

## Introduction

Today is December 27. That means an old year is about to end and a new year is about to begin. I'd like you to think about something in that regard. What is the worst thing that happened to you in 2008? The answer makes you wonder doesn't it? What is the worst thing that **will** happen to you in 2009? Whatever that is, Psalm 37:1-11 reveals what God wants you to do when it does. Chill out!

## Chill Out

American rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a best selling book titled *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* and that's what we have in Psalm 37. Look at the word "wrongdoers" in verse 1. They are what occasioned David to write the Psalm. Wrongdoers were slandering and attacking him. That is what I'm calling today a "bad thing."

"Bad things" though, in their scope, encompass far more than just wrongdoers harming us. Take Kushner himself as an example of that. When his son Aaron was three years old, physicians diagnosed him with a degenerative disease that would kill him before he reached his teens. It eventually did, after which Kushner wrote his book. The reality is that a whole host of bad things happen to us all. A competitor slanders us. Our company lays us off. Our spouse divorces us. Our child rebels against us. An accident disables us. An illness makes us chronically weak. And on it goes. It's a fact of life. Bad things happen to us all.

And it's dangerous when they do. Bad things are always challenges to our faith and we may not be able to stand up under them. Notice how quick people are to attack God when things go wrong. Or notice a whole category of books like *Disappointment with God* by Philip Yancey. They only confirm what I'm saying. Bad things happening to us is dangerous. It can diminish and even destroy our faith and joy.

But it won't if we do what David did.

Look at the word "fret" in verse 1. The Hebrew word translated that

means literally “get heated.” We ourselves talk about people getting hot and bothered. It’s the same idea as the Hebrew word translated “fret” here. It means to get all worked up, to fuss and stew, which is we usually do when bad things happen to us.

But we shouldn’t. That’s David’s very point in verse 1. Don’t fret. Don’t get hot and bothered. Chill out instead. That’s the positive way of saying what David commands. Chill out! To “chill out” means simply to cease striving and be calm. That’s God’s call when bad things happen to us and we answer it by doing four things.

### **Look Ahead**

First, look ahead! That’s what David does. Notice what he says about the wrongdoers who are harming him. Verse 2 – they’ll quickly wither and fade like grass. Verse 10 – in a little while, they’ll be no more. This bad thing that’s happening to him, in other words, isn’t permanent. It’s temporary and will eventually pass.

What is true of David’s bad thing is true of yours and mine as well, no matter what it is. I remember a client of mine saying, “**This divorce is never going to end.**” That is sometimes the way it seems, that bad things are going to last forever. But they aren’t. That’s because each and every one is rooted in time, not eternity. Consequently, no bad thing has eternal life. Each and every one has a lifespan instead. It will, sooner or later and in one way or the other, pass.

So, look ahead. That means purposely bring to mind that the bad thing, whatever it is, is rooted in time, not eternity. Then actually assess it in terms of its lifespan, anticipating that it will pass. There is great consolation in the fact that now is not forever. So keep that fact always in view.

Take cancer, for instance. Most of us fear it but we shouldn’t. If I were diagnosed with it, one of the things I’d do is this. I’d look ahead. I’d purposely and periodically focus my thinking on the facts. Now is not forever. The cancer cells in my body are rooted in time, not eternity.

And they have a lifespan because they are. Either medical treatment or my dying and being with Jesus will make them pass. I will sooner or later, in one way or the other, be free of them.

But it isn't just cancer cells. It's all the bad things that happen to us. So, look ahead!

### Look Around

Chilling out requires doing a second thing. Look around!

When bad things happen to us, we tend to view them as being worse than they really are. We do that because we have blinders on. You know what blinders do to a horse. They limit his field of vision to what's directly in front of him. That same thing often happens to us. We have mental blinders on that limit our perceptions to what is directly in front of us - the bad thing and its effects on us. That makes us think things are worse than they really are, which defeats us.

That's why we need to do what David did. Read all 40 verses of Psalm 37. You'll find that he saw the bad thing, the wrongdoers. But he looked around and saw the good things in his circumstances as well. He got perspective in other words and so should we.

I read about a college co-ed who wrote her parents the following two page letter. Page 1: **"Dear mom and dad: Just thought I'd drop you a note to clue you in on my plans. I've fallen in love with a guy named Jim. He quit high school after grade eleven to get married. About a year ago, he got a divorce. We've been going steady for two months and plan to get married in the fall. Until then, I've decided to move into his apartment (I think I might be pregnant). At any rate I dropped out of school last week, although I'd like to finish college sometime in the future."** By the end of the first page of course, her parents were devastated and could hardly bear to read the second. But they did and it went like this: **"Mom and dad, I just want you to know that everything I've written so far in this letter is false. None of it is true. But mom and dad, it is true that**

**I got a "C" in French and flunked math. It's also true that I'm going to need some more money for my tuition payments."**

That's a sharp co-ed. Do you see what she was able to do? Take the blinders off her parents. Yes, it was a bad thing that she got a "C" in French and flunked math and they needed to address that. But they needed to do so in the context of her moral goodness and common sense.

