

The Flourishing Tree

Don't Go Your Own Way – Aaron Dowds

Saturday 6th February 2022

In my last message I looked at Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana when he changed water to wine. We looked at the 5 words Jesus' mother gave to the servants: "Do Whatever He Tells You." The sweetening and enhancing miracle flowed when those 5 words were followed. Moses also followed these 5 words and bitter water was changed to sweet at Mara. We also learned that the Hebrew word Shema translated as listen means to hear, pay attention and respond and act. We looked at the Great Commission where Jesus told His disciples to make disciples and teach them to obey everything He commanded. Obeying the Commands of Jesus is the way to move from Striving to Thriving and Living. So, what are the Commands of Jesus? Here is the first one. Are you ready?

"After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the good news of God: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe in the good news'"
(Mark 1:14–15).

"From then on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!'"
(Matt. 4:17).

Act 17:30 (ESV)

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,"

Jesus preached Repent and Believe.¹ Paul taught that Jesus commands all people everywhere to repent. Notice believe comes after repent, in that order.

Now you may not be excited to hear this on a Saturday night. Come on Aaron, Repent is that old fashioned word shouted by street preachers holding a board saying "Turn or Burn". Just give me the 7 keys to a joyful and successful life on a Sat night. I am actually. But not 7 keys. Just 2. Repent and believe. I do wholeheartedly believe this is the Jesus way. I love self-help practical books, step and keys. Yet they will all be very limited in this first command is not understood and followed fully.

¹ See also: **Luk 24:46-47 (ESV)** "and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, **47** and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." **Act 2:37-38 (ESV)** "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" **38** And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." **Act 17:30 (ESV)** "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent," **Act 20:20-21 (ESV)** "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, **21** testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Repent is probably better understood as return which I will attempt to unpack. Or another way to view it in the words of N.T. Wright: “to give up your own agenda, and to trust him”² To start us off let’s start in Psalm chapter 1.

Psa 1:1-3 (ESV)

“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; **2** but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. **3** He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”³

Psalm chapter 1 reveals 2 ways to live. 2 ways to walk. 2 paths to choose from. It contrasts those who follow God’s ways with those who choose their own path. Those who Go Your Own Way in the words of Fleetwood Mac and those who Go His Way.

Those who choose God’s path, who choose to delight in living life God’s way are said to be like trees planted by streams of water, bearing fruit in its season, its leaf does not wither and in all he does he prospers. The metaphors in this verse can be paraphrased as:

“No matter what he sets out to do, he brings it to a successful conclusion.”

² “How are we to unlearn our meanings for such a phrase and to hear it through first-century ears? It helps if we can find another author using it at around the same place and time as Jesus. Consider, for example, the Jewish aristocrat and historian Josephus, who was born a few years after Jesus’ crucifixion and who was sent, in AD 66, as a young army commander, to sort out some rebel movements in Galilee. His task, as he describes it in his autobiography, was to persuade the hot-headed Galileans to stop their mad rush into revolt against Rome, and to trust him and the other Jerusalem aristocrats to work out a better *modus vivendi*. So, when he confronted the rebel leader, he says that he told him to give up his own agenda, and to trust him, Josephus, instead. And the words he uses are remarkably familiar to readers of the Gospels: he told the brigand leader to ‘repent and believe in me’, *metanoesein kai pistos emoi genesesthai*.

He was telling his hearers to give up their agendas, and to trust him for his way of being Israel, his way of bringing the Kingdom, his kingdom-agenda. In particular, he was urging them, as Josephus did, to abandon their crazy dreams of nationalist revolution.” <https://godisopen.com/2018/04/19/nt-wright-repent-believe/>

<https://youtu.be/tDDIR8XU9WU>

³ Psalm 1:1-3 AMPC

' BLESSED (HAPPY, fortunate, prosperous, and enviable) is the man who walks and lives not in the counsel of the ungodly [following their advice, their plans and purposes], nor stands [submissive and inactive] in the path where sinners walk, nor sits down [to relax and rest] where the scornful [and the mockers] gather. But his delight and desire are in the law of the Lord, and on His law (the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God) he habitually meditates (ponders and studies) by day and by night. [Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 3:1-29; II Tim. 3:16.] And he shall be like a tree firmly planted [and tended] by the streams of water, ready to bring forth its fruit in its season; its leaf also shall not fade or wither; and everything he does shall prosper [and come to maturity]. [Jer. 17:7, 8.]'

