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“Envy Not!” Psalm 37

Introduction

Think for a moment with me. What did you worry about this last week? The last few days? What annoyed you about other people—something that you wish you could change? If we could play an audio CD or a video clip of the last two days of your life, where would others see discontentment growing as a weed in the garden of your life? Worry, being annoyed or expressing discontentment can all be elements of what the Bible calls “fretting.” Fretting is like an acid that corrodes our soul. It gnaws away at the very center of our lives.

May I ask another question: Where does envy pop up in your life most? According to popular thought, envy is one of the seven deadly sins. Envy is composed of two elements and it is the second one that makes it a deadly sin. First, envy is characterized by a strong desire to have something—some advantage or benefit that someone else has. A strong desire to have something someone else has isn't necessarily bad. Maybe you want to have the courage of the Apostle Paul, the peace of a godly woman you know, or the wisdom of another man. That's OK. But envy goes beyond that. Envy makes us angry, bitter or resentful that someone else has something we don't have. Envy makes us wish things were going better for us and by extension worse for someone else.

Dante defined this as "a desire to deprive other men of theirs." Aquinas described envy as "sorrow for another's good". Envy can be directly related to the [Ten Commandments](#), specifically "Neither shall you desire... anything that belongs to your neighbor".

Some examples might include the following. You are single and your friend is getting married soon. You are envious. You are resentful that they are getting married and you aren't.

As a couple you are asking God for a child or another child and then you hear that another couple is expecting a child. You inwardly wonder, “Why can't we have a child or why can't we have another one?” Or it might be that your child is chronically ill and you envy others whose children seem healthy and whole.

Envy displays itself in the young person who really goes all out for sports but recognizes that he or she will always be on the second team. Most of their games they will simply occupy the bench. They secretly wish someone would get injured so they could show the coach what they have.

We struggle with envy when it comes to wealth and possessions. We reason “I work just as hard as he does. I don't know why he earns \$20,000 more a year in his job than I do working the same hours. I think I am entitled to more.”

We can even be envious as Christians when we see wicked men, evil men, or even good men who simply have no interest in God whatsoever prosper and get all the breaks in life while we who profess to love God and make sacrifices for his kingdom and just want to be appreciated or recognized struggle along in life. We wonder why do the wicked prosper? Why do wicked men seem to have it all and the godly are ridiculed and oppressed?

Psalm 37 give us spiritual ammunition to fight worry, envy, and discontentment It is classified as a wisdom psalm that oozes with godly counsel about how to live in a fallen world where evil seems rewarded and holiness is punished. It is full of aphorisms which make it right home among the proverbs of the OT.

It is also an acrostic psalm, which means that it was poetically woven together so that every other verse in this case begins with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So there is not only wisdom here there is beauty. Other acrostic psalms include Psalm 119. Acrostic psalms were so crafted as to make aid in memory, especially for hundreds of years when these songs were passed down and sung in the Temple and later in Jewish synagogues in home.

The whole psalm deals with one basic question: Why do the ungodly prosper and get all the breaks while the godly painfully struggle through life? It's a question asked a thousand years before Christ and it still is probed 3000 years

It warns against worry as does Philippians 4:6 which teaches us to be anxious for nothing. It warns against envy which is prohibited many times in Scripture such as, in a general sense, in Galatians 5:20-21 where envy is listed among the sins of works of the flesh which include “enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions and envy.” Both envy and worry are serious sins that cause much sorrow in hearts that are controlled by them.

The basic objective of this psalm is simple: It calls us to develop quiet spirit which trusts in God and does not fret over nor become envious of wicked men. But how do we stop fretting when every day we see things on the 24-hour news channels or hear things on talk radio that boil our blood? How do we cope in a society or in a company that reward shrewdness or evil rather than hard work and

morality? How do we deal with acidic effects of worry and envy? Psalm 37 offers three correctives—they all revolve around the theme of where we look.

Look away from evil men

The psalm begins by telling us where not to look. “*Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!*” (Psalm 37:1)

● **Forsake fretting**

Note two things that we must get rid of and put off! We must forsake fretting and then we must exterminate envy. First, forsake fretting. Don't get all worked up because of evildoers. Relax, don't react! Keep your cool! Chill out! Three times we see this command to “fret not” (v. 1, 7, 8). Fret not yourself over the one who prospers. Fret not, it only leads to evil! Fretting won't do you any good! But how? How do we calm down when we see injustice, gross injustice in our government, in some of our economic structures, even sometimes in what is rewarded academically. How do we fret not when there is blatant discrimination or when there is reverse discrimination? How do we fret not when life is not fair?

