



Seven
Part 4 – Walk in Peace
Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're talking about walking in peace. Today, we're talking about how we walk in peace when the wickedness around us is thriving, when wickedness seems to be winning. There's a theme throughout the Psalms: "God, the enemy is winning, you don't seem to be anywhere present in this; you're letting them win, so it doesn't seem like you care, and I'm about done." It's a theme and if you have your Bible, turn to Psalm 37. We're going to get there today. Have a pen ready because there is so much to outline in this passage. It's pretty much going to be our passage of application today as we talk about how we walk in peace, follower of Jesus, when wickedness seems to be thriving.

So, if your brand new, we're in this series and we've been using Proverbs 6 as an outline as we look at seven things that God finds detestable. We've said if God hates it, we should hate it. If God finds it detestable, we should find it detestable. If we don't start with it in corporate worship, we're starting with it personally. We want this to be true of us.

So, here's the outline from Proverbs 6: ***16 There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: 17 haughty eyes...*** In Week One, we looked at haughty eyes. We talked about walking in humility. ***...a lying tongue...*** Then we looked at a lying tongue. We talked about walking in truth. ***...hands that shed innocent blood...*** Last week, we looked at hands that shed innocent blood on Sanctity of Life Sunday and we talked about the most innocent of blood, that of the unborn in our culture.

Today we are looking at ***18 a heart that devises wicked schemes...*** We're going to look at this idea of plotting evil, premeditated evil, premeditated sin. We're not talking about being tempted and then falling. We're talking about those who lie awake at night and think about evil schemes and wicked schemes. Next week, we'll look at ***...feet that are quick to rush into evil...*** It's a whole message about the Patriots. Isn't that terrible? That's horrible, but it's low hanging fruit, so I have to take that. Then we'll look at ***19 a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.***

This idea of a heart that devises wicked schemes we also find in Proverbs 3, very similar. ***29 Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you.*** We get the idea of plotting in the Hebrew and it means *to plow*. I put this picture up here of a plowed field because today we are talking about those who prepare to sow, those who put time and energy into getting a field ready and we're sowing evil thoughts, sowing evil into our relationships.

Scripture goes on to say in Proverbs 10, ***23 A fool finds pleasure in wicked schemes, but a person of understanding delights in wisdom.*** A fool finds actual pleasure in wicked scheming. It's a release for them. "If I can just get even; if I can let this resentment and bitterness come out in an attack on another person..." But a person of understanding, which is what we want to be, delights in wisdom.

We'll look at the wicked today, we'll look at how they try to recruit us and how to avoid that, but, more importantly, we want to spend the bulk of our time talking about how to walk in peace when wickedness is thriving.

Some examples of this... I was thinking about a meeting you may have this week at work. Someone has been planning this meeting and you're just supposed to show up; you've been invited to it. But, they've been thinking all week of what they're going to say. They've been thinking about how they're going to get their agenda across. You show up unprepared. You haven't thought it through because you may not even know what the agenda items are, but someone has really thought it through and now you show up and you're caught off guard. How many of you are quick on your feet? How many of you need time to process before you go ahead and speak? That's called wisdom in the scripture. You don't open your mouth right away. I can kind of be like whatever first comes to my mind, I'll just get it out there, but then when I think about it more... And I want to think in wisdom. I don't want to move towards that of folly.

I was thinking of a meeting that maybe you can understand a little bit more than that, I know I can. As a kid, I would plot evil against my parents. As children, we learn how to do this. We know the time of day that is best to approach our parents with bad news. How many know what I'm talking about? Right now, in here, there's a student who wants to do something on Friday that they know they probably shouldn't do or be with people they know are not good to be with. You haven't received permission yet for that activity on Friday night, so all week, you will plot. All week, you will begin to get the machinery out and plot the field and you'll get it ready. Your room is going to be cleaner than it's ever been. When mom asks you to do something today, you'll be like, "Yes ma'am, I'll get right on it!"

