

WISDOM OVER WORRY

PSALM 37:23-40

Main point: Because of the Lord's power and promise, those who trust Him can live a life of wisdom over worry.

INTRODUCTION:

How do you win the battle over worry? Psalm 37 is a psalm about *security for those who trust God* and the *insecurity* of those who do not. Composed by David in the evening of his life, this psalm is designed to drop wisdom into the reader's mind and heart so that they might *calm down and trust the Lord*. David's counsel is like a ray of sunshine on a cloudy day, or a cup of cold water in a weary land. In the first 11 verses, the wise old king directs us to...

- Contain your anger. (vv.1-2)
- Control your walk. (v.3)
- Condition your will. (v.4)
- Commit your way. (vv.5-6)

By trusting in the Lord and doing good (being constructive), we are to find our happiness in the Lord. By resting securely in Him and waiting patiently for His timing, a better choice is made. The reason we don't need to stress is because *when we look ahead or take the long view*, we understand that...

- The wicked plot but soon perish. (vv.12-13)
- They fortify but soon fall. (vv.14-15)
- They prosper but soon wither. (vv.16-17)
- They flourish but soon vanish. (vv.18-20)
- They borrow but soon lose. (vv.21-22)

Now in this closing section, David speaks with confidence as he gives us some sage advice for overcoming anxiety. Generally, we find ourselves becoming worried about three things: *our ability*, *our security*, and *our posterity*—i.e., our family and kids. Here David addresses all three: *our steps or ability* is dealt with in verses 23-24, *our security* in verses 25-34, and *our posterity* in verses 35-40. There were three truths that elevated David's confidence concerning the righteous, and it may be your confidence today.

EXPOSITION:

A. DAVID'S CONFIDENCE (vv.23-34)

1. Your steps are under God's providence. (vv.23-24)

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.

The man whose steps are established by the Lord is not the wicked man, but the righteous man. "**The steps of a man**" is a metaphor for his *course in life*. David says his course, or the way he goes, is "**established**" by the Lord. The word "**established**" means *to stand erect, to set up, to adjust, fit, or*

direct. The idea here is that all that pertains to a saved man's life is *directed, ordered, fitted, and arranged by the Lord*. In other words, his life is under the divine guidance and control of God.

Now this by no means suggests that we are not responsible for our actions. "*There is a way which seems right to a man [even a Christian], but its end is the way of death*" (Prov.14:12). But choices are overruled by God alone, as they relate to our salvation, according to His own sovereign will. The reason God directs your life and mine is because, "**He delights in his way,**" that is, the saved or the righteous are the objects of God's divine favor.

Now, this does not mean that our lives will be *trouble-free*. Verse 24 doesn't say "*if*" he falls, but "**when**" he falls. The word "**fall**" here does not mean *when he falls into sin*, but when he falls into misfortune, disappointment, reverses, and even calamities. The language here encourages you and I to *preprogram our mind to experience hardship in life*. Sometimes there will be disappointments of your own making. At other times people will disappoint you. Every attempt you make to honor God and to live an upright life will not be successful. David's confidence remains because God is in control over the course of our lives.

The image conveyed is that of a man walking along on a visit, and he trips, stumbles, and struggles to catch his balance and wham!—he falls flat on his face! A couple of months ago, I was out and about and saw an elderly lady stumble, and she was moving so slowly that I thought she would catch her balance. But she didn't, and this poor woman fell right on her face. By the time I opened the door to run to her, she was already getting up. O, how relieved I was! This happens to the righteous in life. We are not always successful on the journey, and sometimes our way is met with disappointment, and we fall! But David says, as one who trusts in the Lord, you can be assured of the Lord's sustaining grace.

- **Psalm 145:14**—The LORD sustains all who fall
And raises up all who are bowed down.
- **Proverbs 24:16**—For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again,
But the wicked stumble in *time of calamity*.
- **Micah 7:8**—Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy.
Though I fall I will rise;
Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me.

