

Songs of Life

GOD OF DELIGHT

Let me ask you a question I've asked before: Do you struggle with faith? Psalm 37 addresses a question we all face if we struggle with living a life of faith: "What will people of faith take as the decisive clue to the way life should be lived?" Will we look at those who appear to prosper and take that as the measure? Or will we look to God in whom we have faith? This is a choice between the pressures of the present and the promise of the future. Put bluntly: this is a choice between faith and no faith. The purpose of Psalm 37 is to offer a way of keeping faith in situations in which that is difficult. Ever been there? Are you there now? This is your song if you are bewildered by the incongruence between faith and experience.

This is a song for those who are looking around thinking, "I'd be better off giving up faith!" Ever been there? Are you there now? This Psalm presents a stark choice: either you look at those around you who are seemingly successful and you copy them... or you hold onto faith with all you've got even though it doesn't seem to make sense and you throw yourself onto the promises of God.

So...how about you?

Do not fret because of those who are evil
Or be envious of those who do wrong;
for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die
away.

Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Delight yourself 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 do this:
He will make your righteousness shine
like the dawn,
the justice of your cause like the
noonday sun.

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.

Refrain from anger and turn from
wrath;
Do not fret – it leads only to evil.
for evil men will be cut off,
but those who hope in the Lord will
inherit the land.

A little while, and the wicked will be no
more;
Though you look for them, they will
not be found.
but the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy great peace.

The wicked plot against the righteous
and gnash their teeth at them;
But the Lord laughs at the wicked,
for he knows their day is coming.

The wicked draw the sword
and bend the bow
to bring down the poor and needy,
to slay those whose ways are
upright.
But their swords will pierce their own

hearts,
and their bows will be broken.

Better the little that the righteous have
than the wealth of many wicked;
For the power of the wicked will be
broken,
but he Lord upholds the righteous.

The days of the blameless are known to
the Lord,
and their inheritance will endure for
ever.

In times of disaster they will not wither;
In days of famine they will enjoy
plenty.

But the wicked will perish;
The Lord's enemies will be like the
beauty of the fields,
they will vanish – vanish like smoke.

The wicked borrow and do not repay,
but the righteous give generously;
Those the Lord blesses will inherit the
land.
But those he curses will be cut off.

If the Lord delights in a man's way,
he makes his steps firm;
Though he stumbles, he will not fall,
for the Lord upholds him with his
hand.

I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous
forsaken
Or their children begging bread.
They are always generous and lend

freely;
Their children will be blessed.

Turn from evil and do good;
Then you will dwell in the land for
ever.

For the Lord loves the just
and will not forsake his faithful ones.

They will be protected for ever,
but the offspring of the wicked will be
cut off;

The righteous will inherit the land
and swell in it for ever.

The mouth of the righteous man utters
wisdom,
and his tongue speaks what is
just.

The law of his God is in his heart;
His feet do not slip.

The wicked lie in wait for the righteous,
seeking their very lives;
But the Lord will not leave them in their
power
or let them be condemned when
brought to trial.

Wait for the Lord
and keep his way.
He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you will
see it.

I have seen a wicked and ruthless man
flourishing like a green tree in its
native soil,
but he soon passed away and was no

more;
Though I looked for him, he could not
be found.

Consider the blameless, observe the
upright;
There is a future for the man of peace.
but all sinners will be destroyed;
The future of the wicked will be cut off.

The salvation of the righteous comes
from the Lord;
He is their stronghold in times of trouble.
The Lord helps them and delivers them;
He delivers them from the wicked and
saves them,
because they take refuge in him.

Today – in the time that remains, I’m going to focus on one verse as a way to encourage you to hold onto faith. That’s what the writer wants the people reading this Psalm to do, this is the song he wants you to learn to sing.

Psalm 37 v 4: “Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart” How do you do that – How do you delight in the Lord when faith is hard? I’m going to make some suggestions that I hope are helpful! I hope they help you sing this song and sing it well.

What does it mean to delight yourself in the Lord? “To delight yourself in the Lord is to throw your whole self into the arms of the God who loves you beyond description. It means finding your most valuable treasure in your relationship with Jesus. It’s about rejoicing in who he is, loving him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”¹

It’s about rejoicing in who he is..... So who is the God in whom you have faith? I am convinced that one of the struggles we have with faith is that we simply have wrong thoughts about who God really is. We carry these wrong thoughts with us and when faith is hard we struggle with God! A little bit of history for you!!

