

## Four Pillars of the Righteous (Psalm 37)

A Bible Message by Bayless Conley

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Please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Psalms.

### TRUST

I want to begin at the end of Psalm 37 with the first pillar, the pillar of Trust. **Trust really is the alpha and the omega of our relationship with God.** It begins with trust, you find trust in the middle, and it ends with trust. Trust takes us to heaven. It says in Psalm 37:39,

39 But the salvation of the righteous *is* from the LORD; *He is* their strength in the time of trouble.

40 And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them, Because they trust in Him.

So unless there is something wrong with my translation of the Bible, the righteous do have times of trouble. Does anybody's experience confirm that? Well, God is our strength in our time of trouble. It says He will help us and He will deliver us. He will save us from our troubles because... and that is a very big word, signifying cause and effect... because we trust in Him. Trusting in Him means we trust in His word; we trust in His nature and His character; we trust in Him. Bottom line: Your trust can bring you out of trouble. **Trust is the avenue through which God intervenes into the circumstances of our life.** It is quite clear that although we do have times of trouble and experience difficulties, God is our deliverer, our strength, and He is our Savior. It is because, the Scripture says, we trust in Him.

### **Fretting Only Causes Harm**

As I said, trust is the alpha and the omega of our relationship with God. It is also the alpha and the omega of this particular Psalm. It ends with trust, and it begins with trust. Look with me in Psalm 37:1,

1 Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.

2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb.

3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

I like the Living Bible translation. It says, "Trust the Lord instead." In other words, instead of fretting over the prosperity of the wicked, instead of envying what ungodly people have that you don't seem to have in your life, even though you are serving God; trust God instead of envying. Trust God instead of being fretful. In fact, that little admonition to not fret, stress out, be worried, or be angry over some seeming blessing that the wicked are enjoying or the prosperity they are enjoying while you may not be at this present time in your life, is actually echoed and reiterated again in the following verses. Look with me in Psalm 37:7,

7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret--*it only causes harm.*

Fretting is not good. One reason he said “do not fret” is because you cannot trust and fret at the same time. **Fretting is a sure sign that faith has become disengaged**, or, at best, it has a very tenuous connection. On the other hand, as we read in verse 7, we are to “Rest in the Lord.” **Having an inward peace is a sure sign that faith is engaged or has a very strong and viable connection.** The Apostle Paul said it this way in Romans 15:13, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” When we do believe and we are in a place of trust, it brings joy and peace into our heart. The writer of Hebrews said it this way in Hebrews 4:3, “For we who have believed do enter that rest.” Trusting God brings a rest into our heart, and rest is a sign that we are connected.

Yet, some people have never quite grasped the concept of trusting God. I think maybe they try too hard; they perhaps over-spiritualize it. Just to make it simple, let me give you an acronym from the word trust: T-R-U-S-T.

### **“T”—Take God at His Word**

Trusting is taking God at His word. That is the foundation and the fountain from which all faith comes. Romans 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **Faith begins at the known will of God, and God’s word is a revelation of His will.**

Now, if you turned up at my house and said, “Bayless, I’m trusting you to give me \$500,” you can trust all you want. It isn’t happening. However, if I promised to give you \$500, if you have my word, that is a different story.

We read at the end of the Psalm that God delivers us, He helps us, and He strengthens us, because we trust in Him. I run into many Christians who are in trouble and having difficulties, saying, “You know, I’m trusting God.” Yet, you almost get a sense that they do not really quite know what that means. It is like if I grit my teeth and lean forward, maybe this will work. If you were to ask some of those people what promise of God they are “believing,” they would not have an answer. **Faith has to be based on something. Faith is based on the promises of God.** At the very least you could say, “Well, you know, I have read in the word that God’s nature is that He is ever merciful, His mercies are new every morning, and I know He is the Lord and that He does not change, so I am just trusting in His mercy.” All right, that is good. That comes from the knowledge of the word of God. **Without the word, there is no basis for faith. So trusting God begins at His word. It is taking God at His word.**

### **“R”—Respond with Action**

The second chapter of the Book of James says, “Faith without works is dead.” The Weymouth translation says, **“Faith without actions that correspond is dead.”**

Like many of you, we enjoyed a fun Thanksgiving holiday with family and friends at the house. We had a great time. We stayed up late playing some games and laughing. We ate a lot of food. Beforehand, I called family and friends and said, “Why don’t we do Thanksgiving at our house this year?” They said, “Yes.” Not one person, family or friend, said, “Well, Bayless, can you give me a sign? How do I really know you are going to have Thanksgiving? How do I know this is a real invitation?” No, they just responded with action. They turned up at the house at the preordained time. As simple and earthly as that is, really, faith in God is not different. You just respond with action. Such as,

- “Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders.”
- “In all things, give thanks.”
- “Honor the Lord with the firstfruits of all your income.”