But, see, parents are brilliant. We know when something's off. And all the parents said... Amen. We know that kind of response is not usually what we get from you and so our first thought when you begin plotting is, "What do you want?" We know you want something.

If you're an evil parent, you take advantage of that plotting. I don't. But if they're preparing me for a big ask at the end of the week, I'm going to take this all the way to the bank. "Son, that bolder out there, I need you to get it to the other side of the yard for me, if you would."

"I'm on it, Dad."

You betcha, because I already know the answer, when you ask me whatever you're going to ask me at the end of the week, is "no."

We plot... We want to get something. We want to get our way, so we begin scheming, we begin thinking it through.

Some of you will hit the pillow tonight and begin plotting against your spouse. You'll begin thinking of ways to win the next argument. You'll begin thinking of ways that you can get more sex. You'll begin thinking of ways that you can go and do whatever it is you want to do. You're just going to begin plotting and thinking and maybe you'll stay up past a healthy time, thinking it all through. You'll have a nice little agenda list in your mind for the next morning and you'll spend a few days plotting to win and to get ahead.

How about this? The scripture goes on to say in Proverbs 12, ***6 The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood...*** I know what I'm going to say.... I do this. I'm guilty of this where the next time that person comes to me to say this, I'm going to be ready. You're not even going to see it coming because I've been plotting. And I may not know when, but I know what and I'm going to be right on top of you so fast. And you'll even know it because you'll say something and this will hit you and you'll think, *Wow, he's thought this through.* I've been plotting, I've been preparing. Lie in wait for blood... what a great word picture. ***...but the speech of the upright rescues them.***

The wicked scheme, seek advice from those who scheme, and invite other to scheme. Here's where we start with this idea from the scripture today. The wicked scheme, they plot, but they not only plot, they seek advice from those who scheme. They try to get better at it, so they go looking for those who want to teach them how to do this better, but not only that, then they invite others. They start recruiting others into their planning. If you have siblings, you know what I'm talking about.

A lot of my plots didn't work with my parents, but once I brought my brother in – who sometimes watches – he was way better at evil scheming than I was. I needed his help. He always tried to bring me into his plots against our parents. Sometimes it didn't work. I told this story years ago. My brother took his front wheel drive F100 into a corn field to go mudding. That's when we learned you need a four-wheel drive to go mudding. He gets stuck out in the middle of a field and we have to run home about half a mile or a mile. The whole way home, we're plotting. Andy's running ideas by me and because I have a guilt prone nature I'm like, 'It won't work! It'll never work!' He's like, 'Stick to the story, man! Stick to the story!' We get home and I'm just shaky because we've been plotting. We would recruit others. We've learned this from small children on.

The scripture says in Proverbs 17, ***4 A wicked person listens to deceitful lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue.*** Then as far as the recruiting goes, Proverbs 12 goes on to say, ***26 The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.*** So, be very careful. We don't want to move toward this. But, that's not really where we are spending the bulk of our time today.

I was thinking this week... Do you know someone who brags about not paying taxes? Have you ever met that type of person? It's kind of frustrating because they drive nicer cars, they cheat on corporate taxes, so they are able to pay their employees a little bit more. Their employees like them... You can go through all the reasons and all the benefits that someone has. They live in a nicer house, they take more vacations... It's because they're not paying taxes. If we're not careful, we can begin to envy that person. We can begin to think *How do I take...* This is how the wicked scheme and we see it and we envy it and we want to move towards it and we begin being recruited towards it.

The scripture goes on to say in Proverbs 11, **18 A wicked person earns deceptive wages, but the one who sows...** Here's that idea again of plowing, of planting, sowing. **...righteousness reaps a sure reward.**

Proverb 24 say, **1 Do not envy the wicked, do not desire their company...**

So that's kind of laying out the way of the wicked, but what if we look at the frustration of the wicked thriving. Solomon dealt with this. We're going to see Psalm 37 today, written by his father, David. But, Solomon struggled with the wickedness thriving. He says this in Ecclesiastes: **15 In this meaningless life of mine...** This is kind of the theme of the whole Book of Ecclesiastes – life under the sun. **I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness, and the wicked living long in their wickedness.**

We've seen this and it's frustrating. Not only are they scheming, not only are they profiting, not only are they getting ahead, but it seems this is the course of their life and nothing is going to stop them. They've been doing this for 10, 20, 30 years, their entire adult life, and nothing is slowing them down. This is frustrating. This is irritating. And if we see it long enough, we have to guard our hearts that we don't join in with it, that we don't say we want to be a part of it.

