

When You Are Angry

Psalm 37:1-11

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I want to read verse 1-2 of Psalm 37 to get us started.

The psalmist is David, and he said, “Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.” Then he gives us the reason: “For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” or “green plants.”

We will soon study Psalm 73, which is a classic psalm on this same subject. It is a psalm of Asaph, where he says that “I looked around at the wicked, saw them prosper and began to become envious. I almost slipped and stumbled.”

Many times we, as believers, are treated unjustly, someone has wronged us or deeply hurt us. There is a danger that we could then get in the flesh, become angry and forget God in the whole matter. Maybe you're struggling with anger because of a hurt in your marriage or in a relationship, or maybe on the job you've been slighted and overlooked for a promotion. Or maybe you're just looking at the political landscape around us today in America, and like so many, you're becoming angry.

So if you've ever struggled with anger, or tempted to become angry, Psalm 37 is for you.

Psalm 37 is a psalm of David. We know he wrote the psalm, and we know when he wrote the psalm. Verse 25 says, “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.” So David is now in his later years, and many feel it was just before he turned the kingdom over to his son, Solomon.

David is giving words of wisdom in this psalm. Psalm 37 has been classified as a wisdom psalm. It's also known as an acrostic psalm, meaning that every third verse starts with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. That was done to enable one to memorize the psalm.

And this psalm also reads much like a proverb. In this psalm, David is not addressing God, he's not praising God and he's not praying to God; he's giving us wisdom. That's why some scholars believe that David, in his old age, is sitting down with his son, Solomon, and is giving him words of practical wisdom; when he finds adversity in his life, he's giving him steps to take on how to respond to that injustice or difficulty.

I liken Psalm 37 to meeting with David in your favorite coffee shop. You're sitting out on the patio and talking across the table with your favorite coffee in hand. You're getting words of wisdom from the man of God.

As we go through this psalm, we're going to learn what not to do and simply what to do. This psalm is simple, but it is simply profound. It has some famous verses that we sometimes miss

as important, because they're so well known and common to us.

So in this psalm, David tells us what to do when we are angry. But first, we find out what we are not to do when we are tempted to be angry, in verses 1-2. David says, "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."

Here is step 1 to take when you're tempted to get angry: Don't be angry. That's pretty simple. When you are angry, stop being angry. But when you're angry and someone says, "Don't be angry!" it just makes you angrier. I don't like to hear someone tell me to calm down when I'm not calm; it just makes me angrier! Pray for me. So this psalm really spoke to my heart; don't be angry.

The word "fret," in verse 1, literally in the Hebrew means "to blaze" or "to be hot." Have you ever seen someone so angry that he is "lit up," that his face turns red, veins pop out on their neck and they get all up tight? They literally turn red in the face. Some have translated it, "Don't worry," but it's more than to worry; it's anger or getting mad. It's anger that has escalated to the point where we're "hot under the collar," we're beginning to blaze or get hot.

David also gives us the reasons why we should not get angry. Verse 1 says, "because of evildoers." So one of the many reasons we get angry is because people do evil, but they don't pay for it and they're never punished.

One of the common areas in our culture today is politics. Why do I watch that stuff?! The arguing between the liberals and the conservatives—we just need to calm down a little bit. Everybody's getting so uptight, and you see evil men who don't seem to pay for their sins. It seems to be so unjust and so unrighteous. So in verse 1, David says, "Don't get angry because of evildoers. Don't get upset and angry with them."

The second thing David tells us not to do is don't get envious. Verse 1 says, "Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity." Psalm 73 is all about just that: Asaph was envious of the prosperity of the wicked, yet he was a righteous man who suffered so much.

But to be envious of the wicked is very foolish. The Bible likens it to a fatted calf that is being fattened for the slaughter. I've often wondered what it could be like if you could get in the mind of a calf. The farmer comes and takes one, puts it in its own pasture, gives it extra food and care and attention. The other cows are looking through the fence and thinking, "That's not fair! Why does that calf get all the extra food? Look how fat it's getting!" That's the secret. That calf is headed for the barbecue. Don't envy that calf. In Psalm 73, Asaph says, "These fat calves have more than they ever could want. Their eyes bug out with fatness."

So the wicked are like fatted calves. Don't be envious; they're on their way to the barbecue. That's why they're being fattened up. Many times that's what the wicked are like.

