

Psalm 73 ▪ Seeing God Who Is Near

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Suffering; Envy; Wicked; Wisdom; Worship

Intro: What God is after most in our lives, is our heart.

God is not primarily concerned with external circumstances or outward appearance.

His main interest is not if our plans are working out well—or to ensure our self-esteem is high.

God is not consumed with our material well-being.

God is after the heart.

God is the only one who knows our heart perfectly.

Jeremiah 17:10 ESV

“I the LORD search the heart
and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.”

- Our Psalm for today is a heart Psalm.
- The heart is a major concern in [Ps 73](#)—it’s mentioned 6 different times.

Heart: not the emotional side of us—but the center of who we are—our motives, desires, actions all flow from the heart.

Luke 6:45 ESV

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

This is a Psalm for heart examination

Asaph: A Levite who was also a musician.

We appreciate how blunt he is.

Asaph would not be a guy, who if you asked how he is doing, would say with a plastic smile—good.

He is also not so cynical that he would lead you to start questioning the goodness of God.

- The Psalm is written with Wisdom. It's similar to how Job struggled and asked: why do the good guys suffer and bad guys not.

“The book of Psalms is notable for facing, not hiding from, life.”

Motyer, J. A. (1994). The Psalms. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 532). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

If we are going to face the reality of life, we need to be open with our heart—and engaged with the Psalms.

A heart check (1-13)

- The Psalm starts out with a great confessional statement: God is good to Israel—but defines the true Israel: one's whose motives are pure (Pure in heart).
- Asaph admits that he almost lost this.

As we've seen with David, this is raw honesty.

Asaph does not put on a Levitical front—*he knows that he can be only one step away from total compromise.*

Asaph teaches us: that it's ok to wrestle through a “dark night of the soul”.

The overriding question:

Is pressing on in a commitment to God worth it? Is it worth it or just a waste of time?

Maybe you've asked that or are tempted to. Maybe it's your crisis of faith.

This Psalm is for you if:

—you wonder why some people have it so easy in life

—you struggle being envious of others

—you are concerned about increasing and creeping materialism, and what it can do to your soul

—If you really want to face life and not hide—not just give religious answers

—If you want to find true, lasting treasure, not the shallow emptiness of most of what you see

- Asaph nails the problem down at the beginning: envy (v3)

—When we deal with our heart, it's vital to see what's going in the core and *identify it with biblical categories*.

Envy

- Prov 14: 30 tells us that envy makes the bones rot; it does something internally that *decays us*.

I was leading a Bible study once where a young mother spoke up and said that she had to limit her time on social media; her marriage was rocky and every time a Christian couple posted something on Valentine's Day or their Anniversary it caused her to envy more, to resent the people and become more bitter.

At least she could identify *the specific sin* she wrestled with it.

At the tip of the iceberg was resentment and bitterness, but under the surface was envy.

- So Asaph identifies envy as the core of his issues.
- Specifically, he envied other's *prosperity*.
- v4-12; 9 - verses meditating and musing on how well it goes with people who are godless.
- So we learn something here—envy has much to do with *false expectations*.

I know what this is like.

I remember in graduate school having a few colleagues whose wives had good paying jobs, so these guys could be full-time students.

My wife had a really great job—one that many desire —taking care of little creatures in diapers who bear God's image (homemaker)...it just doesn't pay the bills. So I had work two jobs—one being night shift, and squeeze school in between.

I found myself both looking down on these full-time student-only guys and making snide comments (must be nice to sleep in to 7:30AM)—but I also had deep pockets of envy in my heart.

I know how false expectations are the direct path to envy.

- These expectations come to a climax in v12.

Why don't I prosper? Why am I in poverty?

Levites don't own property, so there was no "upward mobility" so to speak.

Have you ever said or thought that? Why don't I have this, God? Why have you withheld this from my life?

Job 21:7 ESV

Why do the wicked live,
reach old age, and grow mighty in power?

Sometimes the "Why" is an indication of false expectations that are leading to a path of envy.

But remember what God is after: he is after your heart...which he searches and knows perfectly. God knows what can destroy our souls if we have it.

We can put a ton of emphasis on external circumstances, even playing the comparison game—and forget what is most important and precious to the Lord: *having a pure heart*.

So what does a heart check look like for you?

Pockets of envy?

What are your expectations?

What do you think that God may "owe you"?

Think of the irony: The man who walked this earth with the most joy, and the purest heart owned next to nothing during his earthly life.

—No pockets of envy

—No false expectations

I guess that's what happens when a cross is your final destiny

A turning point (13-17)

It's marked by two things:

1. Wisdom (v15). He had questioned if living faithfully is worth it (v13), and comes to his senses, that he seemed to have lost (v21-22).

Let's not miss the vital lesson. Our age is an age of immediacy. People expect everyone to have an opinion or comment right on the spot. We also live in an age where being transparent is supposedly a high virtue.

But what does Asaph teach us?

There are some struggles you may need to keep quiet for a while. A dark night of the soul is not something to broadcast.

Main reason: *You can actually hurt God's children by broadcasting your doubts.*

Do you ever consider that what you say in front of others, or post on social media, may actually discourage faith?

Transparency is no longer a virtue if it causes others to doubt and question.

2. Worship (v16-17): v17 is the high point - "Until I went into the sanctuary of God"

- › Worship changes everything

A treasure secured (18-28)

- The tone of the remainder of the Psalm is the tune of worship—and it's beautiful.
- › We are tempted to underestimate how much worship plays a part in our lives—even things like "mental health".

- Asaph admits he is mentally unhealthy (v21-22).

I had the opportunity with some other local pastors to meet with the Interim superintendent of Lex/Rich District 5. If you are new to the area, that's the local public school district.

Irmo, Dutch Fork, Chapin.

It's no surprise, there is a huge uptick in mental health issues among young people in general. Anxiety, fear, depression, even students that need to be on "suicidal watch" has grown exponentially.

The district only has 1 counselor per 400 students.

But even if there were 1 for every 40 students—it may never hit a core issue: worship.

Now mental health issues are more complex than just a "get worship right" answers.

—But on the other side, worship is almost never brought into consideration when it comes to mental health.

Asaph was mentally unhealthy, but it was worship that set his mind right again.

Worship gives

1. Perspective (18-19, 27)

- The perspective is that no matter how good people have it, when they don't have God....it's only a temporary thing.

2. Priorities (25-26)

- Asaph would admit that his priorities were off; v25 is a recommitment to the right priorities.

"Nothing on earth I desire besides you."

—Prosperity no longer becomes Asaph's main priority....God does.

3. Presence (23-24, 28)

- By the ends of this psalm, we can see how God became more real to Asaph—he became personal.

Asaph begins with healthy doctrine (v1).

He ends with healthy devotion. He ends with worship

God becomes Asaph's supreme desire—*being near to him is enough*.

Conclusion:

- Now in Asaph's day, getting near to God meant going to the temple.

For us—there is no temple.

Getting near God means going to Jesus, the true temple ([John 2](#)).

- › The turning point for us is treasuring Christ.

Worship means this: *I found my treasure. I've found the very thing that is most valuable.*

| I've never met a person who sincerely treasures Christ, and their life is falling apart.

Not to say that treasuring Christ means no hardship, dark nights of the soul.

But a person who treasures Christ knows their treasure is secure.

Philippians 3:8 ESV

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ

Apply: As we close, search your heart and ask: Is Christ my treasure?

Has there been a turning point? Do I need one?

May we see God has come near through Jesus; and may we live with him as our most secure treasure.