

Fretting, Faith, and Fading Flowers (Psalm 37:1–3)

Isaiah 26:3, which Josh just read to us here before that final song says, “The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.” That is a challenge in the world in which we live, to have a resting and perfect peace of heart, peace of mind, peace of soul, especially in a world where everything seems to militate against that peace. And we want to be at rest and we want to trust in God. And it is very easy to say, when we are cast about in every way, “You just need to trust in the Lord more.” But it's more difficult to do that than it is to say it because doing that requires that we constantly come back to certain foundational truths and analyze and examine our own hearts and diagnose what the problem is, that it is a lack of trust, it is a lack of confidence and faith, and then find ways in which we are to put off that uncertainty and instead turn our hearts and our trust to the Lord.

And we live in a world that is full of anxiety and distress and restlessness, turmoil, uncertainty, chaos, nervous tension, uneasiness, apprehension, injustice, corruption, violence, wickedness, oppression, dishonesty. It's all around us, a constant upheaval and turmoil that can cast even the most grounded of believers into a disquietude of soul that is quite vexing. And when we realize that we are surrounded by the wicked and the evil and we see them sometimes prospering in their evil deeds, that makes the righteous tend to fret and to be even more disquieted because we feel like something is not right. We live in this upside-down world and it is easier to just simply say “Well, you need to trust the Lord” than it is to actually do that when life constantly assaults you with these inequities and these injustices and the chaos around us.

Psalm 37 deals with that issue of the prosperity of the wicked, and we are looking at that. That notion of the prosperity of the wicked is the backdrop of the entire psalm, as we saw last week when we looked at the introduction to this. Psalm 37 recounts many of the blessings that God gives to the upright, and the opening eight verses reorient our focus off the wicked and the things that assault us and onto the Lord. With a relentless drumbeat, the author just brings our focus back to the Lord, back to the Lord, back to the Lord, over and over again, with these various commands that we find in the first eight verses. Because the answer to our vexation over the wicked in this life is not a theological argument about why bad things happen to good people. There are no good people, so that's really not even a right theological question to ask. But it's not a treatise even on the nature of justice or the timing of justice or really even the legitimacy of God's promises. Really the answer to the vexation of our mind and heart, though those

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things play into it, really comes back to focusing our mind and our heart upon God—who He is, what He has promised, and how He is good and sovereign and gracious. And then we are encouraged to wait patiently upon Him for our vindication.

So the author begins by focusing our heart and mind upon God in these first eight verses. We see that the first thing that God gives to those who are His is peace. He provides peace to us. So let's read these first eight verses, and then we'll make a few observations about all eight of them, and then we'll jump into the beginning, the first three verses, this morning. Psalm 37:1–8:

- 1 Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers.
- 2 For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb.
- 3 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate 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 also in Him, and He will do it.
- 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday.
- 7 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.
(NASB)

These verses deal with our response to evildoers and to wrongdoers.

I want you to notice a couple of observations just about those eight verses before we jump in with the first verse. First, notice that there are a number of commands in these verses, some of them negative and some of them positive. Look again at the psalm. Look at the positive commands: verse 3, trust in the Lord, do good, dwell in the land, cultivate faithfulness; verse 4, delight yourself in the Lord; verse 5, commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him; verse 7, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him; verse 8, cease from anger, forsake wrath. And then you'll notice that there are some negative commands. In fact, the negative commands kind of bracket this section of the psalm. Verse 1, do not fret and be not envious, and then verse 7, do not fret, and then verse 8, do not fret.

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And in fact, that command, that negative command to not fret, do not fret, sort of brackets all eight of those verses. Verse 1 begins with “do not fret,” and verse 8 ends with “do not fret,” and in the middle are all of these various commands that we are given. Four of them, four of these commands, directly reference the Lord. You can see them in verses 3, 4, 5, and 7: verse 3, trust in the Lord; verse 4, delight yourself in the Lord; verse 5, commit your way to the Lord; and verse 7, rest in the Lord. And four times there, the name of God is used, translated as “the LORD” in all caps in your translation likely, unless you have the LSB, which translates it as “Yahweh,” which is the name of God. Trust in Yahweh, delight yourself in Yahweh, commit your way to Yahweh, and rest in Yahweh. Trust, delight, commit, and rest. And that would be a good four-point sermon, actually, for the whole eight verses, but we're not doing that this morning. Just wanted you to notice that.