Thirdly, what we shouldn't do is to get even. Don't get angry, don't get envious and don't get

even. Don't envy the wicked; get the eternal perspective. Verse 8 is kind of a summary of the first seven verses. It says, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do no fret—it only causes harm." So in verse 8, David tells them to do two things; forsake wrath and do no evil. What we want to do when somebody wrongs us or hurts us or is unjust toward us is we want to get even with them. We want "an eye for an eye." No—we want more than that; we want two eyes for one eye. "You knock my tooth out, I'll take all your teeth out." But God says, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay." David actually gives us the full reason in verse 2: "For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb."

So David says, "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity." Why? "For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." The picture here is of transcendence and that they are perishable.

We see this in southern California. We recently received rain, and it was a blessing. The grass is green, but for how long? Enjoy the green grass while you can, because soon it will wither away and be gone. So the wicked are like the green grass that is here today but gone tomorrow. Verse 9 says, "For evildoers shall be cut off." This is the reason why we shouldn't get angry and take matters into our own hands.

But the contrast is in verses 9-11: "But those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. 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. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

"The meek shall inherit the earth" may have a familiar ring to you. Jesus said in the Beatitudes at the beginning of His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Jesus was actually quoting Psalm 37:9. He exemplified that in His own life. When He was hanging on the Cross being crucified, what did He do? Peter says, "When He was reviled, [He] did not revile in return." Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

If I were on the Cross, I'd be spitting back at them. I'd be saying, "You just wait until I come back in my Second Coming; you'll get yours!" Instead, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

So when Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," He exemplified that in His life; He was reviled, but He reviled not back, and He submitted to the plans and purposes of God. That's what we need to do.

I believe that Psalm 37 describes the meek man or woman. What does it really mean to be meek? How does that flesh out in our daily lives? Psalm 37 tells us what it means to be meek.

Secondly, we move to verses 3-7, which tells us what to do. The first part told us not to get angry, don't get envious and don't get even. Verses 3-7 say, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. 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 shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret..."—don't get hot and don't boil —"...because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass."

So the antidote for anger and envy is to look to the Lord. The overarching principle in this section is the most important and is this: When you tempted to be angry, to worry or to fret, turn your eyes upon Jesus. To quote a familiar old hymn:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in his wonderful face,

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace."

I love that song. How often we need to remind ourselves. Sometimes it's good to talk to yourself, and tell yourself, "Look to Jesus. Trust in Jesus. Hope in Jesus. Take your eyes off the problem."

David gives us a recipe for life, and I believe these four steps or actions we need to take, that are laid out in this psalm, will work for anyone who follows them. When you are angry, step number one is trust in the Lord. Verse 3 says, "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness." So the problem is we're looking at the wrong thing; we're looking at the problem, we're looking at people, we're looking at our circumstances, we're looking at our health, we're looking at our finances. Instead, we need to focus on the Lord. David said that rather than dwelling on the injustice and let your anger burn, you need to redirect your attention toward God.

What does it mean to "trust in the Lord"? It means to put your faith in Him. Your faith isn't in the government, in your own strength or wisdom or in your finances. A lot of people are trusting in their bank accounts. They need to trust in the Lord. Our faith, our trust, our hope is in the Lord. We know that He will not fail us. So I'm not fretting, but I'm trusting. But when I am fretting, I'm not trusting. Faith and fear are mutually exclusive. If you're freakin' out and fretting and getting angry, it's not an example of trusting in the Lord. So the first step is to trust.

This is the essence of the Christian life. How does a Christian life start? By faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You turn from your sin and trust Him, and Him alone. You don't trust in your baptism, not in your good works or your righteous deeds, not in church attendance, not in your own self-reformation. But you trust in Christ alone. "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Your Cross I cling." If you are trusting in anything other than Jesus Christ, your trust is misplaced. And once you become a child of God, you live by faith and not by sight.

If you are fretting or freakin' out, you're not trusting the Lord and walking by faith. If you're not living by faith, you're living by sight. So the first step is to learn to live by faith. The Bible says, "The just shall live by faith." That's how we walk with the Lord and grow with the Lord: by faith we read God's Word, we accept it and obey it.

Verse 3 also says, "...and do good." So we need to "Trust in the Lord, and do good." But what we want to do is to trust in the Lord and then go get even with them. We want to trust in the Lord and then maybe start a lie about them. We want to get back at them. So it's trust and obey. There's a hymn that says:

"Trust and obey,

For there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus,

But to trust and obey."

