

Be Liberated!

Psalm 37:1-4 NASB

Bill Vande Giessen - Sermon Manuscript

- 1 Do not fret** (heated anger, discontent, despair)
because of evildoers (Grk. *-raw-ha* -to spoil by break to pieces, to make something *good for nothing*)
Be not envious (jealous, covet)
toward wrongdoers (perverse, wicked, unjust)
- 2 For they will wither quickly** (become desolate, barren, cut down, cut off, clipped)
like the grass, and fade (fade away, fall, fail)
like the green herb (temporary, seasonal, blossoms for a short time)
- 3 Trust** (find confident refuge and peace)
in the Lord (Savior, master, provider)
and do good (do your best in seeking to please Him in all things, wherever you are)
Dwell (permanently reside, live)
in the land (provision, vast boundary, solid ground)
and cultivate (nurture, foster, develop; feed on)
faithfulness (truthfulness, hope, trust, dependence)
- 4 Delight** (Heb. *aw-nag* -to be pliable, flexible, delicate, vulnerable) **yourself in the Lord;**
And He will give you the desires (requests, petitions, needs, wants, passions)
of your heart (center, core, mind/soul)

Be Liberated! – Psalm 37:1-4 (*set free, released, unshackled*)

Prayer

Introduction

Psalm 37 has been a great encouragement to me over the years, particularly V4,
“Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Notice the process here, the cause and effect. It’s not “The Lord will give you the desires of your heart, then you will delight in Him”! He calls us to first delight in Him, then His abundant blessings will follow. I’ve titled the message this morning “***Be Liberated***”, which begs the question, “*Liberated from what?*”

Have you ever been embroiled in a situation that is so far beyond your control you just about lose your mind? Something so desperate it claws at the very walls of your inner being, but there seems to be no way out, no answer to solve the problem, no clear direction and no relief from the pain?

Maybe it's the unexpected loss of a loved one, or a shattered relationship that you thought was built on truth and sincerity, only to discover it was actually built on manipulation and lies. Maybe the financial provision for your family has been taken away due to the market crash, job loss, or an injury or illness that has left you disabled.

Whatever it is, we've all likely been through many of these kinds of difficulties. Perhaps, like me, you're even in the midst of one or more right now!

As I've been studying, reading, praying, and preparing for this very message, I've really been blown away as to how much depth and truth can be drawn from these four short proverbial verses in Psalm 37. I had stacks of handwritten notes I'd collected as thoughts came to me over the last few weeks, comparisons, definitions, illustrations, and verses. I'd already prepared the basic outline 2 weeks ago and had kept all my notes to use in preparing the actual message relating to the outlined points.

I finally had a good block of time this last Wednesday to sit down and begin typing out the sermon manuscript. I went through my notes and spent a couple solid hours collating them into something I could share with you this morning. Sometime in the late morning Wednesday I was given information regarding a very serious issue with someone I love dearly and it needed to be addressed immediately.

The matter developed throughout the day and into the evening and, in my effort to deal with and be of help in the situation, I must have inadvertently forgotten to save the work I'd done for this sermon. When I returned to my office Friday morning, I discovered that all the work was completely gone and I had discarded my handwritten notes as I used them to avoid clutter along the way.

I confess, I did spend some time angrily lamenting my situation, tempted to blame those involved in the crisis for distracting me and causing this to happen. I quickly moved through a variety of emotions, but in the end, I knew that God was in control *as always*. I had no more than to cry out to Him in fervent prayer to be freed from my frustration, disappointment, anger, and risk of building resentment of the past. As I did so, I was reminded of the very passage in Psalm 37 we just read together, and I was liberated!

Regardless of your circumstances or sense of hopelessness in any situation, God wants you to know that you too can be liberated – freed from that which seeks to overwhelm you in this world, set free from your own natural tendencies that often times make difficult matters worse, and unchained from the ideologies of this world that promise delight and happiness, but actually only imprison us and drag us down.

Keep in mind that David, the Psalmist, struggled with assaults from his enemies who surrounded him. They appeared to be winning, having great success against him and living it up with no apparent justice brought to bear on their evil attacks. So, David writes of this in some of the Psalms and we can all benefit from it as part of God's word. But David really preaches it to himself first, as an instant beneficiary of trusting God in the midst of great adversity. It's so important for us to be mindful about applying biblical principles to ourselves first, before even thinking about pointing fingers at others.

