

Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

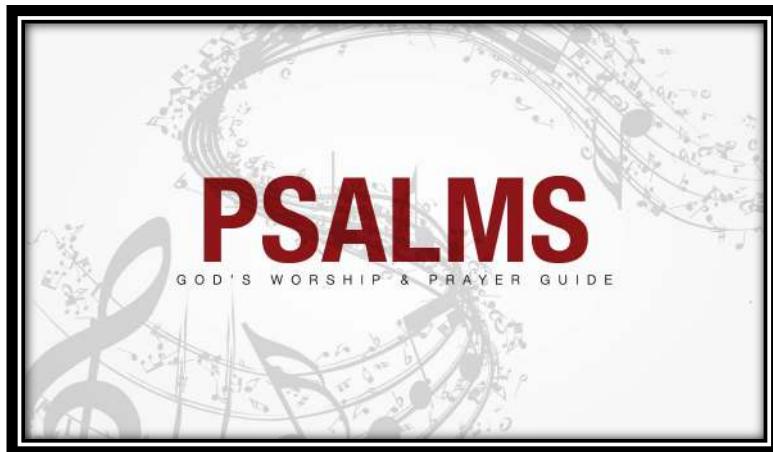
The Path Of Praise

Psalm 37:1-20

Written By

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Sadly, the presidential debates this past week were far from presidential. Anger replaced argument. Emotion replaced substance. Evasion replaced answers. Personal disrespect replaced respect. Indecency replaced decency. The whole event really served as an on stage, quite public picture of what is going on in the public at large. Darkness fights against light, error masquerading as truth seeks to dethrone truth, power and control over the masses endeavors to limit the God-given freedoms built into the Constitution. For the most part, it appears that the advancement of all forms of darkness, be it moral, spiritual, or geo-political, is, well, almost unstoppable and unaccountable for its actions. We all sense its advancement. We all saw its mask pulled off in the debates. We all understand that regardless of which candidate wins the election there will be a personal and public price to pay as darkness is never satisfied.

For Christians, this daily debacle and disintegration leads to one logical, burning question:

How Are Saints Supposed To Live In Tumultuous, Testy Times?

Looking back over the ups and downs of his military, political, and personal life, David, now an older man, shares his sagacious, much needed wisdom and insights in Psalm 37. To make sure believers dealing with the godless, power-hungry barbarians of their day understood how to live effective, impactful lives, David ingeniously wrote this psalm/song in an acrostic format. An acrostic was a mnemonic device designed to help a person memorize the content in question.

How did this operate? From the first verse to the last, all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet were used in consecutive order. This way a “student” could mentally and verbally navigate through the verses. Interesting. God obviously wants us to understand this passage so we can know how to live in difficult days. I memorized it in 1979 for extra credit in an Old Testament class I took while in college. That endeavor certainly changed my life and challenged me to live differently as the culture, even back then, willfully drifted from truth, decency, and respect. I, therefore, submit it to you for your memorization. You will be glad you did for God will use it to make you a mighty tool in His hand in these tumultuous times.

Throughout these forty verses we will encounter a definite tension, really, a battle between truth and error and light and darkness. The believer who is wondering how to function in the conflagration is given much wisdom on how to live, and that wisdom is also in a state of tension between “what is” and “what will be,” spiritually and eschatologically speaking. For our purposes, I suggest we re-shape this motif by calling it “the long view of life” versus “the short view of life.” The latter view, theologically speaking, should directly impact the former view. Let’s consider them in the order David presented them.

The Long & Short View: Don’t Get Uptight About That Which Is Temporary (Psalm 37:1-2).

With two negative commands, David gets our attention in an area we all struggle with in decadent, devious days:

¹ A Psalm of David. Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.

“Do not fret” is better translated by the NAB with “Do not be provoked.” The Hebrew word here, *charah* (חרה) speaks of getting literally hot. From this nuance it was an easy etymological jump to using it to denote getting angry and upset, or as we would say, “Hot under the collar.”

