

## Prayer

O God, You have made this day, and it is full of the magnificent glory of light; the light of sunshine which sustains life on earth; the light of Your revelation which nurtures the soul, and the light of Your love by which we are saved. Shine, Jesus, shine! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: The Church in the Community

Offer prayers today for all who seek to be married in your church, whether as Christians who are members of the church or who come to a church building because it is central to the community in which they live. Pray that the church and its leaders will use such opportunities to help people come to know God's true purpose for marriage, and the saving power of His love.

## Meditation

Thank You, Jesus, for the joy of little things which mean so much;  
Those things through which Your love breaks through into everyday life:

- For a smile on a face which says 'thanks', or 'I love you';
- For a card received from a friend who cares;
- For the smell of good food, ready to be served;
- For the joy of spending time with the people you love;
- For the sound of wonderful music which feeds your soul;
- For the pleasure of talking to a friend 'heart to heart';
- For time spent reading a book that opens your mind;
- For a good night's sleep after a good day's work;

And, thank You, Jesus, for as well as being  
Our Saviour and our Redeemer, You are also our Friend.

## Bible Study - Psalm 37:21-31

- <sup>21</sup> *The wicked borrow and do not repay,  
but the righteous are generous and give;*
- <sup>22</sup> *For those who are blessed by the LORD  
will inherit the land,  
but those who are cursed by Him will  
be cut off.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Those whose allow the LORD to direct  
their steps  
walk a path of which He approves;*  
<sup>24</sup> *And though they stumble, they will not  
fall,  
for the LORD holds them with His  
hand.*
- <sup>25</sup> *I was young and now I am old,  
but I have not seen the righteous  
forsaken  
or their children begging for bread.*
- <sup>26</sup> *They are always generous and lend  
freely;  
their children become a blessing.*
- <sup>27</sup> *Turn away from evil and do good;  
and you will dwell in security for ever.*
- <sup>28</sup> *For the LORD loves justice,  
and He will not forsake his faithful  
ones.*  
*The unjust will be destroyed for ever,  
and the children of the wicked will be  
disinherited;*
- <sup>29</sup> *the righteous will inherit the land  
and live in it for ever.*
- <sup>30</sup> *The mouths of the righteous speak  
wisdom,  
and their tongues speak justice.*
- <sup>31</sup> *The law of their God is in their hearts;  
and their feet do not slip.*

## Review

The two sections of Psalm 37 which we have read so far have been very different. The first section (37:1-11) encouraged the righteous, and the second (37:12-20) strongly condemned the wicked. A typical analysis of Psalm 37 might suggest that the third part of the Psalm which forms our reading today (37:21-31) is about the blessings that the Lord gives to the righteous. The passage does indeed talk about the blessing of inheriting and dwelling in the land (37:22,27,29), about the security of walking in the Lord's way (37:23,24), about the blessing of our inheritance and future generations (37:26), and about the security we have in the Lord (37:28,31). These are all good pegs from which to hang a sermon, but it avoids the really difficult feature of the passage which comes in verse 25; 'I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging for bread ...' This appears to suggest that if we trust in the Lord and live righteously, then we will come to no harm in this world. Now it is certainly true that God's people will gloriously testify to His wonderful provision even in times of difficulty, but the truth is that some righteous people do starve and their children do die as a result of the evil that is in the world. Their powerful testimony, sometimes as martyrs, makes those of us who live in relative luxury and peace feel very small, but what are we to make of this psalm? Can we really tell young people that if they believe in the Lord 'everything will turn out just fine'?

We must be careful to ensure that what we believe, preach and teach is consistent with all of Scripture, and not just a quick opinion about one text, so a deeper look at this passage is required if we are to access the heart of this teaching. In this world, both accidents and evil incidents happen to people of faith and people of no faith alike, and much of the Old Testament teaches that although suffering is an unavoidable part of life, God will save us not so much by preventing tragedy, but by overcoming the power of evil to destroy us through it (see the story of Job and the teaching of Isaiah, chapters 40 -53 for example). This, of course, prepares us for the full Gospel of Jesus in the New Testament, which gives us the full assurance of God's salvation, whatever our human circumstances, if we will place our faith in Him.