This morning I want to share with you 3 guiding principles from Psalm 37 that God wants you and I to embrace and be comforted by as we go on living our lives in this world. The first is this:

I. Stop Comparing – V1-2 (associating, equating, relating, linking)

Of course, I'm not talking about comparing prices at the store to be a better steward of your finances. I'm talking about comparing yourself to others that seem to have it better than you. I'm talking about comparing your looks to their looks, your paycheck to their paycheck, your things to their things. Why are they more attractive? Why do they make more money? Why do they have more and better things than I do?

We do this all the time, and often without even realizing it! There's always someone, something or some situation that seems better than ours.

We also know this idea is not exclusive to just comparing yourself to others, but as we see in the text it's specifically important to not compare to evildoers and wrongdoers. What makes the despair 10x worse is when we perceive that they get to have all the fun, all the money, biggest houses, coolest cars, better family lives, and are just beautiful people in general! The Psalmist writes...

1 Do not fret (heated anger; discontent; despair)

because of evildoers (Grk. *-raw-ha*: to spoil by breaking into pieces; to make something *good for nothing*)

Be not envious (jealous; covet) **toward wrongdoers** (perverse, wicked, unjust)

Do not be provoked to anger or jealousy. Do not covet, the 10th Commandment. Here's why comparing yourself to the *apparent* ease and success of others, especially those we perceive as wicked or ungodly, is harmful:

Comparing...

A. Leads To Discontent And Despair. (gloomy, pessimism, dissatisfied)

B. Leads To Jealousy. (suspicion, distrust, covet, possessive, haughty)

Here's the deal, we can get so caught up in our anger and resentment of an evil person, unfair thing, or hopeless situation that we become the very thing we hate in the process! We begin to respond in negative and hateful ways, which destroys our faith and affects our inner attitude toward everything.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off *everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles*. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

When you start comparing and being provoked to anger and jealousy,
Here's some good advice - ***Stop it!***

We become dissatisfied, gloomy and pessimistic. We develop suspicions and distrust which may or may not be valid, and we finally become disillusioned. "Disillusionment" is when you discover you've been under the enchantment of an illusion and the veil is removed and you see what's really behind the curtain. This is the point that we realize that our fairytale world is falling down around us and reality hits us square in the heart, our core, the center of who we are.
Stop it! It hurts.

Why does this happen? This happens because we've not been finding our delight in the Lord, but rather walking in the flesh simply to please ourselves.

Please take your bible and turn with me to Galatians 5, we will read a lengthy passage, but I want you to see for yourself the distinction and purpose God lays out in His word. Galatians 5 begins with this verse:

Galatians 5 - ¹It is *for* freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
(note: *slavery to sin vs slavery to Christ*)

He continues in **V13**:

¹³ You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh! (*your desires*) rather, serve one another humbly in love.

¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (*Remember, this is like the greatest commandment; Love the Lord with all your heart...*)

¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you *will be destroyed* by each other.

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

¹⁷ For *the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit*, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are *not* to do whatever^{td} you want.

¹⁸ **But** if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (*V14 because the Law is fulfilled*)

¹⁹ The **acts of the flesh** are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (*corruption*)

²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will *not* inherit the kingdom of God.

²² **But** the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

(Liberated from acts of the flesh, fleshly desires!)

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions **and desires**.

²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Let's now come back to V2 of Psalm 37:2...

2 For they will wither quickly (become desolate; barren; cut down, cut off, clipped)
like the grass, and fade (fade away; fall; fail) **like the green herb.**

Grass is cut down when it's out of control. Plants are seasonal and only last for a while. When we compare ourselves, in the flesh, comparing simply put...

C. Leads To Temporal Focus. (short sighted, materialistic, here and now)

2 Corinthians 4:8 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

1 Peter 1:24 (quoting from Isaiah 40:6-7)

For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever."¹³
And this is the word that was preached to you.

The agencies behind the philosophies of this world know and understand our human nature to be attracted to all things temporary very well. Global companies study us intimately and incessantly feed us a destructive and anti-Christ worldview in their advertising:

Just Do It; No Fear; Follow Your Heart; Be Yourself; You Deserve A Break Today...
and on and on it goes.

We are bombarded with this worldview all day every day, not just from advertisers, but from a pop-culture that is fueled by our impulsive human desires; A culture that encourages us to compare ourselves to those we see in movies and magazines delighting in the products they sell, promising everything but delivering nothing but shallow, temporary, emptiness...

Proverbs 25:14 Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both..."

