

# Growing in Faithfulness

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 23 June 2024

Preacher: Richard Marzetti

[ 0 : 0 0 ] As he said, I'm Richard Marzetti. I'm the minister at Chatsworth Baptist Church in West Norwood. If you've not met me before, I've preached here before, but I'm your moderator, which means I'm here to walk with you as you look for a new pastor, minister, whatever you call them here.

So I've worked with your leaders. I'm currently working with your search team. And the advert is out there and it's available for people. And I know that you're praying that God will send the right person here.

So I'm with you through that journey. So we're on growing in faithfulness today. And we had a reading from Psalm 37. If you go back and read the Psalm again, you can read the whole Psalm.

The whole Psalm is relevant. We just heard from 1 to 9, which is what I asked for, because it kind of just gives the flavour of what the Psalmist is trying to get across here.

And in fact, if we just read, I'm just going to read verse 1 to 3 again, because again, I feel that just sort of captures it. Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong.

[ 1 : 0 8 ] 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.

You might have a different translation in front of you. Or if you look at different translations, verse 3, where it says, dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. In other translations, because Hebrew has fewer words than English, the Hebrew words often have a much wider meaning or multiple meanings.

So trust in the Lord and do good. Instead of dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. It also reads or can read, trust in the Lord and do good. Feed on his faithfulness.

Dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Feed on his faithfulness. So a couple of stories to start. I've heard this story a number of times, but I tracked down somebody who was there at the time.

And I remember reading about it. And then you look it up and there are different versions of this story. But you may have heard the story of Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He was once preaching at an ecumenical service when the South African Security Police broke into the Cathedral of St. George's during his sermon.

[ 2 : 2 6 ] In another version I heard, you know, they turned up with guns. They were armed. It doesn't say this in the version I found, but that's another version I've heard. But anyway, it was quite a frightening experience to be worshipping there in the service and to have the security people turn up.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu stopped preaching and just looked at the intruders as they lined the walls of his cathedral. They were wielding writing pads and tape recorders to record whatever he said.

And thereby threaten him with consequences if he made any bold prophetic utterances. I don't know how I would feel if suddenly, this morning, some security police came in and, whatever it might be, came in and threatened us here on a Sunday morning, what it was like for them on that day.

After meeting their eyes with his inner steely gaze, Desmond Tutu acknowledged their power. You're powerful, very powerful, he said. But he reminded them that he served a higher power, greater than their political authority.

And Tutu said, but I serve a God who cannot be mocked. And the writer who's writing this, who was there on the day, said, in the most extraordinary challenge to political tyranny I've ever witnessed, Archbishop Desmond Tutu told the representative of South African apartheid, since you have already lost, I invite you to come and join the winning side.

[ 3 : 58 ] I love that. Since you have already lost, you there with guns and intimidation, since you have already lost, I invite you today to come and join the winning side. Wow.

This week, I was speaking to somebody who is finding life at work really quite difficult. They've got a new boss, and their boss is making their life a misery.

And they've been thinking and praying about this, and God doesn't seem to be answering their prayer. And the boss is making life really awkward for them, to the point now where they are thinking that perhaps the only way to deal with this situation is to leave their workplace.

It's too much. Too much. Can't put up with it anymore. Here we have two very different situations. And perhaps when we look at the world today, we take off something of that.

I was with, I got called out this morning before I arrived here to the oldest member of the church, 95, and she was feeling quite anxious. And so they asked me to pop round, first of all this morning.

[ 5 : 05 ] So I popped round, and she's 95. She's in bed. The carer's there. And she says, but I haven't got round to praying for the world yet, she said. There's so much trouble in the world.

I haven't done my prayer time yet. I thought, oh my goodness, wow, 95, still to be burdened with this sort of thing. But we can be. We can be burdened, can't we, by what's going on around us.

We may not have the physical presence of armed people, or we may not have a really dreadful boss around us. We may just carry some of the anxiety of our world, and what's going on.

Whether it's what's happening in Ukraine, in Gaza, whether it's our own workplace, our own neighbourhood. I'm on one of these neighbourhood WhatsApp things.

You know, so everybody posts on their WhatsApp about what's happening in the local street. So my car was ransacked last night, or I've got on my CCTV, someone was rattling doors at half past one this morning.

[ 6 : 03 ] It's out there, isn't it? Anxiety is out there, isn't it? Oh my goodness, there's so much to be worried about, and it's sometimes even on our own doorstep. How do we cope with all of that?

The psalmist, when he comes to write Psalm 37, constantly says, do not fret. In fact, in those first nine verses, I think he uses the same word three times.

