

## **“God is Good” Psalm 73**

*Introduction:* Our lives are marked by many pursuits. If we were to survey one another’s lives, we would discover many noble and valuable pursuits. Some of you are pursuing an education at some of the top schools in the world. Some are pursuing excellence in your vocational sphere of influence. Others are pursuing joy in relationships. What is it for you? A better living arrangement? better health? a bigger family? greater security? deeper significance?

What is your greatest pursuit in life?

FCF: Our problem is that these pursuits oftentimes overtake us. They dominate our thoughts and control our calendars. God wants for us to enjoy all of life’s pursuits, but he wants us to do so in such a way that they complement our greatest pursuit, which is the pursuit of him.

As we have dove into the Psalms, we have been diving into the character of God. We have learned that God is great. God is glorious, and today Psalm 73 will teach us . . .

**The Point: God is good, and his nearness should be pursued as our greatest good.**

Read *Psalm 73:1-15*. We encounter two realities in these opening verses.

### **I. God is good, but it does not always seem like it. (Psalm 73:1-15)**

- The psalm begins with a declaration: “Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.”
- The goodness of God is the primary theme of this Psalm. Asaph wants us to contemplate and come to experience the goodness of God. What are we talking about when we say God is good?
  - Tozer says, “The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent, and full of good will toward men.”
  - God is essentially good. Goodness is inherent in his nature. It is who he is.
  - **“You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.” (Psalm 119:68)**
  - The order is important. Everything God does is good because he is good.
  - His goodness is behind all he does.
  - Do you see the connection between the goodness of God and the blessings of God. Every blessing flows from his goodness. That’s why we say blessings are any gift from the hand of God carrying benevolent force.
    - He made the world because he is good.
    - He hears our prayers because he is good.
    - He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to save us, because he is good.
    - He extends kindness, grace, mercy, and love because he is good. All of God’s attributes flow from his goodness. Think about this: God’s other attributes flow from his goodness:
  - That’s huge stuff (Creation, care, salvation), but what about the smaller stuff? We can enjoy friendship and family, interests and abilities; we can take joy in snow and sunsets, all because God is good.
  - This is how Jesus’ ministry was described. Acts 10:38 says simply: “He went about doing good.”

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T: Asaph declares God’s goodness (in v. 1), but his life experiences led him to ask a very honest question: If God is so good, why is our world so bad?

- One of the reasons people love the Psalms. They are filled with real prayers, raw emotions, and honest

questions. Asaph was wrestling! He looked up at God and said: "God you are good." But he looked around and was cut to the heart by all of the evil he observed in the world.

- I believe this helps us understand what he means by the words "stumbled" and "slipped." He was walking in the knowledge of God's goodness, but his eyes were diverted from his focus on God.
- It was "the prosperity of the wicked" that stole his attention away from trusting in the goodness of God.
- Just look at them! These arrogant people feel no pain. They are well fed. They never face adversity, but they are filled with godlessness: proud hearts, violent hands, malicious and oppressive tongues.
- Life seems to be a breeze for them. They are loaded with material wealth.
- Just look back at the stunning statement in verse 9. "They set their mouths against heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth." In effect, they are saying: "GOD, I am God. I'm running this thing. I'm sitting on top of the world."

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- Asaph sees all of this and thinks to himself, "All the good I've done . . . it's a joke! It's all for nothing."
  - He pitied himself and he envied the wicked. That is why wisdom prescribes a simple command: **"Let not your heart envy sinners" (Proverbs 23:17)**

T: But why is it foolish to envy the wicked? Because God will judge them, and he will take care of his people. This is what we see in vv. 16-22.

## II. All is set right when we fix our eyes on God (73:16-22)

- What was Asaph's primary problem? Someone will say: "That's easy. It was the fact he was living a good life but suffering, while the wicked were living the high life and flourishing." In other words, it was his circumstances. Right? Wrong. Very wrong.
- Like Asaph, our primary problem is not our circumstances. It is our vision.
- We are so easily consumed by comparing ourselves and our circumstances with others, when God is saying... Hey, l o o k up! L o o k up!
- A vision of the greatness of God will cure you from the curse of comparison. Hear that! A vision of God will cure you from the curse of comparison. It does not matter if we're talking the prosperity of the wicked, the presence of suffering, or the small daily struggles of comparison that creep up in your heart.
- We all do it. Women, I love you , but you are really bad about this. When you see each other, what are you tempted to do? Stare each other up and ... compare... compare... usually it's about your looks.
- Men, don't think we're off the hook. In most cases, men are not as concerned about image. Instead, we compare income, achievements, and power.
- We constantly compare ourselves to others. All of this is driven by insecurity, and much like Asaph's experience these comparisons will wear us out. Freedom is found when we stop looking around and start looking up!

