

Psalm 37:1-9
Anglican Church, Noosa Women's Breakfast April 29, 2017

I've come to believe more and more in God's timing, that things are rarely a coincidence.

So at my church in Seaforth we've been challenged to re-ignite our passion for God and we've used Romans 12 as a springboard.

To reconnect to God.

And I know from Jo and Susan that you've had great encouragement recently from Romans 12:1 – and particularly the idea of offering our bodies as a living sacrifice.

And I'm sure you've been meditating on just what that means –

to be a living sacrifice, which is the outworking of reconnecting to God.

So although it would be great to really brainstorm how we do that, today I'm just going to focus on one aspect.

Romans 12:2 reminds us not to be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

We're to be countercultural. We're not meant to look like everyone else out there in the world.

And God's word throws down lots of challenges in that way, doesn't it.

To live in the world, but not of it.

And I think one of them is to be still.

Now of course, when you stay '**be still**' our minds immediately go to mindfulness and meditation, to yoga and breathing, which are all terrific tools for life.

Or you might be thinking about life balance and the need to achieve more stillness in the midst of your busyness, you know, one of things counsellors are big on is self-care, which again, is a great goal.

But **being still** in the Bible is different.

It has the sense of being quiet, of resting, of not struggling or resisting, almost of resignation, perhaps even surrender.

It's a stillness that allows us to tune out the world's noise and distraction and tune into what God is saying and how God is working in our lives.

We reconnect with God when we **are still and wait** for his plans for our lives to unfold because we **hope**.

In my own life I'm slowly learning the blessing of stillness and surrendering to God, to his timing, to his ways, to his will.

So I'd love to spend the next few minutes looking at the three important things in Psalm 37.

1. Something to stop doing - fretting
2. Something to start doing - be still
3. Something that helps us - hope

Psalm 37 encourages us to remember where our security and hope lie, especially when life seems unfair.

It was written by David in his old age, reflecting on life, acknowledging that life is hard, especially when the wicked seem to be doing so well.

The Bible often uses language that to our ears sounds harsh, words like evil and wicked.

When we use those words we might associate it with terrorism or paedophilia or domestic violence.

But here they simply refer to people, ordinary people who don't trust God, who try to run their lives without reference to him. They're the people all around us, at school, at work, in our families.

1. Do not fret

Look at verse 1

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

Which is literally do not get overheated.

I'm resisting any reference to menopause here.

How well does God know our hearts?

He goes straight to our Achilles heel doesn't he? He knows where we are most vulnerable. The things we secretly envy.

And notice he doesn't say, 'when you fret', does he?

Do you find that hard, when your non-Christian friends seem to have it all and you're struggling?

Perhaps because you give faithfully and sacrificially, you can't afford the lifestyle or the holidays that other people do.

Perhaps because you don't gossip or play office politics you are slightly ostracised at work.

Perhaps it just doesn't seem fair that your beautiful, faithful, Christian daughter attends a wedding a month but has no boyfriend of her own, much less a wedding to plan.

I find it hard that I raised my children, Alex & Nick, as Christians and pray for them constantly and yet their journey into young adulthood has been messed up by anxiety and depression while many of their peers have gone a perfect, straightline from school to university, to job, to career to marriage, to success.

It wasn't what we expected and for a long time, especially when Nick's depression was at its most critical, I was anxious, overfunctioning, hypervigilant.

When David begins Psalm 37 with

Do not fret

he's talking to me.

He uses the phrase '**do not fret**' three times.

And he warns us because our fretting, our worry pulls us away from him.

Disconnection.

We fret about our children, our relationships, our work, about money, about health concerns, about ageing.

Mostly we fret when we feel out of control.

This is one of my biggest challenges. I love everything to be neat, tidy, organised and planned. The quickest way for me to slide into anxiety is to feel that something that was in my control is suddenly out of control.

I catastrophise, I go into rescue mode, I feel sick.

Does that resonate with anyone else?

So how does this happen? How does that anxious feeling sneak up and steal your peace?

After all, many of us here today, know God's love, we believe in his power to create, to change, to heal, to provide.

Perhaps it's because our head knowledge about God's love isn't matched by our heart connection.

Of course it's normal to worry.

But our worry can become our work, our priority, our idol.

It can seem caring and well meaning, but it chips away at our dependence on God himself.

So

Verse 2 reminds us to **trust God** and we think we do.

Verse 5 reminds us to **commit your way to the Lord** and we think we do.

But often we're like Apollo 13, which was off track on its journey to the moon 99% of the time.

It needed rockets to be set off constantly to push it back on track.

And perhaps this happens when we're not seeking God **himself**, his beauty, his splendour, his majesty, **but just the things he can do for me.**

Often we long for the creation and not the Creator.

Verse 4 challenges us to **delight in the Lord** and he will give you the desires of your heart.

But do you notice the order of this verse?

Delight first, receive our desires second.

Delight when life seems unfair and you feel out of control?

Delight in the midst of grief and loss, disappointment and hopelessness?

That's a tough call.

When life disappoints us Psalm 37 reminds us not to fret, but to trust God, commit to God, desire God, to reconnect to him and rest in his promises.

2. Be Still

And I think that's why the Psalmist gives us what is both a command and an encouragement in Verse 7

**Be still before the Lord
And wait patiently for him
Do not fret when people succeed in their ways
When they carry out their wicked schemes**

Some translations use 'rest' or 'quiet', which are lovely images too.

It also implies silence, an end to badgering God, to justifying ourselves.