Do not fret. Do not fret. But we've had many people in Scripture who have fretted, who have worried, who have been anxious. I think about Naomi.

Naomi, the story of Naomi who fled Israel, and she went to another land, and her husband died, her two sons die, but then her daughter Ruth stays with her, doesn't she?

If you read that story. But Naomi says, it's all too overwhelming, all that's gone around her and her experiences, and eventually says, call me bitter, because that's who I am, or that's what I am.

[ 7 : 02 ] Call me bitter. We can be overwhelmed by the things of our world, and what's going on around us. I was really interested to hear Monica earlier.

Maybe I need to go and speak to Monica. We all need to speak to Monica afterwards, about what that was like, to experience that as a Windrush generation, to come over here, and to experience what that was like, to be, to then live in a room, in a house, to experience racism, to experience the difficulties of finding work here as well, and how, or whether you did fret and worry, and you were anxious, and how you dealt with that.

Because this is what the psalmist is talking about, how we deal with this kind of thing. We then got other stories. We've got Hannah, in the Bible, who desperately wants a child, if we read the books of Samuel.

And she's married to Elkanah. Elkanah actually has two wives. He has Hannah, and he has, if I say this correctly, Peninnah. And scripture says that Peninnah wanted to make Hannah fret.

It's there in scripture. She wanted to make Hannah fret. She was teasing her about the fact she couldn't have a child. And the words that are used are to mean to fret, to burn up, to irritate.

[ 8 : 23 ] And so Hannah had all this going on around her as well. Then you've got Joseph's brothers. You're irritated by Joseph himself, aren't they? The way he's treated, and he's got this lovely coat, and he doesn't do any of the work, and they're all out in the fields doing all the hard work.

And they're irritated, and they're fed up with this whole situation so much. They beat Joseph up. They throw him into a pit, and eventually they sell him into slavery.

And then you've got Joseph himself, who haven't experienced all of that, goes off. He's unjustly accused. He's thrown in prison. He's seemingly forgotten about. And actually, the way of the world can overwhelm us, and all that's going on.

So the psalmist reminds us, in a few verses, do not fret. Do not fret, because other people around you succeed.

Do not be envious of those who do wrong, even when they get away with it. Why? Because the psalmist says, they're like grass that will soon wither, and like green plants, they will soon die away.

[ 9 : 29 ] Before I was a minister, I was an estate agent. I know, I know. What can I say? You don't talk to me about it afterwards.

I was an estate agent. And there was one house, this one lady, she was really proud of her garden. And at a time in the summer, when everybody else's lawn or plants are withering like this, the grass is withering away, you went round to her house, you show people round her house, her lawn was, and this wasn't just her flowers, her lawn was immaculate.

Absolutely, in the height of summer, her lawn was the greenest you've ever seen. The greenest I think I've ever seen. I mean, she really took care of the garden. I mean, obviously she watered it night and day, regardless of any hosepipe bans or anything like that.

But she paid attention to her lawn, and she watered it. So when the psalmist says, trust in the Lord and do good, dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture, or feed on his faithfulness, he's saying, don't be distracted by what else is going on around, but feed on God.

You know, you need to water the things that matter. If you want your grass to be green, it's got to be watered. If you want to not fret and to worry, you need to feed on those things that will help grow your faithfulness.

[ 11 : 01 ] So you're feeding on the very faithfulness of God. It's no wonder in Scripture, God keeps telling the Israelites, remember, don't you remember? Don't you remember I did this? Don't you remember I took you out of Egypt?

Don't you remember I took you through 40 years of things? Don't you remember I brought you into the promised land? Because often when things are around us and, you know, overwhelming us, we forget.

We forget what God had done in the past. We forget how faithful God has been. And so sometimes it is, it's worth going back, isn't it? To those things, to be reminded to say, oh yeah, I did have that situation before and I prayed about it and God did answer that prayer.

Or that thing did happen and God did take me through and we talked to Monica, God did take me through that period of my life and we are reminded about who God is.

We feed on his faithfulness because we know he wants the best for us. And in fact, the psalmist speaks about the fact that actually it's an action. This growing in faithfulness is an action.

[ 12 : 04 ] Trust, you've got to trust. You've got to take delight in the Lord, verse 4, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Verse 5, you've got to commit your way to the Lord. There's an action involved in this.

You can't just stand around hoping it's all going to be okay. We also have to take part with God of what's going on. We've said verse and we've sung about it, 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. I think Archbishop Desmond Tutu had a lot to fret and worry about.

Don't you? I mean, not only personally and physically to be arrested, to be intimidated, but he would have known what people were going through.

