

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

PSALM 37:7-22

Main point: Taking God's long view influences our choices and temptation to worry in the short term.

INTRODUCTION:

It is one of the most common yet unreported health conditions today. More than 3 million cases are recorded each year. Treatment can help, but this condition can't be cured. The condition is often inherited and usually self-diagnosable. The condition is called *color-deficiency*, or *color blindness*.

Color. It affects every part of our lives. Color is emotional, experiential, and tactical. It gives art life. It entices us to eat certain foods and buy certain jewelry, and sometimes it literally defines things. A black dog. A blue sky. Green grass. We also use color to interpret information such as signs and lights. It is deeply ingrained in our basic perception of the world. When the ability to see color is *deficient*, as in the case of color blindness, there is a dulling of what is seen.

Many in the church today suffer from "spiritual color-blindness." By this, I don't mean an inability to see ethnicity, but an inability to discern *spiritual conditions* and see *future outcomes*. You might call it *spiritual short-sightedness*. In color blindness, the inability to distinguish between *reds, greens, and blues* is of very little consequence. But spiritual short-sightedness is downright *dangerous*. Why? Because losing sight of the long view results in making wrong choices in the short term. In this psalm, David offers us a pair of glasses with a longer vision to see the world through God's eyes.

Remember, Psalm 37 is a **wisdom poem** which contrasts two ways of life: that of the *godly* and the *ungodly*, the *righteous* and the *wicked*, the *saved* and the *unsaved*. A vast chasm lies between the two, and they are as far apart as heaven and hell. This fact alone should cause you to come up close and listen. If you are on a road that is set to be blown up by dynamite at any moment, wouldn't it be wise to change your course? On the other hand, if you are on a road—though it is paved with difficulty—which leads to the greatest joys in life and satisfaction for eternity, would seeing this help you to endure? David desires to strike his readers with a clear view that will stick with us as we make decisions from day-to-day.

David's mode of instruction is contrasts. Eight contrasts are found between the wicked and the righteous in Psalm 37 (*vv.9, 10-11, 17, 18-20, 21, 22, 28, 37-38*), which are designed for two purposes:

1. **To exhort the godly to trust the Lord.** To "exhort" means to come alongside for help. And if you find yourself battle-weary and spiritually fatigued, then David provides a word from God to strengthen you in the fight.
2. **To challenge us not to become exasperated when the ungodly excels at your expense.** God *delights* in you (*v.23*), God will *sustain* you (*v.24*), God will *provide* for you (*vv.25-26*), *protect, prosper, instruct, deliver,* and *exalt* you (*vv.27-34*). But you must wait upon the Lord and remain focused on Him.

When your spiritual vision is clear, you discover that *the wicked may indeed prosper for a moment*, but *the righteous will prosper forever!* However, which one you experience will depend upon the path you choose. Which values will you adopt? Which road will you take? Which perspective will you embrace?

OUTLINE:

To follow David's sage advice, there are four handles to help us grab hold of the truth of this psalm. Since we only have two hands, we will only seek to hold two truths in today's message.

- DAVID'S COUNSEL (vv.7-11)
- DAVID'S CAUTION (vv.12-22)
- DAVID'S CONFIDENCE (vv.23-34)
- DAVID'S CONCLUSION (vv.35-40)

EXPOSITION:

How do we trust the Lord and remain focused upon God? Here is David's sage counsel.

A. DAVID'S COUNSEL (vv.7-11)

Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.
⁸ Cease from anger and forsake wrath;
Do not fret; *it leads* only to evildoing.
⁹ For evildoers will be cut off,
But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.
¹⁰ Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more;
And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be *there*.
¹¹ But the humble will inherit the land
And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

In the run-up to this section, the psalm opens by offering *comfort* and *encouragement* (vv.1-6), challenging us to **contain your anger** (vv.1-2), **control your walk** (v.3), **condition your will** (v.4), and **commit your way** to the Lord (vv.5-6). In other words, *live your life trusting in God rather than angry at people*.

Now, David returns to the theme of *anger*, again *stressing* that *it will lead you down the wrong path*. Waiting upon the Lord and patience is a better choice. David frames his instruction to be patient with a *command*, a word of *counsel*, and the *consequences* of the choice you make.

1. The command (v.7)—find rest in God who deals with the wicked.

Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who carries out wicked schemes.