● **Exterminate envy**

And then we are told to exterminate envy! “Be not envious of wrongdoers.” This closely resembles, “*Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.*” (Proverbs 23:17). Why are we not to be envious of sinners? Because although evil men may initially prosper, they will ultimately perish. “*For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.*” (Psalm 37:2). David, who likely writes this psalm later in life with lots of experience to back him, lines up with the rest of Scripture in urging us to exterminate it as well as showing the serious consequences of giving into it. I'm going to assume we all agree on that. So what I want to focus the remainder of our time on is how to fight against envy! That's the big issue in Psalm 37. And David is going to show us that at the root of envy is unbelief. Psalms 49 and 73 by the way deal with the same basic question: Why do the ungodly prosper and get all the breaks while the godly painfully struggle through life?

So how do we fight this common temptation to look at those who don't fear God and yet seemingly get away with murder, sometimes literally, and not fret or envy them. Well, first of all we get our eyes off men. That's what we have learned so far! You say, “OK, got that. Now what do I do when I wake up in the morning or when I go to bed at night and I think, “Why isn't God blessing me so that I can have a life of ease and prosperity like those evildoers? Why doesn't God do something about powerful men who are taking advantage of the poor? Why is God allowing those with a strong unbiblical, God-defying worldview plow straight ahead with forcing their beliefs on others? How can we not be scared? How can we not be envious of the lifestyle of the rich and famous or at least those who are a couple rungs above us on the social or economic or political ladder? The rest of

the psalm shows us where and on what we should concentrate. So we have looked at the “put off” of worry, fear and envy. Now we think about the “put on” of it!

Look up to God (vv. 3-8)

David tells us first to look to God with a series of half a dozen commands:

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.”
(Psalm 37:3–9)

● **Trust in the Lord (v. 3)**

Just a brief word about each of these verses! Only a brief word because they are all essentially calling us to do the same thing: Look up to God! First, trust in the Lord! That's God-centered! Then “do good” which is others-focused! So look to God and do good to men! “Trust” is an active commit to God!

As we actively trust in God we then finish the work He has given us to do. We aren't just sitting around trying to analyze what God is doing or how we can avert some crisis in our live, but we seek to do good. Doing good is the active expression of our trust in God. Doing good is doing the next right thing!

● **Delight in the Lord (v. 4)**

We look to God secondly by delighting in Him. God is delightful. He is to be delighted in! God is the exquisite source of delight. We delight in His compassion, His goodness, and kindness. We aren't to merely be faithful to God but we are to find pleasure in God! We go to God our exceeding great joy! We meditate on his glorious perfections day and night until the fire of God's love is kindled in our hearts and we want to spread that delight to others!

Do you delight in God? If you aren't doing that, it is because you don't know Him very well. And the reason you don't know Him very well is that you don't spend much time pursuing a relationship with Him. If you delight in Him, He promises to give you the desires of your heart. That doesn't mean he will give you every carnal desire that you want. Know if you are spending time with God and delighting in Him, your desires will align with His desires and He will give you those God-exalting desires. And best of all, if you are delighting in God, your supreme desires won't be things God can give you—rather your desire will be for God Himself! And God will give you Himself! Think of that! How great is that? Here's our problem: We don't believe that God is as good as He really is and we don't believe our hearts as bad as He says they are! So we delight in food, sex, wealth, power, fun, and self-indulgence more than in God!

Oh, pray this week that you would see that God is good and sin is evil! Then you and I would delight in God—a God who loves to pour out his goodness in our lives. He is a God who is worthy of all delight! He is a God of all joy. Think of this: every time a sinner repents, there is joy in God's presence. Every time one of His children dies and enters heaven, there is great joy and celebration there. Do you know what that means? There is continual joy in heaven—every day, every hour! God delights in us and in Christ there are one hundred thousand rivers of delight! You see the key to joy is not to achieve the life that you are dreaming about now but receiving the life God has given you, Christian friends, and use your life to spread the delight of God to all the nations! You exist to delight in God and help others do the same!

● **Commit to the Lord (v. 5)**

Verse 5 tells us that looking to God means “Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him and he will act.” “To commit” actually means to roll your weight on to something else.” So when you commit your way to the LORD, you are rolling the burden off your shoulder and you are laying it on God. The NT parallel is 1 Peter 5:7 where we cast our care on the Lord because He constantly is caring for us!

