

Introduction: The Illusion of the World and the Truth of the Sanctuary

We often look at the world around us and see the wicked prospering. They seem to have no trouble, their wealth increases, and they live entirely for their own desires without any thought of eternity. When we see this, it is easy for our feet to almost slip. The human heart is prone to wander, and when we are confronted by the apparent success of those who hate God, we are tempted to look at our own afflictions and think that keeping our hearts pure is completely in vain. This is not a new struggle. It is the deep, agonizing crisis of faith recorded for us in Psalm 73.

Asaph was a worship leader in Israel, a man who knew the theology of God's goodness, yet he found himself standing on the edge of a spiritual cliff. He fell into the sinful mistake of placing his own judgment over God's. He tried to read God's providence apart from the Word of God, and it was incredibly troublesome to him. He could not make sense of a world where the righteous suffer and the wicked thrive. It was only when he went into the sanctuary of God, under the authority of the Word, that his mind was enlightened.

This family study is designed to take you and your children into that same sanctuary. Over the next five days, we will walk through Asaph's confession, his crisis, and his ultimate deliverance. We will look past the illusion of the world's wealth and anchor our hearts in the eternal goodness and perfect justice of God. In God's order, in God's way, true wealth is found only in Him. Our security in this life is not found in the strength of our own grip on God, but in the omnipotent grip He has on us.

Day 1: The Confession and the Crisis

"Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." (Psalm 73:1-3, NKJV)

The psalm begins with a profound, definitive confession of faith. Asaph declares that truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart. He does not come to this conclusion like a detached philosopher. He proclaims it like a man who has just narrowly escaped hell. He has looked into the abyss of his own doubt, he has seen the terrifying reality of life without God, and he has returned with a tightened grip on this single, unshakable truth. God is good to His people. This is the bedrock of our faith. Before we can examine the struggles of life, we must establish what is absolutely true about the character of our Lord.

Yet, immediately after making this glorious declaration, we encounter the Christian's great difficulty. Despite knowing God is good, Asaph confesses that his steps nearly slipped. He was tempted to abandon the faith altogether. What could bring a godly man to such a dangerous precipice? He tells us plainly: he was envious of the boastful when he saw the

prosperity of the wicked. He looked at people who lived in open rebellion against the Creator, and he saw that they were succeeding. They had money, they had health, and they seemed to have no trouble at all.

What do we mean by this? Well, men die from various causes. They face sickness, financial ruin, and natural disasters. But to Asaph's eye, the wicked seemed immune to the common sorrows of mankind. They possessed all the comforts of the world while openly despising the God who gave them. And here is the problem when we look at the world through our own natural eyes: we are not near so critical of ourselves as we are of God's providence. Asaph allowed his gaze to drift from the goodness of God to the glittering illusion of worldly success.

Envy is a quiet, deadly poison in the life of a believer. It starts by questioning why God has withheld certain earthly blessings from us, and it ends by questioning whether God is actually good at all. When we envy the arrogant, we are essentially saying that God has mismanaged the universe. We forget that the world's wealth is temporary. We forget that those who prosper in their wickedness are merely being fattened for the slaughter. As a family, we must learn to recognize this temptation and fiercely guard our hearts against the allure of unsanctified prosperity.

Parent and Adult Reflection

As mature believers, we must constantly evaluate where our true affections lie. We often examine ourselves too lightly and are easily deceived about our true spiritual condition. It is easy to teach our children to obey God, but it is much harder to model a life that genuinely prefers God over material comfort and societal approval. When the world rewards compromise and punishes conviction, the temptation to envy the wicked becomes a daily reality.

1. When you look at unbelievers who possess great wealth, career success, or social ease, do you secretly envy their lack of struggle?
2. How does your reaction to financial or circumstantial hardship reveal what you truly believe about God's goodness?
3. In what ways might you be accidentally teaching your children to value worldly prosperity over a pure heart?

Take these questions before the Lord in honest confession. Acknowledge the times your feet have almost slipped, and thank God for His preserving grace that keeps you anchored in His truth.

Questions for Children

It is important for us to talk about the things that tempt us to walk away from God. Sometimes, doing the right thing feels really hard, and doing the wrong thing looks really fun and easy. The man who wrote this Psalm was a leader in God's house, but even he struggled with this. He looked at people who didn't love God, and he was jealous because they seemed to have everything they wanted.