2 Corinthians 11:13-14

For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

It's the same lie being sold to us today that distracted Adam and Eve in the Garden. Imagine satan whispering, "***Just Do It; No Fear; Follow Your Heart; Be Yourself; You Deserve It***" He deceived Adam and Eve into comparing themselves to God, promising that if they would only follow his (satan's) line of reasoning and their own understanding they too could be like God. Self-help *sells*. ***God's hope heals!*** Compare *that!*

Amos 8:11 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign Lord,
"when I will send a famine through the land—
not a famine of food or a thirst for water,
but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord."

So, stop comparing in the flesh! It only leads to discontent, despair, and jealousy while keeping our attention on that which is temporal rather than eternal.

So, let's now look at the "how". Here's what we do to stop falling into that trap.

II. **Grow In Confident Pursuit – V3** (follow, chase, hunt, tracking, on a mission)

Psalm 37:3 **Trust** (to *know* refuge and peace) **in the Lord** (Savior, provider, Master),
and do good (do your best in seeking to please Him in all things, wherever you are)

Dwell (permanently reside, live) **in the land** (provision, vast boundary, solid ground)
and cultivate (nurture, foster, develop; feed on) **faithfulness** (truthfulness, hope, dependence)

Very quickly, here are 4 things we can do to grow in confident pursuit of Him...

A. **Trust God**. (hope, confident expectation, believe, faith)

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Again, notice the process – trust in Him with all that you are, not relying on your own abilities and knowledge, and He will provide for your every need.

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;
I came that they may have life, and ^[a]have it abundantly."

Jesus wants you to live abundantly in Him, and He has a plan for your good beyond your comprehension in the moment. (Romans 8:28; Jeremiah 29:11)

B. **Strive For What's Right**. (endeavor, attempt with all effort, fervor)

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

It's never *right* to do the *wrong* thing, and it's never *wrong* to do the *right* thing.
Be mindful and intentional to praise Him, even when it hurts.

C. **Live Peaceably**. (dwell, reside, inhabit, stay, abide, settle)

Romans 12:17-18 *Never* pay back evil for evil to *anyone*. ^[a]Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, *so far as it depends on you*, be at peace with all men.

The sun and rain fall on the righteous and wicked alike (Matthew 5:45),
as far as it depends on you, dwell in the land and cultivate righteousness.

D. Feed On Faithfulness. (nourish, ingest, digest, nutrition) (truth)

You are what you eat! Some of us need to stop gorging ourselves on spiritual junk food, which is no food at all! Nourish yourself on His truth as you pursue the Lord. Rest in His sovereignty knowing His ways are not our ways. Be still, and know that He is God! And finally...

III. Be Teachable – V4 (learning, growing, understanding, adding to)

Psalm 37

4 Delight (Heb. *aw-nag*; -to be pliable, flexible, delicate, vulnerable) **yourself in the Lord;**
And He will give you the desires (needs and wants, fuel, passions)
of your heart (core, mind/soul, center of your being)

In the Hebrew this literally says,

“Be delicate and pliable in YHWH, and He will set petitions in your inner man”.

Isaiah 64:8 But now, O Lord, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter;
and all of us are the work of Your hand.

In His molding and shaping us as clay in the potter’s hands, He pokes and prods, pushes and pulls, cuts away, shapes, and builds us up so that we become a new creation in Him. Clay is pliable, flexible, and vulnerable. A potter cannot use glass or wood which are rigid and hard. As we delight in Him we can remain teachable by being mindful of these 2 things...

A. Embrace His Ways. (receive, hold to, adopt, cling to, grab on to)

Isaiah 55:8-9 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,”
declares the Lord.

In this, we must be willing to let go of our traditions, preconceptions, and habits as we find they are contrary to His ways.

B. Mirror His Image. (reflect, reveal, duplicate) (character, principles)

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love,
just as Christ also loved ^[a]you and gave Himself up for us...

Just as you were created, in the image of God, and a new creation in Christ. Be liberated from your sinful, fleshly desires; from anger, resentment, and all covetousness - ***be free!***

Dwell in the land and do good, grow in sincere faithfulness, and delight yourself in the Lord and watch how He replaces your fleshly desires for His perfect, Christ-centered, and Spirit-filled desires for you!

Application

What in your life causes you anxiety and/or envy?

**Strive to be teachable, finding complete satisfaction in the Lord
as He continues to mold, shape, and change you.**

Whose image is being reflected in the eyes of those around you?