Who is not supposed to set us off as we seek to follow hard after God? Evildoers. Lexically, this word, *ra’ah* (רעא), means to act in a way totally displeasing to God and God’s ways. In Isaiah 59:15 it is used of those who do not tell the truth, as a case in point. In Isaiah 1:4 it describes the sinful sickness of Israel insofar as they have completely abandoned the LORD and His teachings, while in Hosea 6:8 its synonym, *aven* (עָוֶן), is wedded to the concept of murder. According to David, when you see people like this promote and flaunt their evil with total abandon and almost no accountability you should, of course, be morally disturbed by it (Eph. 4:25ff); however, it should not set you off so you lose control and are angrily consumed by the perpetual flourishing of godlessness. Translated into our vernacular: No shouting at the TV. No flaming statements on Facebook. No bombs released on Twitter. So important is it for maturing believer to not lose their cool in the face of advancing evil David gives us the command, not a suggestion, two more times in this passage, viz., vv. 7 and 8). Instructive, would you not agree? You can put your fist down now and loosen your collar.

Stop and analyze this command for a second. Why do evildoers anger you, why do they set you off so you can’t function and so your family doesn’t know what to do with you?

- They seem to always get away with their evil.

- The godly, or, at least, the moral among us always get “caught” in some technicality.
- They outnumber you, hence they appear to have great power.
- They get more airtime because the media supports them.
- They play the victim when they are the victimizer.
- They shrewdly silence truth-speakers, while no one really ever silences them, despite what they say, teach, or believe.
- They won’t reason toward truth but will only ever cling radically to their evil.
- They are mean-spirited and they get away with it.

I’m sure we could add more to the list, and you probably already have when I posed the question.

If you can relate to any of this, I think you know now what you are supposed to do as a Christian. You are supposed to stop getting all explosive about advancement of evil. Yes, it can, and should bother you, as it did any prophet of God in the Old Testament, and as it did the Lord as He wept over godless, hostile Jews in Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37); however, its pervasive presence should not send you over the emotional edge, causing you to emotionally explode all over the place. If that is the case, then a little confession followed by an appeal for the Spirit’s help is quite in order.

A logical follow-up command, not a suggestion, follows this.

¹ A Psalm of David. Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.

“Iniquity” comes from the Hebrew, *av’lah* (עֲוָלָה), which lexically has three connotations:

עֲוָלָה S5766, 5932 TWOT1580a, 1580b GK6406, 6594 n.f. Jb 11:14 (? m. Mal 2:6 Ko. 2, 453, § 345 d Ez 28:15 [עֲוָלָתָה; but עַ only here Ez, error for עֲוָלָה] questioned by SS, v. Albrecht xvi (1896), 117) injustice, unrighteousness, wrong; — עֲוָלָה ψ 37:1 + 24 times, + i. Is 61:8 (read prob. עֲוָלָתָה); ψ 125:3; 92:16 (Qr) + 2 times; עֲוָלָה v 16 (Kt) Jb 5:16; pl. עֲוָלוֹת ψ 58:3; 64:7; — 1. violent deeds of injustice [*can you say, Antifa?*], בְּנֵי עֲוָלָה 2 S 3:34; 7:10 – 1 Ch 17:9; cf. בְּנֵי עֲוָלָה ψ 89:23, read Now); אִישׁ עֲוָלָה Ho 10:9 (read Now); פָּעֵל עַ שְׁלָחֶב עֲוָלָה ψ 37:1 Zp 3:5, 13; ψ 58:3; 119:3; Jb 36:23; ψ 125:3. 2. injustice of speech [*can you say hate speech rules on a university campus?*]: Is 59:3; Jb 6:30; בְּלָשׁוֹנִי עַ תְּהִגָּה Jb 13:7; 27:4; Is 59:3; Jb 6:30; מִצְאָה בְּשֻׁפְטֵינוּ עַ קְפַזְתָּה Mal 2:6; — 3. injustice, in general [*can you the injustice of choosing people for positions simply based on race and not upon their merit ... regardless of who they are or what they have accomplished through their sacrifices and labors?*], ψ 64:7; Jb 6:29; 11:14; 15:16; 22:23; 24:20, + 36:33 (for MT according to G Di Bu Du al.), Ez 28:15 Pr 22:8; Ho 10:13; of God, ψ 92:16; אֵין עַם יְהִי בָּזֶן 2 Ch 19:7.1

¹ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 732.

Of course, who doesn't see any one of these facets of iniquity played out on a daily basis in our culture? Iniquity of this variety is pervasive. When a "peaceful demonstrator" blows out the window of a top-end sun glasses shop to wantonly steal as much as he/she can, this is iniquity. When a person wastes no time wasting you with vile, venomous words to deface, sideline, and silence you because you are moral and logical, this is inequity. It runs through our godless culture like an unchecked plague.

Here David commands us not to be envious of those who are skilled at living lives full of iniquity. Why? Why would he say this? Probably, because he knows, firsthand, the limitations and temptations of our mortal, sinful frames.