1. Have you ever felt jealous of someone who was doing something wrong but seemed to be getting away with it?
2. Why is it foolish to be jealous of someone who has a lot of toys or money, but does not know Jesus?
3. What should we do when we start feeling like it is too hard to obey God?

Remember that God's goodness is better than any toy, any amount of money, or any easy life. God gives His people exactly what they need, and the best thing He gives us is Himself.

Scripture Memorization

Committing God's Word to memory is one of the primary ways we guard our steps from slipping. When the world tells us lies about where true happiness is found, the Scriptures remind us of the truth. Work together as a family to memorize the opening confession of this psalm.

"Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart." (Psalm 73:1, NKJV)

Recite this verse together at the dinner table or before bed, cementing the goodness of God in your minds before facing the world tomorrow.

Family Prayer Prompt

Our prayers must reflect our absolute dependence on God's grace. If He does not hold us fast, we will certainly slip. Use this time to gather together and lift your voices to the Lord, confessing your weaknesses and praising His steadfast love.

Pray that the Lord would guard your household from the deceptive lure of worldly prosperity. Confess any envy or jealousy that has taken root in your hearts toward those who do not love God. Ask the Father to give you a deep, unshakable conviction that He is perfectly good to His people, even when life is difficult. Thank Him for the grace that keeps your feet from stumbling.

Day 2: The Illusion of Unsanctified Prosperity

"For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment... They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth." (Psalm 73:4-9, NKJV)

When a man allows envy to cloud his vision, the world becomes deeply distorted. Asaph looks at the ungodly and sees men who seem completely insulated from the sufferings of a fallen world. He observes that there are no pangs in their death, their bodies are strong, and they seem to avoid the common plagues that afflict normal men. Because they face no immediate judgment for their sin, pride becomes their necklace—an ornament they wear openly and without shame.

What do we mean by this? We mean that unsanctified prosperity soon leads to practical atheism. When wicked men are successful, they do not turn around and thank God for His common grace. Instead, they use their strength to oppress others and they speak loftily against heaven itself. They act as though God does not see, or worse, that God does not care. They look at their own wealth and conclude that they are the masters of their own destiny. This is the great illusion of unsanctified prosperity.

We must understand that when a person lives in rebellion and God continues to allow them to prosper, it is not a sign of God's blessing. It is a sign of His terrifying patience before judgment. God is entirely just, and His justice is not compromised simply because it is delayed. When the wicked are allowed to gather wealth while setting their mouth against the heavens, they are merely stockpiling wrath against the day of wrath.

Our great danger as Christians is looking at this illusion and wanting it for ourselves. We can easily become frustrated when we strive to obey God's law, only to watch those who mock God's law drive nicer cars, live in bigger houses, and seemingly glide through life without a care. But we must remember that a life lived without the fear of God, no matter how materially comfortable, is a life of utter poverty. We must not be deceived by the proud necklaces and violent garments of the world. They are the uniforms of those marching toward destruction.

Parent and Adult Reflection

It is profoundly difficult to raise children in a culture that explicitly rewards practical atheism. The world tells us that success is measured by financial security, physical health, and social power, regardless of how those things are obtained. If we are not careful, we will

inadvertently train our children to pursue these earthly metrics of success rather than pursuing Christ.

1. In what subtle ways have you equated material blessing or an easy life with God's approval?
2. When you observe the arrogance of a culture that mocks God yet continues to thrive economically, how do you process it theologically? Do you find yourself angry at God, or heartbroken for the lost?
3. How can you actively demonstrate to your family that you value submission to God over earthly success?

We must guard our hearts against the assumption that a lack of trouble means God is pleased. Take time today to repent of any area where you have valued the world's definition of prosperity over the quiet obedience of faith.

Questions for Children

Sometimes, it seems like the people who break the rules are the ones who have the most fun. Asaph saw people who were mean, proud, and completely ignored God, yet they seemed to have everything they wanted. They even bragged about it! It can be confusing when we try to do the right thing, but we have hard days, while people doing the wrong thing seem to have easy days.

1. Why do you think people who do bad things sometimes seem to have a really easy life?
2. Just because someone has a lot of good things, does that mean God is happy with how they are living?
3. If someone acts proud and ignores God all their life, what will eventually happen to them?

It is important to remember that God sees everything. A life without God might look shiny on the outside, but it is actually very dangerous and very sad.