Psalms 1:1-3 TPT

'What delight comes to the one who follows God’s ways! He won’t walk in step with the wicked, nor share the sinner’s way, nor be found sitting in the scorner’s seat. His passion is to remain true to the Word of “I AM,” meditating day and night on the true revelation of light. He will be standing firm like a flourishing tree planted by God’s design, deeply rooted by the brooks of bliss, bearing fruit in every season of life. He is never dry, never fainting, ever blessed, ever prosperous. '

This is a beautiful picture of a flourishing tree. A flourishing tree that is steadily supplied by a steady flow of pure refreshing water flowing from nearby streams of water. A tree that is healthy. A tree that is fruitful. A tree whose leaves do not wither.

This tree bears fruit and its leaves remain healthy even through ice, snow, storms and even predators.

What a beautiful picture of an abundant life. John 10:10 says ‘the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.’”

What does this abundant life look like that Jesus talked about? It’s not an easy life but it is abundant. It looks like the tree in Psalm 1: a healthy tree, that is constantly supplied by a steady flow from streams of living water – a picture of the Holy Spirit. It looks like a tree that is healthy and bears fruit in season. Fruit is used of beautiful character – the fruit of the Holy Spirit and it is also used to talk about the beauty of good works.⁴ This abundant life has beautiful character qualities and does beautiful good works of love, kindness and compassion. This abundant life looks like a tree whose leaves do not wither. In Rev.22:1-2 John gives a description of the new Jerusalem and the bride of Christ. He mentions a fruitful tree and says the leaves are for the healing of the nations. The flourishing tree has leaves which bring healing and they do not wither.

Now in the forest healthy leaves on the trees are a source of healthy nutrition for birds, animals and even underground fungi. In fact, 5 metres underground lives fungi which have a massive role in healthy forests and they require nutrition from the leaves of trees. In order to get these leaves, they order takeaway using scent. The Deliveroo drivers are leaf-cutter ants, millions of leaf-cutter ants who travel hundreds of metres to their local drive-through McTree, cut off the leaves using their scissors and deliver them to the dying underground fungi. The fungi pay the ants not with cash but mushrooms for them to eat. It’s a dynamic exchange happening in forests and the healthy leaves are keeping the ecosystem healthy and alive.

What a helpful picture of a healthy Christian life and a healthy church. Leaves are essential for the shalom and well-being of the forest. The flourishing tree bears fruit in season and its leaves, which are for the healing of the nations, never wither. What heals nations? Love, kindness, compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation and serving is what heals relationships, families, businesses, communities and nations. They bring shalom, wholeness and wellbeing. Hence, the healthy Christian and Christian church is one with an abundant life, bearing fruit and who’s leaves are keeping the ecosystem of family and nations alive and healthy.

So here in Psalm 1 we are given a beautiful picture of the abundant life Jesus wants for you. Yet it also details who gets this type of life. It reveals 2 ways to live. 2 ways to walk. 2 paths to choose from. It contrasts those who follow God’s ways with those who choose their own path. One path leads to an abundant life like the flourishing tree and the other path leads to collapse and destruction. Jesus said there were 2 options. His way or the thief’s way. One way leads to life in abundance. The other way leads to loss, death and destruction. It reminds us of the wise and foolish builders who built on sand or rock. Only 2 ways again.

⁴ **Tit 3:14 (ESV)** “And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.”

One way led to a thriving and strong house that stood strong through storms and gales and the other way led to destruction again.

These 2 paths were also elaborated on by Jesus in Matt. 7:12-14

Mat 7:12-14 (ESV)

“So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. **13** “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. **14** For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Here in Matthew 7 Jesus gives the listeners the famous Golden Rule in v12 which elaborates on the Great Command to love your neighbour as yourself. How do you love them as yourself? Well do to them whatever you wish that they would do for you. It’s a verb, a doing word, not a feeling or emotion. DO also for them. Jesus then explains the two gates and the two ways or two paths or roads. One way is entered by a narrow gate and it’s a narrow way or path. In fact, the narrow way is hard not easy. It’s a path that leads to life and few find it.

The other way is entered by a wide gate and it’s a wide way or path. The way on this path is easy. It’s a path that leads to destruction and many enter this gate or path.