This is exactly what we do every time we board an airplane. When I get on the plane, I rarely see the pilot. I don't know his name. I don't anything about him. I have never talked with him though I might hear his voice and if I am listening I might be reassured that he knows what he is doing. But I can't every remember thinking while I was flying, “Does this guy know how to land this plane? Is he sure that he is going the right way? These clouds don't look familiar to me? I hope we aren't lost! I wonder if he has ever flown a plane that has lost an engine? Does he know what gate we are supposed to taxi to? When to take off?”

No, what do I do, I commit myself into the hands of that pilot. I don't second-guess him. He knows so much more than I do about flying that bird, I don't even think about giving him some advice. I just read my book, power up my computer, take a nap, eat some food and talk to those around me. That's it.

In fact on a recent trip, I actually sat next to a pilot who was off-duty. And you know what. He even was in a trusting condition. He was relaxed. When we hit some turbulence, he didn't run up to the front and try to take control. No, he was in a state of committing himself to the one in charge.

I remember a few years ago flying into Erie with Chris and Stefan. We were trying to land in probably the worst thunderstorm I have ever flown through in one of those little planes you know. And we were concerned but I was committed to letting that pilot do what he was supposed to do. I didn't once question his ability

or credentials. However, when we landed safely I was applauding his expertise with everyone else on the plane who were cheering after landing safely. That's the best picture I can give you of what it means to commit your way to the Lord! You just sit back and trust Him implicitly. You trust Him "to bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday." (v. 6).

- **Be still before the Lord (v. 7)**

And then you keep looking to God as you are "still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." (v. 7) We don't do "be still" very well do we? I don't. I can relate to Blaise Pascal who said that the basic thing that is wrong with the world is that man "does not know how to stay quietly in his own room." To be still and know that God is God is so hard for us who live in a highly visual and stimulating society! Be still before the Lord is a whole lot better way to live than fretting and stewing about whether or not your health insurance provider will pay the bill that you ran up in the hospital in just three days.

- **Wait on the Lord (v. 7)**

But this stillness results in a "patiently wait[ing] for Him." That too is involved in looking to God! Are you good at waiting? I know that I am not! I have worked on that throughout the years, but waiting is a challenge for me. And yet waiting on God is a whole lot better than stewing, fretting, getting all steamed about Al-Qaeda and the sequester and Iran developing a nuclear bomb and gun control and whether an asteroid is going to destroy this earth!

- **Don't get angry at God (v. 8)!**

There's one more way we look to God. Don't get angry at him for what seems to be all kinds of injustice and inequities in the world. "*Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.*" (Psalm 37:8). I think the anger here is likely anger against the Lord! It could also be anger against the wicked! And there it is again! Don't fret? Why? It tends only to evil! Worrying, losing your cool, and being envious will only lead to evil! That's what almost all anger does, right? It leads to evil!

Of course, none of this makes sense if you don't begin with trusting in God who has acted on our behalf going all the way back to the beginning of time. He created us in his image and placed the first man and woman in a beautiful, perfect God and simply asked that they trust Him and obey Him. But as our representatives, they chose to not trust God—to not believe Him. Instead they had a desire, a strong desire, for something that God told them they couldn't have. They were in some way envious of God in that they thought that if they eat of the forbidden fruit that they would be like God! He was withholding something from them. So they delighted in the fruit of the tree instead of delighting in God! Instead of waiting to walk in the cool of the day and spending that quiet time with God and maybe talking with him about what the snake said, they moved

ahead on their own and sinned against God. They rebelled against God their Creator and so have we.

And yet this God who is absolutely trustworthy had a plan to redeem man and to reconcile us to Himself. He sent His one and only Son to rescue us from ourselves and our sin. Jesus shows us what it looks like to not fret over evil men or to be envious of the wicked! Throughout his entire life, he committed his way to His Father, even at the very end of his life when he cried out to God, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Why did he die? To pay the penalty for our sin—our rebellion, our transgression against the law of God! He died that we might live! He died that we might have life to the full. So this God who is utterly trustworthy delivered up His own Son that we might have an everlasting relationship with the God who made us! And He right now is calling you and me to repent of our sins and to trust Him for our salvation! And yet, there is more! This God who is utterly trustworthy and has and is acting on our behalf, is working toward the end, the consummation of all things. This consummation includes both the destruction, the cutting off, of the wicked and the glorification, the perfection of those who are righteous because of Christ's death on the cross.

Look ahead to glory

And so there is a third look we must consider. We look away from evil men. We look up to God. And now we look ahead to glory. We are so easily consumed with the present but God wants us to gaze on the long view, on eternity. This is the only way that we will look away from evil men and keep growing in grace and understand what God is up to in this world! And we don't have to guess what lies ahead because God tells us the destiny of the wicked and how He is at work for all who fear His name!

