

Leader Notes – Lesson 17 – "What's with that, God?" Psalm 73

**PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.
YOU WILL ROB YOURSELF OF THE JOY OF DISCOVERY!**

**In case you don't have time to discuss all the questions,
be sure to ask your group which questions
they want to make sure they get to.**

DISCUSSION STARTER

- If you had to choose between being (a) prosperous, but wicked, or (b) poverty-stricken, but pure in heart, which one would you be? Why?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 73**, ask the **Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth** (John 16:13). We have been using the prayer, *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*, or King David's prayer, *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.
2. Read **Psalm 73** from the *New Living Translation* or *The Message*.
Reader A: Odd Verses 1-27
Reader B: Even Verses 2-28
3. At first reading, what verse(s) stand out to you?

Can you think of a catchy title for Psalm 73? Have several share

QUESTIONS

4. Asaph begins **Psalm 73** with a *proverb* – a well-known, familiar expression that his contemporaries knew and believed. Write out this commonly held belief found in **73:1**.

God is good to his people, especially to those whose hearts are pure

What similar, familiar expression do we use to open our large group meetings at *Growing Together Bible Study*, that we, too, assume everyone believes?

God is good all the time; all the time God is good

5. What does Asaph admit in **73:2** about his belief in this familiar, commonly-held belief found in **73:1**? **He came close to NOT believing this truth about God being good to his people and to those whose hearts are pure. He describes this unbelief as being close to a cliff and his feet slipping he goes over the edge to unbelief.**

♥ Why does Asaph describe his *doubt* with the metaphor of *feet slipping*, almost *losing his foothold* and *coming close to the edge of a cliff*? What does this metaphor convey about *doubt* and *faith*?

Doubt is something that often sneaks up on us. It is a gradual process. It starts little, perhaps by holding on to a grudge or letting resentment reside in our heart. We entertain thoughts of unfairness or God not coming through for us or doubting God's promises – and then all of the sudden we are close to falling over the cliff into all out disbelief that God has our best interests at heart.

6. Asaph precisely identifies his problem in **73:3**. Put his problem into your own words using contemporary language.

Have several share their paraphrase. Basically, Asaph is saying that being righteous and obedient wasn't worth the effort. It seemed that the ungodly had it made in the shade and he was envious their enjoyment of the good life.

7. What is the *key word* in Asaph's confession in **73:3**? Envied

8. The dictionary defines *envy* as *the resentful and unhappy feeling of wanting somebody else's success, good fortune, qualities or possessions*. Fill in the chart below by paraphrasing Asaph's observations about the ungodly (agnostics) and what aroused his envy. Put a check beside the observations where you can say, "I hear you, Asaph! I've been there! I know what you're feelin', brother!"

Verse	Asaph's Observations About the Wicked (Ungodly)	Do You Relate?
4	They have a painless life; they are healthy and strong	
5	They are troubled or anxious about problems	
6	They are proud and cruel to others who aren't as fortunate	
7	They have everything their self-centered minds could imagine or wish for	
8	The scoff and mock others and with their prideful words they destroy others	
9	"They are full of hot air"; they strut around with prideful words	
10	Because they are at the top, people turn to them and drink up every word	
11	They even make fun of God and anyone who believes in God	
12	They don't have a care in the world and they keep getting richer and richer	

- ♥ Relate to your small group a specific situation in which you found yourself thinking much the same thoughts that Asaph struggled with.
- ♥ **73:9-11** makes the ungodly seem like little "gods" to those around them. Who are some of the "gods" of our culture and what effect do they have on people? What is it that people envy about them?
This is a good question to discuss. Celebrities, movie stars, politicians, intellectuals, the wealthy and powerful are the "gods" of our culture. What is it we envy about these people?
- ♥ If you were suddenly rich and famous, would you be anything like the picture Asaph paints of the ungodly? How sure are you of your answer?
- 9. By envying the lives of the ungodly, what was Asaph really saying? What is the hidden message in *envy*? Think of as many things as you can that Asaph implies about God, himself and others when he envies the ungodly.

When he envies the ungodly, Asaph implies that:

God doesn't know what he is doing

God made a mistake

God doesn't really love me

God doesn't have my best interest at heart

I don't like who I am or who God made me

I'm restless of God's plan for me and what he has NOT given me

(These are some examples – your group will have more)

10. What is the unpleasant side effect of *envy*? **Proverbs 14:30; Psalm 73:21-22**

Envy eats away at our insides – it rots the very core of who we are; it causes grief and bitterness. It makes us senseless and ignorant and foolish before God. We are like a dumb animal before God.

11. Asaph finally blurts out what is really eating at him. He honestly states what his heart is feeling. What, does he say, is the core issue? **73:13** (especially *NLT* and *The Message*)

I HAVE BEEN STUPID TO OBEY AND PLAY BY THE RULES – WHAT DID IT GET ME?

♥ The *New Living Translation* states **73:13** as a question. When have you asked yourself the same question?

