Psalm 37 – When Doing Right Feels Pointless
Dr. John Carmichael

[Psa 37:1-40 NASB95] – 1 [A Psalm] of David. Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. 2 For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb. 3 Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday. 7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. 8 Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; [it leads] only to evildoing. 9 For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. 10 Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be [there.] 11 But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity. 12 The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth. 13 The Lord laughs at him, For He sees his day is coming. 14 The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow To cast down the afflicted and the needy, To slay those who are upright in conduct. 15 Their sword will enter their own heart, And their bows will be broken. 16 Better is the little of the righteous Than the abundance of many wicked. 17 For the arms of the wicked will be broken, But the LORD sustains the righteous. 18 The LORD knows the days of the blameless, And their inheritance will be forever. 19 They will not be ashamed in the time of evil, And in the days of famine they will have abundance. 20 But the wicked will perish; And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures, They vanish--like smoke they vanish away. 21 The wicked borrows and does not pay back, But the righteous is gracious and gives. 22 For those blessed by Him will inherit the land, But those cursed by Him will be cut off. 23 The steps of a man are established by the LORD, And He delights in his way. 24 When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand. 25 I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread. 26 All day long he is gracious and lends, And his descendants are a blessing. 27 Depart from evil and do good, So you will abide forever. 28 For the LORD loves justice And does not forsake His godly ones; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off. 29 The righteous will inherit the land And dwell in it forever. 30 The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, And his tongue speaks justice. 31 The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip. 32 The wicked spies upon the righteous And seeks to kill him. 33 The LORD will not leave him in his hand Or let him be condemned when he is judged. 34 Wait for the LORD and keep His way, And He will exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you will see it. 35 I have seen a wicked, violent man Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. 36 Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found. 37 Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity. 38 But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off. 39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in time of trouble. 40 The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.

- Have you ever done the right thing and paid for it, then watched somebody do the wrong thing and get rewarded for it?
- That can get under your skin. First you're angry about what they did. Then you're tempted to do what they did. Somewhere in between, you start asking, "God, is it even worth doing right?"
- Psalm 37 gives us the counsel of David looking back over a lifetime. In verse 25 he says, "I have been young and now I am old." He has seen wicked people prosper, righteous people

stumble, and God sustain people through trouble. He starts with the words some of us need to hear before we send that text or make that call: “Do not fret.”

How do we stay faithful when the people doing wrong seem to be winning?

David shows us how to let go of envy, do the next right thing, wait without taking revenge, and lean on God when we stumble.

I. **Let go of envy — [Psa 37:1-2 NASB95] – 1 [A Psalm] of David. Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. 2 For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb.**
   a. David pairs fretting with envy. The longer you stare at what somebody gained by doing wrong, the easier it is to wish you had their results. David says their success is like green grass that soon withers. It can look impressive today and be gone tomorrow.
   b. Psalm 73:2–3, 16–17. Asaph nearly loses his footing when he envies the wicked. Worship helps him see where their path leads. [Psa 73:2-3, 16-17 NASB95] – 2 But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped. 3 For I was envious of the arrogant [As] I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ... 16 When I pondered to understand this, It was troublesome in my sight 17 Until I came into the sanctuary of God; [Then] I perceived their end.
   c. Application. When comparison starts eating at you, bring it into prayer. Name what you envy before God. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where resentment is shaping your decisions. This week, pray for the person whose success you’ve been stewing over.
   d. Don’t let somebody else’s success talk you out of your obedience.

II. **Do the next right thing — [Psa 37:3-6 NASB95] – 3 Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light And your judgment as the noonday.**
   a. David puts trust and action together: “Trust in the LORD and do good.” Delight in God. Commit your way to Him. Then let Him bring your righteousness to light. Verse 6 speaks directly to the person who wants to clear their own name. God sees what happened, and you can entrust your reputation to Him.
   b. Galatians 6:9–10. Paul calls believers to keep doing good even when they grow weary and the harvest is still ahead. [Gal 6:9-10 NASB95] – 9 Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.
   c. Application. Ask the Holy Spirit to put one act of obedience in front of you. Tell the truth when a half-truth would be easier. Keep a promise when it costs you. Do something good for someone who can’t repay you.
   d. You can do the next right thing before you know how the whole thing will turn out.