Today, we're going to be focusing on the first three verses and the counsel that the psalmist gives us for dealing with or being at peace with the state of the wicked in this world. Verses 1, 2, and 3—we're going to see one principle from each of these verses. In verse 1, we must refuse to fret. In verse 2, we must remember they fade. And in verse 3, we must respond in faith. Refuse to fret, remember they fade, and then respond in faith.

Look at verse 1: “Do not fret because of evildoers, be not envious toward wrongdoers.” Now, it's interesting to me that this is how the psalm begins. Do not fret. It doesn't even begin, really, the psalm, with talking about an attribute of God that we are to focus on. It is right out of the gate from the very first word, here's what you're doing. Here's what you ought not to do. And so do not fret. And instead, we are to fix our attention on the Lord. “Be not envious toward wrongdoers,” verse 1 continues. The most natural response for the people of God in a world such as ours, when we are surrounded by wicked people, is to fret. That's the most natural inclination of the human heart is to get upset and to be anxious.

That's what our word *fret* means, to be anxious or upset, to be vexed or agonized or troubled over something, to fuss about it. And that kind of captures the idea of the Hebrew word that is translated “fret” here. There's really no single English word that captures kind of the passion of this word. And I'll tell you what it means. Our English word *fret* has to do with being anxious or worried or fussing over something. And this word is a little bit more colorful than that. Thirty-five of the ninety-three times that this word translated “fret” is used in the Old Testament, it describes becoming hot or angry,

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and it is translated as hot or angry, to become hot or angry, to be kindled or to burn with anger.

In fact, the noun form of this word is used back in Psalm 2:5, speaking of Yahweh, “Then He will speak to them in His anger [that's the word, the noun form of that word] and terrify them in His fury.” And when it is used of God's anger or human anger and translated that way, it describes more than just simply a worried anxiousness over something. You can see how that doesn't fit. That idea doesn't fit in Psalm 2. God does not speak to them in His worry or His anxiety over something, but He does speak to the wicked in His anger. And so this word describes a disquietness of soul, of heart, that has the idea of heating oneself into a vexation. It's kind of, in some ways, a reflexive verb in the sense that it describes one who gets churned up because they churn themselves up, especially with human anger, over some injustice or something that is going on in their lives. To heat up oneself in vexation—it describes God's burning anger. And when used in human beings, it describes human anger that is likewise burning and heated.

The verb form is used four times in the Old Testament, three times here in verse 1, verse 7, and verse 8, and then one time in Proverbs 24:19, where we read almost the exact same words that we find in verse 1. “Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked” (Prov. 24:19). Allen Ross in his commentary on the Psalms says that this word *fret* here, the word translated “fret”—he says this: “It expresses a passionate intensity, a consuming indignation.” Let's stop there for just a second. Hear those words. A passionate intensity, a consuming indignation, like you are being burned up on the inside because of what you see. Do not have this burning intensity that consumes you because of what you see going on with the wicked. Ross continues, “Krauss says [I don't know who Krauss is, but probably a German guy from the name] that it goes even further than that, it is a passionate frustration and inquiry about the power and the rule of God.”

So this isn't just an anger that is disconnected from God in some way. This is a disquieted state of soul, a consuming, passionate anger over a situation that drags God into the middle of the anger and becomes vexed and frustrated and fretting about His rule and His power. So it's not just I'm angry that this bad thing happens in the world, but I'm angry because this bad thing happens in the world and God should do something about this now. And because He's not doing something about it and righting this wrong, therefore I am upset, I am consumed with this, because some injustice has been done and it has escaped God's attention. So it's an anger over what God is doing, anger over

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what God is working, how He works, and when He works, and what He decides to do in His time, how God is dealing with the issue. And it really is describing an impatience with God.