**There is an action that we need to respond with. It starts with the word, and then we need to act upon the word.**

### “U”—Utter the Truth

Thirdly, and this is an integral part of trust, “U” is utter the truth. Look in verse 30 of this Psalm. It says (Psalm 37:30),

30 The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, And his tongue talks of justice.

Or of right things. Why is it that the mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom and right things? The answer is found in the next verse, Psalm 37:31,

31 The law of his God *is* in his heart; None of his steps shall slide.

Jesus taught us that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. When I put God’s law in my heart, it will be fixed upon my lips. The result is that it stabilizes my life. My steps do not slip. **The word has to be both in my heart and upon my lips because faith is expressed not only through actions, but also through our speech.** I realize that this is very elementary, but I want you to follow because some people, for all the time that they have been saved and in church, have never quite caught this. You could say it this way, just for reason of explanation: **Faith comes in two halves, in the heart and in the mouth, and it is not until you put the two together that the circuit is made complete and the power of faith is released.**

Look at Romans 10:8,

8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”  
(that is, the word of faith which we preach)

Notice the word needs to be in two places: Our heart and our mouth. Look in the next verse, Romans 10:9,

9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.  
10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto (*or resulting in*) salvation.

If heart and mouth do not come together, both connecting with the word of God, the faith circuit is not made complete and the power of faith is not released.

I was working with a friend the other day on a little light on a boat. One of the navigational lights just would not come on. We took the housing off. This simple little light was in there. There are two contact points. I don’t know if there was rust, or something got in there, but we had to clean the contact points off and jiggle it a little bit. Finally, when it got good contact on the top and bottom, boom! The light came on. The power was on; it was available; but it was not being expressed until both contacts were made. **Friend, until heart and lips both connect with the word of God, the power of faith is not released.**

Some people's biggest problem is about an inch below their nose. There are some people who, as a habit of life, have the bent or propensity to always see the glass half empty. With their speech they are continually reinforcing the most negative scenarios in whatever circumstances they might be in. They just have a bent toward that more than other people. We all have a bent toward destructive things. The nature of sin is still in our flesh. With some people, that bent goes one way; with some people another way; and with some people, it is the easiest thing in the world for them to speak negatively. You know who you are. So does everybody else.

- "It will never work!"
- "I can't believe we are even trying this!"
- "I never get a break!"
- "I always get sick this time of year."
- "We are probably going to lose everything we have. I knew this was going to happen!"

They continually speak that way. You know, you could just as easily be saying things like:

- "You know, God can make a way where there is no way."
- "All things are possible with God."
- "Nothing can separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus."
- "Love never fails."
- "God makes all things work together for the good of those who love Him, that are called according to His purpose."

You could say those things, but people who have that natural propensity toward negative speech are really going to have to discipline themselves and re-train their lips. I think the most important thing for all of us is to take a look at the well that we are drinking from because, again, Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." **Whatever we fill our heart with is eventually going to come out in our speech. It is pretty important because the Book of Proverbs says death and life are in the power of the tongue.**

Before I was a Christian, and I want to emphasize that this is before I was a Christian, a friend of mine and I traveled across the country without any money, borrowing gasoline from other people's cars. I mean, we made it across a lot of states. One night, when I was helping myself to someone else's gas, I was having a little trouble. I must have swallowed what felt like a gallon of gasoline. Oh, man! I was sicker than a dog! For about the next 36 hours I was belching petrol. If I had opened my mouth around anybody in the next couple of days, they would have said, "He has been drinking gasoline!" It was obvious what I had put in me when I opened my mouth. You know what? Let me be around you while you are unguarded, and I am going to be able to tell what is in your heart in abundance because it is going to come out in your speech. Not when you are watching your "p's" and "q's" and thinking, "I'm not going to say anything wrong. Pastor Bayless is here." **It is those things we say as a habit of life in those unguarded moments that really is a revelation of what we have put in our heart.**

So take a look at the spring that you are dipping your water from. In the Book of James, chapter 2, when it talks about speech, it says that your tongue is like a rudder on a ship determining the very direction of your life. It says, "No fountain sends forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening." It is talking about our speech. **Start dipping the bucket of your heart into the well of God's word and filling your heart with that fresh water of God's word.** Friend, when you then get in situations, what you have put in your heart is going to come out of your mouth.

