

Issue 57 Study Guide

Our God-Given Prayer Assignments

By Cynthia Hyle Bezek

Note: This Bible study is formatted for small group open discussion. If you use this study by yourself, we suggest you journal your answers to the discussion questions. Also, please use suggested translations where indicated. Biblegateway.com is an excellent source for translations you may not have on hand.

People in Bible times didn't have the privilege of praying about elections—citizens don't get to choose their king or emperor, after all. Even today, out of 196 countries in the world, more than 80 are considered “non-democratic.” Voting isn't—and never has never been—an inalienable right for God's people.

But for those of us who live in America, it *is* a right, a responsibility, even. But it's not necessarily easy to discern how to use that right. In the not-too-distant past, many Christians voted largely according to political party lines. They trusted their party to put forth candidates who, for the most part, would uphold their Christian values—even if those candidates weren't professing followers of Christ.

That's not necessarily true anymore.

A recent study of American voters showed that a full one-third feel alienated by their political parties. The candidates running on the major party tickets often display glaring character flaws. Furthermore, the values they stand for are often ambiguous at best.

And yet, as people who care about those who lead our country,

and who believe that our one little vote really does make a difference, the burden of discernment can be overwhelming. And the temptation to fear-driven arguing and divisiveness is real. Think of the recent polarization that took place in American churches over COVID-19, to give just one potent example.

So, what does God's Word say to us in confusing times like these? Psalm 37 is a great place to spend some time in deep contemplation. Its message is timeless, offering hope and a path to peace, even in the midst of troubled times.

Discussion Questions

Preparation: Print out Psalm 37 in your preferred Bible translation. If you are doing this study with a group, print out copies of the text for everyone. Provide or have everyone bring colored pencils or pens for the study activity.

At the start of your time together, read the psalm out loud. You can read in unison or go around the circle, taking turns reading verses. After you've read together, dive into the study.

1. Look at Psalm 37:1–9. In red on your printout, underline everything you can find that God's people are *not* to do when all around them seems to be evil. Write below one thing from what you underlined that you are sometimes tempted to do.

Read verses 1–9 again. In green, circle everything God's people *are* to do in evil times. Which list is longer, the "do" or the "not do" list? What does that suggest to you?

Of the things that God tells us to do in evil times, which one seems most challenging or important to you personally? Why?

2. Now look at the entire psalm again. On your marked-up copy, make a blue box around everything in this psalm that God promises to His people who hope in Him. Keep in mind that these promises were made to Israel, so some may not specifically apply to us today. But many still do. Which of these general promises offer inspiration for your prayers? Write the verse numbers here: _____ . Now, choose one to use as the basis for a short prayer and write it on the lines provided.

3. Scan the psalm again, especially focusing on verses 21–40. What kinds of actions mark God’s people? Using pink or orange, mark them on your printout with a double underline. Choose the one(s) that you wish more Christians, yourself included, were more known for doing.

4. Verse 40 says that the Lord helps and delivers the righteous because they take refuge in Him. What do people, even Christians, sometimes take refuge in other than or in addition to the Lord?

Action Steps

1. Has this study convicted you of any attitude or action that you need to confess to the Lord and turn from? Make a note here of what that is, then spend some time talking to God about it.

2. As you studied Psalm 37, did you sense the Holy Spirit inviting you to be more intentional concerning an attitude or action He might want to help you display more clearly in your life? Note what that is, specifically, and any first steps you could take.

3. Look again at the promises you identified in question 3. Find another one or two you could base prayers from. Incorporate all these new Scripture-based prayers into your regular prayer times, both personally and corporately.

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