

Psalm Thirty-Seven

Do not fret because of the wicked;
do not be envious of wrongdoers,
for they will soon fade like the grass,
and wither like the green herb.

Trust in the LORD, and do good;
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication
shine like the light,
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,
over those who carry out evil devices.

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.
Do not fret—it leads only to evil.
For the wicked shall be cut off,
but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look diligently for their place,
they will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land,
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

The wicked plot against the righteous,
and gnash their teeth at them;
but the LORD laughs at the wicked,
for he sees that their day is coming.

The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows
to bring down the poor and needy,
to kill those who walk uprightly;
their sword shall enter their own heart,
and their bows shall be broken.

Better is a little that the righteous person has
than the abundance of many wicked.
For the arms of the wicked shall be broken,
but the LORD upholds the righteous.

The LORD knows the days of the blameless,
and their heritage will abide forever;
they are not put to shame in evil times,
in the days of famine they have abundance.

But the wicked perish,
and the enemies of the LORD are
like the glory of the pastures;
they vanish—like smoke they vanish away.
The wicked borrow, and do not pay back,
but the righteous are generous and keep giving;
for those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land,
but those cursed by him shall be cut off.

Our steps are made firm by the LORD,
when he delights in our way;
though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong,
for the LORD holds us by the hand.

I have been young, and now am old,
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.
They are ever giving liberally and lending,
and their children become a blessing.

Depart from evil, and do good;
so you shall abide forever.
For the LORD loves justice;
he will not forsake his faithful ones.

The righteous shall be kept safe forever,
but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.
The righteous shall inherit the land,
and live in it forever.
The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom,
and their tongues speak justice.
The law of their God is in their hearts;
their steps do not slip.

The wicked watch for the righteous,
and seek to kill them.
The LORD will not abandon them to their power,
or let them be condemned when they are brought to trial.

Wait for the LORD, and keep to his way,
and he will exalt you to inherit the land;
you will look on the destruction of the wicked.

I have seen the wicked oppressing,
and towering like a cedar of Lebanon.
Again I passed by, and they were no more;
though I sought them, they could not be found.

Mark the blameless, and behold the upright,
for there is posterity for the peaceable.
But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed;
the posterity of the wicked shall be cut off.

The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
he is their refuge in the time of trouble.
The LORD helps them and rescues them;
he rescues them from the wicked, and saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

I recall an appointment Meghan and I had some years ago with a financial advisor at our bank's local branch. Being younger and still in the early stages of our careers, we have not done this often. But there were some documents that we needed to sign, and he wanted to talk to us about options for our RRSPs while we were there.

During the course of our conversation, he referred us to a graph which showed a century's-worth of stock market losses and gains. He was trying to persuade us to house our savings in a particular way, and to do so, he was appealing to a long-term investment strategy.

One can sum up Psalm Thirty-Seven, James Waltner writes, in a question: *"What does faith in God mean in a world when wickedness sometimes seems to pay handsome dividends?"* (Herald Press)

It is a question that no few biblical writers wrestle with, and no few people continue to wrestle with today. Why does it seem like evildoers are swiftly and amply rewarded for their actions? If one looked at the world one might easily conclude that, as a strategy, corruption makes for good returns, and in doing so be tempted to invest our lives similarly.

Speaking out of the Hebrew wisdom tradition, the psalm-writer warns readers to stop and think seriously before rushing to take that same approach. That method of banking is short-sighted, he warns. These people might seem to benefit from their bad behavior now, but it is no guarantee for the long-term.

"Do not fret because of the wicked. Do not be envious of wrongdoers." They might appear to reap abundantly today, but in reality, theirs is "fading grass" and "withering herbs" (v. 1).

Instead the writer instructs us to live our lives "with a long view of history" (Waltner again). "Trust in the LORD and do good, so you will live in the land and enjoy security. Take delight in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart" (v.2).

Like the financial planner that Meghan and I met with, the poet-advisor repeats this guidance a number of times so that we will understand it, and so that it will sink in. The rich payments the wicked cash out today are fleeting and illusory. "Their day is coming" (v.13). A "little while" and they will be no more (v. 10). But "the righteous," in the end, "will inherit the land and dwell in it forever" (vv. 11, 22, 29, 34).

The writer shows us the big graph to try and shake us out of short-term thinking and acting. He presents an alternative, long-term investment strategy. He wants to convince us to avoid acting recklessly out of an impatient desire for immediate gains. Anger (v.12), violence, abuse (v.14) and greed (v.21) might provide distorted forms of momentary satisfaction, but will not pay off over time.

Last faithful readers be mistaken and think that their compensation will be the same, only delayed, we are told that the return-on-investment for the righteous lies beyond this life and is not, strictly speaking, material of monetary. Instead, it is reality that is enduring and incorruptible, lasting forever (vv. 18, 27, 28, 29). That is the future that "awaits those who seek peace" (v. 37). - NS