



As we've gone through Genesis earlier this year, there were multiple Sundays where I kept going back to certain truths in Psalm 37, in particular the statement, **"Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil."**¹ When Abraham would fear Pharaoh or another ruler or nation-state, we knew something bad was going to happen. Abraham would resort to his own logic instead of trusting God and his promises.

In some ways, when we're reading the Bible, it's easy to point the finger at Abraham or the wandering Israelites and judge them. But, as has been said in the past, "When you point your finger at someone else, you have four others pointing back at yourself." Just think about Psalm 37:8 again, and let me ask you, "How often do you have anxiety and fear?" Even if you say it's not that much, I want you to question yourself a little more. Let me put in all of Psalm 37:8 now: **Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.**² Anger and fear go hand-in-hand. Did you know that? Anger rises because, many times, we're not getting what we believe we need or deserve in order to live a good, safe, prosperous life. In other words, our fears are coming true, so then anger rises.

If this doesn't make sense, let's just look at current media (whether secular outlets or social media). Did you know that many or most successful videos online are successful because they either trigger fear or anger? There was a news article last year called, "Does Social Media Leave You Feeling Angry? That Might Be Intentional." In the article, it states that ". . . algorithms consistently select content that evokes anger and outrage from its users to maximize engagement" (<https://www.npr.org/2022/09/13/1122786134/does-social-media-leave-you-feeling-angry-that-might-be-intentional>). Boston Children's Digital Wellness Lab stated in one article that "There is a growing body of [evidence](#) that today's constant flow of media messages can produce fear and anxiety in children" (<https://digitalwellnesslab.org/parents/fear-and-anxiety/>).

Fear and anger are on the rise in our society. So, it shouldn't be a surprise as we face a new year that I want to take a few moments to talk about both. Refrain from anger and fret not yourself. This goes completely against the current of the world and how we naturally function as humans. Yet, isn't that how we are to live? We are Christ-followers, right? He was against the grain! He swam against the current. Yet, I fear that so many Christians unwittingly fall into the same ways of thinking and acting as the world. And, many Christians will justify their anger and/or fear.

We're entering into another election year. I can see it all coming. Bombs being lobbed at others, accusations made even against Christ-followers, passions on high alert. And some Christians, after the election might even feel like their world has come crashing down. Let me ask you a few questions: **Do you know that this world is under God's curse (i.e. – the Fall)? Do you know that America's morality is defiantly against Christ? Do you know that Holland is neither the Kingdom of Jesus nor is it even Mayberry anymore?**

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:8.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:8.

Yes, everyone here knows this. My heart does feel anger when I think about all the ways that people justify and support sin – whether ending children’s lives or terrorizing bodies created in God’s image or selfishly emphasizing self at the expense of the needy (and so much more). I also can feel fear at times, too. There have been times I’ve written things and they’ve been posted online, and while my stance was simply biblical and historically Christian in its stance, I’ve received angry pushback.. I then think about what the future holds for Christians. At what point in time will we be actively targeted and persecuted? That doesn’t make me feel warm and fuzzy.

Now, some people will then say, “That’s why we got to fight for ourselves!” Then anger is on the rise. Even now, I can get on Instagram and see Reels where professing Christians or religious or moral people post videos where they’re more in a hostile stance than one of refraining from anger. So often, it seems like people are communicating like they want to have the “mic drop” moment. In other words, “I said the final thing and no one can argue against me! Ha! So there!”

Does that sound like refraining from anger, forsaking wrath and not worrying yourself? It doesn’t to me. Even as I say this, I can imagine there are at least some people here saying, “Yeah but. . .” I get it. I’d love to say that, too, but if we are people of the Word, the Word must be our standard in *everything*. I can’t cherry-pick the commands I want to obey and the ones I don’t want to.

Christians are to live, think, and act in ways completely different from the world because, even as we have been reminded in the Christmas season, our Savior came and is coming again. His Kingdom is coming someday! No more will sin and sorrow grow. No more will thorns infest the ground far as the curse is found! We have this hope! Therefore, this world is something I’m passing through, and my (and our) desire ought to be that others would experience the world to come.

So, let me ask you a question, **“Do you live your life in such a way that people would know you’re living in light of eternity and Christ? Or do your fears and anger reveal you’re more focused on this life?”**

Before I go further, could we just stop for a moment and ask the Lord what the truth is in our hearts? Take a few moments, and I’ll continue.

Psalm 37 comes to us as a reality check. Where is our focus? Are we focused on the Lord or on this world? Is our hope in the here-and-now things that we can see or on our glorious relationship secured in the Lord? Verses 1-2 start the same by saying, ¹“Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! ²For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.”³

If you are given to worry or anxiety, you hear this and may think, “Easier said than done.” Or, maybe you say, “Why not?! The events in America are horrible! I’m anxious!” And so, you justify your anxiety because the immensity of the circumstances. But Psalm 37, and the Bible itself, teaches us something: **The absence of fear and anger doesn’t come because of the absence of problems. The absence of fear and anger comes when resting in the presence of the all-powerful, loving God.**

Do you hear this? Tonight, many of us are going to have New Year’s celebrations! Midnight comes, and we will cheer to another year. Not to be a downer, but next year is going to have problems. In this world, we will have tribulation. Things will happen that will remind you that you have no control. Our church will weep with those who weep this year. I’m confident of these things.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:1–2.