Look at vv. 16-17! Asaph is back in "the sanctuary of God," back in God's presence, and when he was captured by a vision of the greatness of God, everything made sense.

*Check Verses 18-20:* "Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin." God is too holy, too perfect, too glorious to smirk at our sin while we disregard his glory. He will have the last word in the judgment.

If you have lived for any length of time, you have asked why good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people? Does this question keep you up at night? Perhaps the problem of evil in our world is keeping some of you back from loving God and others on the verge of forsaking God. A change in your vision may not answer all of our questions. After all, only God has all the answers. BUT I believe the

following **Five Perspectives on Evil & Injustice** will help us process what we see in our world in a God-honoring manner.

### 1) We need a proper view of time and justice.

- Verse 20 says it seemed as though God were asleep, but he will rouse himself, the wicked will be punished and justice will be served. God works on his own clock.
- **2 Peter 3** addresses the coming judgment of God. Verse **8** says **“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”**
- What if God delayed justice to help us remember how he has extended such great pardon to us?
- Those who balk at pardon have usually never experienced pardon.
- Moreover, everyone on the planet experiences the kindness and benevolence of God. Theologians call it common grace. Jesus said God makes rain fall on the just and unjust.
- “The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over that all he has made.” (Psalm 145:9)

### 2) We need a proper view of sovereignty.

- In times of suffering, we cry out: “That’s not fair.” “God, you should do something, and do it now, and to be more specific, do it the way I want.” And once again, just like in the garden, we want to call the shots and command God, but God will not be commanded.
- What if God allowed evil, in part, to remind us of his goodness? This world is evil. We are evil. We long for something more, something better, and that something is God.
- I believe the charges leveled against God during times of suffering are implicit affirmations of his goodness and power. If God were not good and powerful, why would we go to him with our questions and, at times, complaints?

### 3) We need a proper view of God’s care.

- In times of suffering, we are tempted to doubt God’s care. We may even believe he receives joy out of watching us suffer. Listen! Jesus was a man of sorrows. And why? Because the one who is essential goodness tasted our fallen world in a way no one else has had the capacity to taste. You got that?
- Not only did he experience suffering, the message of the gospel is that he suffered for us! in our place! He suffered the consequences of sin I should have suffered. He died the death I should have died, but now because I trust in his work for me and call him my Lord, I have life. Do you? Call on Christ today!

### 4) We need a proper view of God’s plans.

- God works much good from evil, even when we can’t see it.
- Tim Keller says, **“Tucked away within the assertion that the world is filled with pointless evil is a hidden premise, namely, that if evil appears pointless to me, then it must be pointless.”**
- We see this in the Bible from Joseph to Jesus. What people mean for evil, God works it for good.
- And this is true today: Take one of the Marathon bombing victims. Who would have known one of his caring nurses would be the woman of his dreams and now soon be his wife: Jimmy Costello.

T: Not only does God work good from evil, he also has a plan for an end of our suffering...

### 5) We need a proper view of the end of our suffering.

- Brokenness will give way to healing. All that is ugly around us will give way to beauty, and suffering will give way to glory! **“For I consider that the present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18)**
- One day God will eradicate all suffering and reverse all of the effects of the curse by restoring his good creation. No more pain. No more cancer. No more tears, war, oppression, ignorance, evil. No more death.
- The resurrection is the down payment on this promise.

When Asaph saw the justice and holiness and goodness of God, he had a moment reminiscent to Job.

- Look at the language of realization and repentance in vv. 21-22: I was bitter and emotionally wounded,

but my response to you God was “senseless and ignorant.” (NIV)

- What did Job say? **“I uttered what I did not understand. . . Now I see. . . . Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:3-6)**

T: Finally, verses 23-28 will teach us that a clear vision will lead to an intentional pursuit.

