

Four Steps to a Fruitful Christian Life

By Paris Reidhead*

Now turn, please, to Psalm 37. Our meditation is going to be in this very precious Psalm. There are some portions of Scripture to which one finds himself drawn over and over again, because they are so appropriate. Psalm 37. And if you have never underlined the four steps to a fruitful life, you had better get your pencil handy, because you will need it, and it will prove of help to you. Psalm 37. It is important that you should have certain Scriptures that are so well known by you, so understood, so much a part of your life that well there are just certain circumstances that cause them to raise up, spring up in your heart.

Notice how it begins. "Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity" (Psa. 37:1). David is here exhorting himself, the Spirit of God is exhorting David, David is exhorting us to remember that our poise, our joy, and our peace does not depend upon others. You remember how I have said it in the past. Nothing that ever happens to you hurts you. It is only what you do about it. Well you could translate this first verse that way if you want it. I suppose it would be a very free translation, paraphrase to say, Remember what happens to you doesn't hurt you. It is only what you do about it. But that is essentially what he is saying; because if you fret with that inner disturbance of your own spirit, you are injuring yourself.

I saw it just the other day in a little restaurant where I had to stop. It said, "Ulcers are not caused by what you eat, but by what's eating you."

Well this is what David is saying, again in a very free translation. Don't allow yourself to be fretted, to be eaten by what others do or are doing. Remember, remember.

Well what do you remember. "They shall soon be cut down like the grass" (Psa. 37:2). There was a time in my life when I thought that I was God's little ice pick, and the only function I had in the world was just to puncture every balloon I could find, just to show everybody. And you know this is a dreadful, just a terrible, terrible way to be. If I had understood what I am trying to understand about Psalm 37, I would've realized that God is able to take care of all these things. God is able to take care of it.

I remember some years, oh 10, 12 years ago, someone had attacked very unjustly on doctrinal issues some of the things that I had believed, and I was quite disturbed. And my wife said, "Dear, well you do not need to do that. Truth crushed to earth will rise again. And if it is true, then you will profit from it, and if it isn't true commit it to the Lord."

Well this is what he says, "They will soon be cut down like the grass, wither as the green herbs." As we rake the yard in the spring, and gather up all the dry grass, we realize that that grass that is now nothing but just to be removed was the flower of beauty last summer. Oh, do not worry. Do not let your heart get disturbed. Do not allow yourself to be troubled. That is what he is saying.

Now I said, The four steps to a happy, joyous, fruitful Christian life. The first is the first word of the third verse. Now underline it, so that you see it every time you open to Psalm 37 you will see it, it will leap out at you. Trust in the Lord. Leave the person that is doing ill and wrong unless it affects the church, unless it is in such a way that your moral responsibility as an overseer in some way either in your home, or in the church, is involved. But as far as reprisals, trust in the Lord. He is able to take care of problems. He solved problems. He answers difficulties. Trust in the Lord. Trust in the Lord. Trust in the Lord. This is David's answer. "Trust in the Lord and do good" (Psa. 37:3a). Do not let your conduct, your words, your attitudes be influenced by what other people do. "Trust in the Lord and do good."

"So shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed" (Psa. 37:3b). I like that. That is great encouragement. The fact that God has told us in this verse that the primary, the first step in the foundation of our life of rest and peace is in the character of God, His ability to chasten. Do you have fear of God? The longer I go on with the Lord the more conscious I am of the fact that He is my father, I am His child, and as much as He loved me, He is perfectly prepared to whip me to pieces if need be for my own good. You say, That isn't a very nice way. I do not like to think that.

I remember I was speaking at a conference a few years ago, and I spoke to a group of young people who were very unruly on. Our God is a consuming fire, and you are to serve Him with reverence and Godly fear. And no sooner had I finished than a missionary got up and changed his message and said, Young people, Isn't it wonderful; We don't have to fear the Lord any more. Well they didn't. They didn't. They didn't fear Him. But I fear Him. I know Him well enough. I know that I can trust in the Lord, just as I can trust in the State Police. If I go to fast they are going to be faithful, they are going to stop me, give me a ticket. I can trust their faithfulness. That is right. And I can trust my Heavenly Father's faithfulness. If I need a spanking He loves me too much to let me get by. He is going to spank me. Now I think that is good. That does not trouble me in the least. Does it trouble you, the fact that if your Father loves you enough so that if you need it He will spank you. You know you should be troubled if you need it and He does not spank you, because He says "For whom He chastens every child and scourges every son" (Heb. 12:6). The person who is troubled is not the one who is chastened, but the one who is not.

