, parents always ask a question, don't they? It's a question that attempts to make sense out of something inherently irrational. It's a simply question. It consists of just one word formed from three letters. "Why?"

After the walls are covered with Magic Marker, after the bike is left where the car runs over it, after the teenager comes home two hours late, parents always ask the same question, don't they? They ask "Why?" And the same answer always comes back. "I don't know." And it's the truth! They don't know because they were living life by default.

The psalmist says adults do it too. We do. It seems to endemic to humanity. But if you live your life like that, if you live life by default, you'll eventually find yourself thinking "I wonder why life never ended up the way I thought it would? I wonder why I never found a sense of lasting joy or fulfillment from my life." And then you'll answer yourself with those same three words "I don't know. I just don't know."

Jesus saw the problem. So he talked about it in a parable he told at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. He told a story about a man who built his house on sand. And the rains came, and the waters rose, and the house was washed away. And if you took that story and asked the man in it, "Why? Why did you build your house on sand?" What do you think he would say? "I don't know. It just seemed like the right thing to do."

You see nobody sits down and plans to build a house or a life on sand. But it happens. And if you don't want it to happen to you, you're going to have to make a change. You're going to have to get your life off the default setting. We're going to talk more about how to do that next week.

But for this week, I want to leave you with a quotation. I won't tell you the source of the quotation because I want you to remember the words more than the source. But here's the quote.

"Most adults move through their day-to-day life on default, just responding to what's happening around them; showing up, living lives of mediocrity, and in far too many cases doing less, much less than they hoped to do. We were designed for more."

My friends, I believe those words are telling us the truth. I believe they resonate with the words of David in Psalm 1 and with the deepest desire of our hearts. I believe for many of us we know that we were designed for something more in life than what we've experienced so far. So I invite you to pray with me ...