He goes on in Ecclesiastes 8 to say, **12 Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him.** And all God's people said... Amen.

I like this point. It may be a little morbid to you, but I think it should encourage you if you think about it over the next few days, so don't just take your immediate gut reaction to it, take it the next couple of days. **The wicked scheme, prosper, and eventually die.** That's what you need to keep in mind. It doesn't last forever. It will not continue forever.

We want to jump into Psalm 37 today. I'm going to highlight practical, how-to stuff here for us to move forward in. Home groups, I want to encourage you. We don't have time in today's message to go through this entire Psalm, but I want to encourage home groups. If you have the time... And it may take you two nights together to go through this, but encourage people to go through with a highlighter or a pen and look at all the practical ways that we can stand not only against wickedness, not only not join in with wickedness, but we can again walk in peace when the wicked thrive and the wicked prosper. I'm going to point out some 14 examples of this practical, how-to wisdom. It's David struggling with his enemies. "Lord, what do I do because the enemy seems to be winning." This whole Psalm builds that out.

Psalm 37 - **1 Do not fret because of those who are evil...** This is not a time to worry. **...or be envious of those who do wrong...** We've already seen that. Don't wish you were one of them. Don't try to join in. **2... for like the grass they will soon wither...** Here's that theme again. It may last a lifetime, but that's as long as it can last. It can't last any longer than that. **...like green plants they will soon die away.**

3 Trust in the Lord... Lean into his wisdom and his understanding. ...**and do good...** Do the right thing. As we are going to see in this text, doing the right thing will cost you. Don't we want our kids to learn that? Doing the right thing will cost you. It will cost you money. It will cost you time. It may even cost you friends.

I didn't ask my daughter permission to share this story, but... here we go. Corynn knows I love her and I'm not going to embarrass her. One of the things I've always taught my kids and I've been trying to teach young guys in ministry coming up is don't ever be that person who cancels a gig or an appointment or an activity or something you have planned if something better comes along. You want to be a person of your word. You want to be someone who can be trusted. Doing the right thing will cost you. I loath pastors who are committed to speak or preach somewhere and they get a better invitation and they cancel this to go be with someone more important or something bigger. That's a character problem. So, I'm teaching my kids that.

Here's the problem. My kids are 12 and 14. I'm reminding them right now. Man, you're starting to live a social calendar as though you own a car. You don't drive yet. I'm starting to get like my parents a little bit, which I know they are deeply honored by this. My mom will cry over all these stories and my dad will be like, "Oh, thank you Father." But I remember my parents didn't drop everything all the time to take me places. Then to shuttle me around like all over the place... There are all sorts of people that my daughter has babysat for that are thinking, *We're going to have to start picking her up.* No, I'm good... I'm excited to take my kids to work and they'll tell you this. No matter what time I pick my kids up from work, I'm always excited because I want my kids to see that Dad values work.

This week, my daughter was committed to a job to babysit and then the night before, she got an invitation to go to Winter Jam for the same night. She comes into the family room... My daughter is not a plotter. I can honestly tell you that. She doesn't plot against us, she wears her emotions pretty clear and it's just right there that we process them. But, I'm also at that place where I think it's very important with teenagers that you don't make their decisions for them. They make their own decisions.

She comes in and goes, "I got this invitation to go to Winter Jam..."

I'm like, "Oh, that's awesome! I've heard Winter Jam is fantastic!"

If you don't know what that is, it's a Christian concert. You stand in line before you pay \$15.00 and everybody's there.