Trust in the Lord. Trust in Him to supply your needs, and if your need happens to be a spanking trust in Him, trust in the Lord to do it. Have implicit confidence in the character of God. He is not going to alter His character to accommodate your condition. I am glad of that. Oh, I am so glad of that. I am so glad that I can absolutely trust that God is going to do right. That means me and you. He is going to do right. It is a great encouragement to know that.

Now the next thing is, and you underline the first word again, "Delight. *Delight thyself also in the Lord*" (Psa. 37:4). Some folks say, I remember hearing one say at least, this was the key to God's cash box. Oh, my, my, my. If you think this is the key to His cash box you are mistaken. This isn't how you get your hands where God's provision is. This is how you get your heart where God's purpose is. "Delight thyself in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

I recall one person saying some time ago, "Well I have done that and He has not given me the desire of my heart." "What is the desire of your heart?" "My desire is so and so." "But" I said, "You have not delighted yourself in the Lord." "Well, what do you mean?" "To delight yourself in the Lord is to be delighted with His will, and absolutely committed to His purpose." And you want His will more than life itself. To delight yourself in the Lord isn't to find that He is delightful to you, but in the sense in which He is just sort of doing everything that you want Him to do as a means to an end. To delight yourself in the Lord is to come to that attitude where you say, Lord, Thy will be done. I delight to do Thy will O God. It is my meat night and day. This is to delight yourself in the Lord. Where not only have you implicit confidence in His character that He will do what is right, but you are delighted when He does what is right, and you completely rest in it. This means also going back to what we said, When He chastens you.

It is rather hard to look into the face of a father that has just chastened you and say, Thank you, Father, I needed that and I am very grateful for it. I have never had that happen to me with my children. I do not suppose that any of us are very anxious to do it with our Heavenly Father. But really this is what He means, that we can look into His face and say, Thank you.

Well why? What do we want anyway. We want His will. We wanted His will. Do you want position, and so you say, Well now I am going to delight myself in the Lord, and He will give me the position I want. Oh, but you've missed it. To delight yourself in the Lord is to be delighted with what He wants for you, and not with what you want for you; because you feel His will so much wiser and better than yours. "Delight yourself in the Lord." I am delighted with what God wills for me. Hard. Do not think for a moment it isn't hard. But of course, the whole of life is a series of adjustments to the will of others. If it were not so we would all be wild animals out in the woods, tearing at each other, like beasts in the field. To delight yourself in the Lord is to have come to the place where you look and say, Thy will be done. To delight yourself in government is to look at the community, and the state and the nation, and I am grateful that there is government to protect me and others from me. To delight yourself in your employer is that the rules that he exacts, and the tasks that he presents are worthy of my loyalty and my service. To delight yourself in the Lord, therefore, is to come to the place where all that God plans and all that God purposes for you has become the passion of your heart. Now that isn't hard. Trust in His character. He is God. "He that cometh to God must believe that He is," what He says He is, delight Thyself in His will (Heb. 11:6).

Now the third rule, to a happy, fruitful, joyous Christian life is the first word in the 5th verse. Commit. "*Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.*" "Commit thy way unto the Lord." So many times we make plans that

do not work out, we are disappointed. I suppose God wants us to continue to make plans, but He does not want us to be disappointed. I think we should always make our plans, and now say, Lord, bless my plans for you, but this is the best I can see and understand. Now you choose. It has been stated, Man proposes, but God disposes. Are you prepared to say, Lord, my days, my times are in your hands. The ministry of my life is in your hands. How much do you trust the Lord? How big is God? Is He big enough to take good care of you? Is He big enough to know what is best for you? Is He big enough to look out for His investment in you. What investment does God have? The Blood of His Own dear Son. The life of His Son. If God's invested this, don't you think that He is quite capable of taking your time, and your plans, and your hopes. I think He is. I believe that you can with just open face and joyous heart say, Lord, Thy will be done.

I will never forget as a young boy, in Bible School, facing the necessity of having to quit school at the close of my third semester. I was not well, and I had no money, and I just felt I had to quit. And all my friends were warning me of the utter disaster of quitting, stopping, and here I was feeling in my heart that God wanted me to do it, however foolish it seemed, and I had to commit my way to Him. And the way? Stop. It seemed so ridiculous, so odd, seemed so strange, that God would lead somebody into Bible School, and after a year and a half to quit, stop. But I did. I committed my way to Him. I am so glad that it's such an issue, seemingly so big, because it seemed to me that God had called me to His service, and now He was just leading me to stop. Could I trust Him, or was I going to have to just take this thing in my hands and just force it through. It was a terrific battle, days that I thought about it, and nights and I prayed over it, and finally I came to the place that this was what it was. It was the first time really that I had ever faced an issue as to whether or not I could commit my future, my plans, my hopes, my ministry to the Lord.