This is the state of soul, though he doesn't use it, that Asaph expresses in Psalm 73 when he says, "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence" (v. 13). See, Asaph was consumed over this issue of the prosperity of the wicked, and after wrestling through what he saw, he says, "Maybe then I have been pure before God and I have been pursuing holiness and I have been casting away my sin all for nothing, all in vain because God deals with the wicked this way and with the righteous this way, and that is an inequity and an injustice, and these scales are flipped, and the whole universe is upside down." And then you get this disquieting anger within you that brings God, as it were, into the courtroom where, God forbid, you take the throne and begin to pass judgment upon God's deeds and His works and what He does and how He works it out in His timing, as if you or I could be God's counselor and say, "Here is how You need to deal with the wicked, and here is what You need to do to the wicked, and until this happens, I will be disquieted in my soul and I will have this grudge, this burning indignation, against how God works in this world." So the psalmist commands us, "Do not fret."

Now there is an anger that is right and just in this world. The Psalms express that kind of anger. Ephesians 4:26 says we are to "be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on [our] anger." So there is a righteous indignation and an anger that is righteous and holy. The anger that is righteous and holy is not an anger for my own honor, my own glory, my own good, my own sense of justice, but rather it is an anger over God not being vindicated, God being blasphemed, innocent people suffering. There is a righteous anger that is angry the way that God is angry and for the things that anger God. But when I become the one who is hard done by and then I am angry over that, that is an unrighteous indignation. But there is a righteous indignation, and it is easy to understand how we can be angry over what the wicked do in this life. The injustices abound all around us, and as righteous people, we have to deal with that.

When protesters burned down city blocks during the "Summer of Love" in 2020 over the death of a criminal on a street somewhere, and meanwhile pro-lifers by the current regime are being raided and arrested and put on trial for standing outside of abortion clinics, that should make you angry. There's a place for righteous indignation over that. But it becomes a sinful anger when I bring God into the dock, as it were, and begin to

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judge Him and try and dictate to Him how He should deal with this situation of injustice. We can understand being angry when violence and lawbreaking go either unnoticed or even rewarded in some cases, like say, for instance, somebody were to start a GoFundMe campaign to get a criminal out of jail for burning down a police station or something like that, maybe a vice presidential candidate, if they were to do something like that. And meanwhile, they are prosecuting and persecuting the righteous. That should make us angry. It should make us angry in a righteous way that this injustice is happening and thus God is being blasphemed. When it is OK in our culture to openly groom children in every corner of our society, but if you teach children biblical sexual ethics, you are a puritanical domestic terrorist, that seems unjust. It's easy to understand how the righteous would be perplexed by that. When we endure infliction and yet the wicked seem to delight themselves in ease and abundance.

Spurgeon said this: "It is alas! too common for believers in their hours of adversity to think themselves harshly dealt with when they see persons utterly destitute of religion and honesty, rejoicing in abundant prosperity." It is part of our nature to be prone to be upset over these injustices, and the more finely tuned your sense of justice and righteousness is and the more you desire holiness and righteousness and are aware of your own sin, the more likely you are to be vexed and to fret over the unrighteousness of those around us. Spurgeon calls this inequity "paradoxical providences." I love that phrase. Paradoxical providences. It just doesn't seem to be right, does it? And yet by God's providence, this is how it flows out in this life. But it's paradoxical in the sense that it's the opposite of what we would expect to see at times. "To see lawbreakers," Spurgeon says, "strutting on horses and the upright walking in the mud."

So what is the answer then to the fretting? Stop it. That's it. Read again verse 1 if you doubt that: "Do not fret." Stop it. Cease from your fretting, and if you have trouble with that, go down to verse 7: "Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way." And if you're still not understanding what the psalmist is saying, read verse 8, the very end of it: "Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing." Stop it. That is difficult. I understand that. Have you met people who are just seething with rage over the wicked? That is not healthy. That is not right. That is not righteous. The anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Remove whatever it is that is causing that anger. Put off the fretting, and you're going to put on faith—that's verse 3, but we're not there just yet. Fretting is the opposite of faith.

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Now look down at the end of the second half of verse 1. Notice the second half deals with envying. “Be not envious toward wrongdoers.” So we have two negative commands right off the start—do not fret and be not envious toward those who are wrongdoers. Envy really is a weakness of faith. It is the opposite of faith. Envy is when we desire to have what the wicked have or desire to be what the wicked are, to enjoy what the wicked enjoy, to have their station in life and to mimic it, to enjoy it as well. Envy is what leads to fretting because we see what the wicked have and we want what the wicked have, and then we become angry when we don't get what the wicked have and the wicked don't get what we have or what we think at least that they deserve.