The command here is one of the hardest for us to apply. To "**rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him,**" speaks of a particular kind of rest—namely, the *rest of silence* or ceasing from words in self-defense. The idea is that we do not need to speak in order to vindicate ourselves—because to rest in the Lord means, *we will trust in God to deal with the wicked and protect us*.

David must have sighed when he said this because there were so many times that he did not wait for the Lord (Bathsheba, Absalom, and a census taken). Think back, dear friends, on the number of times you wish you would have waited patiently for Him. But, you spoke too soon, acted too quickly, or

failed to act all because you were worried or angry about why this was happening. What is it that David would have us to know?

He would have us to understand that this **patience** is not achieved by *secretly being preoccupied with the schemes of the wicked*. This is the dangerous “why-cycle,” which we ride around and around on in our minds. *Why did they say this? Why did they do that?* Patience is never achieved this way, but rather, patience is learned by *enduring under the trial*, keeping your cool, and waiting for *God’s appropriate time*.

In order to be a successful Christian, David says, we must learn patience (*Cf. Heb.10:36-39*). Frequently the Scriptures speak of how necessary it is that we wait on God. In Psalm 40:1, David repeatedly urges us not to get ahead of God: “*I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.*” God is most attentive to the cry of a waiting soul. He turns His ear to hear their plea for help. Again, in Psalm 25:3, David writes, “*None who wait for you shall be put to shame.*” There are no exceptions to this assertion. All who wait upon the Lord will never be disappointed. Psalm 25:5, David adds, “*For you I wait all day long.*” Such patience often involves waiting for an extended delay. And this is why it requires *courage*. Psalm 27:14, “*Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.*” The command to wait patiently will involve a calm willingness to accept difficult situations that are painful or irritating, but we are not left without divine aid, for the fruit of the Spirit includes, “*love, joy, peace, patience,*” (*Gal.5:22*) which Tozer called “concentrated strength or the power to wait!”

2. The counsel (v.8)—David offers us counsel that is specific and balanced. Why is patience required? Because anger is futile, and it accomplishes nothing except harm.

⁸ Cease from anger and forsake wrath;
Do not fret; *it leads* only to evildoing.

The type of “**anger**” that David warns against is not *anger toward people*, but *anger toward God*. It arises from the experience of seeing the wicked go trouble-free while we suffer, which seems grossly unfair. It is the total opposite of “*delighting in the Lord.*” Spurgeon reminds us that this anger is “especially [because of]...the arrangements of Providence, and jealousies of the temporary pleasures of those who are soon to be banished from all comfort.”

When we are secretly seething because we are not *getting WHAT we want, WHEN and HOW we want it*, it *always, always, always* leads to wrong-doing. The cold shoulder, the sinful thought, the bad attitude, the shopping spree, the sinful indulgence! *Anger*, whether silent or verbal, opens the door, allowing the mosquitos of sin to come into our lives and bite us. David calls us to shut the front door! “*Cease from anger and forsake wrath...*”

Peter, one of the most impatient disciples, must have observed this patience in the Lord Jesus. He writes in the second chapter of his first letter, “*and while being reviled [loidoreo—which means to be abused verbally and to become the subject of foul language], He [Jesus] did not revile in return; while suffering [experiencing harm or emotional pain], He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet.2:23). To *entrust* means to *put into the care and protection of His Father*. We can do the same. Our Father is not only the *Scorekeeper*—He is also the Provider of grace for His people. Jesus was not only *our example* in this, He also became *our substitute* so that we might be forgiven and healed and later follow His example. Resist impatience on the front end. Choose to rely on the*

Lord. This is where the battle is fought first and either won or lost. The command and counsel are followed by a look at the consequences.

3. The consequences (vv. 9-11)

⁹For evildoers will be cut off,

But those who wait for the LORD, they will inherit the land.

¹⁰Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more;

And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be *there*.

¹¹But the humble will inherit the land

And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

David's counsel is, *do not fear or fret* because lost people may initially prosper. The reason why patience is required is that evildoers will *eventually* be "**cut off**," not only in this world, but the world to come. Five times David uses that phrase, "**cut off**" (vv.9, 22, 28, 34, 38; Ps.12:3; 34:16). It is a terrible way of describing the ruin of those who refuse to submit to and obey God. Yes, they may look like they are green and flourishing with life and freshness, but suddenly the day of grace is ended, and destruction mows them down like grass!