In the 2nd Century an Egyptian astronomer called Ptolemy figured out that the earth was the centre of the universe and the fixed point around which everything moved. For centuries people believed this. For centuries our whole understanding of how the universe worked and the earth's place in it, was influenced by Ptolemy's conclusion. For centuries people believed that the sun moved around the earth. Everything we once understood about how the universe worked came from what Ptolemy had said – the earth is the centre.

It also influenced how people thought about the place of the earth, and “man” in the universe, and people found ways of proving Ptolemy's conclusion to be correct. Even the church supported the view that the earth was at the centre of the universe. How people lived, how they understood life, how they understood the universe and their place in it were all influenced by Ptolemy's assertion that the earth was the central and fixed point of the cosmos.

In the 16th Century Copernicus, a Polish astronomer challenged everything people believed by saying that the earth revolved around the sun. This did not go down well. It challenged everything – not least faith! For centuries people had believed the earth was a sphere and not flat but to say that the sun was the centre and fixed point of the universe was a step too far. Following Copernicus, Galileo was put under house arrest by the church because he agreed with Copernicus. The church had decided the Bible taught that the earth was at the centre of creation. To challenge this view was heresy. But Copernicus was right ... wasn't he!

We now know the truth is that the sun is at the centre of our solar system; we know that the earth revolves around the sun. What is true today, was in fact, always true, and it has changed the way we think about everything. Copernicus' discovery was a complete reversal of the way we had previously imagined the earth and the universe to be. This kind of change in thinking is called a paradigm shift.

“With this paradigm shift everything changed. Neither the navigators who set sail and verified that the flat earth was in fact a globe, nor the space explorers who walked on the moon could have embarked on their ventures without this paradigm shift. Our sense of who we are and the way the cosmos functions, our sense of time and the place we hold in its immensities, our appreciation of the

intricate ecology of our existence – all this and more, is radically affected by this paradigm shift.”²

On the other hand, nothing changes. We still say “the sun rose” and “the sun set.” The sun still makes things grow and we can’t live without it. The truth about God affects everything about us. The question is, is what you believe about God really true? What you believe about God will necessarily affect the way you live. If you want to know what you really believe about God – look at the way you live. The truth about God doesn’t change, but we don’t always live in the truth – do we? Delighting in the Lord comes from knowing the truth. Seems to me we often carry with us things about God that are simply not true, and what is needed is for us to know the truth about who God is.

I’ll give you an example from my own life. As most of you know my father died when I was 6 years old, so I grew up without a father. My mother tells me I was a daddy’s boy – always doing what he did. My understanding of God was influenced by my experience of not having a dad. My dad was distant – so was God. God was a God who didn’t intervene in times of trouble or confusion. I always understood that God was always there – but always the other side of the door! God was a God who was involved in the lives of lots of people I knew – but not mine. Somehow I didn’t quite register high enough on God’s chart for him to be involved in my life.

When I was about 20, I went through a bit of a crisis, and I started to talk to the curate at the church I had grown up in. We started a conversation about God as Father, and I realised it meant nothing to me. It’s a long story but slowly I began to realise the truth about God as Father and it was different to the truth I had lived with – a wrong truth!

I fell in love with a very familiar story told by Jesus, you’ll find it in Luke 15 – ‘The Waiting Father’ and one verse in particular. “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” (v 20) Here was a God who longed for me to enjoy his presence and who enjoyed mine! Here was a God whose heart was broken – just the same as mine. Understanding this changed me. It made faith a little more possible in a hugely difficult struggle with life and everything that

happens, and I began to delight in the Lord. Perhaps the biggest truth I had to grasp was that God delights in me and loves me as I now love my own son.

Now, friends we're going to pause here - I want you take a couple of minutes to share with the person next to you, a passage of scripture that has revealed the truth about God to you and helped you in your struggle in faith.