● **What the wicked will do:**

- **plot but ultimately perish (vv. 2, 9-10, 12-13)**

In verses 12-22 there are **a series of contrasts between what the wicked do and what will happen to them in the end.** Likewise there is a series of contrasts that reveal the destiny of those who trust God: the righteous.

First they plot, but they ultimately will perish. "*The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him, but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming.*" (Psalm 37:12–13). The wrongdoers will fade like the grass and wither like the green herb (v. 2). They will be cut off (v. 9)—a phrase which refers to divine judgment. And "*In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.*" (Psalm 37:10). Psalm 49 explains in more detail:

"The wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they called lands by their own names. Man in his pomp will not remain; he is like the beasts that perish. . . . Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd,

and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell. . . . Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him. For though, while he lives, he counts himself blessed—and though you get praise when you do well for yourself— his soul will go to the generation of his fathers, who will never again see light. Man in his pomp yet without understanding is like the beasts that perish.” (Psalm 49:10-12, 14,16–20)

◦ **fortify but soon fall (vv. 14-15)**

The wicked will fortify and attack but they will soon fall. They will fall by their own devices and schemes. *“The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright; their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.”* (Psalm 37:14–15). Though the wicked will attack the righteous, their own evil will destroy themselves. Sin carries within itself its own seeds of destruction. As we have seen repeatedly in human history, governments that are evil can exist for awhile but eventually the corruption that they are built on will result in their own implosion, often from within themselves as we saw 25 years ago with the Soviet Union. The same is true of individual lives.

◦ **prosper but soon wither (vv. 2, 16-17)**

The wicked will prosper but they will soon wither. Wealth and power one day will be taken away from the wicked but God will sustain the righteous. *“Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.”* (Psalm 37:16–17)

◦ **flourish but soon vanish (vv. 18-20)**

Though the wicked flourish now, they will soon vanish. *“The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will remain forever; they are not put to shame in evil times; in the days of famine they have abundance. But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.”* (Psalm 37:18–20). Like grass that fade, like green herbs that wither, and like smoke that blows away, they will soon be lost. Their beauty will fade, their popularity wane and their wealth will be overextended.

◦ **borrow but soon lose (vv. 21-22)**

And finally they will borrow but soon lose it all—which by the way is happening in our country even now. *“The wicked borrows but does not pay back. . . but those cursed by him shall be cut off.”* (Psalm 37:21–22). The wicked eventually aren't able to pay even the interest on the debt they owe, much less on the debt itself—a condition we find ourselves in as a country right now.

So we can't always judge things by what we see right now, right here. The judgment of God is often delayed for his sovereign purposes. Don't just his ultimate purposes by what you see right now!

- **What God will do for the righteous**

- **He will fulfill your desires (v. 4)**

And yet look what God will do for us now and in the final consummation of all things. He will give us the desires of our hearts. "Open up your mouth wide and I will fill it," says the Lord! He will fulfill the desires of those who seek him and fear Him! Do you want greater glimpses of His glory? He will put you in the cleft of His rock and pass by so you can see the afterglow of His glory! Do you long for more intimate communion with God? He will come and dwell with you and walk with you for He is your God!!! Do you want more conformity to Christ? He gives us His Spirit to transform us from one degree of glory to another! God will not withhold anything that will be conducive to your spiritual and eternal well-being.

- **He will supply your needs (v. 5, 25-26, 29)**

Secondly, God will supply your needs. *"I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing."* (Psalm 37:25-26) *"The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever."* (Psalm 37:29). So "commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him, and He will act" (v. 5). Your needs may be great and urgent like Israel's were when they were at the Red Sea or traveling in the wilderness but don't despair! You will be fed! It may not be in the way or time you think! But He will supply your needs.

Be encouraged by God's provision, for example, in Elijah's life during the famine in Israel. How much food did the ravens bring every day to Elijah? Enough for that day? They didn't airlift a month or a year or three year's worth of food, did they? No, one day at a time. And how about when he was with the widow of Zarepath? Enough oil every day for her, her son and Elijah! Just enough flour every day for them all. God will supply the needs of the righteous!