- We are tempted to envy those who get away with things.
- We are tempted to envy those who push parameters and get famous because of it.
- We are tempted to envy those who are financially prosperous even though their lives are built on iniquity.
- We are tempted to envy those wicked people whom people en masse tend to look up to.
- We are tempted to envy those who cleverly use their skills in iniquity to make them upwardly mobile careerwise.

And so on and so forth. Temptation comes with our fleshly natures, but as saints we should never envy those who live contrary to God, no matter what they achieve in life, who they know and who knows them, nor how far they go in life.

Why should we not get outwardly angry or be envious of those who live large where evil is concerned? David's answer is one we will encounter many times throughout this passage. The prepositional phrase gives us the reason we need to cognitively understand and implement:

² For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

David taps into two familiar similes to remind us of the utter transitory nature of godless people, a divine feature they typically forget in their blind, insatiable quest to go for all the hedonistic gusto in the here and now. As a former landscaper, and a lover of all things related to gardening, the king is speaking my language and he has my attention. I hope he has yours as well.

For one, David says, the godless will "soon be cut down like the grass." The green grasses on the hillsides in the spring in Israel is here today but gone tomorrow. Just let the rain cease, and the sun move into its summer mode, and the grass is cut down. I'm sure cattle and goats aided in this mowing action too. How practically instructive. Just as grass in all of its glory cannot resist the blade of the mower, so the godless will not be able to resist the judgment of God when it comes either in this life . . . and most certainly in the next. For another, David reminds us in our most frustrating moments on this earthly pilgrimage that the godless will "wither as the green herb." Pick an herb: mint, parsley, dill, sage, rosemary, or oregano. Like grass, it is here one day and gone the next. Both grass and herbs were never designed to be eternal, and neither are the godless and their loose, unchecked lifestyles. They will advance and spread their wickedness, as Paul prophesies in his second letter to the Thessalonian believers (2 Thess. 2:1-9), and as Daniel and John remind us of the advancement of the kingdom of the Anti-Christ during the tribulation (Dan.

7:21-27; Rev. 7; 12-13); however, they are always temporary while saints are always eternal. More on that as we unpack the passage.

Scripture is quite clear that the day of the godless will, in fact, terminate with the day of God, or the Day of the Lord.

²⁷ For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works (Matt. 16).

⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God (1 Cor. 4).

⁷ and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,¹⁰ when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (2 Thess. 1).

They who constantly harangue saints for not living up to whatever their shifting, godless standards are, they who arrogantly push evil on the rest of us with the zeal of a missionary, they who call evil good and good evil are headed for the time of divine reckoning and there is nothing they can do, save to worship Christ, to stop it. They might have their version of fun in the sun now, but it will be met with eternal fire . . . soon, as David says. This is the main motivation we should not be all uptight, angry, and envious of their advancements. In due time they will dry up and blow away and be forgotten, while saints, on the other hand, will shine like stars for all eternity in God's presence.

So, what about it? Are you uptight/angry and/or envious about that which is transitory and about the seemingly unchecked advancement of evil? If so, you need to give those emotions to God and ask for mature ones to help you live as His light in the darkness. The last thing unbelievers need is a combative, angry, volatile, verbally unpredictable Christian coming at them. No. They need someone who knows God and walks humbly with Him and know how to represent Him with immorality is on a winning streak.

As a side note, if you are one of those in the majority (Matt. 7:13-14) who lives for evil and sin, then I'm here today to challenge you to trade your temporal pleasure for eternal gain by coming to Christ in repentant faith. Paul is spot on in this regard:

¹ We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6).

Now is the time to come to God. What's holding you back? I'm sure in eternity it will not be worth it. He, on the other hand, is always worth a step of faith.

Turning from the negative to the positive, David gives a rapid fire number of commands designed to teach us how to live in combative, carnal days.

The Long & Short View: Do Live Sold Out To God (Psalm 37:3-7a)

First, we'll read the King's words and then circle back to quickly and methodically dissect them. I have highlighted the commands for your quick identification and consideration:

- 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; . . . (Ps. 37).

The first command is trust. The Hebrew for "trust" means to be "full of confidence." Ever jumped out of a perfectly good aircraft? Many of you have with the military. Did you pack your chute? The answer is, I'm assuming, is "no." So you jumped out of a plan with a chute attached to your back you did not assemble. You did this because you had absolute trust (confidence) in the man or woman who did their job as trained.

