

PSALM 37:1-40

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¹Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, ²for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb. ³Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. ⁴Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday. ⁷Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices. ⁸Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil. ⁹For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. ¹⁰Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. ¹¹But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity. ¹²The wicked plot against the righteous, and gnash their teeth at them; ¹³but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that their day is coming. ¹⁴The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to kill those who walk uprightly; ¹⁵their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. ¹⁶Better is a little that the righteous person has than the abundance of many wicked. ¹⁷For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous. ¹⁸The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will abide forever; ¹⁹they are not put to shame in evil times, in the days of famine they have abundance. ²⁰But the wicked perish, and the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away. ²¹The wicked borrow, and do not pay back, but the righteous are generous and keep giving; ²²for those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off. ²³Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way; ²⁴though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand. ²⁵I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. ²⁶They are ever giving liberally and lending, and their children become a blessing. ²⁷Depart from evil, and do good; so you shall abide forever. ²⁸For the Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his faithful ones. The righteous shall be kept safe forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. ²⁹The righteous shall inherit the land, and live in it forever. ³⁰The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak justice. ³¹The law of their God is in their hearts; their steps do not slip. ³²The wicked watch for the righteous, and seek to kill them. ³³The Lord will not abandon them to their power, or let them be condemned when they are brought to trial. ³⁴Wait for the Lord, and keep to his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on the destruction of the wicked. ³⁵I have seen the wicked oppressing, and towering like a cedar of Lebanon. ³⁶Again I passed by, and they were no more; though I sought them, they could not be found. ³⁷Mark the blameless, and behold the upright, for there is posterity for the peaceable. ³⁸But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off. ³⁹The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their refuge in the time of trouble. ⁴⁰The Lord helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they take refuge in him.

Psalm 37 brings to mind 14th century mystic Julianna of Norwich's prayer, "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well." The psalmist calls me be still, to let go of undue anxiety, and trust that all shall be well, to believe in Paul's proclamation that everything, all worries, all frustrations, all loss, shall be redeemed and "swallowed up in victory." These are words I need to hear as I get caught up, sometimes consumed, by the immediacy of today's problems, anxious for instant resolution.

The psalmist also reminds me of the significance of good deeds in the eyes of the Lord, to direct my attention towards acting justly, albeit in small ways, rather than feeling overwhelmed by the injustice by others I see. Yet the psalmist also illuminates the thirst for justice as our restless desire for God who will quench this desire and right the scales. However, the quest for justice must be grounded in the peace of God. When I forget to ground the pursuit of justice in God I lose my way, become fatigued, feel my results are insignificant, and am easily give into cynicism. The psalmist reminds me to first "trust in the Lord" and then "do good." Psalm 37 nuances the expression "If you want peace, work for justice" to mean "If you want peace, trust in God's peace and work for justice."