

Explore the Bible: The Path

May 17, 2017

• *The Explore the Bible lesson for June 4 focuses on Psalm 1:1-6.*

Friends, both surgeons, built a five-star cabin on the top of Casper Mountain, elevation 8,100, just south of Casper, Wyo. They built it for their families, of course, but also for ministers who need a place to get away. There is no Internet, no television and no cell service. It takes a couple of days to get accustomed to the silence.

The tall, lodge pole aspen that cover the mountainsides, intermingled among centuries-old pine trees, have leaves that spin in the breeze, giving the appearance of being adorned in silver jewelry. My wife and I have renewed ourselves many times during summer months up on the mountain, all but certain we saw God taking a morning stroll up there among the aspen where it is as quiet as a cemetery.

No one stands alone

As we were walking through a grove of them once, our friend who built the cabin explained to us it might appear that all the aspen trees stand alone. In fact, just beneath the surface, out of sight to the human eye, each aspen is part of a huge network of roots.

No one tree can stand on its own, nor must it do so. Each tree needs every other tree. When the gentle breezes blow, all the aspen dance together. When strong storms blow, they stand together, leaning together, holding one another up.

The first six verses of the first chapter of Psalms serve as nothing less than an introduction to virtually everything else to be read in the entire book. As it is, it begins at the beginning of what should be, what God intended, our

lives to be. Well-rooted, living in community with people who will help us stand, well-nourished on good spiritual food, minds properly set on the ways of God.

Bad company

In conversation with some elderly parents, they were expressing grief, decades old, at what had become of one of their adult children. The father made one comment, in his grief, that was very telling. He said his son had gotten in with the wrong crowd. Their influence overwhelmed him into behaving in self-destructive ways from which he'll never recover. They held him accountable, too, but mostly for choosing people as friends who had no chance of helping him live out his faith.

Good parents care about the school their children attend, their teachers, their health and extra-curricular activities. They also pay just as much attention to whom they select as friends and pray that God will send those friends soon.

It's a fact that never changes with age. We tend to become most like those with whom we spend the most time. No truer words ever were spoken: "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" (v. 1). More often than not, shallow or poor character rubs off on good people long before the good rubs off the other way.

Perhaps the easiest path, the one of least resistance, is the path of those the psalmist called "scoffers." A scoffer is a cynic. He or she most often sits off to the side, not daring to enter to make a positive difference or help carry weight. They love to cast the stones of cynicism even when inflicting terrible pain on others. If we make our seat among them, we almost certainly will become one ourselves in time.

If any misbehavior in a church deserves the discipline of the church, none

should receive it more than scoffing. Scoffing is a toxic acid that can destroy a church from the inside out forever.

Nourished by God's word

Yet, when we determine to be a good influence among friends, peers and fellow Jesus-followers, we will spend our time meditating on God's word so our lives will be a holy resource and not a roadblock to it. That is the only way our souls can be nourished and therefore a hopeful and positive presence in the lives of others.

Without solid company to help us stand and lean into the strong winds and without holy nourishment from within, we will find ourselves standing alone in the storm. Rest assured, the storm will come, and it will blow harder than we could have imagined.

The psalmist pulls no punches as he warns each of us of one's ultimate destiny. His warning is worthy of serious and constant reflection. If it is true that the trajectory of our lives has been set by truths listed above, when we get where our lives are now aimed, where the path we're following this very moment is leading, where might that be?

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