

# *Pursuing God*

## In Step with the Psalms

Lesson 13: Psalm 37

### Spiritual Stability through Crisis

#### *Stay on the Path ~*

Winning isn't everything in life, finishing the race well is what matters. Applause, awards, and achievements are enjoyable for the moment but can be fleeting. Going the distance with the eternal prize in focus not only increases our faith, it develops character, perseverance and a passion for life. President Woodrow Wilson once said, "I had rather temporarily fail in a cause that will ultimately succeed than temporarily succeed in a cause that will ultimately fail."

In Psalm 37, David stresses that what is important is not an effort or a cause that begins well but rather one that ends well. Life is a work in progress, so what would help us through crisis circumstances is to learn to take a long look before drawing conclusions. Appearances can be deceiving; often things are not really what they seem. No matter what's going on around you, be assured that God is at work behind the scenes orchestrating events and people to accomplish His purpose and will.

No one likes to see the wicked prosper but that is often what happens, at the expense of the righteous. When the ungodly prosper the godly suffer, prompting the question, "Where is God?" In this psalm, David exhorts the believer not to become frustrated, but to be steadfastly focused on the Lord. Interestingly, this psalm is not modeled as a prayer to God but is directed to the reader. The believer is challenged to place our trust and faith in a loving heavenly Father, not to worry about the wicked. Their fate rests in God's ultimate judgment.

#### *Did you know ~*

Psalm 37 is an acrostic, in which every other verse begins with a succeeding letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is a *wisdom* psalm, similar in style to what we see in the book of Proverbs. The contrast between the godly and ungodly is explored in depth along with an exhortation to trust in the Lord. Wisdom is critical to the believer; it is the ability to apply knowledge correctly in a manner that is pleasing to God. Wisdom instructs the believer to place God at the center of everything—all of life's choices, decisions, and pursuits.

## Psalm 37

### The Heritage of the Righteous and The Calamity of the Wicked

A Psalm of David.

1 Do not fret because of evildoers,  
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.  
2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,  
And wither as the green herb.

3 Trust in the Lord, and do good;  
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

4 Delight yourself also in the Lord,  
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the Lord,  
Trust also in Him,  
And He shall bring it to pass.

6 He shall bring forth your  
righteousness as the light,  
And your justice as the noonday.

7 Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;  
Do not fret because of him who  
prosperes in his way,  
Because of the man who brings  
wicked schemes to pass.

8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;  
Do not fret—it only causes harm.

9 For evildoers shall be cut off;  
But those who wait on the Lord,  
They shall inherit the earth.

10 For yet a little while and the wicked  
shall be no more;  
Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,  
But it shall be no more.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth,  
And shall delight themselves in the  
abundance of peace.

12 The wicked plots against the just,  
And gnashes at him with his teeth.

13 The Lord laughs at him,  
For He sees that his day is coming.

14 The wicked have drawn the sword  
And have bent their bow,  
To cast down the poor and needy,  
To slay those who are of upright conduct.

15 Their sword shall enter their own heart,  
And their bows shall be broken.

16 A little that a righteous man has  
Is better than the riches of many wicked.  
17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,  
But the Lord upholds the righteous.

18 The Lord knows the day of the upright,  
And their inheritance shall be forever.  
19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time,  
And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.  
20 But the wicked shall perish;  
And the enemies of the Lord,  
Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish.  
Into smoke they shall vanish away.

21 The wicked borrows and does not repay,  
But the righteous shows mercy and gives.  
22 For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth,  
But those cursed by Him shall be cut off.

23 The steps of a good man are ordered  
by the Lord,  
And He delights in his way.  
24 Thought he fall, he shall not be utterly  
cast down;  
For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

25 I have been young, and now am old;  
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken,  
Nor his descendants begging bread.  
26 He is ever merciful, and lends;  
And his descendants are blessed.

27 Depart from evil and do good;  
And dwell forevermore.

28 For the Lord loves justice,  
And does not forsake His saints;  
They are preserved forever;  
But the descendants of the wicked  
shall be cut off.

29 The righteous shall inherit the land,  
And dwell in it forever.

30 The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom,  
And his tongue talks of justice.  
31 The law of his God is in his heart;  
None of his steps shall slide.

32 The wicked watches the righteous,  
And seeks to slay him.  
33 The Lord will not leave him in his hand,  
Nor condemn him when he is judged.

34 Wait on the Lord, and keep His way,  
And He shall exalt you to inherit the land;  
When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.  
35 I have seen the wicked in great power,  
And spreading himself like a native green tree.  
36 Yet he passed away, and behold,  
he was no more;  
Indeed I sought him, but he could not be found.

37 Mark the blameless man, and  
observe the upright;  
For the future of that man is peace.  
38 But the transgressors shall be  
destroyed together;  
The future of the wicked shall be cut off.

39 But the salvation of the righteous  
is from the Lord;  
He is their strength in the time of trouble.  
40 And the Lord shall help them and  
deliver them;  
He shall deliver them from the wicked,  
And save them,  
Because they trust in Him.

(Scripture from the New King James Bible, ©1980 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.)

**Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer.**

**Read Psalm 37.**

*Listen to the psalm ~ First impressions*

What is the *tone* of Psalm 37? What stands out to you from your initial reading?

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*Put a psalm in your heart* ~ (Memory verse) **Psalm 37:4-5**

(Write out the verse in the spaces below. Practice it each time you open your lesson.)

*Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.  
Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass.*

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*Learn the lessons of the psalm* ~

*Selah* (Think about):

It's been said that Psalm 37 is so steeped in wisdom that it could have been dropped into the middle of the book of Proverbs. The great injustice surrounding the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, which is very perplexing at times, is here addressed and put into perspective by looking at it through the lens of the future.

