

STEP IT UP AND DANCE

PSALM 37:21-31 MAY 15, 2019

Everything around us is in the full bloom of spring. Many of us know that right away when we wake up every morning with asthma and itchy eyes. But it *is* lovely to see the many blossoms on trees around town. For a farmer, the bloom of spring is more than just pretty flowers to look at. As farmers watch the blossoms and the weather, they try to predict crop yield so they can plan for orders, equipment, and the like. More and more, researchers are turning to A.I. machine learning to try to predict the outcome of a given harvest.¹

In Psalm 37, we've been learning God's wisdom from David about the lush life of the Godly person. David predicts the outcome of a life lived in trusting relationship with God. That person is going to be formed into a bright shining star in God's hands. Their righteousness, we're told, will be brought forth as the light, like the sun in the noon sky. David says the righteous life is a life full of promises and provisions and protection and, we see tonight, the *production* of spiritual fruit in all sorts of areas of our lives. Just as a fruit tree doesn't grow its crop on one, solitary limb, so too all parts of our lives are going to be developed by God as we walk with Him, bearing the fruit of righteousness.

As has been the case in the first 2 sections, as David describes the Godly life, he contrasts it with the wasted life of the unbeliever. Showing the profound difference between the two.

We begin at verse 21 tonight, where we see the spiritual fruit of *generosity*.

Psalm 37:21 - ²¹The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives.

When you examine the fruit hanging from the life of the ungodly, it is selfish in character. It's like a stone fruit, with that hard core. David describes them here as being ready and willing to take advantage of the help offered to them by others, without paying back what is owed. Generally speaking, they are categorized here as *takers*. Of course that doesn't mean there aren't non-Christians who are charitable or generous or that every unbeliever defaults on their loans. But, in a general sense, the core of the unsaved person is one of hard selfishness. A putting of self before others.

By contrast, we're told here that those who belong to God are to be *givers* by nature. The *new* nature that we're commanded to put on, created to be like God, righteous and holy.² Our God is a Giver and He is rich in mercy. We've been grafted into Him through Jesus Christ and now He's made us new and is continually forming us into the image of His Son. His Son is meek, and so (as we saw last time) we are called to meekness. God is merciful, so we are to behave mercifully. God is generous beyond compare, so we are called to generosity. And it's a *selfless* generosity. Luke 6:35 says "lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great." So we're to give and to lend, expecting nothing back, not just to friends and family, but Jesus said there in Luke 6 we're to act that way *toward our enemies*. "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful."

Psalm 37:22 - ²²For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, But those cursed by Him shall be cut off.

¹ <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aæ159>

² Ephesians 4:24

Again and again David comes back to this promise that God's people will inherit the earth. 5 times he reminds us. This should have a great impact on our mindset, especially in regard to how we live life and how we bless others. When we're generous, we're not *losing* anything. In fact, acts of mercy and generosity are *investments* in heavenly treasure. David gives us a long view of life. And a long view keeps you from being short sighted. So, cultivate the fruit of generosity in your heart.

Psalm 37:23 - ²³The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way.

What a wonderful verse! We would do well to return often to verses 23 and 24 and receive God's comfort and affection there.

We're told that the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord. What does this mean? Does this mean that you have no free will? That all the events of your life are already set in stone? No. The Bible does *not* teach what is sometimes referred to as "meticulous determinism." You *do* have a free will. *That's* what the Bible teaches. And it talks to us about what happens when we "turn" from God's way. It commands us to "walk" in the Lord's path. It uses the same image that David is using here of a man and his steps. So what *does* it mean that the steps are 'ordered'?

Well, the term can mean "firmly established," or "directed," or "provided for." It's not unlike when you've seen in a movie someone learning a dance. Or perhaps you've gone to a class yourself. And there, on the floor, are an order of footsteps for you to learn and then follow.

God *has* prepared a path for each of us to walk in. Proverbs says as we seek His will, He will show us the path to take. Isaiah says He's made it smooth. When we walk in step with what God has prepared, when we're living in harmony with the Lord, David says God is *delighted!* Take that to heart: God *delights* in you when you trust Him and obey Him and go His way.

He delights in your big steps and your small steps. Sometimes we talk about living life "one step at a time," meaning we're just barely hanging in there in our daily lives. Other times, something big will happen and we'll say something like, "That's a *big step* in your career." Big or small, God *delights* in you when you're stepping with Him.

Psalm 37:24 - ²⁴Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds *him* with His hand.

Each and every one of us is imperfect. We fall short of the Holy Spirit's potential in us. But the Lord doesn't have any buyer's remorse as He watches our lives. Consider, for a moment, the person who penned this verse: David. The man who slept with his friend's wife and then had him killed. The man whose pride led to a plague that resulted in the death of 70,000 Israelites. This same man is the one who can say, with the authority of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, despite our failures, God is not going to hurl us down like trash. In fact, He uses His strength to *keep* us secure in His arms of love.

Does that mean God doesn't care when we fall short or when we choose disobedience? Of course not. We don't sin that grace may abound. We don't fail that His strength may abound. The whole point of this Psalm is to talk about how a *righteous* person walks with God, in obedience, though imperfectly. As we go with Him, He loves to delight in us and is faithful to uphold in those missteps. If we go back to the dance analogy, God is our dance partner, enjoying that communion and the swirling of life's steps. When we stumble, He is there to hold us up and keep us from sliding.