She said, "But I've committed to babysitting."

I'm like, "Oh, then you can't go."

She starts telling me the reasons why and then I say, "You can't go; that's in my heart, but you make that decision; it's totally your decision."

She already knows the decision. I love when someone knows the decision, but now they're just seeking... "Any loopholes I'm not seeing here, Dad. Could you see if there's anything I'm not really grasping." Then she says to me, "You make the decision."

"Oh no, no, no, I won't make the decision. I'm at the point in your life where I'm influencing and advising, but you have to make the decision."

"Just tell me I can't go!"

"No, you have to decide it."

She goes, "I have to keep my babysitting commitment."

"Yes, you do, which stinks because I heard John Crist is going to be there." I want her to feel that because what do we call that? I think it's called *adulthood*. That's adulthood. You make a commitment. You don't cancel commitments for something better. You don't want to be that friend where you've scheduled something with a friend, but then someone more popular or cooler asks you to do something and you cancel your previous plans to be with that cooler person. You don't want to be that person. Do good.

Do the right thing no matter what it costs you. And it will cost you time and it will cost you money. Listen, you're going to see the people that are cheating on their taxes, you're going to watch the people... I'm thinking of hotel owners who are frustrated because you keep your building up to code and you drive by hotels on the strip that don't. It frustrates you and your like, *Well maybe I shouldn't have to do that*. No, do good. Stick with the law.

...dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. I love the idea here. I love the imagery. I love the word-pictures that the scripture gives us. In Ecclesiastes, we read that the sleep of a laborer is sweet. I could add to that. It doesn't add to it in the scripture. The sleep of a cheater is terrible. Let's go back to the lying tongue. When you were a kid and you lied.

I was a liar as a small child. I was a liar and I would have to lie and then I would have cover up the lie and then I'd have to cover up the lie. I had to lay on my bed at four years old scheming on my next thing to say to cover up the lie. And then you realize safe pasture is so much better. Enjoy safe pasture. Sleep well.

I slept last night for nine hours. I was absolutely exhausted. I think I feel asleep at 10:00 and got up at 7:00. I know it's somewhat lazy, but I didn't wake up once. That a good night's rest. Then you pop out of bed feeling better. The wicked scheme on their beds. Do good, do the right thing, trust in the Lord, follow his ways.

4 Take delight in the Lord... Now you actually find joy in doing the right thing that is costing you. You're able to celebrate doing the right thing that may be very costly. ***...and he will give you the desires of your heart.***

5 Commit your way to the Lord... In your time of prayer, you go before the Lord and you're like, "This is painful." I remember over ten years ago when the recession fell out and there were so many people making bad decision with money. I knew pastors making terrible financial decisions, like decisions I wouldn't put in the "do good" category. There was part of me going, "But, Lord, everybody's doing it. This is costing way too much."

Going into the recession, I already had the skill of buying high and selling low. This was a skill I had from very early on and the recession just made that way worse. "Lord, would it be okay if I just..." No, do the right thing. "Okay, Lord, I am going to do the right thing." I would wake up in the middle of the night scheming when finances got tough for many of us. But, Amy and I just got to a place where we were doing the right thing already, we were not going to change from doing the right thing. "Lord, we're going to commit the right thing to you. We want you to know the desire of our heart is to always do the right thing no matter what and this is literally costing us a ton of money right now to not take the easy way out or to take the shortcut."

...trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. Now here's where it begins to get a little more difficult. **7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him...** Do you know how you wait patiently? With your mouth closed.

Yesterday, I was at a restaurant and everybody around me was being served and I was in that cone of silence where no one can hear you or see you. No one was serving me, and I had a tough time waiting patiently. I was actually looking at these notes that say, "Wait patiently." I'm sitting there with it, the menu right in front me, and as I'm saying, "Wait patiently," I'm like, "Where is the dang waitress? When am I going to get served? This guy is on his second cup of coffee and I sat down before he did."