Jesus divided the world into two groups: the *saved* and the *lost*, the *sheep* and the *goats*. As you look at your home, your neighbor, your school district, community, or this nation, which would you say that there are more of—sheep or goats?

Spurgeon said, "Although the wolf is very strong and fierce, and the sheep is very weak and timid...the day will come when the last wolf [and goat] is dead, and then the sheep shall cover the plains and feed upon the hills. Weak as the righteous often are, **'they shall inherit the land'** when the wolves shall have been cut off from the earth."

- The lost DO have their day of prosperity, BUT it is *short-lived*.

Verse 10 invites us to exercise faith, "**...and you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there...**" Faith is willing to wait and watch for the evidence. It is as if David is saying, "Go ahead and check out the evidence...stare at his once famous place or title, and you will see nothing of all he had on earth is his. It has passed into other hands. Simply, he was here, and now he is gone. The wicked have no place in the kingdom of God."

But what will happen to those who humble themselves and trust in the Lord?

¹¹ But the humble will inherit the land

And will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

Written a thousand years before Jesus began His public ministry, Jesus quoted this line in His Sermon on the Mount in the third beatitude, "*Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*" (Matt.5:5). Who are the humble? The humble are not *the weak* or *one who lacks conviction*. *The humble are not those who* walk around with spiritual flabbiness! The humble are not a "peace-at-any-price" kind of people. Moses was meek—but no servant leader of the Old Testament was stronger or more viral than Moses! The humble, as Jesus defines it, is a person who is untamed like a wild horse, but who has been broken by a trainer. Their legs are not broken, but their will has been broken. They have been brought under the control of a rider. A humble person is a person who has power brought under the control of a higher authority. To be brought into submission. A humble

person is one who previously lived to do their own thing and to go their own way, but now they have been "*meeked*," *broken*, and they have humbled themselves under the authority of God in Christ.

Jesus explains that the *humble* shows us the character of a true saint. In the face of the prosperity of the wicked, the humble Christian *will submit to God's will without murmuring*. They will wait under the providence of God, knowing that *God shall keep His promises*. Resting in the Lord and patiently waiting for Him is a better choice because it offers to us *the kingdom of heaven, comfort, inheriting what God promises, and delightful satisfaction in God*.

Will you listen to David's counsel?

B. DAVID'S CAUTION (vv.12-22)

In the previous unit, David contrasted *the fate of the righteous* with *the fate of the wicked*, but here considers the inevitable end of the wicked as a caution. He gives us five insights about the future of the ungodly. Why are we not to worry? Because if we look ahead, we will understand that...

1. They plot but soon perish. (vv.12-13)

The wicked plots against the righteous
And gnashes at him with his teeth.
¹³ The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees his day is coming.

Often the prosperity of the wicked is gained at the expense of the innocent or on the backs of oppressed people. The "**gnashing at him with his teeth**" shows the grinding depths of their anger and hatred of God's people. In Psalm 35:16, David used this term to describe the "*godless jesters at a feast...*" who gnashed at him with their teeth. They ridicule, make jokes, and publicly mock God's people. Jesus used this same expression to describe the helpless anger and loud wailing of the man cast into the outer darkness of hell, "*Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'*" (Matt.22:13).

However, their gnashing is like a dog who is barking at you and, if he could, he would rip a chunk of meat out of your leg; but it cannot. All it can do is bark. This is how the wicked are against the righteous. They cannot do what they *desire*, only what God *allows*. How does God see them, and how ought we to see them?

¹³ The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees his day is coming.

With all their plotting and barking, the wicked can accomplish nothing against the Lord and His people, and He laughs at them with derision (*Cf. Ps.2:4*). The Lord sees it all and knows that the power of the wicked is limited.

James Montgomery Boice said, "If God can laugh at the wicked, shouldn't we be able at least to refrain from being agitated by them."

God “**sees his day coming.**” The lost, the wicked, *do not see how close they are to destruction.* They are like “spiders,” to use Edward’s analogy on a web above the fires of hell.

Jonathan Edwards—“There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God.”