Your steps are under God's control. Now sometimes when we fall, it feels as we are being thrown down. The word for "**hurled**" here is the same word that is used when God hurled Israel into captivity for their disobedience (Is.22:17). It is the same word that was used to describe how the Lord "*hurled a great wind on the sea*" to get Jonah's attention (Jon.1:4), and of the sailors who "*threw*" Jonah overboard (Jon.1:15).

The point is that whether it is in discipline for disobedience or simply because of missteps or a lack of wisdom of your own, God will not allow the righteous to be "**hurled headlong,**" meaning, the believer will not be thrown down or cast away forever. Your disappointment and hardship will only be temporary. It will not flatten you or me completely so that we don't rise again. Why? Because "***the LORD is the One who holds his hand.***"

The reason we bounce back and recover is through no power of our own, but when we are brought low by *heartache* and *disappointment* and *setbacks*, we find, as it were, an invisible hand upholding us, sustaining us, and carrying us through! Are there any witnesses out there who can say, "Amen" to that?

In his commentary on this psalm, Harry Ironside tells a story about George Mueller, the founder of the great faith orphanages in England in the last century. Mueller was a man of great prayer and faith. He spent a lifetime placing the needs of his orphanages before God and saw many wonderful answers to his prayers. Someone once picked up Mueller's Bible and was thumbing through it, and when he came to Psalm 37:23, he saw next to the words "*The steps of a man*" Mueller had written in the margin, "*...and the stops,*" so that it read, "*The steps and the stops of a man are established by the Lord.*" Mueller had been meditating on this verse and recognized that God was not only in charge of his forward motion, but also the times of enforced inactivity.

Oh, how that truth burst upon my heart and mind as I thought of this time of enforced inactivity under the sovereign providence of God! Dear friends, what this means for us is that God has a wonderful design in this time for us. He orders our steps and our stops. Your forward movement and your pauses and wait times. Be encouraged. Look for the smile of God in your situation. Look with expectancy at what the Lord will do in and through you. Your steps are under the control of God.

2. **Your needs are guaranteed by God's provision. (vv.25-26)**

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.

As I prepared this message, a text came across my phone from a group of fellow pastors all across the world. One pastor in a foreign country was struggling with the needed resources to care for his family. He was not to the point of begging, but his need was urgent, and the other pastors were seeking to rally support. It caused me to ask,

- Is it possible to say that we have never seen the righteous without life's necessities?

Spurgeon was troubled by this verse because he had seen the children of the righteous begging for help. He concluded that this was *David's testimony* but *not his own*. He had seen it. So what does David mean by this verse? Is he speaking *categorically, universally, and unequivocally*? Are there some exceptions to this rule?

When you are **young**, there is a sense of *idealism* that one possesses. Opinions are strong. Energy is ripe. Adventure awaits. Young people can smell "bunk" a mile away, but what they lack is *the wisdom of experience*. David had gone through that time of youth, and through middle age years where the mature strength of manhood, with its struggles with identity and security are felt. Now he is in the fourth quarter of life—**he is old**. The memory of certain *joys* and *hopes* are gone. Friends and family members have passed away. The next chapter of life is in another world. The shores of eternity touch his toes as he looks out on that boundless ocean of eternity future. As an old man, he can *look back* with a *calm, sober reflection* of what *works* and *what does not*. He tells us that in all his life, he has never seen the truths that he has given to us *contradicted*. Is David naïve in his thinking?

- What about the Christian woman who struggles to feed her kids, David?
- What about the Christian man who loses his job and his health, and now he has hit rock bottom, David?
- What about the pastor or missionary who serves the Lord in the Gospel enterprise, but he does not have enough to get medical aid for his family, David?

The key word in verse 25 is the word "**forsaken**"—"...yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken." It means *wholly, finally, and utterly*. Words are understood by their connections, and if we consider the whole of this context, then it is safe to conclude that David does not mean *that the righteous never have needs or never suffer want or poverty*. We know this is not the case.