But fear and anxiety and anger shouldn't fill us as I say. Why? Because we are children of the all-powerful, loving God. As the Psalm begins with commands, and then promises that the evil will be punished someday, it continues to move us to see the tender love of God.

Resting in the all-powerful, loving God. In verses 23-24, we read, "²³The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; ²⁴though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand."⁴

The idea of verse 23 is that when you delight in the Lord, your way of life is secure forever. Even though this evil world, sinners, and the brokenness of this world might look like it's destroying us, we're secure. God's ways always last even the most immense of storms. So, in verse 24, David says that though we may fall, we won't be cast headlong – meaning, we won't stay down. Why? Look at the illustration: The Lord upholds his hand. This is like an illustration of a younger child holding his father's hand. The child may trip or even fall, but that child will get up again. Why? Because God holds his hand. Nothing can keep us down.

Christian, do you know this about God? Do you know the tender relationship you have with God himself? The word for "LORD" here is the name of God that emphasizes his covenant power. This is Yahweh. The covenant-keeping God who has set his steadfast, never-ending, never-giving up love on all who turn to him!

Why does this matter to now this about God? Because I think we tend to believe that this world is more powerful than God. Sometimes when I talk to people (or even myself) about not worrying, they'll say, "But I have to do something!" And they may be right. But the first thing they need to do is rest in the Lord. That's FIRST. Otherwise, you're doing without the strength of God. Do you remember the story of Moses and the Israelites when they were so afraid, they wouldn't fight the battle God called them to do? Then when God stated their punishment, they said, "We will go and fight!" God says he wouldn't go with them if they did. I can't help but wonder if many of us are just like the Israelites. We either are so frozen in fear, we do nothing. Or, we do, but without God. Oh, Christians, listen carefully. Nothing matters if we are not resting in our Savior first and always. Yes, you have to do something – savor the Savior. The all-powerful, loving God is holding your hand.

This reminds me of a conversation I had with some of my children recently. They were telling me about someone else who hated storms and how they'd cry whenever there was a storm. Then one of my kids said, "I love storms!" I then wondered to myself, "How much does parenting have to do with my child loving storms?" I mean, I love storms, too! A thunderous storm comes, and I love it. I'm amazed by storms! When my kids were younger, in the midst of storms, I'd talk about God's power to do whatever he wants, and this God loves us. Did my words excite them and also comfort them? Have you ever had situations with your children where either your words or even your holding them comforted them when they were afraid? Why do you think your presence helped soothe their fear? Because you're greater than their fear. You're more powerful, and you're good.

Now, does your presence take away the storms and the things they're afraid of? No. But they can endure without fear because of your presence. Now, think about King David's statement here. The Lord holds

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:23–24.

our hands. Are the evildoers stronger? Are the sinful circumstances in America beyond God's control? What if the sin continues and gets worse? Has God let go of us? NO! Christian, God holds you. He is all-powerful and he loves you and me. This should affect us. Remember the apostle John's words? **There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.**⁵

How often are you savoring the satisfaction that only Jesus can give. You will not be satisfied even if all the fearful things go away. You need Jesus! You need to be reminded again and again that he has conquered and will conquer all evil! Jesus came to this earth and endured hatred from sinners, and yet as he loved them, he took the punishment they deserved so that they might be forgiven.

Now, Jesus calls us to live in the same ways. He tells us we are to love our enemies. He doesn't say that we won't have enemies, but that we are to love them. Not be angry that our enemies won't submit to us. Not live in fear. Love.

So, go back to the first two verses: Fret not yourself and be not envious. What does this mean? Don't be anxious about what they can do to you. "Oh no, if this person is voted in, they'll do this or that to me or my kids." That may very well be true, but are you living in fear of that? I hope not. Then, "do not be envious." What does that mean? The word "envy" just doesn't mean to be jealous. It means to not want someone to have what they have. I think this refers to the success that the wicked can often have. And, I think sometimes Christians want the power, control, success that the world has. So, we fight fire with fire. In other words, if you lob a bomb at us, we're going to do it back. Why? Because all we're thinking about is getting the success they have. And we don't want them to have it. That's just envy. That's not godly.

As I say all of this, you might say, "Ok, then how are we to live?" Well, again, first rest in the Lord. And, if we're resting in the Lord, then I think verse 5 gives the overarching way of living: ⁵ Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶ He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. ⁶ I read these verses because the focus of David is on the reality that everything rests on the Lord. If I'm to rest on the Lord, I'm also to rest in the reality that the Lord is in control.