What a great hymn!

But from the time I was a young boy and learned that hymn, I've never forgotten its truth. This is what the Christian life is: to trust Him and to obey Him. Even when I don't understand and I can't see, I trust Him and I obey Him. "There's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." That's what verse 3 tells us to do.

Each of these commands, in verses 3-7, promises a blessing. Verse 3 says, "Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness." To Israel, there is nothing more important than being on your land. That was the Promised Land. That was the land "flowing with milk and honey." Those were the blessings of God: the blessings of God were attached to the land and the promise of the land. What a blessing that is. So when the people would obey, would trust and would walk with God, they would eat of the fat and of the fruit of the land and of the blessings of the land.

I believe with all my heart, because God is faithful, that He will not let you down. If you trust Him and put your hope in Him, He will not let you down. We may let Him down, but He won't let us down. So we can trust Him, even in the darkest night of our soul.

The second step we need to take, in verse 4, is delight in the Lord. This grows out of our trusting in Him. When we trust in the Lord, it means we put our delight in Him. "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart."

These are simple steps that we can take on a daily basis: Everyday we can trust Him and do the right thing, and everyday we can delight in Him.

There is a great danger in misinterpreting verse 4. It is a refrigerator-magnet verse. (That's not a theological statement.) It's one of those verses we love to stick on the refrigerator, we love to

quote, but it is misinterpreted. It has been misinterpreted by saying that if I'm a Christian and love the Lord and delight in the Lord, He'll give me whatever I want. "That beach house I saw the other day—I claim it in the name of Jesus! And to add a little emphasis, I did a Jericho march around it!" "That car I saw the other day—that's mine in the name of Jesus!" Maybe you're not married, and you're claiming some woman to be your wife. Maybe you do a Jericho march around her. It's sad. But people get the idea that if they delight themselves in the Lord, He'll give them the desires of their heart. That doesn't mean you'll get whatever you want!

But here's what it does mean. I like this. I believe that if the Lord is your pleasure, the word "delight" means that you take pleasure in God. It means that all of your pleasures are in Him and in knowing Him. So if you don't get the house and you don't get the car and you don't get the spouse you want, the income you want and the kids you want, your pleasure is the Lord. You have the Lord; what more do you need? Remember Psalm 23? "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." It means I have everything I need. So all of your pleasures and all of your joys are in the Lord.

And when you delight in the Lord, based on this verse, He puts His desires in your heart. Then, and only then, can you honestly say, "I have all the desires of my heart," because the desire of your heart is God. You are delighting in Him; He's number one. Your pleasure is in Him. When you delight in the Lord, He gives you His desires.

I believe this is one of the best ways to discover God's will for your life. It's not by looking around and doing what you want, but by delighting in the Lord, He places His desires on your heart and then He fulfills them in your life. Sometimes I tell young people that if they love the Lord with all their heart, soul, strength and mind, then they can do whatever they want, because what you will want to do will be what He wants you to do. They'll be in the will of God. If you love the Lord, you won't want to be out of His will. You won't want to do anything that is not in His purpose and plan for your life. So this is where it starts: You trust the Lord to save you, to keep you, to guide you and then you delight in Him and make Him your pleasure and joy. So many times when I counsel people who are struggling, I always bring them to this psalm.

Are you trusting the Lord? Are you delighting in the Lord? If you do, He'll give you the desires of your heart. God puts those desires in your heart.

The third step you need to take is in verses 5-6. Not only do you need to trust the Lord and delight in the Lord, but you need to commit your way to the Lord. Verse 5 says, "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." In Hebrew poetry, "commit" and "trust" are synonym terms. "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light..."—there's the promise—"...and your justice as the noonday." In other words, God will vindicate you. If you put your trust in Him and you commit your way to Him, God will vindicate you.

What does it mean to "commit your way to the Lord"? This word "commit" means "to roll." The idea is to take a big rock or burden and "to roll" it over onto the Lord. This is what Peter said in 1 Peter 5:7 where he says, "...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." It means to

roll your care upon God or put it on God.

So He is talking about letting God guide your steps, your thoughts, your marriage, your children, your singleness, your bereavement, your loss, your pain, your sickness, your health—put it all in God's hands. Wake up every morning and say, "Lord, I am Yours. This day belongs to You. I give You my day. Guide me and direct me. Have Your way. Lord, whatever direction You want me to go in, it's in Your hands." You commit your way to God.