III. **Wait without taking revenge — [Psa 37:7-22 NASB95] – 7 Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. 8 Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; [it leads] only to evildoing. 9 For evildoers will be cut off, But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land. 10 Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be [there.] 11 But the humble will inherit the land And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.**

12 The wicked plots against the righteous And gnashes at him with his teeth. 13 The Lord laughs at him, For He sees his day is coming. 14 The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow To cast down the afflicted and the needy, To slay those who are upright in conduct. 15 Their sword will enter their own heart, And their bows will be broken. 16 Better is the little of the righteous Than the abundance of many wicked. 17 For the arms of the wicked will be broken, But the LORD sustains the righteous. 18 The LORD knows the days of the blameless, And their inheritance will be forever. 19 They will not be ashamed in the time of evil, And in the days of famine they will have abundance. 20 But the wicked will perish; And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures, They vanish--like smoke they vanish away. 21 The wicked borrows and does not pay back, But the righteous is gracious and gives. 22 For those blessed by Him will inherit the land, But those cursed by Him will be cut off.

a. David tells us to rest in God, wait patiently, and let go of anger before it leads us into evil. He takes the threat seriously. The wicked plot and draw the sword, yet God sees where their violence will lead. The promise that the humble will inherit the land turns the picture around. The people who look powerless have a future God has promised them.
b. Matthew 5:5 and Romans 12:19–21. Jesus echoes Psalm 37's promise to the meek, and Paul calls believers to leave vengeance with God and overcome evil with good. [Mat 5:5 NASB95] – 5 "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. [Rom 12:19-21 NASB95] – 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath [of God,] for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. 20 "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
c. Application. Before you answer the accusation or fire back online, stop and pray. Ask the Holy Spirit for self-control and the courage to speak truthfully. Where action is needed, take it with a clean heart. You can address a wrong and leave vengeance with God.
d. You can stand up for what is right without making payback your goal.

IV. Lean on God when you stumble — [Psa 37:23-40 NASB95] – 23 The steps of a man are established by the LORD, And He delights in his way. 24 When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong, Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand. 25 I have been young and now I am old, Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken Or his descendants begging bread. 26 All day long he is gracious and lends, And his descendants are a blessing. 27 Depart from evil and do good, So you will abide forever. 28 For the LORD loves justice And does not forsake His godly ones; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off. 29 The righteous will inherit the land And dwell in it forever. 30 The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, And his tongue speaks justice. 31 The law of his God is in his heart; His steps do not slip. 32 The wicked spies upon the righteous And seeks to kill him. 33 The LORD will not leave him in his hand Or let him be condemned when he is judged. 34 Wait for the LORD and keep His way, And He will exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you will see it. 35 I have seen a wicked, violent man Spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. 36 Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found. 37 Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright; For the man of peace will have a posterity. 38 But transgressors will be altogether destroyed; The posterity of the wicked will be cut off. 39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is

their strength in time of trouble. 40 The LORD helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.

a. The person whose steps God establishes can still stumble. Verse 24 gives the reason the fall doesn't have the final word. God holds that person by the hand. David has seen God sustain His people through hardship, and he describes them still lending and giving generously. The psalm ends with God as their refuge "in time of trouble."
b. 2 Corinthians 4:8–9. Paul describes being struck down and still being sustained by God. [2Co 4:8-9 NASB95] – 8 [we are] afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;
c. Application. If you've stumbled, bring it into the light. Confess what needs confessing, let someone pray with you, and ask the Holy Spirit for strength to take the next faithful step. If someone else is struggling, put your prayers into action with a meal, a ride, or an offer to help.
d. You may have lost your footing. God still has your hand.

- **When evil seems to get ahead, trust God enough to keep doing good, wait for Him to act, and take refuge in Him.**
- The next time doing right costs you, remember where Psalm 37 ends. God is the refuge of His people in the trouble. You can let go of the need to settle the score because your future is in His hands. So tell the truth. Keep your word. Keep doing good. And if you've fallen, reach for the hand that's already holding you.
- Release anger and envy. Receive strength to do right. Take refuge in Jesus Christ.
- **"Lord, I give You what I can't fix and what I'm tempted to take into my own hands. Holy Spirit, give me the strength to do what is right while I wait on You. Amen."**