And envy then also leads to imitation. Proverbs warns us about this. Proverbs 3:31: “Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways.” Do you hear that? Do not envy the man of violence, do not choose any of his ways. Envy is what leads to choosing the path of the wicked because we see what the wicked have and we say, “But I want that.” And if they got that by doing that, then we are inclined or at least tempted to pursue their ways to get what they had the way that they got it. So do not envy the wicked man or you will be inclined to pursue his ways. Proverbs 23:17: “Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the Lord always.” Fearing God keeps us from envying the wicked.

Now that is difficult when you are in school and you see one of your schoolmates being advanced to the top of the class and they're student of the month and even valedictorian, and they cheated all the way to the top to get that. They used some AI to write their tests and they are a teacher's pet and so of course they are always getting the benefit of the curve and always getting the benefit of the teacher's spare time. They get to the head of their class, and yet you know that the student is not working hard. They are cheating at every opportunity they have, and you are the only one that notices it. And if you envy that student, then you will be tempted to do what that student has done to get off with the ease that that student has enjoyed. Likewise, if you are in a workplace and your coworker is promoted after fudging the numbers and adjusting the charts just a little bit and lying to his supervisor, and he gets promoted and you get passed over, you will be tempted to do the same thing that your coworker does if it means that you could enjoy some of the pleasures and benefits that he also received from his cheating.

If you envy the path of the wicked, then you will imitate that, because first we envy it and want it, and then we get angry when we don't get it, and then we are willing to sin

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in order to get it, and so we will follow their ways and their path in order to get what they have. And here's the worst part. This is the final step. Then you justify the sin by excusing it, saying, "I was due this thing. I didn't get this thing. I deserved this thing, and therefore it's OK for me to sin to get this thing because it was owed to me. This was something that was mine by right." And so then you justify the sin. So, the psalmist begins, refuse to fret.

Now look at verse 2. Remember they fade. Verse 2: "They will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb." Here's the perspective that we must have on the wicked, and we're going to be coming back to this time and again as we work our way through Psalm 37. The perspective we must have is that the flourishing of the wicked is short-lived, and their destruction is sudden and swift. Now this agricultural analogy here of the herb and the green grass, it's one that anybody who lived in Israel in ancient times or even today is familiar with. There is a time of the year in Israel when it is lush and green and growing and fruitful and looks beautiful—that's the rainy season—and then after a couple of months all of that goes away and everything is brown and dry and arid unless it's right next to the Jordan River. The rest of the land goes from green to brown in a hurry because when the heat of the summer months come, the grass withers quickly and fades away. So the imagery here is that the wicked are like an herb that is planted with shallow roots and shallow soil, or like grass, and its roots do not go down deep into the soil at all. When that summer heat comes and the sun comes up, then that grass dries up and withers away quickly. It's an agricultural analogy that is very powerful.

In fact, the word *wither* here is used back in Psalm 1:3 when it describes the man of God who meditates on the law of the Lord day and night. It says, "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither [that's the same word]; and in whatever he does, he prospers." In Psalm 1, the righteous man, the godly man, the blessed man is described as the tree that does not wither. And here in Psalm 37, the unrighteous, the wicked, are described as the grass that does wither.

Now we may not see them withering now, but we will. It may seem as if they are flourishing now for a time, but they will wither, and when it happens, it will be sudden and it will be quick. They are green and lush and well-fed, fat and happy now, and they delight themselves in abundance. But God's Word promises that while they skip about

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with ease right now, there is coming a time when they will skip no more and they will wither quickly.

In fact, this agricultural analogy brackets the entire psalm, Psalm 37. It's here in verse 2, but then look down at verses 35–36: “I have seen a wicked, violent man spreading himself like a luxuriant tree in its native soil. Then he passed away, and lo, he was no more; I sought for him, but he could not be found.” So there's another agricultural analogy kind of at the bottom of the psalm that sort of brackets everything that is in between, as if the psalmist is reminding us at the beginning of the psalm and at the end of the psalm that what we're talking about is something that looks luxuriant, well-fed, healthy, vibrant for a brief period of time, but like grass or like a tree with shallow roots in sandy soil, it will wither quickly once the heat of God's judgment comes upon it. Once that summer comes, it will be gone. Their judgment will be sudden, and it will be swift.