It is the same with Yahweh, the eternal, all-powerful God but on a whole other level. He who can be trusted to keep the sun shining and the planets spinning perfectly in their respective places for His lofty purposes, can be trusted in all aspects of our lives while we live in the Devil's domain (Eph. 2:1-3). When you trust God, you . . .

- Believe that what He says about life and living is true.
- Believe what He says is a wise and a foolish life path is viable.
- Believe what He says about eschatological judgment is a fact.
- Believe what He says about His provision for you as you live for Him isn't an illusion.

No, when you trust God, you have full confidence that what He says is true no matter what your culture says. Do you? Do you have full confidence in God, especially in these dark days? Where in your life do you need to trust Him more?

- Lord, help me trust you even though it looks like the nation is self-imploding around me.
- Lord, help me trust you even though the Devil has done a number on my marriage.
- Lord, help me trust you to help me gain a much needed victory over an addiction which plagues me.
- Lord, help me trust you even though the world and my work has ganged up on me and it feels like I'm always playing defense.

If you lack trust in God, right now is as good a time as any to say, “Lord, I draw the line in the sand today and say I am going to trust you no matter what, and I know you’ll bless me because of this.

Logically, when you trust God, all the other commands follow suit. The second command is to perform good works. Doing good means since I trust God in tough time I will have no problem performing good works. Again, living a life of good deeds, which is sadly lacking in our day and is even mocked (as we see with how the press comes after Amy Barrett and her two adopted children from Haiti), is not a suggestion but a command from God. Even though the godless barbarians have breached the gate, as it were, in so many areas of our culture (universities, corporate companies, the military, churches, etc.), believers are summoned to step up and be known for doing good deeds. Why? For one, this was the life of Christ and we are to emulate Him, and for another, good deeds become a good witness for God, as Jesus teaches:

¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt. 5).

Enter T25P, also known as The Twenty-fifth Project, led by our very own Jay Harriot, as well as many other Christian servants. Their goal? Provide for the needs of the poor living in a tent city in Woodbridge.



Back in June, Jay related an amazing story to me. Shaq, a tent dweller, had spent seven years in jail. When released, he wound up in the woods. When his tent burned down, Christians secured him a new one. When he committed another crime and wound up in jail in Chatham, VA, one of our men drove down to visit him once a month for a year. After his release, he dropped off the scope, but then this summer he re-surfaced after being gone for two years. He told Jay how he had finished a college degree and was now pursuing a Masters of Divinity so he could be an educated, powerful voice for the God who saved him. Amazing. Awesome. Don’t tell me good deeds are not powerful in godless days.

What good deeds will you do this day, this week, this month, this year? When bad deeds prevail, good deeds are all the more necessary. No wonder God commands them from us.

Third, we are commanded to “dwell in the land.” For an Israelites this meant that even though the culture headed south (2 Kings 17), they were not to turn tail and leave the land. They were, on the other hand to stay and spiritually fight. Similarly, we are not to run for cover, duck and hide, or leave our posts where God has providentially placed us. I have received many calls over the years from saints who want to do that very thing because of opposition and godless pressure at work. My counsel is always the same: God seems to have placed you where you are for such a time as this, so don’t leave unless you have good reason. Trust Him and He will bless you as He did countless brave saints before you.

Fourth, “feed on His faithfulness,” which merely means to focus on how faithful God is so you won’t lose faith in faithless times. How do you do this? Read the Word daily to be reminded.

Mark well when you see His faithfulness and then stop and thank Him for it. Additionally, pay attention to His faithfulness to you each day and thank Him.

Not long ago, Liz and I needed to change some things with her step-father's Social Security. We asked her brother, who has Power of Attorney, to contact the Social Security Administration in Escondido, CA, so he did. No one answered. So he drove there because time was of the financial essence. The building was closed because of COVID, and there was just one lone car in the massive parking lot. So what did Mark do? He called the building one more time. This time, someone picked up (absolutely jaw dropping): "This is the Social Security Administration. Can I help you?" Hugh? What? The lone car in the parking lot *just happened* to belong to the LONE worker who just happened to temporarily be in the building that day, and who *just happened* to pick up this ONE phone call. Within a few minutes she solved our family issue. Don't tell me there is not a God who is faithful to His people, and since He is faithful in these normal things of life, He will be faithful when you have to stand up for Him against the godless hoard.

So, go ahead. Have a time today where you and your family and/or friends feed on God's faithfulness. The exercise will put wind in your sails as you sail in to potentially troubled waters.