Uttering the truth is a very integral part of trust because if you continually speak the opposite of God's promises and speak contrary to the declarations of God, that faith circuit is never made complete. **Faith has to be in the heart and in the mouth, and when they both touch the word of God, faith works.**

### **“S”—Single Focus**

The “S” in the word T-R-U-S-T stands for single focus. Jesus, in Matthew and Luke's gospels in the King James Version, talked about having a single eye. Focus. When Peter was walking on the water to go to Jesus, he became distracted. He saw the boisterous wind. He saw the waves, and he began to sink. He let something that had no bearing on the miracle that was in progress rob him of his faith. Listen, it is not easier to walk on the water when it is calm. The wind and the waves have nothing to do with walking on the water. Peter became distracted. He took his eyes off of Jesus. **The moment he began to look and concentrate on the circumstances surrounding him, his faith began to diminish.** I am just telling you to **keep your eyes on Jesus.** Keep your eyes on the Savior. Keep your eyes on the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the author and the finisher of our faith. Keep your eyes on the living word, Jesus.

**We are not denying circumstances are there, but gaze at the Savior and glance at your problems.** Some people do that in reverse. They gaze at their problems and occasionally glance at the Savior. You can never have strong faith when you do that. The Bible says Abraham grew strong in faith while looking onto the promise of God.

I read about two little boys playing in the snow. They were throwing snowballs and one of the boys said, “I’ll tell you what, see the two trees over there?” There were two distant trees. He said, “I’ll bet I can walk to that tree with a straighter line than you can walk to your tree.” The other boy said, “You’re on!” And they started walking. About every ten feet the boy who made the challenge looked back to check how straight his line was. He walked and checked, walked and checked, and by the time he got to his tree, he looked back, and he had this zig-zaggy line that went all the way back to the starting point. He looked at the other boy's trail through the snow, and it was as straight as an arrow. He said, “How did you do that?” He said, “I never took my eyes off the tree.” Friend, **focus has a lot to do with trust. Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You because he trusts in You.”**

You see, it starts with taking God at His word, responding with action, uttering the truth, and then staying focused on those promises. Those are all a part of T-R-U-S-T.

### **“T”—Thank God in Advance**

Then, finally, “T” is for thanksgiving. Just offer thanks to God in advance.

If you are a parent with young children, and a parent that keeps his word to your kids, you will know what this is like. A number of times when the children were small we would say, “Hey, we are taking you out of school today, and we are taking you to Disneyland.” Chaos would erupt: “Thank you, Dad! Thank you, Dad! Thank you! We are going to Disneyland! We are going to Disneyland! We don't have to go to school! Oh, thank you, Dad! Thank you, Dad!” They might even call a little friend, “We don't have to go to school today. We're going to Disneyland! Thank you, Daddy! Thank you, Daddy!” All they had was my word! Nothing else. Yet, they were offering thanks in advance, an expression of their faith in a fallible father.

**Friend, we have an infallible heavenly Father, and we need to offer thanks to Him.** I quote to you from the Living Bible, speaking of Abraham. When he and Sarah could not have children, and God had promised them that they would, Romans 4:20 says, "His faith and trust grew ever stronger, and he praised God for this blessing even before it happened." **T-R-U-S-T, a pillar in the life of the righteous.**

## **PATIENCE**

The second pillar is Patience. Actually, a huge theme of Psalm 37 is patiently waiting on God. Especially when it seems like the wicked are being blessed and the righteous are not, especially when it seems that the wicked are prospering and the righteous are getting the short end of the stick, and the righteous are in trouble, experiencing dilemmas; and it seems like those who do not serve God and do not know God have everything that a heart could wish for. **The theme throughout this Psalm is to wait patiently on God.** We read it in the first couple of verses. Look with me in verse 7, (Psalm 37:7).