Psalm 73—which you're going to hear me quoting Psalm 73 throughout Psalm 37. In Psalm 73, Asaph says, “Until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form” (vv. 17–20). A total destruction, withering grass. Psalm 92:7 says “that when the wicked sprouted up like grass and all who did iniquity flourished, it was only that they might be destroyed forevermore.” Zophar is right in Job. Now, not everything that Job's counselors said is right or good, but Zophar was right in Job 20:4–8 when he says this:

4 Do you know this from of old, from the establishment of man on earth,

5 that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless momentary?

6 Though his loftiness reaches the heavens, and his head touches the clouds,

7 he perishes forever like his [own dung]; those who have seen him will say, “Where is he?”

8 He flies away like a dream, and they cannot find him; even like a vision of the night he is chased away. (NASB, bracketed insertion from ESV)

He perishes forever like his own dung. If you have an issue with that, don't take it up with me. I'm just reading to you what Scripture says.

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This psalm, Psalm 37, has plenty to say about the judgment of the wicked, and we're going to get to all of them before we get to the end of the psalm. But for now, I just ask you to consider this: why would you envy that? Why would you envy that? That's really the point. Don't envy the sinner. Why do you fret over that which is perishing quickly? Has anyone ever envied grass and thought to themselves, "You know, I wish I was like grass." Or a withered tree, a dead tree? Nobody ever envies that.

Let me give you another word picture, and I'm borrowing elements of this from Spurgeon, but I'm adapting it a little bit for my own purposes, so when you get to Heaven, don't blame Spurgeon for this if something goes south. It's all me. Imagine that you're sitting in a theater watching a production on the stage and there's a young boy sitting right next to you watching the same production. And on the stage, there's a man who is playing the part of a king, and he has on his stage robe, his cloak, his outfit, and he's got his robe on and his crown, and he sits on a throne up on the stage, and he rules over a vast domain in this play. And he gets to sit down in a couple of scenes and enjoy lush banquets and the best of foods, choice wine, and all the comforts and ease that the commoners can only imagine and dream about but never get to taste. And then imagine the boy sitting in the crowd next to you begins to envy the king on the stage. And he thinks to himself, "I would like to be that man. I would like to sit on that throne and wear that robe and have that crown and sit at that stage prop of a table and enjoy the lavish banquet that's up there. I mean, that looks like quite a feast. I wish that I could be that actor." But then the actor has to take off the robe and step off the throne, and the curtain comes down and the lights go out and the theater empties out, and that man who played the part of the king for a brief period of time has to go back to his house and live like the rest of the commoners. But then imagine that the boy sitting next to you begins to say to you, "I envy that king. I want to be like him. I want to have what he has."

And then further, imagine that this boy sitting next to you is actually himself the heir to a large estate. And the throne is his, and the kingdom is his. And though he doesn't enjoy any of it now, the certainty that he will sit down at a table and enjoy a banquet that puts this one to shame and sit on a throne that puts this one to shame and wear a crown that puts this one to shame—all of that is his and all of it is certain. And that boy begins to envy what that actor has for two hours.

Now what would your counsel be to that young man sitting next to you, the heir to the throne and the kingdom envying the guy playacting on the stage? What would you

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counsel him? Do not fret or be envious of that man because everything that he enjoys disappears in two hours, and you just have to wait and you inherit the kingdom. That's what you would advise him. It fades. It's going to be gone. We have to remember that. Such is the state of the wicked.

To give you a second word picture, not nearly as good, and this one I'm kind of inventing myself, so I don't know where this is going to go, but imagine that you're a barn animal, and this is not an *Animal Farm* reference at all, but imagine you're a barn animal and you've been working the field for Mr. Jones for all this time, and you get your daily allotment of water and grain while that ox sits in the stall over there in the corner and never gets to go out. He just lays around eating the best of grain, drinking the milk. He's just growing fatter and lazier by the day. And finally, one day, after you've worked hard out in the field, you're coming back into the barnyard and you see the ox being led with a bucket of grain out to the truck. And now he gets to go away. And you can only imagine it's to a vacation, some lush pasture somewhere where he gets to lay around and just eat the greenest of grass. And then you would say to yourself, "Man, I sure envy that ox." But what's the problem with that? What you don't know is that ox is being led away to the slaughter.