Prov 16:25 puts it this way:

Pro 16:25 (ESV)

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”

The wide gate, the wide path, the wide road is easy and it seems right to a man to go on this path. It’s an easy path and many are on it so it must be right. It seems right to a man because it follows the heart’s desires to do whatever you feel like doing without any restrictions. It’s throwing off chains of restraint and going after liberalism. A book was written called, “Why Liberalism Failed,” by Patrick J. Deneen. It asks the question: “The World Is Better Than Ever. Why Are We Miserable?”

Here's a quote from an article titled “The World Is Better Than Ever. Why Are We Miserable?:”⁵

⁵ “By “liberal,” I don’t mean left-liberal politics; I mean (and Deneen means) the post-Machiavelli project to liberate the individual from religious authority and the focus of politics on individual rights and the betterment of humankind’s material conditions.

*As we have slowly and surely attained more progress, we have lost something that undergirds all of it: meaning, cohesion, and a different, deeper kind of happiness than the satiation of all our earthly needs. We’ve forgotten the human flourishing that comes from a common idea of virtue, and a concept of virtue that is based on our nature. **This is the core of Deneen’s argument, and it rests on a different, classical, pre-liberal understanding of freedom.***

For most of the Ancients, freedom was freedom from our natural desires and material needs. It rested on a mastery of these deep, natural urges in favor of self-control, restraint, and education into virtue.

It placed the community — the polis — ahead of the individual, and indeed could not conceive of the individual apart from the community into which he or she was born. They’d look at our freedom and see licentiousness, chaos, and slavery to desire. They’d predict misery not happiness to be the result.”

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The full quote and article is in my notes I emailed out. So many are on the path of liberalism, looking for freedom from all restraint and the pursuit of pleasure to bring happiness. But this is the wide path of liberalism and it has failed. Rather than leading to happiness this way, the wide path of liberalism has led people to misery.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. Yes, the wide path is easy and attractive. Be your own God. Make your own rules. Throw off restraint. Don't suppress your natural desires, that's unhealthy. Be self-absorbed and self-obsessed. Seek pleasure above all else.

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Proverbs says there is a way that seems right to man but ends in death.

What is this way?

Isa 53:6 (ESV)

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

So there are just 2 paths. 2 gates. 2 ways. Not one hundred options or 100 gates or 100 paths. Just 2 ways. His way or our own way.

And what do all people naturally choose? Of course, all men and women have turned to his/her own way. All like sheep have gone astray. All have turned from our original way. Our original way was relationship to Father as honouring children, but we turned. We strayed. And which way did we choose? His way? Did we choose the narrow gate with the

<https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/03/sullivan-things-are-better-than-ever-why-are-we-miserable.html>

narrow path which is hard but leads to life? No. We went astray, we went our own way and only a few turn around and get back on the correct path.

All chose to go his own way. This is ultimately what sin is. Going our own way away from Father. Turning away from father and Father's house. It's what the Prodigal son did. He went astray. When you turn away from father and father's house you are going astray. The Prodigal son turned away from Father. Things seemed too hard on the narrow path so he turned and went on the easy, wide path. It was an easy path and many were on it. But it led to the pigs and destruction.

Eating with the pigs, the Prodigal son made a decision. He turned back in the direction of Father and Father's house. That turning is called repentance or in the words of N.T. Wright: giving up your own agenda and trusting him. The Prodigal son's agenda wasn't working so he chose to turn, give up on his own way, his own agenda and return to Father and His agenda and trust Him again.

One of the Hebrew words for sin is *chet*, which in Hebrew means "to go astray". Sin ultimately is going our own way which is astray. It's going after our own agenda. Astray means away from the correct path or direction. Away from the correct way of doing something.

Walking in the hills I know it's easy to be on the correct path and to go astray.

Remember, our own way is not the correct way. Our own way is the easy path, the easy way. It's entered by a wide gate and many are going that way but it ends in destruction. There is a way that seems right to man – his own way – but it ends in death. Going our own way is going astray. It's going away from the correct path or direction like the Prodigal son heading away from Father and towards the pigs. The correct path is towards Father, in His home, honouring and pleasing Him as His child. It's a narrow way, it's a beautiful way which leads to life but it's also a hard way. It's hard not because of all the burdens and restrictions Father puts on us for living in his house but it's hard because it's not all about me any longer. My way is all about me. His way is firstly about Him and others.