You let God choose your sorrows and your joys. Life isn't always sunshine. If life was always sunshine, our lives would turn into a desert. Into every life, sorrows must come, because God wants to produce fruit in our lives. He wants to develop character. So in troubled times, you need to say, "Lord, I don't understand why I'm in the hospital right now....I don't understand why my parents are so sick....I don't understand why my wife is suffering so, but Lord, I commit it to You. I roll it on You. I put it in Your hands." Give God all your sorrows and joys, and then let God vindicate you.

I love verse 6, which says, "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday." God promises to vindicate you, if you'll trust in Him. And let God bless you in your work and in your ministry. Wherever God calls you to go, commit it to Him, and He will lead you and guide you. So by trusting in Him, He will "bring it to pass," verse 5, and "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday."

I believe this is a beautiful parallel to what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:33, where He said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things..."—what we eat or drink, or when we sleep—"...shall be added to you." All these other things in life, He'll add to you. What a great formula on how to live: Seek God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind, and God will take care of everything. God will guide you, lead you, and He will provide for you. "Seek first the kingdom of God."

The fourth and last step we need to take is to rest in the Lord, verse 7. We trust in the Lord, we delight in the Lord, we commit our way to the Lord and we "rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Again, this is a form of Hebrew poetry, of saying the same thing in different ways. You rest in the Lord, and you wait for the Lord. When you are resting and waiting, and not fretting, He says that He will take care of you and provide for you.

Note the steps to take: We start with trust, it moves to delight, it moves then to commit and it ends with resting and waiting patiently.

One of the secrets of the Christian life and having success in the Christian life is learning to wait on God. We don't run ahead of Him, and we don't lag behind Him. But we let Him lead us. Learning to wait means to look to Him and trust in Him and hope in Him.

Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, translated this statement as, "Be silent to God. Let Him hold thee and mold thee." Let Him hold you and mold you.

Corry Ten Boom once said, "Don't wrestle with God; nestle with God." I like that. So often we are resisting Him and we're fighting Him, instead of just letting Him hold us, mold us and make us into what He wants us to be.

So don't take vengeance into your own hands. Don't get even. Don't get angry. Just rest in the Lord and wait on the Lord. God has a perfect time for everything in your life. None of us like to be driving a car with a back-seat driver in the car. That is one of the things that can make you angry. "Look out!!" I would almost rather get in an accident than have someone scare me to death and I'd die of a heart attack. I thought there was a giant truck coming at me, and I didn't see it! "There's a squirrel in a tree over there!" "Really."

The other day we were in Hawaii, and my 28-year-old son was riding shotgun with me. I remember when he was four, when he rode with me, he couldn't even see out of the car. He didn't know where we were going. He didn't know how to get there. He just enjoyed being with Dad. His little legs couldn't even touch the floor of the car, and he couldn't see over the dashboard. But he's with his Dad! He never said, "Look out, Dad!" He never said, "Dad, I'm really concerned; do you know where we're going? Do you know the way?" He would just say, "Hey, this is awesome! I'm cruisin' with my Dad!"

But not now when he's older. On this trip my son was telling me how to drive, and he was freakin' out. It was like, "Dude, calm down!" He thinks Dad doesn't see or know how to drive or know where reverse is. He was a back-seat driver.

We do that with God. "Lord, look out! Look out! Lord, don't You see that?! Lord, don't You think You should slow down right now? Lord, You should really turn left—right here!!" Lighten up. He's got the wheel. He's in control. Just let Him drive. Just rest in Him. Just enjoy your time with the Lord. He knows where to turn, when to stop. He knows all the dangers. Let Him take the wheel; let Him guide and direct and lead your life.

I think you could summarize Psalm 37 with the words of the prophet Isaiah in chapter 40, verse 31: "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Isn't that great? When the prophet Isaiah said that they "shall renew their strength," it means an exchange. It's like taking in a dead battery. You don't want it recharged; you want a new battery. When a battery goes bad in your car, you have to get a new battery; you can't keep recharging it, because it will no longer hold a charge. So what this means is when you wait on the Lord, He gives you a brand-new heart, brand-new strength. He gives you eagle's wings, so you mount up as eagles and run and not grow weary and walk and don't faint.

So the steps you need to do are number one, trust in the Lord; number two, delight in the Lord; number three, commit your way unto the Lord; and number four, rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.

Let's pray.