Edwards ended the sermon with one final appeal, “*Therefore let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come!*” That’s David’s message in this psalm. The message Edwards preached was interrupted many times by people moaning, “What shall I do to be saved?” Oh, I pray to God that this is the inner cry from those listening this morning. The answer is *Christ crucified!* The answer is *Christ risen!* The answer is *Christ surrendered to and believed upon!* The answer is *Christ received and relied upon* to cleanse and change the wicked heart!

2. They fortify but soon fall (vv.14-15)

¹⁴ The wicked have drawn the sword and bent their bow
To cast down the afflicted and the needy,
To slay those who are upright in conduct.

¹⁵ Their sword will enter their own heart,
And their bows will be broken.

This is the “boomerang principle” of evil. I have never used one of these “killing sticks,” but the word on the street is that you can throw a boomerang from 150 yards away and miss your target, and at some point, it will return back to the direction of the thrower. And if it hits you, it will kill you on the spot. Paul calls this the divine law of sowing and reaping in Galatians 6:7, “*Do not be deceived. God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*” David says the wicked “**have drawn the sword,**” showing their *hostile intent*, “**bent their bow,**” showing their *readiness* to wound and “**to cast down... and slay,**” but *God reverses the action.* What a mighty God we serve! Their weapon doesn’t merely misfire, but the Lord Himself uses it to bring judgment upon them!

Hundreds of times, this has been the case. Haman was hung upon the gallows that he built for Mordecai. Saul, who sought to slay David, fell upon His own sword. Herod, who slew many little babies seeking to kill the baby Jesus, was murdered himself.

Why would it be any different for you, if you continue to rebel against God and His people? God shall protect His people!

With all the wisdom of instructional poetry, David says in plain language, “being wicked seems to be the stupidest choice one can make!” You may choose to trust in God and be blessed, or forsake Him, trust yourself, and be broken. Which choice will you make?

The wicked plot but soon perish. The wicked fortify but soon fall.

3. They prosper but soon wither. (vv.16-17)

Better is the little of the righteous
Than the abundance of many wicked.

¹⁷ For the arms of the wicked will be broken,
But the LORD sustains the righteous.

The phrase “**better is the little**” is taken from the wisdom of the Proverbs and begins a string of short-pithy illustrations.

- **Proverbs 15:16**—Better is a little with the fear of the LORD
Than great treasure and turmoil with it.
- **Proverbs 16:8**—Better is a little with righteousness
Than great income with injustice.

The commentator, Horne, said, “God’s blessing can multiply a mite into a talent, but His curse will shrink a talent into a mite.” In other words, God can make your little stretch and your stockpile disappear, according to His will.

Don’t take the “**little**” referred to here by David to mean that poverty is some lofty spiritual position. Remember, the contrast is between *the righteous* and *the wicked*. But here is an error that the righteous easily fall into, and that is, *we think that wealth makes us better, and poverty makes us worse*. I can hear my son, Josh, saying, “Dad, having money gets things done.” Now, who would deny this? Not even David denied this fact, but what he corrects is the thinking that more makes *you better or life better*, therefore, abundance is worthy of pursuit more than God. No, no! The wise King says, “*the better way, the better hope, belongs to the righteous.*” Why so?

Answer: “**God will break the arms of the wicked,**” which is metaphoric language indicating that *God will remove their capacity to acquire wealth*, but the righteous can anticipate divine aid. At the end of the day, the righteous have a better bargain! “He sustains the righteous.” He upholds them when they feel as weak as water. He supports them by girding us with strength.

- **Isaiah 40:30-31**—Though youths grow weary and tired,
And vigorous young men stumble badly,
³¹ Yet those who wait for the LORD
Will gain new strength;
They will mount up *with* wings like eagles,
They will run and not get tired,
They will walk and not become weary.

4. They flourish but soon vanish. (vv.18-20)

¹⁸ The LORD knows the days of the blameless,
And their inheritance will be forever.

¹⁹ They will not be ashamed in the time of evil,
And in the days of famine they will have abundance.

²⁰ But the wicked will perish;
And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures,
They vanish—like smoke they vanish away.