Here's another thought – have you ever thought how much God delights in you? He delights enough to send Jesus, and Jesus delights in you enough to go to the cross. Ever wondered what it cost Jesus to do that? He gave up a relationship of love, devotion, loyalty, support, integrity, co-operation, harmony, commitment, honour, trust, transparency, interdependence, joy and security. He did it because he delights in you.

Genesis hints at God's delight as he walked in the garden with Adam and Eve. It records his anguish and hurt when Adam and Eve hid because they had shattered the relationship. But Jesus delights in you so much he said "I'll go! I'll go to the cross to restore what's broken, because I delight in them and I want them to delight in my Father." But it cost him:

- The frailty of becoming a human baby.
- The shame of illegitimacy.
- The terror of being a refugee.
- The experience of an oppressive occupying power.
- The learning of a trade.
- The grief at the loss of an earthly father.
- The direct confrontation with Satan.
- The hunger from fasting.
- The disappointment of unbelief in his home town.
- The humility of washing dusty feet.
- The weariness of constant ministry.
- The frustration with his disciples.
- The misappropriation of money by a follower.
- The scorn and criticism as he:
 - Befriended prostitutes
 - Chose terrorists as disciples
 - Had meals with corrupt businessmen
 - Cared for lepers

Did good on the Sabbath

Ministered to non-Jews

The hatred and opposition of the religious leaders.

The fickle nature of the masses.

The ingratitude of so many he ministered to.

The treachery of the betrayal by Judas.

The agony in the garden.

The temptation to avoid the cross.

The loneliness as his followers desert him.

The heartbreak of denial by his key leader.

The injustice of an illegal trial.

The lies and slander in front of Pilate.

The mockery of Herod.

The manipulation of the mob at this trial.

The physical pain as hair was pulled from his face.

The agony of the beating.

The disgrace of human spittle trickling down his face.

The anguish and shame of crucifixion.

The curses of the soldiers.

The insults of the onlookers.

The gloating of his enemies.

The revulsion of being made sin.

The horror of death.

The forsaking by his Father – the shattering of the Trinity.

The permanent alteration to the Trinity now – Christ has a resurrected body in heaven.³

He went through all that because he delights in you and he wants you to know the truth about his Father. The truth is he is: “especially fond of this one....”

When faith is hard, the truth remains that he is especially fond of his children. It is a truth that we would do well to grasp when the choice is faith or no faith.

Here’s another thought – how awake are you? When faith is hard we often want God to do something spectacular. We’d like the situation to be dramatically changed wouldn’t we? The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Jesus sustains all things by his powerful word (Heb 1 v 3); if he stops doing that – everything stops. Moment by moment, by his powerful word, Jesus sustains everything. Question is – how awake are we to that truth. It means that God is always,

everywhere, powerfully present. It means that whatever is happening his powerful presence is sustaining us. The question is never: are we in God's presence? The question is: are we awake to God's presence moment by moment?

The only real life you have is now. Yesterday is gone, the future is fantasy, the only real life you have is now. Are you awake to the living, powerful presence of God? Friends, you don't have to run anywhere to find the presence of God. Whatever your situation – his powerful presence is there. He is in your workplace – however hard that might be in these difficult economic conditions. He is there in your home, among your family and friends. He is as close as the air we breathe. This is the truth and we don't need to run anywhere but where we are to find God!

Being awake to the powerful, sustaining presence of the one who is moment by moment sustaining the universe can help us hold onto faith. When life is difficult it takes the eyes of faith to see – to awaken the heart and mind. It needs us to be awake to what God is doing. The disciples found it hard to recognise Jesus after he had risen. It's because they didn't understand what he had done – they had missed what God was doing. But once their eyes were opened and they were awake to God's presence, they were transformed. EE Cummings writes in a poem: "Now the ears of my ears are awake, and now the eyes of my eyes are opened." To choose faith when life is tough – let us awaken the ears of our ears and open the eyes of our eyes to the powerful, sustaining presence of God.

"Delight yourself in the Lord ... and he will give you the desires of your heart."
Friends, how I pray that you will choose to sing this song!

1. Willow Creek – *Encountering God: Psalms Vol 1*, Zondervan 2008 pg 44
2. Peterson E, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, Eerdmans 1992, page 174/5
3. Hathaway B, *Living below with the Saints we Know*, pages 23/24.