♥ What was Asaph hoping his "pure heart" would get him? **The good life!**

12. Asaph was doubting God's goodness, yet he was careful about expressing his doubt. Why? **73:15**
He knew that if he expressed his doubt and resentment, he would cause other believers to stumble and doubt.

♥ What doubts have you had about the Christian life? Do you feel guilty about these doubts? Why or why not?

♥ Is doubt wrong? Why or why not? How do you think God responds to people who doubt him? **We might be tempted to doubt, but temptation is not sin. Sin is when we give into the temptation and let it have its way in our hearts. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith (the opposite of doubt) it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God. God cannot work in our life if we doubt and don't have faith in who he is and what he has promised.**

♥ Are you careful in expressing your doubts openly? Why or why not? **Our negative words and doubting attitudes can cause others to doubt God and to see him in a bad light. We need to be careful we don't cause another brother or sister in Christ to doubt God.**

13. What was Asaph's first approach in dealing with his dilemma? **73:16**

He tried to figure it all out on his own by using reason

♥ Does this approach usually work for you? Why or why not?

14. In what verse did Asaph experience his "turning point" or "Aha! moment" and what made the difference?

Verse 17 – He went into the sanctuary of God and became still and quiet before him. The implication is that he asked God for HIS perspective. He finally realized that even though the ungodly might prosper here on earth for a while, they would someday pay the consequences of their behavior and their beliefs.

♥ Have you ever had a "sanctuary experience"? When? Where? What happened?

15. What perspective on the ungodly did Asaph get from God that made him realize that the prosperity of the wicked in this world doesn't matter? **73:18-20, 27**

All their prosperity is temporary lasts but a moment in light of eternity. They are on a slippery path that leads to destruction. Their present life lasts no longer than a dream. In the end, the ungodly will be the big losers.

♥ Does Asaph's insights satisfy you as it relates to the prosperity of the ungodly? Why or why not?

♥ How can you gain God's perspective when you feel confused or upset about the way our world is or when you are facing a problem that is causing you to doubt and worry? **We can always ask God for his perspective on things.**

16. After Asaph gained God's perspective, what did he realize about the negative effects of doubt? **73:21-22**
Doubt always leads to bitterness, foolishness and ignorance

17. What was God's response to Asaph's doubt? **73:23-24**

Even though Asaph doubted God's faithfulness, God never left him. We belong to God no matter what we do. God is holding our hand whether we are aware of it or not. He keeps leading us and giving us counsel. Our feelings may change toward God, but his perspective of us never changes. This is comforting news!

♥ What does God's response to Asaph's doubt reveal about the character of God?

God never changes and he loves us for reasons other than our behavior. Nothing we can do will make him love us any more or less than he already does. God's unchanging character does not, in any way, depend on us.

♥ Can you expect the same response for God when you give into envy and doubt? Why or why not?

18. How, specifically, does Asaph respond to God's faithfulness to him? **73:25-26, 28**

Asaph responds with worship by focusing on God and telling him how wonderful he is and what Asaph appreciates about God's character. He tells God that he desires him more than he desires the prosperity he was seeing in the lives of the ungodly. Asaph tells God that he will be his forever – that God is the strength of his life. He tells God how much he enjoys his presence.

19. Write out **73:25-26** from one of the four translations. (When you write out Scripture, you will often see details and words that you might miss when you just read the text.)

To what extent do you agree with Asaph's statements in these verses? Partially or Completely? What would it take for you to come to complete agreement?

20. By the end of the **Psalm 73**, Asaph comes full circle. How does **verse 28** lead back to **verse 1**?

Asaph is relieved

He ends this Psalm with the same statements about God that he began the Psalm with. God is good and he's good to those who belong to him. Asaph declares that he will tell others of God's goodness.

♥ Worship is Asaph's pivotal act in the psalm. How can worship help you deal with your doubts and hard questions about living as a follower of Jesus Christ?

Worship (focusing on God and telling him how great he is) whether done in prayer or music or some other activity gets our eyes off ourselves and onto God's changeless, powerful, awesome character. It allows us to begin to see our circumstances from God's perspective. It will build our faith and help us to actually believe God's promises to us. It will help us focus on eternity and to see this life as temporary and fragile. When we worship, we have an encounter with the living God and we are changed for having been in his presence.

♥ What new perspective does **Psalm 73** give you about your own circumstances?

Our reading and studying the Bible (doing this lesson) should make a difference in our every day life. Otherwise it has little value in our lives. Ask several to share how Psalm 73 made a difference in how they view their own situations.

RESPONSE:

Below are some generally stated faith lessons from Psalm 73:

- Looking in the wrong direction will cause me to have the wrong perspective.
- Success and riches are not always a sign of God's blessing.
- Lack of success and riches is not a sign of God's disfavor.
- Regardless of my circumstances, God *is* good all the time!
- I should look to God for answers to problems that trouble me.
- There is no security apart from God.
- Experiencing God's presence is the most important thing in this life.

Discuss the above insights and how they can help us in every day life.