Now where my analogy breaks down is that eventually all the farm animals get led away to the slaughter. But stop there for just a second. Just imagine the folly of standing there envying the ox being led away to the slaughter. You would counsel all of the other barn animals, "Don't envy him. It is better to work the land for Farmer Jones—if only you could avoid the slaughter and inherit the whole farm, but you're not going to."

So, what the wicked have only hastens their ruin, it doesn't hasten their reward. There is no reward. There is no reward. I promise you this, in ten thousand years, you and I will stand around and look at each other and shake our heads in disbelief that we ever even for a moment wanted to trade places with the wicked—shaking our heads in disbelief. And we will say, "Was that not just like a dream, and it vanished, and here we are with the land and the kingdom under our feet and at our fingertips? How foolish were we to envy them for even a moment, to even want to trade places with that for even a moment."

Do not fret, remember they fade, and third, respond with faith. Look at verse 3: "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness." Trust in the Lord—you'll notice all caps in your translation. It's the tetragrammaton, which is the name of God, YHWH, Yahweh. Some translations, like the Legacy Standard, translate that as

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“Yahweh,” taking the name of God and translating it. Instead of just rendering it as “the LORD” with all caps, it actually renders it as “Yahweh,” so it's “Trust in Yahweh.” Fretting is a lack of trust, and so the psalmist commends us rather than to fret and be envious to instead place our faith in Yahweh, trusting in Him, His justice, His promises, His goodness, His wisdom, His timing. Trust that the wicked will indeed wither and the meek will indeed inherit the earth.

“Trust in the Lord and do good” (v. 3); that's the second part of that first statement, do good. There is a faith and there is good works; these two things go together. Faith comes first, then good works flow out of that, so we trust in the Lord and we do good, and this is in contradistinction to the wrongdoers of verse 1. So yes, we are tempted to fret over the wrongdoing of the evil and to be envious of them, but instead we trust in the Lord rather than being envious, and we do good rather than do evil or mimic the ways of the unrighteous and the wicked. So rather than pursuing what the wicked do to get what they seem to receive for a period of time, instead we are to trust the Lord and we are to instead do good.

Notice the second part of that—before I move on to the second part of that phrase, there is always the temptation when doing good without an immediate reward to begin to think to ourselves, why am I doing this? Right? To lose heart in doing good. I do good—this is Asaph in Psalm 73—I wash my hands in innocence and I pursue the Lord. And what do I get out of it? I'm chastened every morning while my neighbor who is wicked and is concerned with nothing about the Lord is fat and happy and well fed. He has everything that the world could offer. He enjoys it, it seems like, carefree, without a worry in the world. So why do I wash my hands in innocence? Why do I do righteousness? Why do I serve? Why do I mortify sin? Why do I apply the means of grace if in this world it seems as if the results are so upside down to what they should be. There's always the temptation to lose heart in doing good when you see the prosperity of the wicked. So the psalmist says, “Trust in the Lord and do good” (Ps. 37:3).

Now what does that look like? Second part of verse 3, “Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.” It's interesting—if you have other translations, you will notice that there's a different translation of that phrase. It's somewhat enigmatic and uncertain exactly how best to translate the second half of verse 3. I'll give you a couple of different ways that it's translated in major Bible translations. So the NASB, which I just read to you,

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says, “Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.” Here's how a couple of other translations translate it:

The ESV, English Standard Version, says, “Dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.”

The NIV says, “Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.” That's quite a bit different, isn't it?

The King James says, “So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” I had to say that slowly because I don't normally speak in that kind of cadence, but, “So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.”

And then the New King James, “Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.”

And again, the NASB, “Cultivate faithfulness.”

So how do we translate that? How are we to understand what the author is saying there? It really boils down to two possible ways of understanding what he's getting at. Number one, he could be referring to what God does for us. He could be referring to what God does for us. And that would be the King James, New King James, NIV, right? “Verily thou shalt be fed” (KJV), you will “feed on His faithfulness” (NKJV), you will “enjoy safe pasture” (NIV). Dwell in the land and God will do this for you. In other words, what the author is describing here is God's provision for His own people. In other words, don't be envious of what the wicked have. Instead, dwell in the land, be content with your lot, and trust that God in His faithfulness will shepherd and feed and provide for you.

