

Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph.

¹Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.

²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.

³For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.

⁵They are free from common human burdens;
they are not plagued by human ills.

⁶Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence.

⁷From their callous hearts comes iniquity;
their evil imaginations have no limits.

⁸They scoff, and speak with malice;
with arrogance they threaten oppression.

⁹Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.

¹⁰Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.

¹¹They say, "How would God know?
Does the Most High know anything?"

¹²This is what the wicked are like—
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.

¹³Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.

¹⁴All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.

¹⁵If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.

¹⁶When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply

¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.

¹⁸Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.

¹⁹How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!

²⁰They are like a dream when one awakes;
when you arise, Lord,
you will despise them as fantasies.

²¹When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,

²²I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.

²³Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.

²⁴You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

²⁷Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

²⁸But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds.

Thoughts on the Psalms

The Psalms and living before the face of God

“We will not be looking here primarily for ideas about God, or for direction in moral conduct. We will expect, rather, to find the experience of being human before God exposed and sharpened.”

The Psalms “are not provided to teach us about God but to train us in responding to him. We don’t learn the Psalms until we are praying them.”

“This is the elemental language we always use when our life, our well-being, and deepest interests—identity, health, love, guilt, trust—are at stake. There is no mere information about God here. There is no program implemented for God here. This is a cry for survival that develops into the shout of the saved.”

The Psalms, hatred, and enemies

“Hate is often the first sign that we care. If we are far gone in complacency, it is often the only emotion with enough velocity to penetrate our protective smugness and draw red blood. That does not mean that prayer legitimizes hate—it uses it.”

“The way of prayer is not to cover our unlovely emotions so that they will appear respectable, but expose them so that they can be enlisted in the work of the kingdom.”

“Our hate is used by God to bring the enemies of life and salvation to notice, and then involve us in active compassion for the victims. Once involved we find that while hate provides the necessary spark for ignition, it is the wrong fuel for the engines of judgment; only love is adequate to sustain these passions.”

(from Eugene Peterson *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*, p.12, 42, 99, 100, 102)

Small groups

1) What different emotional states are expressed in this psalm, either directly or between the lines?

2) What’s the movement of the psalm? Turning points? What happens to the writer’s emotional and spiritual state over the course of the song? How might you depict it in image, drawing, outline?

3) Is this a prayer? Is God addressed directly? What is happening between the psalmist and God throughout the psalm? What kind of relationship does this person have with God?

4) Where does your life resonate with this psalm?

Large group

“I was a brute beast”: What envy, bitterness, and discouragement does to us.

“Until I entered the sanctuary”: Worship is the only thing that breaks the yuck.

“Earth has nothing I desire besides you”: Where all prayer gets us in the end. Nearness to God is all we really need.

Living honestly before the face of God. Don’t get cleaned up first and then pray.

“If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. If you look at God you’ll be at rest.” — Corrie ten Boom