They needed to look around, in other words, and we do too. So someone keyed your car. You can get it fixed. So you flunked the bar exam. You can take it over again. So you lost your high paying job. You can downsize and get another one. So your body is aging and aching. You'll get a new and perfect one at the Second Coming of Jesus.

That's enough to make the point. Take the mental blinders off and look around. Keep bad things in perspective. Assess them in terms of the entire context of good things in which they occur.

### **Look In**

The third thing we have to do to chill out is found in verses 3. David says, "do good." He means by that look in and be constructive!

Outward Bound is a program that teaches people how to rappel. You know what rappelling is. It's using long ropes to climb down steep cliffs. Well, rappellers sometimes get to a point of difficulty in their descent when no one can help them. No helicopter is going to come to whisk them away. No genie is going to pop out of a bottle and rescue them. So Outward Bound developed a motto for that situation. "If you can't get out of it, get into it." That means look at anything constructive you can do in your location on the cliff, no matter how small, and do it.

That's essentially what David is saying in verse 3. When bad things happen to us, if we can't get out of it, get into it. Or to say it another way, look in and be constructive.

There's something we need to grasp. No matter how bad a situation is, there's always something we can do about some aspects of it. So, we should do that. We should do what we can about those aspects of it

that are possible and leave the rest in God's hands. Doing something constructive, no matter how small, sometimes turns the tide. It can cause breakthroughs or even stimulate outside forces to help us.

Back in the mid-70's, a six year old in the Bronx was hit by a car. By the time he recovered several surgeries later, his mother had \$35,000 in medical bills to pay. When he found her crying about it one day, he took her hand and confidently declared, "**Don't worry mom, I'll pay it off for you.**" So he began walking the streets collecting newspapers, pop bottles, and aluminum cans. He'd put them in his little red wagon, take them to the grocery store, and cash them in. Amazingly, after a year of doing that, he had made \$1000. At that point, a reporter got wind of what he was doing and wrote an article about it in the New York Times. Soon, New Yorkers all over the city were saving their newspapers, pop bottles, and aluminum cans for this little boy. To make a long story short, after 8 years, he had made \$17,000. Several individuals, inspired by the grit he showed, then matched that amount and he paid off the entire bill.

Do you see what that little boy did? He couldn't get out of it, so he got into it. He looked in, at his circumstances, and was constructive. He saw and did the good that he could. We should do the same.

## **Look Up**

There's a fourth and final thing we have to do to chill out. This is the most significant of all. Look up.

Looking up has to do with the two most significant realities in human life. The first reality is this. You and I are beyond genuine harm in God's presence. Romans 8:28 teaches us that. God causes all things to work together for our good. That means that no matter how bad the thing is that's happening to us, its ultimate outcome will be a good one. The second reality is this. God's presence, by itself, is enough. Psalm 16:11 articulates that as well as any verse in the Bible. In God's presence is fullness of joy. That means that His presence gives us

all the joy that we could possibly want, no matter what.

Now, I want you to suppose two things. #1 - You truly believe the first of those realities. You're confident, without doubt, that you're beyond genuine harm in God's presence. And #2 - You experience the second. You're consistently fully joyful in the core of your being, no matter what. Question - What would the natural outcome of believing and experiencing that be? It'd be calmness and rest. You'd be chilled out, in good times and bad, without even trying to be.

That shows us what the ultimate secret to chilling out is. It's to look up. That is in fact that basic thrust of this entire Psalm. Notice the series of commands in verses 3-7: "**trust in the Lord,**" "**delight yourself in the Lord,**" "**commit your way to the Lord,**" and "**rest in the Lord.**" Those commands call us to look up and I'm speaking metaphorically. To look up means to preoccupy ourselves with God. The Bible teaches that there are certain central activities that engage Him. Thus, to look up means to arrange our affairs around practicing those activities. We offer a discipleship curriculum that teaches you what those central activities are and how to practice them. Get the curriculum and do just that - learn and devotedly practice them. You'll eventually come to believe and experience the two realities I explained earlier if you do. You'll then be chilled out, in good times and bad, without trying to be.

I would point out that looking up is something we must begin to do **before** the moment of crisis, not **during**. If we aren't looking up **before** bad things happen, we usually won't be able to **while** they're happening

## Conclusion

So that's the message of Psalm 37 and I'd sum it up this way. Several months ago, I was walking behind teenagers at the mall, one of whom suddenly said to the other, "**Take a chill pill.**" Well, that's what we have in Psalm 37 - God's chill pills. There are four of them. Look ahead, look around, look in, and most importantly, look up. Let's do those four things. We'll be chilled out and calm if we do.