7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. (Verse 9),

9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.

10 For yet a little while... (Now understand God's "little while" and your "little while" may differ, but He does say a little while) ...and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more.

And then verse 34,

34 Wait on the LORD, And keep His way, And He shall exalt you to inherit the land; When the wicked are cut off, you shall see *it*.

In that verse, The Living Bible says, "Don't be impatient for the Lord to act. Keep traveling steadily along His pathway; and in due season, He will honor you with every blessing." God says the tables will turn, but **we must learn the discipline of resting and waiting expectantly while we continue doing what is right.**

We need to have the patience of an oyster. An oyster will have something get inside of its shell that irritates it. It might be a little piece of seashell or a large grain of sand. So it secretes this substance and begins to cover that irritant. It covers it with layer upon layer over a long period of time. Eventually it forms a beautiful, if not extremely valuable, pearl. Pearls come from irritants. That is what they are made from, but it takes time.

I'm telling you that if you will continue to cover those things that irritate you with trust, faith, and prayer and you will not quit, **God can turn your difficulties into pearls if you are willing to wait patiently.** Whatever is going on in your personal life... maybe your name has been maligned, maybe there is some financial difficulty, maybe there is some other thing going on... friend, just keep covering it in prayer and trusting God. God can turn your difficulties into pearls if you will learn that discipline to patiently and expectantly wait on Him. God promises that the tables will turn.

It is interesting that throughout this Psalm God actually brings a bigger picture to the forefront. Throughout the psalm, He talks again and again about the righteous. The table is turning, and

the righteous are actually inheriting the land. Verses 11, 18, 22, 29, and 34, all talk about the righteous inheriting the land. I am certain that there actually is a temporal promise of physically inheriting land, and I think we can trust God for that. In fact, I think it very well may be part of the Abrahamic covenant that we are a part of through Christ. Though that may be true, and God certainly does deliver and help the righteous in their time of trouble, the bigger picture that God is painting here is an eternal one. **If we just have our minds on the temporal, the earthly, and do not look at the eternal, I think we really miss the main point that God is trying to make.** In fact, as an example, look at a couple of verses with me. Verse 18,

18 The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever.

That is eternal, my friend. Look in Psalm 37:29,

29 The righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever.

Only the slightest fraction of our inheritance and reward is in this life. In fact, **the good things that God provides in this life, if you were to compare them with the things He has prepared in the next life, are almost immeasurable they are so small by comparison.**

In the span of my lifetime, I have been to some pretty beautiful places. I remember as a teenager I moved to Utah and saw some beautiful canyons while I was living there. When I lived in Oklahoma, I saw some beautiful canyons. In Hawaii I have seen Waimea Canyon, which is just stunning in its beauty. I thought I had really seen something until one day. I was traveling with some friends and I said, "Let's go see the Grand Canyon." It was about an hour out of our way. They said, "Oh, Bayless! I have seen pictures of it." I said, "I think it is almost a mile across or something. We should go see it." I finally talked them into going, and I was thinking, "Okay, this is going to be really big." Well, we drove up to the rim of the canyon, and I looked across. It was 18 miles across. I was awe struck! It seemed to physically and literally take my breath away! I thought, "Man, I have never seen a canyon until I saw this!" I understood why they call it grand.

I think in the same way, only on an enormously larger scale, when we get to heaven, everywhere you turn, it is going to take your breath away. I think you are going to be awestruck by everything you see. It will be beyond earthly description. This earth is just a shadow of things to come. Thank God for all of the good things He does! Man, I am into it! I am in to God's deliverance and His help and His strength and His safety and all those things. Yet, friend, I have one eye on the Judgment Seat of Christ, and I have one eye on eternity. When God makes new heavens and a new earth, and He comes to dwell with us, friend, that is the real reward.