Well you're going to face that. You have faced it. Every time there is a test or an issue you are facing it again. "Commit your way unto the Lord." You are facing such issues daily. You want the greatest glory out of your life for the Lord Jesus Christ. "Commit your way unto the Lord." You want your life to be the most fruitful and useful. "Commit your way unto the Lord." This is what He is asking of us, that obedience; Someone said blind obedience. No, not blind obedience at all. It is because I trust in the Lord. I have implicit confidence in His character. I delight in His will that I can commit my way unto Him. This isn't blind. This isn't blind faith. This is the eyes that see clear into the very Counsel Room of Eternity, and know that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). "Commit thy way unto this foreordaining love of God," who has a tailor made life for you. "Commit thy way unto the Lord."

I recall someone saying at the time of my Ordination, "Are you willing to commit your life to the Baptist Ministry?" It was in the Minnesota Baptist Convention. I said, "No sir." "Well, why are you asking for ordination?" "Because I have committed my life to the Lord Jesus Christ." He said, "That's not good enough for me. We have to expect loyalty." I said, "I am prepared to give loyalty. Good that is what I want to hear." "To whom?" "To the Lord Jesus Christ." He said, "That's not what I want to hear." "Commit thy way unto the Lord." It is too easy to commit our way to someone, anyone else. "Commit the way unto the Lord." "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (Psa. 37:6).

All these issues. You see, if you defend yourself when the problem arises, you use up what is worth defending by your defense. There is nothing left. It's like having a hundred dollars, and having to use two hundred dollars to protect the hundred. You might as well have let it go in the first place. You would have been just broke. Now you are a hundred dollars in debt, and so it is that if you have to defend your reputation, and defend something, you might as well stop, because if you defend it you use up what is left right there and you are worse off than you were before. And so David is being assaulted by Saul. He is being accused of every vile thing by Saul. He is being hunted and hated, and persecuted by Saul.

He says, What about these evil doers. "Fret not thyself." What about all these calamities that are being levelled against me, all these accusations, what about this? "The Lord will bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." Just leave it, just leave it, let go, just rest. Do not. Do not fret yourself. Trust in the Lord, Delight yourself in the Lord, Commit your way unto the Lord. Well you see we all are by nature impatient. So the 7th verse and the first word gives us the fourth step onto the plateau of blessing and joy and victory. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."

So frequently when we trust and delight and commit, right now we want to have the answer. Well David said to his own heart, God's time isn't yours. We are in such a hurry, such a hurry. "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass, cease from anger, forsake wrath. Fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off, but those that wait upon the Lord they shall inherit the earth" (Psa. 37:7-9). Rest. Rest. Rest. Isn't this wonderful? Four steps. Here you are in the midst of your problem. Take the first step, *Trust in God's character*. Take the second step, *Delight in God's will*. Take the third step, *Commit to God's plan*. Take the fourth step, *Rest for God's day*. Wonderful. So easy. So easy to have peace, so easy to have joy, isn't it? Yes it is.

But here again is just one of the paradoxes and conundrums of the Christian life, What is so easy is so terribly hard. Why? Because it is my nature to trust in me, my skill, my ability, It is my nature to delight in my plans, It is my nature to commit myself to my ability. It is my character to rest for a minute and then go right on with it, take after it. This is completely contrary to nature. *Trust in the Lord, Delight Thyself in the Lord, Commit Thy way unto the Lord, Rest in the Lord.* Will you underline it, will you think about it, will you believe in it, will you ask God to make it real in your life. You are facing an unknown future. There is no problem in that. I do not need to know the future as long as I know the One who knows the future, you see. I do not need to fret myself, because I know the One who has the wisdom and the power.

Well I just have to come back here again, and again, and again, and say, Lord, make this to be more than words I have underlined, but make it to be the life I live. I know my heart. Just because you have read it, do not think you have it. You know if you would go home and memorize between now and tomorrow morning the first nine verses of Psalm 37 and use them tomorrow and be sure that you can memorize them, and write them down, and test yourself, see that you get the punctuation right, everything right. Do you know something; the month of May would be a far richer month than April was, just because of this. Not just because you memorize did it, but because you lived in the good of. It made it yours. What more need we? That is enough to go to prayer, isn't it? It is enough to meet the needs of our friends and concerns of our hearts, our future, our ministries, our burdens, our desires. It is all there. Shall we do it. Let us just tell the Lord how worthy He is of trust, and how easy it is when we know Him to delight ourselves in His plan, and why we ought to commit our way unto Him, and then ask Him to give us patience because we don't have it to rest, and wait for the Lord. Shall we go to prayer. Let us bind our hearts together in love for the Lord Jesus, because the Lord of whom He speaks is the One who went to the Cross for us.

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