Fifth, "delight yourself also in the LORD," simply means to just be joyous about knowing and walking with Him. Be joyous when you sit down with Him for a conversation about things. Be joyous because He is there with you any time. Be joyous that He is joyous despite what's going on around you. Be joyous because He has forgiven you and He will give you wise for living. In tough, trying times like ours there are plenty enough reasons to be depressed and downcast. Been there. Done that. Counter that by focusing on the joy of the faith in the living God who lives and walks with you down life's path. Are you delighting in God? Really? Or are you angry at Him?

Sixth, "commit your way to the LORD." To commit in Hebrew literally speaks of rolling a stone. You know the drill. Once you get a stone on a hillside rolling, gravity kicks in and it takes off. So it is with following hard after God in hard times. You commit yourself to Him wholeheartedly: your mind is His, your talents are His, your body belongs to Him, your gifts and abilities are given to you by Him, your education and connections are His, and your financials are most assuredly on loan from him to be used for Him. So to commit to Him in tough times is to say, "Lord, while others may desert you, I will stand fast with all I've got. Show me what you want me to do and I will do it."

Seventh, "trust also in Him." We've already talked about this in verse 3. Trust is merely saying, "Lord, I don't know what is going on around me, I don't know why this is all happening to me, and I don't know the outcome, but this one thing I do know. You love me, you are with me, and you will go before me making the crooked path straight." Are you really trusting Him in these dark days, or are you stocking up beyond measure so you can weather a potential societal meltdown come November 3rd? Note, if you trust God, David says He will bring it, which is what you desire, to pass. He will cause your rightness in a given godless situation to shine like the sun, and you will live to see justice in the situation.

A friend of mine, a Christian, recently told me how a job she was the logical choice for based on experience and education, was given to someone less qualified. The majority of the godless board members passed on her for political reasons and political points. She was sad to say the least. But I encouraged her to trust in God's perfect and providential leadership, and to rest in the fact that He will give her the desires of her heart even though the culture may be stacked, at times, against her.

Eighth, “rest in the LORD.” To many of our lives are lived with no margin, no wiggle room, and no free time. Who has not gone to work at the Pentagon in the dark, only to leave that windowless building to head out to your bus in the dark at the end of a very lone, complex, and demanding day. Listen up, in order to make it in evil times, which can be very taxing upon a person’s psyche and spiritual person, times of quiet with God are a must. MacDonald tells an interesting story along these lines in his book *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion*,

In the deep jungles of Africa, a traveler was making a long trek. Coolies had been engaged from a tribe to carry the loads. The first day they marched rapidly and went far. The traveler had high hopes of a speedy journey. But the second morning these jungle tribesmen refused to move. For some strange reason they just sat and rested. On inquiry as to the reason for this strange behavior, the traveler was informed that they had gone too fast the first day, and that *they were now waiting for their souls to catch up with their bodies* [emphasis in original].²

Hopefully you, like the tribesmen, have now had an “ah ha” moment. Dealing with the Devil and his cohorts will drain you dry like a battery. That’s why you need to carve out some time in your jungle for you and God to have some quality time together. Do this and you will find your spiritual batteries will be full of new life and vigor, and your outlook will improve as well. So, what are you waiting for. It’s time to rest.

Ninth, “wait patiently for Him.” Great. Patience would come last. Years ago it Charles Spurgeon said regarding his comments on this verse in a sermon, “Time is nothing to him; let it be nothing to thee. God is worth waiting for. He never is before his time, he never is too late. In a story we wait for the end to clear up the plot; we ought not to prejudge the great drama of life, but stay till the closing scene, and see to what a finis the whole arrives.”³ Wise counsel from a godly man who lives effectively in the godless days of the 1800s of England.

So,

- Are you being cast in a negative light because of your conservative political views as a politician?
- Are you in a secular environment where you are afraid to say anything about the evil you see around you lest you lose your job?
- Are you taking heat because you finally engaged the family at a gathering about where you see the country going?
- Are you being cast as a perpetrator and a victimizer just because you are in law enforcement?
- Is the swamp coming after you because you have no desire to play but its rude, ruthless rules?
- Are you sitting under a couple of professors who want to destroy your Christian faith?

² Gordon MacDonald, *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1986), 26.

³ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-87* (Lynchburg: The Old Time Gospel Hour), 172.

I do not know what your complex situation is, but you do. What I do know is what you, as a Christian should do: Pray for patience to wait and see what wondrous thing God will eventually do because He loves you.