Sometimes when we hear what God calls us to, we think, "That's not going to work! I have to do something more!" But is that true? What if Jesus said to the Father, "That's not going to work. If I act this way, I'll be murdered and the people will just continue on in sin!" Then there would be no salvation. The point of our living is to point to God's seemingly upside-down ways. We aren't to war like the world wars. We are to watch as the Spirit works through us to shine the light of Jesus – whether through martyrdom or through simply living faithfully day by day in Christ's love and grace. So, two questions come to my mind so far in this sermon: **Are you resting in Jesus or seeking to find rest in circumstances changing? Do you trust God is in control, even as you obey his upside-down ways?**

If you answer yes to these questions, then the following verses will make sense. King David shows us how we ought to live. Let's read verses 2-4, and 7-11: ² For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. ³ Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴ Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. . . . ⁷ Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! ⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:18.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:5–6.

only to evil. ⁹ For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. ¹⁰ In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. ¹¹ But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. ⁷

These verses reveal that the problems remain, but they won't forever. Yet, clearly this psalm is written to people who are *in the problems*. If you've ever gone through a trial, and it's been lengthy, in some ways you might not be encouraged to hear that it'll go away sometime. You want it done *now!* When you read this psalm, when you hear "soon fade" or "in a little while," you realize that these statements don't mean in a day, week, decade, century or even millennia, because wickedness is still on the earth, isn't it?! Yes. Those of us who know God also know he will judge evil. And when it happens, it'll come swiftly. But in the meantime, we also echo the psalmist prayer, "How long?!" How long is soon?

Yet, in the midst of this long-soon until God judges the wicked, the psalmist gives us encouragement, show us that **The absence of fear and anger doesn't come because of the absence of problems.** There are problems, but since God is holding our hands, and God is good, loving and in control, we can live for his glory in the here and now. So, what does that look like? If you're saying, "But I have to do something!" We've already seen we must rest in the Lord, trust he is in control (and not us). And then, **Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness; Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him.**

When we feel anger and feel anxiety, we often think we have to do something *now*. Our emotions and mind are sped up. Look at what David says. Trust and obey. Do what you know what you ought to do. Trust God will do what he says he will do and that he will do always what is right and good and best. And you do what you know God has called you to do.

To dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness is to live as God has called you where you are. We are stewards of what God has given to us in this life – with our families and friends and neighbors. What has God called you to do with them. Shine the light of Jesus in these relationships. Delight yourself in the Lord, be still before him, wait patiently for him. Patience, stillness, delight.

Do you delight in God? What does that mean? It doesn't mean that you always have super high feelings, but there's a settled satisfaction and even happiness when you know God and learn about him. Do you delight in him? There are many times I'm sad in talking with people because they're more focused on solving problems or "doing the right thing" than they are on delighting in God. That concerns me because what does it matter if you gain the whole world, but your relationship with God is nowhere and thus lose your soul. I can guarantee that if you are delighting in the Lord, fears and anger will diminish. But the question comes to you, **Is God more valuable to you than the things around you, and getting what you think is best now?** You will only seek to delight in something that you find more valuable. The same is true for being still and waiting patiently.

Waiting patiently for what? For God's rescue. For David, the evildoers and wrongdoers might persist for a while. But is God worth the wait? From eternity past, God had a plan to free people from their sinfulness and free them to know him in all of his glory for all eternity future. Many of us here are his children. And we became children at the expense of the Son of God sacrificing his own life for us on the cross. And he rose from the dead and gave us the Spirit to guide us in this broken world. And he says that the circumstances don't need to control you any more. Instead, know God. He's more powerful, more

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:2-4, 7–11.

glorious, more wonderful. He's at work, and he loves you and me. Do you believe this? Then live like it. ¹ Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! ² ³ Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. ⁴ Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶ He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. ⁷ Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! ⁸ Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. ⁹

If I were to define the character of one who lives this way, I'd just go to David's word in verse 11: **meek**. The word for "meek" refers to power that's under control. To be meek means that you know who's in control of you and you submit to him. You could do this, that, or the other thing, but God is guiding you, so you submit to him. Does verse 11 sound familiar to you? Jesus emphasized these words in his Beatitudes. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land. He's referring to eternal life and eternal home with God. People can persecute and kill us and others, but we still are victorious. Since this is the case, I don't need anger or fear.

I believe Satan wants us to fear and respond in fear because it's a very deceptive tactic to incapacitate Christians and distract us from our mission. If we can act like the world, then the world won't see Jesus through us. And we will get caught in other kinds of sins. Revert to fear or anger, and Satan wins. Treat sinful image-bearers with contempt and then they won't see the love and mercy of God through his children.

Jesus was meek towards us, and for thousands of years, he's been praised by generations – whether the societies were hostile to Christ or open to Christianity. God now calls us to the same. Savor the Savior. Delight yourself in God. Get back to the basics. Trust and obey. There is no other way. God holds your hand.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:1.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:3–8.