I was talking with a friend one day. We were sitting in a café talking about injustice and some of the things that people go through in this life. Talking about the different places in the world where there is great injustice and where believers in Jesus Christ are severely persecuted for their faith. We got to talking about individuals that we have known who have had to experience some really hard things and the fact that we did not have answers as to why they had to experience these hardships. It was really quite a moment, because almost in unison when we looked at each other, we almost said the words together. **Eternity is the great equalizer.** I believe that is true, my friend. **God wants to intervene in the circumstances here and now, but don't lose the bigger picture.** It is not just about this earthly life. This is a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. The real reward, the real inheritance, comes

when this life is over. For those who have experienced injustice and all of those things, who have put their trust in Christ, eternity is the great equalizer.

## **GUIDANCE**

The third pillar that I want to speak to you about is guidance. Look in verse 23 (Psalm 37:23),

23 The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.

How many are glad that God wants to order our steps? Now, we know if God is ordering our steps, nothing could go wrong. Well, look at the next verse,

24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds *him* with His hand.

What is that all about? If God is guiding my steps, why should I fall at all? Because there is always that human element. I do not always get it right! Maybe this has been your experience; it has certainly been mine. There have been times I have been flowing right in the middle of what seems to be the center of God's will, everything firing on all cylinders. Then I sort of get sidetracked and go over to this little eddy over here, and I'm just sort of spinning around with a bunch of leaves and debris. I'm thinking, "Man, something is wrong. Something is missing. God, this is just not how it is supposed to be!" You know, His mercy intervenes, and swoosh! I get out in the main flow, "Oh, yeah! I remember what this is like. Awesome! Jesus, You are so good!" Then down the road, swoosh, get off into some little eddy again and spin around again, thinking, "I have seen that leaf before!" **God, in His grace gets you back into the middle of His will.** I think that is what this verse is saying. God understands the human element and the fact that our frame is earthly. He is saying, "Look, if you will just keep a right heart, even when you mess up, even when you misstep, even when you don't get it, I will get you where you need to go. Even if you get sidetracked, I am going to get you right back into My flow. Friend, it's about Me; it is not about you. So just trust Me." **God will get us where we need to be.** He is so good! He orders our steps; and even when we fall, He does not let go of us. We are not going to be utterly cast down. **He will bring us to the place that He has designed for us as long as we keep an open and an honest heart.**

One of the ways He guides us is mentioned earlier in the Psalm. In verse 4 it says,

4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

I don't think it means that if you will just be happy in God, He will give you a bunch of stuff. The Hebrew word "delight" literally means to be pliable or soft. It is the person who says, "You know, I made Jesus 'Lord.'" That must mean something. Lord means boss. Maybe I should not just rush off and live life my way. Maybe I ought to submit my plans to the Boss. Maybe I ought to say, 'Lord, you know, I have some plans and things I would like to do, but I'm willing to put anything on the altar. I want Your will for my life; and, God, I'm just checking with You.'" When we take that kind of a pliable posture, God does something. He gives us desires. He literally begins to put desires in our heart. **When we are soft and pliable before Him, He gives us the desire; and the reason He gives us the desire is so He can give us the desire.**

I came back to California because God led me through desire. I rebuked the devil for about a year. I was sure it was the devil because I like California and I wanted to come back here. Somewhere in my Christian journey I had picked up this theology that said, "Well, whatever you don't want to do, whatever you hate, that is what you need to do for God to prove your love for Him. And that is what God wants you to do." So I planned on going to the place that I thought I would hate the worst on Planet Earth and serve Jesus. I mean, He was Lord, and I was going to do it. And this desire kept coming up to go back to California and start a church. I was just rebuking the devil, saying, "You are not going to tempt me, devil. I have given my life to Jesus. You are not going to tempt me." I'll tell you, it was an epiphany for me when I realized those desires were coming from God. They were like those trick birthday candles that you cannot blow out. They just kept coming back and coming back, and I realized that God had wired me up to enjoy what He had called me to do. He had also given me the grace to enjoy who He has called me to be.

**Whatever He has called you to do, wherever He has called you to be, you are wired up for it, and He has given you grace for it. Not that there won't be hard and difficult times, but there is the grace to have joy in it.**

So God led me back here through desire. In fact, the next verse goes right along with that. It says, "Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." In other words, you have received some direction through desire, and you know it is not just some stubborn thing that you are going to do. You have really opened your heart to God, saying, "God, Your plans..." and you have this desire that will not go away. All right, that needs to become your way, and you need to walk in it and trust God. He will bring it to pass; but the idea is that He is guiding you through desire.