I went back to studying then I picked up all my stuff and I'm not talking, but I want everybody to see I'm leaving. I wasn't leaving. I was moving to a table where maybe I would be seen. I go and sit down... I was and obviously in their zone, so I think I was on the line of zone one and zone two where this side was being served by this one and the other side of the line was served by that one.

Waiting patiently is difficult. I'm going to do this with a closed mouth; I'm not going to be demonstrative. I'm not going to remind everybody around me how righteous I am and how I'm doing the good thing. I've committed my way to the Lord, not those around me, and I can wait. "Lord, if you truly are my vindication, which you have declared, then I can wait and trust that you will take care of this now or you'll take care of this later, but I trust that you have it."

I think this passage is getting a little more difficult for me the more we go through it. Trust in the Lord? Okay. Don't envy evil? Well, we're not going to be envying evil and wickedness, but now I'm waiting. Here's where we go back to the wicked prosper and they scheme for a lifetime. You mean I may have to wait decades? I'm going to wait patiently for him.

...do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger... So, see, we don't do this well, now we are going to be turning to anger and we are going

to start to get into the scheming role. We're going to be joining them in their wickedness. **...and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.** So, let's put wait patiently... you do that with a closed mouth. And don't allow anger to take over when you see the wicked prosper.

An open mouth and a closed heart will ruin you. An open mouth – talking, running your mouth. A closed heart, a term for unresolved anger, will ruin you. There's a Hebrew term for that. Does anybody know what the Hebrew term for this is. It's Twitter. That's the Hebrew term for this right here. The Greek is Facebook. Do you know what social media has become? It's a bunch of open mouths and a bunch of closed hearts.

I think it was Adam that gave the illustration in December that I think was perfect. I've been using it; it's phenomenal. He said "Social media is a group of people discussing things and you hear the topic they're on, you hear the conversation they're having, and you have an opinion on it. You rush in and spew your opinion all over it and then you walk out of it." That's not healthy conversation. You have your closed heart, you have your bitterness, resentment towards whatever the issue or the topic is, and you just go off on them. This is why we need to be learning... We say this as parents. I don't have to show up to every fight I'm invited to. Don't we say, as parents, "Choose your battles." I don't have to show up to every battle I'm invited to. This will set you free.

I was telling Amy this week, I don't have the emotional capacity, I really don't. I was talking with a friend this week who is kind of taking a break from ministry right now. It's because his emotional capacity was not only reached but went way over because he was showing up to every battle he was invited to. I just simply asked him why. I have one mentor who told me to respond to everyone, go back to everyone, respond to every email, every phone call. But, then I have another mentor who says that if you do this, you won't be in ministry very long. You only have so much emotional capacity.

I told Amy, "Doesn't it set me free to know every concern, every critique, every criticism, every gripe, every whine..." Sorry, I went to a dark place really fast right there. I can receive it maybe in the moment, but I can't meet with you... I'm going to receive it right here in this moment, but I want you to know, for your sake, for my sake, for the sake of community, when I walk away from it, I'm not continuing in it. I can't. I'm not going to allow this to take time away from my family or time away from my walk with the Lord. I can't engage in every single battle. I can receive it. I can be kind in the moment, but here's why this is freeing.

If you engage in every battle, then you will plot to win the war. If you don't engage in every battle, then you don't leave plotting and that's the problem. If I engage right here and you catch me off guard with "You said this, you did this..." I'm getting defensive. I'm a processor; I'm learning not to go at you, but, I walk away and I start scheming, I start getting even.

Let me just ask you a question. I'm going to talk to those in school right now because it will continue into work if you don't deal with it right now. Is there someone in your life right now that you are thinking about being mean to this week at school? And you're plotting, you're thinking about how you're going to be mean to them. You're thinking about that person you don't care for much and you're going to stay engaged in the fight, so you're going to spend your days plotting how to win the war.

I want to encourage you that there is much better way. This way ruins you, but, according to Psalms 37, we're set free.