Psalm 37:25 - ²⁵I have been young, and *now* am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.

This was the testimony of David's life. He had certainly experienced multiple instances of provision when he and his men were hungry. There was the showbread incident when he was on the run from Saul. Ziba brought him food when he was escaping from Absalom. As we talked about last time, this is not an absolute guarantee for all believers everywhere. What *is* absolute is God's faithfulness. He is not gone. He is *always* Emmanuel, God *with* us. And we can go to Him with any need, knowing He is mighty to save.

Along with the fruit of generosity, we want to be harvesting crops of praise. Specifically, like David does here, we want to be regularly and publicly honoring God for His faithfulness. Let's talk to one another about what God has done for us. What we have seen Him do.

Psalm 37:26 - ²⁶He [the righteous] *is* ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants *are* blessed.

It struck me that here we see the righteous person *actually doing* what they *should* be doing. Remember, David is speaking in these 2 verses about what he's personally experienced in life. Maybe verse 21 came off as *theoretical*, but verse 26 is *actual*. They *actually* lend. They're *actually* generous. They really are merciful when they deal with others.

It made me think of all those politicians who say that they're fiscally conservative when they're trying to collect votes, but once they're in power that's all out the window. We're up to \$22 trillion debt right now.³ Which means, by the way, if they were to spread the load around, every single American would owe \$67,000 (and counting)!

But the fruit of righteousness isn't just hypothetical, it's real. It's growing in our lives. It impacts how we relate to people. Not just with those who need help, those we're "lending" to in this song, but we see there in the home as well. "His descendants are blessed." As we walk down the steps God has fashioned for us, we become a blessing to others, not a burden to them. In the home, in our community, toward our enemies. That's the power of God's work in our lives. That's the power of spiritual fruit.

Psalm 37:27 - ²⁷Depart from evil, and do good; And dwell forevermore.

David consistently presents all of this as an either/or arrangement. It's a binary decision. Two categories: righteousness or wickedness, evil or good, following God or *not* following God. Going God's way isn't something we do from time to time. Godliness isn't an *accessory* in the Bible. It's a different way of life. It's an altogether different *direction* which takes you to a different *destination*. To be a child of God means to turn *to* Him and *away* from sin and away from idols. To turn off the old path and *onto* the new one God has carved out.

As he said back in verse 3, David says again, "Do good." The fruit of goodness should be ripening on the bows of our lives. In the context tonight, one of the many ways we do good is through generosity. The Bible encourages this fruit in our lives. Jesus said it is better to give than to receive. We heard Luke 6:35 earlier. Proverbs 11:25 says "The generous soul will be made rich."

³ <https://www.heritage.org/debt/commentary/our-national-debt-just-hit-22-trillion-will-congress-finally-take-it-seriously>

As we've noted before, temporal land promises made to the Jews in the Old Testament are not applied to us. Rather, here's how we can think of verse 27 in a New Testament context.

1 Timothy 6:18-19 - ¹⁸Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Psalm 37:28 - ²⁸For the Lord loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.

You and I are safe in the hands of God. We are protected and preserved. But that does not remove the responsibility of obedience from us. God has decided what is right and what is not, what is good and what is not. He loves justice. And we are commanded to go His way. It's one thing to stumble and fall short of God's highest for us. It's another to *walk* in disobedience. If you're a Christian, that's not really possible.

Ephesians chapter 2 says that Christians *once* walked in sin and disobedience, according to the course of this world, but now we have been made alive and set on a *new* path. A *new* set of steps in which we love what God loves, think like He things, speak like He speaks, and continually grow in grace.

Psalm 27:29 - ²⁹The righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever.

Again the promise and the reminder of what's coming. In this Psalm it is a constant calibration for us to keep life in perspective. In Proverbs 2, Solomon describes the Godly as being people of integrity and that they will inherit the land. And so we're seeing lots of spiritual fruit. Of mercy, of generosity, of obedience, of integrity and now, in verse 30, the fruit of *wisdom* in the life of the righteous.

Psalm 27:30 - ³⁰The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, And his tongue talks of justice.

Our words, like our thoughts and our actions, are to be conformed into the righteous image of Christ, like a crate of nourishing, ripe fruit, not rotten. The child of God here is described as speaking about the truth of God, the character of God, the goodness of God.

Perhaps at this point a reader thinks, "Well, I see all these great descriptors and promises concerning the righteous person. But what is the starting point? How do I find the next step on this path David is talking about?" An answer is furnished in verse 31:

Psalm 37:31 - ³¹The law of his God *is* in his heart; None of his steps shall slide.

The steps of life are found by taking heed to the word of God. More than taking heed, by internalizing and following God's word. Where it's not just a reference we turn to, but the supply at the very core of our being. When David examined the fruit of the righteous, when he took a good look at Godliness, he discovered that it was God's word that directed a person's steps. When a person believes and submits to God's word is when the Lord is able to develop all that fruit and accomplish the wonderful things we've been reading about these last few weeks.

Of course, it doesn't happen all at once. John Phillips writes, "God's promises do not ripen in a day."⁴ But, as we walk with God, looking forward to the ultimate completion of His work in us, we're able to know which way to go by keeping God's word in our hearts. As we step through each day, this walk with our Lord is not meant to be a trudge, but a delightful dance with the One who loves us. We delighting in Him and Him delighting in us, as He brings forth our righteousness like a star in the sky.

⁴ John Phillips Exploring Psalms