When verse 25 confidently asserts that the children of the faithful will not starve, how does this fit into the wider understanding of Scripture's teaching about suffering? The clue is to be found in the setting of the psalm. Here, as nowhere else in psalm 37, we hear the words of a teacher speaking personally to pupils; 'I was young and now I am old ...' (37:25) Having taught the standard Old Testament themes of right and wrong, he tells his pupils his own experience. He says that he has found the ways of the Lord to be secure and trustworthy. By speaking in this way and emphasising his own age, the teacher appeals to the pupils to think in the long term rather than the short term, and this is the key to our further interpretation of this text.

The teacher is primarily concerned that his pupils will make judgements that make sense in the long term, rather than the short term, and it is obvious that this is the perspective of his teaching. His appeal to the pupils becomes, through the psalm, an appeal to us. All we experience now, for good or ill, is best placed in the light of God's eternal perspective. This is why we must set our sights on truth, justice, righteousness and wisdom and not allow any evil or wickedness to come between us and our Lord, to whom we are committed.

## **Going Deeper**

The verses which make up our passage for today only contrast the 'wicked' and the 'righteous' in verse 21, which follows on from the previous section. However, from verse 22, the passage deals almost entirely with the blessings and characteristics of the righteous, and we will now look at how they illustrate God's 'long term' perspective in life.

### **Take the Long view**

Once we have identified the significance of verse 25, it becomes obvious that the long term perspective which it indicates is a key feature of the whole psalm. Because God is the Lord of both the beginning and the end of all creation, it is therefore His righteousness alone by which we will ultimately be judged, and His timing is crucial for all things. For example, psalm 37 tells us that we must wait on the Lord (37:9), that our 'heritage will last for ever' (37:18), and that the judgement of all evil ultimately belongs to God alone (37:17).

By keeping this long term perspective on life, we will more readily see God at work through the ups and downs of our own lives. Verses 23 and 24 contain a promise of God's long term care,

which adds the encouragement that even though we stumble, we may be assured the Lord will lead us 'by the hand' (37:24) and bring us through our troubles. This image is very reassuring, but it is even more helpful when we realise what is meant by 'stumbling'. In this context, it means becoming confused about right and wrong, or making the wrong moral choices in the short term. In the long term, the Lord will help us if we are committed to Him. I doubt if there is any one of us who does not appreciate this promise of God, for we face moral choices all the time, and we all make mistakes. Unless the Lord helps us, then what hope do we have? Christians today have this hope because of the presence of Jesus in their lives, but a psalm such as this reflected the love of God long before the time of Jesus, when the people of Israel based their religion on the laws of Moses. It is helpful to know that through psalms such as this, even the Old Testament indicates that the religious laws given to Moses were not the final word on the revelation of God! The psalm was written by someone who had lived a long life (37:25); it was the voice of experience!

Taking the long term view certainly helps us with the difficult passage which comes next (37:25,26) which speaks of God's people not being forsaken by the Lord or abandoned by Him to despair and social depravity. For in the Lord's good time, He will enable those who trust in Him to come through difficult times to a place of blessing. Whatever our personal circumstances, the teaching of this psalm asks us to place our whole trust in the Lord's provision, in the firm belief that He will ultimately bless us. It may be very hard for us to yield everything to Him, and even harder to do this when we are suffering. This is when we need to hear the voice of wisdom and experience from those who have travelled far longer and far further along the road of life than ourselves. Their testimony of the Lord's provision is one that can inspire us to hold on to righteousness and truth even though life is tough.

As an aside, I do not wish to belittle the difficulties that some people face, but I have personally served the church in parts of Zimbabwe where there was (and is) great poverty and injustice. Amongst the Christians who endured the terrible conditions of life I observed, I found few complaints. The quality of generosity and open hearted hospitality I observed amongst those who had very little put me to shame. I saw with my own eyes how those who placed all their lives into the Lord's hands were extraordinary examples of generosity, and despite their relative poverty lived with dignity and moral rectitude that is rarely seen in the West. It is amongst the relatively wealthy that I have heard Christians grumbling about the Lord's provision and the quality of their lives; not the genuinely poor.