### III. Pursue a deep and abiding experience of the goodness of God (73:23-28).

I want to give you three characteristics of this pursuit of goodness.

#### The pursuit begins with desire (23-25).

- Read 23-25. *“Whom Have I heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth I desire beside you.”*
- This is the language that grips me in the Bible! **“One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)**
- Who is saying: “one thing?” Just one thing. This is my one thing. This is what I’m chasing. This is what I’m spending my life to know! This is what helps me, holds me. This one thing: the pursuit of God!
- **“You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.” (Psalm 27:8)** Do you see how that comes from within us? You can’t fabricate that.
- If someone were to observe your life over the next month, from the time you rise until you hit the pillow at night, what would they conclude about your desire for God?
- Is God your *summum bonum*? Your highest good?
- God, give us a deep and ever increasing desire for you.

T: Our desire for God will lead to satisfaction in God.

#### The pursuit brings satisfaction (26, 28a).

- Verse 26 *“My flesh and heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. . . . But for me it is good to be near God.”*
- Do you see what is going on here? “Because God is good, we do not have to look elsewhere.” - Tim Chester
- He is our strength. He is our satisfaction. All of our sin springs from a failure to believe God is good. Unbelief is the heart of every sin.
- If you want to learn how do we fight sin & idolatry & unbelief, here it is in one word: BETTER.
- B.E.T.T.E.R. money, sex, power. God is better. He is the greatest good. Approval, comfort, achievement. God is better. T.V. Internet. Better. The Patriots. Jesus is better. You can tell Bobby Kraft and Billy Belichick Pastor Tanner says so.
- Our desires do not ultimately satisfy because our desires are too weak! This is why people make \$, have it all, look back and find nothing but emptiness.
- **G. K. Chesterton** said: **“Meaninglessness does not come from being weary of pain, but meaninglessness comes from being weary of pleasure.”** We have over indulged and find ourselves wanting.
- Remember, anything that usurps God as our highest affection, our highest love is an idol. What does that tell us? The issue of the matter *is ordering of our loves.*
- {H} As we think about God being our greatest good and supreme satisfaction, anything we love should ascend up to cause us to grow a deeper love for God.
- Whne I take delight in being a good friend and receiving true friendship, it should accelerate my affection for God.
- When I love my wife and children properly, it should cause me to deepen my love for God.
- When we sing, play, write, read, create, relax, sleep, come to church, whatever we do should serve the greater purpose of pushing us to our “one thing,” the one great pursuit of the greatness & glory of God.

- This is why Augustine said: **“He loves Thee too little who loves anything together with Thee which he loves not for thy sake.”**
- Augustine calls us to love God supremely! It is a call to allow all of our lesser loves to ascend up and push us toward a greater love to God. I hope this absolutely wrecks us in the best possible way!
- Do you see how do we do that? Augustine is saying, Asaph is saying, make the most of your education, desire a good job, chat it up with an acquaintance over a nice cup of Mystic Coffee, enjoy a good meal, watch a good game, but let any delight in these things led you to greater delight in God.
- God’s creation should point us to a deeper love our Creator. Anything less is idolatry.
- This is how you live a “One Thing kind of life.” ☺ We delight in everything for a deeper delight in him.

*T: The pursuit begins with desire, brings satisfaction & culminates in praise.*

### **The pursuit culminates in praise (27-28).**

- Praise with words of adoration (He is worthy). Praise him with words of gratitude. (Everything comes from him!) And . . . Praise him with words of testimony.
- Do you see the connection between our fellowship with God and telling others about who he is? This is the connection between our pursuit of God and our proclamation of the gospel in evangelism.
- Perhaps this is why Proverbs 28:1 says, “The righteous are as bold as a lion.”
- That does not mean, I’m in your face. It just means because I’m so full of God, I can’t help but tell you how great, how glorious and how good he is.

### *Conclusion*

Can we pray?

God, we pray that you would help us to taste and see that you are good (Ps. 34:8). We pray that you would increase our desire and affections for you. We pray that we would pursue you like never before, and we pray that pursuit would overflow into proclamation. “But as for us your nearness is our good.” Through X. Amen.