

# Steps of a good man

ODCC 00/00/09 (x.pages)

**Text:** Psalm 37 (esp 23-24 & 34)

## Introduction

1. The Bible tells us (and therefore the Lord God instructs us) that the righteous man shall live by faith. There are a number of scriptures like Heb 10:38, for example, says, *“But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”*
  - a. Incidentally while “he” and “him” are used if you are a female you can insert “she” and “her” because EVERYBODY must live by faith.
  - b. That Hebrews text taken on its own is frightening because on its own it seems as if we walk on our own – as if we have undertaken a mammoth task and if we do not complete it we’re in serious trouble (or like walking a tightrope).
  - c. Like running the comrades marathon in South Africa – it’s an 88km race run from Pietermaritzburg to Durban and then Durban to Pietermaritzburg in alternating years. The elevation is 27ft at the coast in Durban to 2675ft at the highest point – there are some gruelling hills and some strong winds.
  - d. Many start the race but not as many finish it. There is a 12-hour time-limit and when the limit is reached the convenor of the race stands at the finishing line with his back to the competitors so that he cannot see them. The winner has come in hours ahead of them and these have run to the best of their ability and many of them miss out by seconds and minutes and receive no recognition – everyone who completes the marathon within the time limit gets a medal. When the bell rings the race is over and the hard run, the pain for many was for nothing.
  - e. If you have ever received Christ as Saviour, you’ve begun a race and God will not be pleased if you do not finish the race. But you are not running alone!

## Who is the good man (or woman)?

1. The steps of a **good man** are ordered by the Lord. It is the person who has put their trust in God.
  - a. There are two analogies about “putting your trust in God” which we should keep in mind, especially because we live in a fairly safe society free from starvation, homelessness, disease, and war, etc.
  - b. The one analogy is marriage – whilst the union is not physical but spiritual, nevertheless, we are betrothed to Christ and so we ought always to live developing our relationship with Him and always mindful how we can please Him.
  - c. The other analogy is that of birth. When a baby is born, there is no going back into the womb. When you accept Christ as your Saviour you are born into the family. God is your Father now.
  - d. God takes His fatherhood very seriously and we need to take our sonship (daughtership) seriously.
2. The whole of this psalm is a picture of that relationship. It says: • **Trust** in the Lord • **Delight** yourself in the Lord • **Commit** your way to the Lord • **Wait** on the Lord (patiently) • The **word** of the Lord is in his heart • the Lord **blesse**s • the Lord gives an **inheritance**, etc.
  - a. It’s this kind of person that the Lord delights in.
  - b. God does not love this kind of Christian more than a Christian that is self-absorbed. He will continue to work in the, shall we say, luke-warm Christian because that Christian belongs to God.
  - c. *“You are not your own; you were bought with a price”* (1 Cor 6:19+). You and I were redeemed from a worthless **no life** with a costly price.
  - d. God will honour the blood of Jesus shed for us and work in us to bring us to a place of faithfulness and dedication and love.
  - e. God is committed to me because He loves me.

## Ordered steps

1. The steps...we might say the very path, the very road, the very route that he travels. The journey that we walk is according to God’s leading.
  - a. Or the race course, if we use our previous illustration. In the Comrades Marathon there are guides to point out the way, especially for the front runners.
  - b. And God will make sure that we run the course exactly.

- c. The apostle Paul uses the same analogy of the Christian life and says we are running a race.
  - d. We all run the race but God plots a course very tailor-made for each of us. Of course, we can be encouraged as we read the Bible – it is full of examples of those who have run before us.
  - e. And we can encourage one another as we run because even though our courses may vary, our experiences will not.
2. God is not a sadist. It's not His desire to take us on a difficult path for the pleasure of seeing us struggle and suffer.
    - a. There will be many difficult stretches. We may even believe that God has forsaken us.
    - b. Or we may find it hard to believe that God has actually brought us this way – surely not!
    - c. What did David say, *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me”* (Psm 23:4).
    - d. What did Jonah say, *“You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me...But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God”* (ch 2).
    - e. What did Paul say, *“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us”* (2 Cor 1:8+).
    - f. And what about Jesus, *“He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.”* (Is 53:7). His was a unique calling but none-the-less, Jesus walked a pre-determined path and therefore He is able to comfort and encourage us.
  3. Though he stumbles (or “when he falls” in some translations). It's not a matter of “if” but “when”!
    - a. Well, don't worry, because WHEN he stumbles the LORD upholds him. The Heb word used there indicates “arm pits” and the picture is that of a parent allowing their young child to walk but their hands are under the armpits – not holding them up – but if they trip they will be caught *before* they fall.
    - b. To fall means to be destroyed and God will not allow us to be destroyed.

## Conclusion

1. I once listened to a preacher giving an illustration of a man who started coming to church. He came regularly for months. The preacher struck up a friendship and realised the man had never really made a commitment to Christ. The preacher challenged him but all he ever said was that he was “thinking”. One day this man was going on an important business trip and after a meeting he came forward for prayer. The preacher began to pray something like this: “Lord, this man is going on this trip...I pray that it will be unsuccessful. I ask that it may be fraught with problems. I ask that he may even face dangers yet preserve his life, Lord. The man stopped the preacher and asked him, “What are you doing? What kind of prayer is that?” The preacher replied, “All you want is a blessing from God but I want God to jolt you out of your inability to make a commitment and I want God to bring you to the end of yourself – my prayer might help.”
2. Verse 34 says, *“Wait for the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.”*
  - a. Paraphrasing it says, **“Trust in the Lord, commit your life to the Lord, run the race and stick to the course – it will be well worth it in the end.”**
  - b. Repeating Paul, he said, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.”* (2 Tim 4:7-8).
  - c. We have to keep our eyes on heaven where we see Jesus who has gone before. The unbeliever says, **pie in the sky** – but the Christians says, it's the finishing line and we are not running this race for nothing.