Now in Jewish tradition, repentance is called *teshuvah*, a Hebrew word translated as "returning". Since sin is going astray, the idea of repentance in Jewish thought is a return to the right path. A return to the right way. A return to the path of righteousness. When the Prodigal son decided to return to Father and Father's house and ask to be made a servant he was returning. He was returning to his correct identity. His correct calling. His correct purpose to live in relationship with Father and represent Father. To reflect the image and likeness of Father to his world. The Prodigal son was returning to the correct way and path and going through the narrow gate back into Father's house. He was returning. That is repenting.

Since all have gone astray all need to return to the correct path. This is not just a once in a lifetime practice but a daily practice of returning to the correct path in thoughts, attitude and practice. All like the Prodigal son need to return to Father and Father's house through the narrow gate. All need to return to their correct identity, their correct calling, their correct purpose onto the narrow way and path. This returning is called repentance. And since all have gone astray, all have gone their own way, all need to return to Father and His way. And

what is that called? Repentance and this is why in Acts 17:30 the bible says “all men everywhere” have to repent or return.

Why all men everywhere? Because all have gone astray. All have gone his own way. And we are tempted daily to go our own way. And so all need to return to the correct path and remain on the correct path. That is what repent means. ⁶ Derek Prince puts it this way in his book Through Repentance to Faith:

“Repentance involves a decision of the will to turn away from self-pleasing and doing your own thing to turn back to God. Face up to God and say, “Here I am. Tell me what to do and I’ll do it.”

Prince, Derek. Through Repentance to Faith . Derek Prince Ministries. Kindle Edition.

That’s exactly what the Prodigal son did. This is a daily and regular practice we need in our lives. It’s interesting to note that in Matthew 7 just before Jesus tells his listeners to enter by the narrow gate He gives them the Golden Rule to how to love and treat others.

The narrow way is connected to loving others because God is love and so His way will involve love. **The wide gate and path is about self-love. The narrow gate and path is about selfless love.** Living a life of selfless love for God and others is the true narrow way, the narrow gate that leads to true life and deep joy.⁷

Let’s go back to Psalm chapter 1 about the flourishing tree. Psalm 1 gives us a key to living God’s way, a key to experiencing an abundant life and a life that looks like the flourishing tree which bears fruit and who’s leaves never wither.

“But his delight and desire are in the law of the Lord, and on His law (the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God) he habitually meditates (ponders and studies) by day and by night.”
AMPC

⁶ *“The Hebrew word for repent means literally “to turn around.” You have been facing one way—the wrong way, with your back to God—so you turn 180 degrees around, face toward God, and say, “God, here I am. Tell me what to do and I’ll do it.” If we put the Greek and Hebrew definitions together, we have a complete picture of repentance: It is a decision followed by an action.”* Prince, Derek. Through Repentance to Faith . Derek Prince Ministries. Kindle Edition.

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⁷ **Rom 13:8-10 (ESV)** “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. **9** For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Joh 15:10-11 (ESV) “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. **11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

This reminds me of the 5 words we spoke about in the miracle of water to wine. Do whatever He tells you. The person who does not go his own way but goes on the correct path is a person who delights and desires the instructions and teachings of God and he habitually meditates (ponders and studies) on them.

We can go our own way. Or we can go His way. And how do we know what His way is? His way is the way of love. We can ask in each situation: what does love require of me? We can also meditate on his words and teachings in the Bible so that His word abides in us and speaks to us. Daily when faced with situations we need to come as allow His words to speak to us and direct us.

The way to walk on the narrow path that leads to life is through meditating on His words, teachings, instructions or commands. In fact, Jesus taught the way to abide in His love is to keep His commandments. Derek Prince puts it this way: ⁸

Derek Prince:

*“From the parable Jesus told of the wise and the foolish man, we saw that building on this foundation, first of all, consists in **acknowledging the Bible as the written Word of God, recognizing Jesus as the living Word, and then hearing and doing what Jesus said.** **Building on the foundation must involve hearing and doing what Jesus said.**”*

Prince, Derek. Through Repentance to Faith . Derek Prince Ministries. Kindle Edition.

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*“I pointed out that we have the Word in two forms: the written word (the Bible) and the personal word (Jesus, the Word of God made flesh). How we respond to the Word in each form reflects our personal relationship to the Bible. **We do not love God any more than we love His Word. We do not obey God any more than we obey His Word. If we want to find out what place God has in our life, we must find out what place the Bible has, because they are the same.** The Bible is the written Word; Jesus is the personal Word. Through the written Word the personal Word comes into our lives.”* Prince, Derek. Through Repentance to Faith . Derek Prince Ministries. Kindle Edition.