- Jacob suffered want and sent his boys to Egypt in famine.
- Elimelech and Naomi suffered want and moved to Moab to sustain their life.
- Sometimes God hurls His people into poverty and suffering because of their disobedience.

But **forsaken**...so that we have not a friend? No, for Jesus is a Friend of sinners and a Friend that sticks closer than a brother.

Forsaken...so that we have no family? No, for Jesus said, "*everyone who has left houses or brothers or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much (in this life) and will inherit eternal life*" (Matt.19:29).

You say, but "my mother and my father have forsaken me!" But Psalm 27:10 says the Lord has taken you up and adopted you into His family!

Looking back over the long course of his life, David is confident with his observation. He stands to testify that being right with God does not make you poor in and of itself, but it makes you *industrious and wise*. Being right with God may not mean you are able to give your kids the best education, but you do teach them the value of *hard work, respect, and honesty so that they are not begging bread, because they are willing to work*.

Being saved saves a man from many of the wrong choices in life that result in poverty. And if by providence, misfortune comes upon us through no fault of our own, God has promised that He "*will never leave us or forsake us*" (Heb.13:5).

Application: What does this mean for us? Perhaps for the saint struggling with worry about your needs right now, you need to *bow your head and close your eyes* and speak to your own heart and say,

You don't have to worry and don't you be afraid
 Joy comes in the morning, troubles they don't last always
 For there's a friend named Jesus who will wipe your tears away
 And if your heart is broken, just lift your hands and say
 Oh, I know that I can make it
 I know that I can stand

No matter what may come my way
Jesus, my life, my life is in your hands.¹

Perhaps, you are forced into a situation through no making of your own—like Hagar in Genesis. Caught in the middle of two frustrated believers, she finds herself being treated harshly and cast out of Abraham’s house. But the Lord did not forget about her. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water, directed her to go back and submit to Sarai’s authority, and said He would multiply her descendants. Then she said,

- **Genesis 16:13**—Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees”; for she said, “Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?”

God sees you too. And if your trust is in Him, then your steps are under His control, and your needs are guaranteed by His hand.

- **Philippians 4:19**—And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

We win the battle over worry by knowing that our steps are under God’s control, our needs are guaranteed by His hand, and finally...

3. Your faith is marked by God’s preservation. (vv.27-34)

In this closing section, David adds color to some of the previous advice that he has given, but shows us now *how faith and works* mark the righteous and are affirmed by God’s care.

What is the evidence of the life of the righteous? They live *a life of faith*.

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.
The righteous will inherit the land
And dwell in it forever.

How does faith mark the life of the righteous? It is seen in *their words*.

³⁰ The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom,
And his tongue speaks justice.

Why is this? Verse 31 answers, because *the law of God is in his heart*.

³¹ The law of his God is in his heart;
His steps do not slip.

That is, because the saved man *lives his life according to God’s will found in His Word*, he is saved from a life of unnecessary heartache, shame, and reversals. And because God’s Word is a lamp to his

¹ Kirk Franklin, “My Life Is in Your Hands”

feet and a light unto his path (*Ps.119:105*), God *preserves* (*v.28*), God *instructs* (*vv.30-31*), God *delivers* (*vv.32-33*), and in due time, God will *exalt* them.

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.

This is the promise given to every man, woman, boy, or girl who trusts the Lord—God will exalt you in due time. Jesus said in,

- **Luke 18:14**—for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”
- **James 4:6**— But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”
- **1 Peter 5:5-10**—You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.
⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,
⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. ⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, [*know your priorities*] be on the alert [*have your eyes open*]. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [*remember your enemy*] ⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

Where is your confidence today? Don't place it in the government, or even in your own abilities. Trust in the Lord. His providence rules over all. His provision will provide all you need. His preservation of your faith is a mark of grace.