*I. Your hope is in the Lord's deliverance and justice.* vv. 1–11

Believers must be careful to watch our attitude and the way we respond when dealing with wicked individuals. They may prosper and move up in the world by getting their own way, but they too are mere mortals who are ultimately accountable to God for their deeds. Although they may seem to thrive for a season, the Bible says they have a hard time standing up to adversity.

1. What are the two things the psalmist instructs the believer *not* to do in verse 1? Why?

The word *fret* means to worry, fuss, agonize, to become vexed in spirit. To become *envious* is to be jealous, covetous, “green with envy”, and resentful. Such heart attitudes must not be part of the believer’s life; for what good does the wicked person’s prosperity do for them? It only hastens their ruin, not their reward.

2. In verses 3–8, David counsels the righteous on how we are to conduct ourselves in the world. List as many commands as you can find. Next to the action on the part of the believer, note in which verse it is found and God’s response if one is mentioned.

David’s advice

God’s response

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. In verses 7 and 8, the psalmist repeats the earlier command (v.1) saying, “do not fret.” What does fretting bring do to the believer? Think about it for a moment . . . in your opinion what kind of harm would it bring?

God’s people should not attempt to take matters into their own hands, rather we must learn to be still and wait patiently for the Lord.

4. Compare the outcome for the godly and the ungodly in verses 10–11.

### *Pause & ponder ~*

In Matthew 5:1–12, Jesus modeled for His followers the way of wise living that pleases the Father. In the face of persecution and injustice, when we follow His example there is great comfort and reward. Read these verses with your own circumstances in view and finish the sentence, noting each blessing that God has for you.

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Blessed are those who mourn* \_\_\_\_\_

- *Blessed are the meek* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Blessed are the merciful* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Blessed are the pure in heart* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Blessed are the peacemakers* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake* \_\_\_\_\_
- *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad* \_\_\_\_\_

*II. God delights in the ways of the righteous. vv. 12–26*

It could be said that David composed this psalm as a memorandum. Being advanced in age, he takes a look back at his own experience with God’s character and faithfulness. He issues a strong warning about the future of the ungodly along with and an encouragement for the believer to look to the Lord.

1. Using verses 12–26, pick out the prominent words or phrases that depict the wicked, describing their attributes, actions and how God will deal with them.

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2. Next, contrast the righteous, describing their attributes, actions, and God’s subsequent faithfulness to act on their behalf.

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David emphasizes the blessing of the righteousness in these verses, saying the Lord delights in the steps of a good man, upholding him with His own hand.

## *Touchpoint~*

In Psalm 37, David presents us with the man the Lord delights in (vv. 23–24) as well as the believer who delights in the Lord (v. 4). These verses mirror the words of Psalm 1:1, *Blessed is the man . . . whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.* In other words, the person who lives a God-centered life is blessed. This is the man or woman who hungers and thirsts after righteousness, who reads to study, who is saturated and filled by the Word, displaying clear evidence of God’s abiding presence.

- What promise is there for this person? v. 4

When one meditates in the Word day and night, it is because this kind of *soul* satisfaction is found only in the Lord. God gives the one who delights in Him the desires of their heart because their heart’s desire is for Him! When He is at the center of every aspect of your life as a Christian, He makes even your everyday choices His choices for you!

Look up the references below that speak about pleasures, gladness, goodness, and rejoicing. Think of them from a personal standpoint and note your findings.

a. Psalm 16:11 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. Psalm 21:6 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. Psalm 34:8 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. Philippians 4:4 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. Personal: Which of the above verses speaks to the need of your heart today? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Advanced in age and looking back, David noted: *I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken.* They are merciful and lend freely, their abundance overflowing to their children (vv. 25–26).



*III. You are called to wait in obedience on the Lord.* vv. 27–40

David gives the reader good reason to be encouraged about life—God loves the righteous and will never forsake those who are His, but the godly must persevere in doing the will of God from the heart. When the Word is written on our hearts, God’s people speak and act wisely, standing firm (v. 30).

1. According to vv. 27–33, what does God think about justice?
  - a. What enables the righteous to promote justice? vv. 30–31
  - b. What do the wicked seek to do to the righteous that God will not permit? vv. 32–33

The psalmist concludes in vv. 34–40 by drawing the reader’s attention to the major points of the chapter: (1) It is God who delivers His people and administers justice; (2) God delights in the ways of the righteous; (3) Believers must remain obedient while waiting on the Lord.

2. Write a summary statement about the fate of the wicked from vv. 34–40.
  - a. What is the outcome for the “blameless” and “upright”?
3. What will the Lord do for the righteous in time of trouble? vv. 39–40

As Christians living in a wicked world, we are called upon to put our faith in the Lord to save, protect, strengthen, and deliver us in our times of need. Waiting is an expression of loyalty and submission to Him. He, in turn, never puts to shame or disappoints those who wait for Him!

*Pause & ponder ~*

Personal: You will only love the Lord to the degree that you obey Him. Keeping that thought in mind, to what degree are *you* obedient? Please share your thoughts.

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## *Live the psalm ~*

What is the desire of *your* heart today? You will find your soul satisfied only in Him. Do you long for Him more than anything else this world has to offer? Don't settle for anything less than what He wants you to have—abundance now and eternity with Him!

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## *Pray the psalm ~*

Pick the verse(s) in Psalm 37 that ministered to your heart this week; write them down in the space below. Lift them as a prayer to God, asking Him to help you find your delight in Him.

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*Be on guard. Stand true to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong.  
And everything you do must be done in love.  
1 Corinthians 16:13 NLT*