Now, God's provision for the righteous is part of Psalm 73. You remember later on when David says, “I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread.” He talks about God's material provision for His own people in time by His providence. That's part of the psalm. It's part of the answer to the prosperity of the wicked, but I don't think that that's what the author is getting at here. He's going to deal with that later. I think rather in the second place what the author is describing here is not what God does for us but what we are to do in being faithful. This is how the NASB translates it: “Dwell in the land and cultivate [in other words, it is another command] faithfulness. The ESV says, “Befriend faithfulness.” Literally the words mean “shepherd fidelity.” Dwell in the land and shepherd fidelity. Because it is the word that is used of cultivating something, grazing something, shepherding, pasturing it, and then the word for fidelity or steadfastness or faithfulness.

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And I think that what the author is saying here is that we are to trust in the Lord and do good. What does that look like? We are to dwell in the land—that is, to live in the apportionment that God has given to us. In Israel, they had given each tribe a partition of the land in which to live, and they were to dwell in that land. And part of dwelling in that land—in other words, carrying on life, living out your life, enjoying the things that God has given to you. You are to dwell in the land and live there and cultivate or shepherd your own faithfulness and fidelity to the Lord. In other words, you trust in the Lord and do good and make sure you protect, guard, feed, and take care of your own faithfulness. Don't fret over the unfaithfulness of the wicked. Cultivate your own faithfulness. Do not be worried about what the wicked have and envy it, and instead, enjoy what God has given to you and make sure that you are fixated upon shepherding and guarding your own faithfulness. That I think is what the author is describing. It's something that we must be diligent to do, to guard our own fidelity to the Lord as we shepherd faithfulness in our own lives.

So what does it mean to shepherd faithfulness? What does a shepherd do? He leads and feeds and cares for and watches out for and protects those that are underneath of his charge. We are to do that with our own fidelity and faithfulness, examining our own faithfulness and protecting it and making sure that we are not fretting about what others have, but instead that we are minding our own business, in a sense, if I can say it that way, that we are enjoying what God has given to us, and that we are cultivating our own faithfulness to Yahweh in the midst of living the life that He has called us to live.

And so then I would ask you this. What are you doing to cultivate faithful obedience to the Lord? Fretting will poison that. Fretting will undermine that. Anxiety over evildoers is the death of faith. So do you spend more time agonizing over the wicked and every headline that runs across Fox News, or do you spend more time cultivating, monitoring, feeding, developing, and protecting your own fidelity and faithfulness to the Lord so that, again, in the language of Hebrews 12 and 13, you may finish your race, you may run your race and finish it, and then, having done the will of God, receive that which is promised?

Ecclesiastes 9:7–10—this is the reflection of Solomon, the man who saw life under the sun. And he says in Ecclesiastes, look, sometimes it happens to the wicked according to what the righteous should get, and sometimes it happens to the righteous according to what the wicked should get, in this life when viewed under the sun. So Solomon acknowledges all of the injustices and the seeming vanity of life in this world without

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God. But then every once in a while in Ecclesiastes, Solomon opens up the window and lets the sun shine in for a little bit, and you get to see life as it is in truth. And he gives you some good wisdom along the way as he's wrestling through that issue. In Ecclesiastes 9, Solomon says this:

7 Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.

8 Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.

9 Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.
(NASB)

I think that's what Solomon is saying. Dwell in the land. Live your life. Enjoy your bread, the gifts that God has given to you. Focus on those. Enjoy those things. Live with those things. Thank God for those things. And do good. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might because life is short. And don't fret over the wicked. Don't worry about the inequities and the lack of justice and righteousness in this world amongst the wicked. Instead, live life with the wife of your youth and enjoy the blessings that God has given to you. Dwell in the land, do good, cultivate faithfulness, trust in Yahweh, and He will bring it to pass.

Matthew Henry says this: "When we look forward with the eye of faith, we shall see no reason to envy the wicked with their prosperity, for their ruin is at their door and they are ripening apace for it. . . . Outward prosperity is a fading thing, and so is the life itself to which it is confined. They will sooner be cut down by the judgments of God. Their triumphing is short, but their weeping and wailing will be everlasting." Therefore, refuse to fret, remember they fade, and respond in faith.

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