There are certainly many ways that God guides His children. In fact, I have shared this before. **He will guide us through the Word, the whisper, the weight, and through the witness.**

### **The Word**

First, He will guide us through the Word. If you are at a crossroads in your life, you better study the Map. **His Book is a roadmap for life.** There are answers in it. It will tell you what you need to do. It's the first place you need to look.

### **The Whisper of His Spirit**

Secondly, God guides us through the whisper of His Spirit. The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God." When Elijah was in the cave, an interesting sequence of events happened. There was this mighty wind that came and tore the rocks apart, but the Bible says God was not in the wind. There was an earthquake, but it says God was not in the earthquake. There was a fire. It says God was not in the fire. Then there was a still small voice, and God spoke to the prophet in a whisper. Sometimes we are looking for God in the fire, the earthquake, and in the wind. **We are looking for Him in the spectacular, and we are missing the supernatural that is in front of us all the time.** I think sometimes our personal worlds are just a bit too busy and too noisy, and **we need to withdraw like Jesus did and get quiet with the Father because it may be that He is whispering to us all the time, and we are just not hearing.**

I have a friend who went to an all boys' school, and he said they had a man come and speak to them who, many years ago, had sailed around the world by himself in a small sailboat. The man was not a Christian, and he was not sharing from a Christian perspective, but my friend said, "I

remembered something he said. I believe he was in the Pacific Ocean, and he ran into what they call a dead calm, and for ten days and ten nights there was not the slightest breath of wind. Not a ripple on the water, not a fish broke the surface of the water, not a seagull, nothing. It was motionless, still, quiet for ten days.” This man who was not a Christian made the statement to all of those boys. He said, “In the middle of those ten days, I realized something: There is a God.” The Scripture says, “Be still and know that I am God.” Sometimes God speaks to us in the stillness. He whispers to our heart.

### **The Weight**

Then there is the weight. And by that, I do not mean “w-a-i-t” but “w-e-i-g-h-t.” The weight of conviction. I would put desire as a kind of sub-category under that. It is when you just have a certain conviction in your heart. You don’t know how you know, but there is something there that will not go away. I have an inward conviction that I need to be involved in certain regions of the world in the salvation of those people groups. I cannot honestly tell you I have had a dream or a vision or a revelation or that God has spoken to me in some way or given me a prophetic word. It is just something that is undeniable, it is just there, and it is never far away from me. I could reach out and touch it at any time. It is a weight that tells me I am supposed to have something to do with that, supposed to move in that direction. I think God guides us through that weight of conviction. It is just something you know in your “knower.” You don’t know how you know, but you know that you know.

### **The Witness**

Then, finally, there is the witness. That is the witness of others. **God speaks to us through other people.** The Bible says faithful are the wounds of a friend. Many a friend is going to tell you what you want to hear. A true friend will tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. If you are shutting off the voices of those who are close to you, you may be shutting off the voice of God. We need to listen. Now maybe God cannot find somebody in that circle of friends, so He will move to the next circle of people with whom we are acquainted. If God cannot find somebody in that circle, He may move to the next circle, which is our foes, our enemies. Yes, God can even speak to us through an enemy.

Josiah was one of the greatest kings that Judah had ever known. In fact, the Bible says that no king turned to the Lord with all of his heart and soul like Josiah, no one before him, and no one after him. He led the nation in revival and reformation. He was a mighty young man for God. Pharaoh Necho was coming through the land, a sworn enemy of Israel, and Josiah went out to meet him in battle, and Pharaoh says, “Look, don’t mess with me. I’m on an errand from God. You have no part in this, Josiah. Go home.” Josiah would not listen. He went to fight him, and Josiah was killed before his time, and the Bible says he was killed because he did not listen to the words of God spoken through the mouth of Pharaoh Necho. Josiah just could not conceive that God would ever speak through an enemy.

I think God just wants to get through to us, and He wants to guide us. I think it is a wonderful part of this Christian life. Jesus said, “My sheep know My voice, and they follow Me.” He does want to guide us.

### **GENEROSITY**

Finally, the fourth pillar of the righteous is generosity. Look in verse 21. Psalm 37:21,

21 The wicked borrows and does not repay.....But the righteous shows mercy and gives. (Verse 25),

25 I have been young, and *now* am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.

26 *He is* ever merciful, and lends; And his descendants *are* blessed.