B. DAVID'S CONCLUSION (vv.35-40)

One last time, David contrasts *the wicked* and *the righteous*; and he concludes, here is the great difference (*vv.35-38*), and the great deliverance (*vv.39-40*) between the two. The choice is yours.

1. The great difference (vv.35-38)

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.

Imagine a leafy green tree, perhaps a bougainvillea with pretty flowers all over it. In verse 20, David said they *appear to flourish but soon vanish*. Their success is only *temporary*; it doesn't last long. Here he seems to convey the same metaphor and implies when a tree is growing so great in its native soil, it is hard to think of such a great tree being suddenly chopped down—but that's the way it happens!

Their security seemed assured, but “**lo, he was no more.**” So, what is the difference?

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.

If you trust in the Lord, *contain your anger, control your walk, condition your will, and commit your way to God* by delighting in the Lord, you will find that the Lord *helps, delivers, sustains, and preserves* you and yours.

But you say, Pastor, I've tried to be meek and thought I had been "meeked" like a horse and brought up under His authority, but...it seems that my sinful nature gets the best of me! How can I experience the wisdom of God and live a life of trust in the Lord? Listen closely to David's closing words.

2. The great deliverance (vv.39-40)

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.

Look at verbs—salvation, helps, delivers, saves. Who is the source of all these mighty actions? It is the Lord. He is our *strength!* Salvation is *FROM* Him, *BY* Him, and *OF* Him, alone! (*Rom.11:29*).

There is one thing you must do. **Take refuge in Him.** But how? Jesus said,

- **Matthew 11:28-29**—Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

Only Jesus gives *a command that pushes us* and *an invitation that draws us*.

Only Jesus has *the royal authority* and *the divine sovereignty* to command us to approach Him.

Only Jesus calls us to salvation, and if you listen to Him carefully, His words ring with a note of urgency!

The hour is late, His coming is soon—"Hither to me now," He says. Life and sin trap us, and with each passing day, you sink down—and unless He calls you, you will go down! The invitation is for *everyone*. The invitation is for those *burdened by sin*. The invitation is to *learn from Jesus*. He does not call you to an *institution*, an *organization*, a *ceremony*, or a *ritual*. He calls you to *Himself*. He invites you to make Him *the continued subject of your learning*. The invitation offers rest for people tired of trying to overcome sin on their own.

Are you bent over with the dead weight of impossible expectations and sin?

Are you exhausted from the rat race of life?

Are you enslaved by guilt? Only Jesus can set your enslaved will free!

CONCLUSION:

Self-satisfaction and **self-absorption** are harnesses that *exhaust our lives*. It is like trying to live your life on a hang-glider, which initially gives you the feeling of floating above it all, but sooner or later, the wind will shift, and you have no breaks, no fuel, no engine, and no power to aid you. *Jesus offers a better way.*

It is simple, but not easy. Lower yourself down and place your neck under His yoke. It will feel strange at first, but just look right beside you. There you will see the heart of One who is so *gentle yet strong, lowly yet exalted, human yet divine*. But what will ultimately lift that burden from your heart is to recognize that this gentle, pure, and holy Savior died on a cross as a substitute for your sins (*1 Pet.3:18*).

The powers of darkness and the grave could not hold Him down—He conquered the grave and defeated the devil! He is mighty to save! Mighty to deliver! Mighty to keep! Mighty to transform all who take and trust Him (*Rom.10:9-10*). Will you take refuge in Him by faith now? Mahalia Jackson put it best when she sang,

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come! I come

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt
Fighting and fears within without
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Just as I am, and waiting not
to rid my soul of one dark blot
to Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind
Sight, riches, healing of the mind
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve
Because Thy promise I believe
O Lamb of God, I come, I come
Because Thy promise I believe
O Lamb of God, I come, I come²

² Charlotte Elliott, *Just As I Am*

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