

Abide in Me

John 15:4

*Bible studies for disciples
who make disciples*



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Life is Hard, God is Good

When Your Faith Cracks

Psalm 73

Asaph, chief musician in Jerusalem during the reigns of David and Solomon, was credited with writing twelve psalms (Psalms 50; 73-83). These psalms are known for their distinctive style, which is both poetic and prophetic. In general, they deal with the difficulties of life while focusing on the character of God. In this series we are going to consider six of Asaph's psalms, beginning with his most familiar one, which is Psalm 73. It reads like a story as it centers on a common complaint: *Why do the ungodly prosper in this life?*

I. READ AND OBSERVE THE PSALM

- In the left margin of verse 1 write: *The Central Truth*.
- In the left margin of verses 2-3 write: *Asaph's Struggle*.
- Circle the word *envious* (v. 3).
- Draw a downward bracket from verses 4-12. Label it: *The Posture of the Elite*
- Draw a downward bracket from verses 13-15. Label it: *Honest Admission*
- Draw a downward bracket from verses 16-17. Label it: *The Turning Point*
- Double underline the phrase *until I went into the sanctuary of God* (v. 17).
- Draw a downward bracket from verses 18-20. Label it: *Perspective Restored*
- Draw a downward bracket from 21-28. Label it: *The Goodness of God*

¹ Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
² But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
³ For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
⁴ For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
⁵ They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
⁷ Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
⁸ They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
⁹ They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.
¹⁰ Therefore his people turn back to them,
and find no fault in them.
¹¹ And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"

¹² Behold, these are the wicked;
 always at ease, they increase in riches.
¹³ All in vain have I kept my heart clean
 and washed my hands in innocence.
¹⁴ For all the day long I have been stricken
 and rebuked every morning.
¹⁵ If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
 I would have betrayed the generation of your children.
¹⁶ But when I thought how to understand this,
 it seemed to me a wearisome task,
¹⁷ until I went into the sanctuary of God;
 then I discerned their end.
¹⁸ Truly you set them in slippery places;
 you make them fall to ruin.
¹⁹ How they are destroyed in a moment,
 swept away utterly by terrors!
²⁰ Like a dream when one awakes,
 O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.
²¹ When my soul was embittered,
 when I was pricked in heart,
²² I was brutish and ignorant;
 I was like a beast toward you.
²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
 you hold my right hand.
²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
 and afterward you will receive me to glory.
²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?
 And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail,
 but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
²⁷ For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;
 you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.
²⁸ But for me it is good to be near God;
 I have made the Lord God my refuge,
 that I may tell of all your works.

“The Psalms are the necessary soul-carving tool in an age of distraction. They require deep thought and sustained commitment. They stand for everything our multi-tasking, distracted, buffered selves have been wired to resist. They are the essential spiritual discipline for overcoming our indifference to communion with God. They call us out of our small worlds into the large world of God’s making and redeeming. If we give them a chance, the Psalms will resonate with our souls. They are essential tools for Christian spirituality, but the learning curve can be steep” (Douglas Webster, *The Psalms: Jesus’ Prayer Book*).

II. EXPLORE THE PSALM TOGETHER THROUGH DISCUSSION

1. “If we give them a chance, the Psalms will resonate with our souls.” In what ways does Psalm 73 resonate with you?

2. Asaph envied the wicked. List some of the implications Asaph was drawing against God when he was bothered by the prosperity of the ungodly.

3. What metaphors did Asaph use to convey the spiritual danger he was in?

4. What was the turning point for Asaph in verse 17? What does it mean for us to enter the sanctuary of God today? Describe a time in your life when you had a “sanctuary experience.” How does entering the sanctuary of God change everything?

5. What five ways did Asaph come to characterize his envious attitude? (cf. verses 21-22)

6. What specific actions does Asaph ascribe to God in this psalm?

7. Capture the theme of Psalm 73 in one complete sentence.

8. What counsel would you give to believers who are doubting whether God is good to them?

9. List all the ways God has shown His goodness to us in Christ.

*Lord, what a thoughtless wretch was I,
 To mourn, and murmur, and repine,
 To see the wicked placed on high,
 In pride and robes of honor shine!*

*But O their end, their dreadful end!
 Thy sanctuary taught me so;
 On slipp'ry rocks I see them stand,
 And fiery billows roll below.*

*Now let them boast how tall they rise,
 I'll never envy them again;
 There they may stand with haughty eyes,
 Till they plunge deep in endless pain.*

*Their fancied joys, how fast they flee!
 Just like a dream when man awakes;
 Their songs of softest harmony
 Are but a preface to their plagues.*

*Now I esteem their mirth and wine
 Too dear to purchase with my blood;
 Lord, 'tis enough that thou art mine,
 My life, my portion, and my God.*

~ Isaac Watts