But I particularly like the **God's Word** translation which says

**Surrender yourself to the Lord,
And wait patiently for him**

For me being still is an act of surrender.

In the struggle between God and I, I need to be still and to let him be God.

Rick Warren, who wrote ***The Purpose Driven Life***, says that surrendering your life means:

- Following God's lead without knowing where he's sending you;
- Waiting for God's timing without knowing when it will come;
- Expecting a miracle without knowing how God will provide;
- Trusting God's purpose without understanding the circumstances.

http://pastorrick.com/devotional/english/surrender-let-go-and-let-god-work_993

Yesterday I visited my lovely friend Liz. Liz is married with two daughters, in her early 40s, has a great job and was raised in a loving, Christian home. She and her husband are in our Growth Group and are keen sailors and cyclists. They live life to the full.

Four years ago Liz was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and their lives changed forever. She lives with discomfort, fear and uncertainty. Last week she had a treatment which has left her weak and in pain, unable to risk exposure to any infection or food that might have a hint of salmonella.

When I asked her how she coped, she said that mostly she kept a sense of balance but occasionally she'd have a meltdown.

'I just want this to go away. It's unfair.'

Which seemed to me, especially as a counsellor, to be perfectly normal.

But later as we were chatting, she said

'I've been praying that God would show me what he wants to do with my life.'

And she wasn't just talking about this job or that job, she was talking about perhaps doing missionary work when the girls had finished school.

Well I was so rebuked by her faithfulness. I'd be praying for healing, for a miracle for the pain to ease.

But she is doing exactly what Rick Warren says. What God says. Accepting God's will now and into the future.

Because God promises that when we are weak, he is strong.

More than that, what God says in Psalm 37, to **be still** before the Lord, to surrender to his love, not because you're defeated and there's no other option but because this is actually the best way to live.

Trusting that it's God's will and not pushing back.

Praying that you'd understand what you need to be learning in the midst of it all.

Allowing space between your prayers to really actively listen.

Resisting giving him the detailed shopping list of requests that you are convinced would help the situation.

Waiting patiently for his timing to be revealed.

Joni Eareckson Tada wrote in her blog last week

Our natural tendency is to try to figure things out, try and understand God's plan. But a grocery list of biblical reasons explaining the whys and wherefores behind suffering doesn't always help when you're hurting. What does help are the promises of God.

The promises to give us a hope and a future.

As I try to live this way, I'm working on changing my prayers for Nick.

I'm praying for God's will for his life, not what I think might be best.

"Could you heal his depression, motivate him to get a different job, inspire him to start studying, help him get on better with his dad, find him the perfect girl, bring him back to faith...."

I'm praying for myself that I will accept his will and look for the ways I need to grow.

I'm praying that he will replace my anxiety with peace.

When life's hard Psalm 37 reminds us not to fret, but to reconnect to him by being still and surrendering ourselves.

Being still with God, surrendering before him is a bit like that white flag at the end of a battle.

Tim Keller says

'unless you're willing to admit you're at war with God, you will never know how to surrender.'

Sometimes we recognise our fretting. It's lying awake at night, playing through the worst case scenarios endlessly in our minds.

But sometimes it can look like superwoman, hyperactivity, rushing around using every resource we have to fix something.

So often we ignore our need for God and rely on our own strength.

Sometimes in our the midst of our well-intentioned busyness and even in our prayer life we can be at war with God, struggling against what is obviously his will.

That's when we most need to be still and vulnerable.

Of course, it makes sense that it would be God's will to heal Liz, for Nick to come back into relationship with him, for all your prayers and concerns for your loved ones to be answered the way we'd love them to be answered.

But perhaps not yet.

It's when we lay down our arms, our need to be in control, our need to be right, our need for instant gratification, that we let go and let God.

That's peace

Of course humanly speaking this is almost impossible – right?

3. Hope

But verse 9 reminds us why this is possible.

**For those who are evil will be destroyed
But those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land.**

Those of us who trust in the Lord have hope.

The Israelites looked forward to inheriting the land.

We look forward to being in the kingdom forever.

And this hope is not just wishful thinking.

It's not 'Hope the weather is fine for bbq' or 'I hope you get the job' or 'I hope you feel better soon'.

When the Bible uses the word hope, it's a guarantee, it's certain. It's sure hope.

The one thing we all have in common is that life happens.

And sometimes we feel **hopeless**.

Psychologist Sarah Edelman says

Whether we are happy or miserable depends on our expectations.
Not on the things we have, but on the things we expect.

Change Your Thinking

Hope is one of our most powerful motivators and God offers future **hope** through Jesus.

We have hope because Jesus, God himself, reached down into the mess of humanity, and died in our place, taking the punishment for our sins.

We have hope in Jesus because he showed us by his obedient death, the most perfect surrender in history.

Remember how he prayed in Mark 14:36

"Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

We have hope because are counted as righteous, not as wicked.

We have hope because Jesus saved us when we were completely incapable of saving ourselves.

Which is the way Psalm 37 ends

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

Be still before the God who created you, who knows you and understands every pain and every fear.

Rest in the God who is more than able to replace your anxiety and fretfulness with peace that can only come through trusting in Jesus.

We have hope!

Brene Brown who has championed the concept of vulnerability says

"Connection is why we're here; it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives."

<https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/17-brene-brown-quotes-to-inspire-you-to-success-and-happiness.html>

I think she's brilliant but she's only talking about connecting to each other.

How much more purpose and meaning will we have when we are reconnected to the Creator himself.

Let's pray

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18