Generosity, certainly, is a hallmark of the Christian life. Let me just share with you some contradictory terms, if I might:

- spicy bland food
- a successful failure
- intelligent stupidity
- exciting drudgery
- an illiterate reader
- an honest liar
- a stingy Christian

Stingy and Christian do not go together any more than spicy and bland go together, any more than illiterate and reader go together. **A Christian is a follower of Christ. Christ is the epitome of generosity. He is the source of generosity.** He is our highest example of generosity. He gave all. And listen, if a hundred dollars seems really small to you when you are at the mall and yet it seems really large to you when you are at church, maybe you should consider your ways. It is not dependent upon how much we have. Look in verse 16,

16 A little that a righteous man has *is* better than the riches of many wicked.

One reason is because the righteous man is going to share what he has. He will be generous with it.

We all know the story of the good Samaritan as told by Jesus. A man was on the road to Jericho. He was jumped by thieves. They almost killed him. They robbed him and left him bleeding and dying. A Levite passed by, walked on the other side of the road, and did not lift a finger to help him. A priest walked by, did not lift a finger to help him. A Samaritan came, picked the man up, bandaged his wounds, poured in oil and wine, put him on his own donkey, took him to an inn, paid the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him. Nurse him back to health. When I return, if there is anything more that is owed, I'll pay that, as well." Jesus asked the listeners, "Which one of these men in the story was a friend to this man who was wounded?" They all said, "Well, the Samaritan, of course." He said, "Go do likewise."

Now there are three types of people in the story. There are the thieves. A thief is a person who says, "What you have is mine, and I'm going to take it." There were the Pharisees and the priests. This type says, "What I have is mine, and I'm not going to share it with you." There was a third category, the Samaritan, and he says, "What I have is yours, and I will share it with you." Which one did Jesus tell us to follow and do likewise? The Samaritan.

I remember when I was serving as an assistant pastor, there was a lady in church who had been through a really bad marriage. Her husband had been abusive and addicted to drugs. Anytime they got money, he spent it on drugs and was pretty rough with her. The marriage broke up, and she was doing the best she could to raise two kids on her own, working in a little truck stop serving breakfast to the truckers. I think she was making minimum wage and living in

a dilapidated house. I had been out to visit her, and she was really in a bad part of town. The senior pastor told me one Sunday, "Bayless, it has come to my attention that this gal is really in dire straits financially. She is behind on her bills. We are going to take up an offering for her today. But I feel in my heart like we are supposed to keep it anonymous." I said, "Cool." So he gets up, tells the congregation, "We have someone in the church who is in really bad shape, financially, and we are going to take up an offering for them. But I just feel like I'm not supposed to tell you who it's for." I happened to be sitting a couple of seats away from this gal, and I couldn't help but watch her when the offering plate was passed by. She bowed her head and prayed, and then opened her purse and put everything she had in that plate. I cried. She had no idea it was for her. It is a spirit of Jesus, a spirit of Christianity, and it was really quite amazing. When the service was over, the pastor came up and gave her the offering, and then she cried.

I really think it is one of the hallmarks of those who have Jesus Christ living in their life. I mean, God is the original giver. **God so loved that He gave. If I am not just as generous now as when I first got saved, maybe I have left my first love. I think it is one of the indicators of where we are with God.** I know we can use wisdom as an excuse because wisdom is the principal thing. I have learned a little bit, thank God, because when I first got saved, I gave away everything I had; and, unfortunately, God did not lead me to do all that. I got myself in a fix a number of times. I think God was scratching His head, thinking, "When is this boy going to get some wisdom? I'm getting tired of having to bail him out." So I have grown in wisdom, thank God! I do not just give out of emotion in some of the things that I did before, perhaps even foolishly. I have to take an honest look at my heart and say, "Am I just as generous? Could I give just as lavishly? If God said to give it all, could I do it without hesitation? Or maybe I don't love Jesus as much as I first did."

Jesus spoke to the church in the Book of Revelation, He said, "You have left your first love. Go back and do the first works." It should be something that stands out in our life. It is a spirit of generosity. It is the way that we look at life. It has to do with everything about us. **A spirit of generosity should be a part of every person who names the name of Jesus Christ.**

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