A closed mouth and an open heart will save you. A closed mouth, waiting patiently before the Lord, trusting in the Lord, committing your way to the Lord. And an open heart... Don't close your heart because wickedness is thriving. Don't close your heart because those who have done evil toward you are prospering in it. Leave your heart open to the Lord because you only have one heart. A closed mouth and an open heart will save you. This way will allow you to enjoy beautiful pasture. This way will allow you to sleep at night because you're going to be able to say, "God, you got this."

Some of you need to, every night and starting tonight, go to bed, resigning as general manager of the universe. And the last words out of your mouth before you fall asleep simply need to be "God, I'm turning the world over to you for the next eight hours. You got this." You're like, "Well, he already knows that." Yeah, but you don't. You wake up at 2:00 or 3:00 am scheming. A closed mouth and an open heart will save you.

9 For those who are evil will be destroyed... Their day will come. ...but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. 10 A little while... We have to remember this. When we use the term lifetime in the scripture, we are also saying a little while. And all the senior adults said... amen. ...and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found.

Now look at this. I love the word picture we are going to go into. ***16 Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked...*** Some of you in this town tell me about a mafia style business practice. I don't fully know what that means, but you're tempted sometimes because you see other theaters or other shows succeeding in a way that you don't like or think is ethical. I'm not even getting into all that and some of you'll want to tell me... Don't pursue it. If you believe it's unethical, if you believe it's wrong, don't pursue it to get ahead. Better the little that you have, better the hundred tickets sold than all these tickets sold. Better the money that you're making in your hotel than the one who is making more because they've cut the corners and not followed the law or the code or whatever. Better the little that you have than the wealth of many wicked.

23 The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; 24 though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.

32 The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, intent on putting them to death; 33 but the Lord will not leave them in the power of the wicked or let them be condemned when brought to trial. 34 Hope in the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it.

35 I have seen a wicked and ruthless man flourishing like a luxuriant native tree, 36 but he soon passed away and was no more; though I looked for him, he could not be found.

And here is the end of the matter in Psalm 37. When the wicked prosper, if we will delight in the Lord, commit our way to the Lord, trust in the Lord, wait patiently, have a closed mouth and an open heart, we will then begin to understand. Yes, the rain falls on the righteous and the wicked.

37 Consider the blameless... We need to be considering the blameless. Consider their ways. Consider those who have walked in peace for years. **...observe the upright...** See how they have lived and choose that course. **...a future awaits those who seek peace.**

I just want to remind us as we close. With your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Pharisees, the elders, and the Chief Priest all plotted against him. And what we just read in Psalm 37 is a picture of our Savior. He took it all for you and for me and he went to the cross. They plotted to take him in secret and in the darkness of night to put him on ridiculous trial and to then take him to the cross. That plotting against Jesus took place and ultimately took his life and he died for you and for me. If we are following in the way of our Savior, we'll consider that, we will look to the blameless, so that we can walk in peace.

I hope this week, as you see wickedness taking place around you and evil taking place around you, that your choice will be not only will you not join in, but you also won't live in frustration. You're not going to scroll social media. Even if you don't put your opinion in there, you're not just going to sit there and let that build up in you. You're going to commit your way to the Lord. You're going to walk in peace.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time this morning. When the wickedness around us seems to be thriving, may we not join in. But, even more than that, when wickedness prospers, may we wait patiently before you, may we just allow you to give us the desires of our heart, and even though it means maybe less for us or a little for us, I pray we never envy that which the wicked have. We want to walk in peace. We want to walk in your perfect peace.

I pray for the one right now that's been scheming this week and schemed through the night last night against a parent or against a child or against a spouse or against a co-worker or against another business in town. If they've been scheming, I pray that today they would drop the schemes and they would trust in you, they would commit their way to you, they would delight in you, and they would walk in peace.

For those who have never placed faith in Jesus, here, over at the Chapel, or online, I pray that today would be the day that they confess with their mouth and believe in their heart that Jesus was raised from the dead and with that they are saved. I pray that many are turning from their wickedness and sinfulness today and turning toward Christ the Savior.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.