

“The scripture many preachers don’t heed”

Psalm 37:1-8 NIV) Of David. **“Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong;** (2) for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.

(3) Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. (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 do this: (6) He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

(7) Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; **do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.** (8) **Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”**

Psalm 37’s mystery intrigues me.

It’s a curiously unique acrostic.

Television networks once featured a newsman

asking a prominent politician: **“What do you think of Aleppo?”**

The puzzled politician reacted:

“What is an Aleppo?”

That day, I did not know where “Aleppo” is.

Could we be sure that newsman would have intelligently responded were he asked:

“What is an acrostic?”

How many people could fully define the word “acrostic”?

One acrostic definition reads:

“A composition in which the initial or final letters of the lines taken in order form a word or phrase.”

Most folks understand acrostic that way.

In May, we see acrostics based on the word MOTHER.

Multi-tasker

Overworked

Tender

Honest

Early-riser

Resilient¹

¹ I associate the above words with my wife’s role as a mother.

At THANKSGIVING and CHRISTMAS acrostics of those holidays become popular.

Psalm 37’s acrostic fits the typical definition, but in a different way.

Psalm 37’s acrostic does not spell a word like **JESUS** or phrase like **GO WITH GOD**.

The acrostic in Psalm 37 progresses through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

- The phrasing in verses 1 and 2 begins with the first Hebrew letter, Aleph.
- The phrasing in verses 3 and 4 begins with the second letter, Beth.
- The phrasing in 5 and 6 begins with the third Hebrew letter, Gimel.

Psalm 37 contains forty verses total.

The numbers don’t add correctly, do they?

If Hebrew has 22 letters and there are two verses per letter, you expect 44 verses.

Yet Psalm 37 has only 40 verses.

Why the math mystery?

I can explain the math; I cannot explain how variation came about.

The phrasing in four of the Hebrew letters received only one verse, not two verses.

For instance, the fourth Hebrew letter Daleth (ד) has only one verse—verse 7.

That’s also true of the Hebrew letter Kaph (כ) in verse 20, the Ayin (ע) in verse 29, and the Qoph (ק) in verse 34.²

That explains the existence of forty verses.

Why those four letters got only one verse, not two, I cannot explain.

Psalm 37 raises something far more crucial.

Did you notice the term “fret?”

The word fret occurs three times in the psalm.

We fret for many reasons.

My fretting challenges.

The fretting subject today helps confirm my belief in God.



² English readers can see evidence of how those four letters received only one verse in the *THE HOLY SCRIPTURES According to the Masoretic text*, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 5707-1947, page 801.

When things occur that appear beyond coincidence, they point us toward God, don’t they?

As sure as the sun comes up every morning, the Lord tests me on the subject of my sermon each week.

It’s as if the Lord says to me: **“Bob, you’ll be preaching on this subject, let’s test you first on how you have been handling it.”**

As Norma can tell you, I had almost daily fretting “tests” this past week and they kept getting more intense.

These weekly tests do not seem accidental; they convince me of the Lord’s reality and that He holds me accountable for what I do and say.

The basic meaning of the Hebrew word translated “fret” is:

“burn, be kindled, of anger,”

“heat oneself in vexation.”³

Did anger get kindled in you last week?

You might recall the prevailing counsel a few decades ago.

“Don’t stifle your anger,” said the experts. “Get it all out;” “Let it all hang out!” they advised.

“Repressing feelings is bad for you,” they said.

Medical and psychology professionals no longer tell us that.

A government website post maintained by the Australian state of Victoria says this:

“The constant flood of stress chemicals and associated metabolic changes that go with recurrent unmanaged anger can eventually cause harm to many different systems of the body.”

In plain speech: If you don’t control your temper, you’ll badly damage your body’s organs.

The website posting on anger continues:



³ חרה *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* William Gesenius, transl. Edward Robinson, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1978 p. 354

“Some of the short and long-term health problems that have been linked to unmanaged anger include:

- headache
- digestion problems, such as abdominal pain
- insomnia
- increased anxiety
- depression
- high blood pressure
- skin problems, such as eczema
- heart attack
- stroke.”⁴

This advice comes from an official site of a state government in Australia.

Continued anger harms mind and body.

Consider these sidebars:

1. Those warning us about anger now are mostly medical and health specialists.
2. Most of the news we hear and read is designed to make us angry.

3. Preachers often get us rankled about the state of the world and the sins of others.

I confess to doing that.

Yet three thousand years ago, Psalm 37 warned us against getting overly agitated.

It’s one thing to speak honestly.

It’s another thing to get riled and furious with our blood boiling.

Jesus cautioned us against it.

Paul repeatedly advised Christians about prolonged anger.

Bottom Line:

God’s word gives excellent, cutting-edge, advice—no charge.

Yet contemporary “experts” claim the Bible is outdated.

“We know better,” they say, “Listen to us. We base our conclusions on scientific research.”

Modern studies only confirm what the Lord said long ago and we usually get charged for hearing the results.

⁴ www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthy site sponsored by Australian State of Victoria.

**Yet remember, a few years ago,
mental health specialists advised us
differently about anger.**

Human experts keep revising their theories.

God’s word does not change or vary.

Contemporaries scoff at people who trust God
and His word.

**Would you like some free, time-tested
advice about anger?**

**Psalm 37 rationally presents the case for
controlling anger.**

- Fretting is not harmless worrying.
- Fretting destroys even so called strong,
well-educated, intelligent people.