The agricultural image of green **pastures** is vivid. Imagine driving along the highway in Iowa in the spring or summer, and miles of lush green fields of corn or golden wheat lay stretched before you. But when fall or winter comes, it changes entirely. David says the temporary success of the wicked is like this. The *success*, the *fame*, and the *prosperity* of the wicked appears as if it will last forever, but *suddenly, unexpected*, it goes up in **smoke** deliberately by the hand of God (*Cf. Judg.15:5*). Beauty fades, popularity wanes, wealth overextends itself and is lost, and influence passes to other hands.

Here is the difference between the righteous and the wicked—“**the LORD knows the days of the blameless...**” that is, the righteous are under *the watchful care of God*. In “**the time of evil...**[*distress and oppression*]...**in the days of famine** [*difficulty*],” they will not wither away because God knows them like a father knows His child and will sustain them.

Do you desire temporary, fleeting pleasures, or lasting provision from a sovereign good God?

5. They borrow but soon lose. (vv.21-22)

²¹ The wicked borrows and does not pay back,
But the righteous is gracious and gives.

²² For those blessed by Him will inherit the land,
But those cursed by Him will be cut off.

The contrast here is between *takers* and *givers*. There are lovers and haters, givers and takers—which one are you? The language here takes us back to the blessing and curse section of Deuteronomy 28. One of the blessings promised to obedient Israelites was that they should be able to lend and should not need to borrow.

- **Deuteronomy 15:6**—For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you, and you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; and you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

And one of the curses denounced on them, if they disobeyed God, was that they would be forced to borrow, and not be able to lend.

- **Deuteronomy 28:44-45**—He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail. ⁴⁵ So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you.

The *perpetual takers* will be *cursed*, but the *constant givers* will be *blessed*.

The lost are always out for themselves. They borrow because they want to get ahead quickly and see borrowing as a short road to success. They are slow to repay, not because they do not have the ability to do so, but because they are greedy and want to keep it all for themselves! They think they can get away with it. But they do not see that there is a Divine Auditor who has a perfect accounting of all our deeds, and someday the books will be opened!

On the other hand, “**the righteous is gracious and gives.**” It is not a question of getting ahead or borrowing or repaying at all. For them, money is a gift from God to be used to help others. It is a tool to honor God with, not an instrument to serve their own interests.

Application: What does this mean for us? Many pastors take a sharp turn here and travel off into the principles of debt and loans. The issue here is not whether it is right or wrong to use credit cards or take bank loans. You don’t have to be a Christian to understand that getting in credit card debt is not wise.

The central issue David has in mind is *greed as a reflection of one’s character*. This is where the difference between the believer and the unbeliever comes in. As believers, God forbids us from being *covetous*. Greed breaks the Tenth Commandment, “*thou shall not covet*” (Ex.20:17).

Covetousness or greed reaches down to the very things that we *desire, imagine, or wish* for in our hearts. And what we desire deep in our hearts actually makes us who we are, *"for as a man thinks within himself, so is he"* (Prov.23:7a). In other words, what we desire formulates our character and touches the whole of our being. Paul said to the Thessalonians that he never came with a *"pretext for greed"* (1 Thess.2:5), which reminds us that this sin of greed can dress itself in the attire of virtue. Sometimes this sin can hide itself in the name of being *"frugal,"* or *"a good steward,"* or *"providing for one's family."* Let us hear the words of Jesus who said, *"Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions"* (Luke 12:15).

How does this correct your thinking? Have you been thinking that more is better?
How does this encourage your patience? Will you wait for the Lord or charge ahead and do your own thing?

CONCLUSION:

Tolstoy, the Russian writer, tells the parable of the man who met a tall, sinister figure who promised him all the property he could possibly encircle in a day. The man took the sinister figure at his word and got up early the next day. Before the sun appeared on the horizon, he was ready to go! As soon as the sun peaked, he was off on his journey. Putting his feet down, he said, "This is mine, and this is mine," on, and on he went. Noon came, but he would not stop for food or water. Greed had eaten him up! A friend said, "Rest awhile!" Another said, "Stop and drink!" But he would not stop. Finally, the man ripped his shirt off because of the heat and started to run as the sun was setting and saying to himself, "Just one more step, just one more step." Until he reached his goal, ...and fell dead! Then he had all the ground he could cover: a burial plot, six feet of dirt!

You will never be happy until you are happy in Christ. In the long run, the only true satisfaction is to be found in righteousness, which is the hallmark of the one who lives in relationship with the living God through faith in Christ.

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