



LESSON 17: "WHAT'S WITH THAT, GOD?"

PSALM 73

INTRODUCTION

The heading of the Psalm 73 says, *A Psalm of Asaph*. Asaph was a Levite who led one of the temple choirs during the time of David (1 Chronicles 15:19; 25:1-2). He probably wrote this psalm and his choir probably sang it often.

Psalm 73 is a personal story from Asaph's own experience. It chronicles his own journey from faith into envy and doubt and back again to faith. It is an interesting story and one that we all can relate to.

Psalm 73 is a great example of the Psalms giving us permission to be human. Asaph looks around and sees that the ungodly (the agnostics of his time) seem to have a much better life than the godly (those who remain faithful to God and his

commands). In this psalm, he is blunt and honest about his observations and his readiness to sell out. It is as if he is saying, "What's with that, God?"

As we follow Asaph's faith journey, we can learn from his experience. We learn that doubts and disappointments can be a *good thing* if we handle them correctly. We learn that we must learn to see things from God's perspective and not our own.

In **Psalm 73** we see, again, God's faithful and patient character. We can say with new conviction, "God is good all the time. All the time God is good."

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** slowly and thoughtfully in at least *two translations*. (*New Living Translation* and *The Message* are particularly good in capturing the message **Psalm 73**.) As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that are meaningful to you and put a question mark by anything that you would like clarified.
3. At first reading, what verse(s) stand out to you?
4. Can you think of a catchy title for Psalm 73?

QUESTIONS

5. 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**.

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

6. What does Asaph admit in **73:2** about his belief in this familiar, commonly-held belief found in **73:1**?

♥ 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*?

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

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

9. 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		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		

- ♥ 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?
- ♥ 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?

10. 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.
11. What is the unpleasant side effect of *envy*? **Proverbs 14:30; Psalm 73:21-22**
12. 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*)
- ♥ 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?
13. Asaph was doubting God's goodness, yet he was careful about expressing his doubt. Why? **73:15**
- ♥ 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?
 - ♥ Are you careful in expressing your doubts openly? Why or why not?
14. What was Asaph's first approach in dealing with his dilemma? **73:16**
- ♥ Does this approach usually work for you? Why or why not?
15. In what verse did Asaph experience his "turning point" or "Aha! moment" and what made the difference?
- ♥ Have you ever had a "sanctuary experience"? When? Where? What happened?
16. 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**
- ♥ 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?

17. After Asaph gained God's perspective, what did he realize about the negative effects of doubt? **73:21-22**

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

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

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

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

20. 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?

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

♥ 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?

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

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.

What other faith lessons from Psalm 73 could you add to this list?

Which of these faith lessons means the most to you? Why?