Psalm 37 tells three harms of fretting.

**1. Do not fret because of evil men or be
envious of those who do wrong . . .**

Consider a child that tattles.

“Mom, do you know what Susie did?”

**Kids who ratfink on siblings would
often like to do the same thing.**

**The child tattles thinking, “If I can’t get
away with it, Susie won’t either.**

We adults are more sophisticated, of course.

We ratfink, too, but we do our “rat
finking” by gossiping.



*Norman Rockwell’s
impression of gossip.*

**Do not fret because
of evil men or be
envious of those who
do wrong . . .**

**2. Do not fret when men succeed in their
ways, when they carry out their wicked
schemes . . .**

**When we observe the wrongs of others,
we frequently fret.**

Public figures get folks worked up about
all the evil trending in the world.

I have done a lot of that myself.

Not all the evil, but using sermon time to
describe the world’s wickedness.

Is evil rampant in this world?

Absolutely.

**Jesus said the world’s hate is darkness
resisting the light.**

**Paul referred to his time “as crooked
and warped.”**

But how should we react to the world’s evil?

Should we be distressed about it?

Should we pretend evil doesn’t happen?

Neither.

We cannot deny that it is taking place and
the world’s evil should sadden us.

**But we cannot allow the world’s evil to
cause angry meltdowns in us.**

Paul wrote the Philippians about the crooked,
warped generation in which they lived.

**Years before he wrote this letter, local
authorities in Philippi badly mistreated
Paul and his co-worker Silas.**

They were falsely accused, severely beaten
and jailed without a trial.

**When it first opened (1963), I toured the
Los Angeles County Jail.**

At the time, the facility was considered
state-of-the-art and spacious.

Accommodations were clean; and
prisoners had access to libraries, a good
diet, television, and physical exercise.

**One minister commented: “I wouldn’t
mind staying here.”**

Someone said
to him, “Yes,
but you can go
home tonight.”

Perhaps his
house wasn’t
much nicer than
the jail.



Had he spent the night in jail with
Paul and Silas, the L.A. minister
would not have made that comment.

There were no lights in Paul’s jail.
The jailer confined Paul and Silas in stocks
so their feet and hands could not move.

No restroom breaks.

The air reeked of urine and dung.

Vermin ran freely in the darkness.

Paul and Silas were unjustly jailed.

They had every human right to fret and complain about injustice.

Yet Paul and Silas spent the night, not incensed, enraged, and complaining.

They prayed and sang hymns.

To Christians in the very town where he spent the miserable night unjustly beaten, and jailed.

Here is how Paul taught us Christians to deal with the world’s depravity:

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing,¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life.”⁵

This passage clearly shows:

- **As it does now, evil prevailed in society.**
- **God’s people dealt with it without grousing and bickering.**

• **They also remained true to God’s word.**
To grumble about injustice indicates fretting.

“Do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.”

3. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.

Fretting signifies that we have a problem.

We must be cautious about focusing so much on the world’s sins.

Our chief concern must be correcting our own wrongs.

In Luke 13, Jesus warned:

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.² Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’”

⁵ Philippians 2:14b-16a NIV

We stop fretting at what others are doing and we correct our own lives.

I am the only person I can change.

If I do not repent, God will judge the world, but I will go down at the same time.

All of us would like to say that we are godly people and that we have the Spirit of God with us.

If we harbor anger and bitterness, we should be nervous.

Even if we have only a residue of hostility, we should be edgy:

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”⁶

We should avoid the mistake of disconnecting verse 30 from 31.

In verse 30 (above) Paul warns about upsetting God’s Spirit, who dwells in us.

⁶ Ephesians 4:30, 31 NIV

The word grief indicates regret.

Paul cautioned Christians in Galatia that folks who possessed the qualities listed in verse 31 would not share in God’s kingdom.⁷

Why would God remove His Spirit from us?

The presence of certain stuff causes God to withdraw his Spirit.

The Lord doesn’t want certain qualities in us.

bitterness – includes envy

rage – fury, intense feeling

anger – revenge, retribution

brawling - shouting, clamor

slander – name-calling

every form of **malice**.

Stuff like the above builds in us and damages us worse than black mold in a kitchen.

Believers should “get rid” of it; remove and set it aside.

All of it – Every bit.

At her memorial service, I eulogized a local farm wife.

⁷ Galatians 5:19-21

Her husband, family, and relatives adored her.

The community deeply respected her.

She loved people. She was extremely strong.

In her youth, she helped her father milk cows and played high school basketball.

Vera retained a strong grip almost to the day of her death.

The family reminisced about her ability to completely remove chicken innards with a single, memorable-sounding-pull.

The meaning of the word translated “get rid” in verse 31 reminds me of the complete force in Vera’s chicken innards skill.

The Lord expects that we thoroughly, intensely devote ourselves to clearing our minds of anger residue.

We cannot let it fester and take root.

Our fretting tells God that we don’t trust him to take care of us.



Doing that must really insult Him.
**Are you prepared to stand before God,
Creator of the Cosmos, and
say to Him:**

**“Lord, I didn’t trust you to handle matters
on
our tiny planet.”**

**“Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe
pasture. (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 do
this: (6) He will make your
righteousness shine like the dawn, the
justice of your cause like the noonday
sun. (7) Be still before the LORD and
wait patiently for him...”**

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