Oh, wait upon God for his provision. Don't trust this world. Don't be like the Jews of Jeremiah's day who asked if they should flee to Egypt for help when they knew the king of Babylon was about to override their city. Jeremiah told them that God wanted them to stay in the city and though it would be captured God would provide their needs for all who trusted Him. But those who ran to Egypt for help, a picture of relying on the arm of flesh and independence apart from God would perish. That's exactly what happened! Even in your severest trial, God will provide for His own. I'm reading about that right now in the life of Nadia Kuvshnikov's father who spent several years in a Russian Gulag camp in the years of Stalin. He should have died many times, but God provided for him. Why? Because he refused to deny God and his steadfast faith was rewarded.

No doubt others died who believed in God but you know what? They entered heaven right away and received the full reward of their spiritual blessings!

- **He will make all things work together for your good (v. 6, 24)**

“*though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand.*” (Psalm 37:24). This is the OT equivalent to Romans 8:28. You say, “But my difficulties are too great? Too many!” Don't forget Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Don't forget Job. Don't forget Joseph. People mean things for evil, but God means it for our good! God designs things for our good. He will bring it to pass. You may be misrepresented by a friend. Don't worry! He will make your righteousness shine as the noonday sun. Your reproach will be rolled away one day! You may be falsely accused? You may face a life long on conflict because of your righteousness. Think how much Christ endured for your sake!

O that men did but know what provision there is made for them in the Gospel of Christ! In, and with Christ, there is all that we can want, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity——Only let us seek to be washed in his blood, to be renewed by his Spirit, and to live altogether by faith on him; and we shall find such rich supplies, such heavenly consolations, such a fulness of all spiritual and eternal blessings, as shall far surpass all that the carnal eye has ever seen, and all that the carnal imagination has ever conceived ¹

- **He will give you a great inheritance (v. 11)**

“The meek shall inherit the land.” This is repeated by Jesus in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth!” I believe that this is referring to our ruling and reigning with Christ forever even on this earth. Those who look up to God for salvation and blessing and live for His glory have a great inheritance waiting for them! As Charles Simeon says,

“Contemplate the state of those who are now in heaven; how free from care, and how completely happy in the fruition of their God! Such in a measure may our state be even in this present world. Those who believe in Christ are privileged to rejoice in him, yea, and many do “rejoice in him, with joy unspeakable and glorified.” By committing themselves, and all their concerns, to him, “their very *thoughts*, which are naturally as fluctuating as the wind, are established.” O Believers, live not below your privileges: carry every thing to your adorable Saviour, and expect from him all that infinite love can give, and all that Omnipotence can effect. “All things are yours, if ye are Christ's;” even “death itself, as well as life, is among your treasures:” and soon shall all the glory and felicity of heaven be your unalienable and everlasting possession.]²

- **He will grant abundant peace (v. 11)**

Delight in God (v 4) and you will delight in abundant peace! Abundant shalom!

- **He will direct you and delight in you (23)**

1 Simeon, C. (1836). *Horae Homileticae Vol. 5: Psalms, I–LXXII* (298). London: Samuel Holdsworth.

2 Simeon, C. (1836). *Horae Homileticae Vol. 5: Psalms, I–LXXII* (298). London: Samuel Holdsworth.

“The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way;” (Psalm 37:23)

- **He will protect you and deliver you (27-28, 32-23)**

“Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever. For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.” (Psalm 37:27–28) . . . *“The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death. The LORD will not abandon him to his power or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial.”* (Psalm 37:32–33). No one will pluck us out of God's hands. No one whom Christ redeems and rescues will ever be lost ! We are kept by the power of God through faith to everlasting salvation!”

- **He will instruct you (vv. 30-31)**

He will instruct you so that your mouth will speak utter wisdom and your tongue will speak justice!

- **He will exalt you (v. 34)**

Lastly, when you are tempted to lose your cool and stew over evil men or when you are tempted to want all the fame, notoriety, seeming ease, happiness and wealth that they have remember this promise: *“Wait [take the long view, look ahead to glory] for the LORD and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.”* (Psalm 37:34).

Conclusion: a great difference, defense, and deliverance

So you see there are two choices: you can prosper now though you be evil but one day you will perish ultimately in hell. Or you can look up in trust to God and look ahead to glory, having it possibly rougher now than you expected but knowing one day you will have a great inheritance and abundant peace with God!

God makes a huge difference! He is a reliable defense. And He offers great deliverance—from eternal punishment from sin, from the deceptive powers of evil and from the illusion this world offers. People of God, fret not! Envy not! Unbelieving friend, Trust Jesus Christ today, commit your way to Him! It's the only way for you to be reconciled to God and escape the wrath of God that hangs over your soul this very day! Take the long look up to God and ahead to glory!