It is also clear from Psalm 37 that the Lord's provision is not about 'riches'; for the Lord provides enough for us to be generous in our response to others (see 37:22,26). Riches and poverty, right and wrong, age and youth; all are put into their proper perspective by this Psalm, for God will always direct life according to His long term goals, even though may we have to traverse difficult paths.

### **The Care and the Plan of God**

Psalm 37 does not just talk about the long term objectives of faith and our relationship with God. It also tells us what we must do now in order to keep in touch with the Lord's plans for us, and our future. This is indicated in verse 27, where we are bidden to 'turn away from evil and do good'; this is practical short term advice, and it is given consistently by psalm 37 in order to keep us on the right track. There is plenty of evidence that doing good will not bring short term benefits, but it does enable the achievement of long term goals. The whole story of David is an example of this, particularly if he really did have anything to do with the origins of this Psalm (given that the superscription says that it comes from his collection). David spent many years 'doing good' in the eyes of the Israelite people and in service to the troubled King Saul. Eventually he was unjustly hounded and thrown out of his country for many years. He was also separated by force from his family and endured every kind of poverty and extreme (read about it in 1 Samuel 20-31). The short term picture for David was frequently bleak, but he appears to have been sustained in the long term by the hope of establishing the earthly kingdom of God's people. When he had endured years of trouble and distress, God blessed him with the promise

of an eternal Covenant of which our Lord Jesus Christ was the fulfilment (2 Samuel 7). By 'doing good' in the short term, he enabled God to trust him with His long term goals.

This is the same as the message given by Psalm 37 in the remaining verses of our passage. If we 'do good' (v27), then 'we will dwell in security for ever' and we will 'inherit the land and live in it' (37:29). In other words, if we remain faithful to God by doing everything in our power to do good, then He will protect us and make us part of His plan for the future of His Kingdom (His 'inheritance'). And lastly, verses 30 and 31 come as a form of guarantee for the spiritual principles that have been given us. God will do what He has promised, and He does not waver from His intent.

## **Application**

The Christian has the wonderful privilege of being able to trust in the promises of God that are both for our good, and for our care. Sometimes, God's people are not fully aware of these promises even though they have worshipped Him for years in church. 'Doing good' even has a bad reputation amongst some Christians who feel that any emphasis on this is in opposition to the Gospel which says we are saved by grace and by grace alone. It is so sad to see such misunderstanding, for our salvation by grace alone is never threatened by the principal of doing our best to be morally 'good'. Of course we are not saved by our good works, but that does not mean we should do anything less with our lives than seeking to do what is good and right in all circumstances, so that the Gospel may be proclaimed and the love of God be shown in a world which so desperately needs his moral example.

Psalm 37 also teaches about the importance of experience. There is a great move within the church today to give young people freedom to develop 'church', worship and mission. This is laudable, but will be quickly doomed if it is not seasoned by the active guidance of experienced leaders. The enemy has well known ways of distracting young people into 'short-termism' in relationships, work and worship, and they need the wisdom of more experienced people with years of practical advice. Further, they need to learn, and those who are unwilling to learn should never be allowed to lead God's people, whatever their age.

All of us, young and old, make up the totality of God's people, and the Lord will use us according to our gifts. Psalm 37 highlights the gift of wisdom through age and experience. This will help God's people find God's eternal perspective on all things, and help us see that what happens to us now is a part of His far bigger plans.

## **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. What are the greatest benefits of age and experience? What good things do young people need to learn from the experience of age?
2. Do you like the idea of being generous (37:26)? What place does generosity have in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and what does Jesus have to say about it?
3. If 'doing good' is the advice of this psalm about righteous living, what are the essential features of doing evil which we must avoid?

## **Discipleship**

Spend some time thinking whether you are consciously aware of trying to 'do good' in your everyday life. Is this something which just happens, or is it something that requires great effort or concentration? It is possible that each of us would benefit from making a conscious effort to 'do good' in one or two areas of our life. We can never deal with all the issues that face us, but if we can identify one or two features of what we do that would benefit from our attention in this way, we will certainly please the Lord and hopefully ourselves as well.

## **Final Prayer**

Praise God for life, for His Care and His purposes for us. Praise God that He has revealed His word so that we might know His way. Praise God because He loves us and wants to hold our hand on life's pathway. Praise Him, now and for ever. AMEN