He would have heard people's stories. Things would have been fed back to him about people he knew and loved and how they'd been treated. There were plenty of things for Tutu to fret and worry and be anxious about, to cry out to God as I'm sure he did.

[ 13 : 05 ] I'm sure he wasn't perfect. I'm sure he had nights of anguish where he called out to God in prayer and said, Lord, what's going on? But ultimately, on that day when they were surrounded by the soldiers, he was able to speak with authority given to him by God to say, look, despite what you see, come join the winning side.

Come join the winning side. You are grass that withers, he's effectively saying to the soldiers. Your day will come. Justice will eventually see to it that you will face your day because that's God's heart.

That's the arc that God is taking us on. Now, sometimes we don't see this in the immediate time. The person who is struggling at work, maybe the wisdom is they do need to leave their job.

Maybe the wisdom is their prayer won't be answered that their boss gets ill, gets a stomachache or decides to move on or move or whatever prayer they're praying.

Maybe the wisdom is they do need to move on. Maybe that particular prayer that they keep their job isn't going to be answered. And so sometimes, you know, around us, we have to think, well, even though the experience is off, the soldiers might have their way today.

[ 14 : 27 ] Even though the boss may have, may make things worse for us that we have to leave. Even though that, we still seek to be faithful because ultimately it's not necessarily what we see with our eyes, it's who we are putting our trust in.

So Naomi is bitter. Call me bitter, she says. But she's with Ruth. And Ruth says, you know, I'm not going to leave you.

I'm going to come back with you. Your God will be my God. You know, this incredible testament of faith, wasn't it? And sometimes, when we're going through a difficult situation and we're struggling and the things around us are making us fret, we need good people to support us and to stand with us during those times, to pray with us and encourage us.

We had some friends who were trying desperately for a baby. This is not a story about having a baby, by the way. It's about standing with somebody. They couldn't have a baby. And tried natural means, they tried IVF, but it wasn't working.

It's costing them a lot of money. And they were sharing their disappointment. You see, God answers Anglican prayers as well. I'll just let you know. He answers Anglican prayers as well.

[ 15 : 40 ] They were sitting down with the vicar of their church and they were telling the vicar, this is what we're going through and we're done. We're spent. Not only are we spent in terms of money, we're spent in terms of faith.

We just don't believe it anymore. And the vicar said, you may not have faith, but we do. You may not have faith, but we do. And we will stand with you during this time.

Now, praise God, yes, they did end up having a baby by natural means. It was a miracle. But I just love that idea that actually in their difficult time when they were fretting, they were anxious, they were worried, other people were prepared to stand with them and say, but we have faith.

We will stand with you. When Hannah is being irritated by Peninnah, who's saying, look, I've got children, you haven't, I've got children, you haven't. You know, Hannah offered her situation to God, didn't she?

She said, Lord, this is where I am. This is the desire of my heart. Will you meet me where I am? And if I have a child, I will dedicate him to the Lord. Joseph, in all that he went through, and all the injustices that he faced of being thrown into the pit, of being abandoned by his brothers, of being told, they told his dad that he was dead, he got sold into slavery, he gets unjustly accused of sexually harassing the wife in the Egyptian household, he's thrown into prison, he's seemingly forgotten about.

[ 17 : 10 ] So all of his circumstances for many years, oh, oh my goodness me, there's so much to be worried and anxious about and God has forgotten about me. But sometimes, also God uses these situations, doesn't he, to transform us, that who we are to be faithful people means sometimes we do have to go through difficult times and difficult seasons.

It's not always a test, sometimes it's just the reality of the world we live in and the difficulties we face. But like the grass, those seasons will end, they will soon wither, even if it is to an extreme and we don't see it in this day.

The psalmist goes on to talk about, but you will be justified forever because beyond this world we get to be with the Lord. So whether we find justice in this world or we will find it in the next.

And that is, that's the whole bigger thing that we hold on to. Not only do we have a faithful, loving and just God who is with us through all of those seasons and we see these people transformed. Joseph is transformed, isn't he?

But we also know there's a bigger story going on beyond what we see and experience in the here and now and we are trusting in God for eternity, not just for our short years that we're here on earth.

[ 18 : 30 ] To grow in faithfulness then is we need to be committed to trust, to delight in the Lord, to walk with other people who are going to support us.

Maybe we in fact need to support them and encourage them through these times. We need to take an active role in seeking to that. Maybe one day we'll have the courage like Archbishop Desmond Tutu to speak out to power because we know who our God is.

We know the end from the beginning and we trust in him through each and every situation.