Scripture Memorization

Let us continue to anchor our minds in the truth by memorizing God's Word together. Today, we look at the dangerous pride of those who ignore God.

"Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment." (Psalm 73:6, NKJV)

Discuss what it means to wear pride like a necklace. It is something visible, something people show off. Pray that God would replace any pride in your hearts with humility.

Family Prayer Prompt

As a family, come before the Lord and ask Him to clarify your vision. We need eyes to see the world as He sees it.

Pray that God would protect your family from the illusion that a comfortable life is the same thing as a faithful life. Ask Him to strip away any pride that you might be wearing like a necklace. Pray for those in your community or in the broader culture who speak audaciously against heaven while enjoying God's common grace; pray that God would grant them repentance before they face His justice. Finally, ask the Lord to give you a deep contentment in His provision, whether it is much or little.

Day 3: The Danger of Worldly Envy

"Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—" (Psalm 73:13-16, NKJV)

Here we reach the darkest point of Asaph's crisis. The envy he allowed into his heart has finally produced its bitter fruit: despair. He looks at his own life—a life dedicated to cleansing his heart and washing his hands in innocence—and he compares it to the easy lives of the wicked. His conclusion is devastating. He says, "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain." He is effectively saying that following God's law, guarding his purity, and striving for holiness has been completely pointless.

Why does he feel this way? Because while the wicked are seemingly free from trouble, Asaph feels that he is plagued all day long and chastened every morning. He is experiencing the discipline of a loving Father, but because his eyes are fixed on the world, he interprets that discipline as a curse. This is the danger of trying to read God's providence based solely on our own observations. When we evaluate God's goodness by looking at our immediate circumstances, we will always misinterpret what He is doing.

Yet, even in the depths of his confusion, the Holy Spirit restrains Asaph. He admits that if he had spoken these doubts aloud, if he had stood before the congregation and declared that following God was useless, he would have been untrue to the generation of God's children. He realizes that his words carry weight and that his unchecked doubts could destroy the

faith of others. This is a profound lesson in maturity. Even when our minds are clouded with doubt, we must not use our speech to cause weaker brothers and sisters to stumble.

Asaph tries to figure out this massive contradiction on his own. He tries to understand why a just God would allow the wicked to prosper while the righteous suffer. But human reason alone cannot solve the mystery of God's providence. Asaph admits, "It was too painful for me." It was too troublesome, too heavy, too confusing. He has reached the end of his own wisdom. He is trapped in a maze of his own making, and he cannot find the way out until he looks entirely outside of himself.

Parent and Adult Reflection

We are often tempted to calculate the "return on investment" of our obedience to God. When we sacrifice a career opportunity to maintain our integrity, or when we face social rejection for standing on biblical truth, we expect God to immediately reward us with peace and prosperity. When the opposite happens—when obedience brings hardship—we are tempted to echo Asaph: "Have I kept my heart pure in vain?"

1. Have you ever felt that your obedience to God has not "paid off" the way you expected it to?
2. When you are deeply confused or frustrated by God's providence, how do you handle those thoughts? Do you vent them in ways that discourage other believers, or do you take them privately to the Lord?
3. Why is human reason completely insufficient for understanding the justice and providence of God in a fallen world?

We must guard our speech, especially around our children and younger believers. Let us repent of the times we have spoken audaciously about our trials, and ask God for the grace to trust Him even when His providence is painful to our understanding.

Questions for Children

Sometimes doing the right thing is hard, and it might even feel like doing the right thing gets you into trouble, while kids who do the wrong thing seem to have it easy. Asaph felt exactly this way. He actually started to wonder if trying to obey God was just a big waste of time. But he was careful not to say that out loud to the other people at church, because he knew it might hurt their faith.

1. Have you ever felt like it was unfair that you got in trouble for doing the right thing, or felt like obeying your parents or God was useless?

2. When you feel frustrated or confused about something hard, who is the best person to talk to about it?
3. Why is it important to be careful about what we say when we are upset or doubting? How can our words affect our family or our friends at church?

It is okay to not understand why hard things happen. But instead of complaining or saying that following God is a waste of time, we need to take our confusion to Jesus and ask Him to help us understand.

Scripture Memorization

Today we memorize the verse that shows the breaking point of human wisdom. We cannot understand the world on our own.

"When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me—" (Psalm 73:16, NKJV)

Remind your family today that it is perfectly fine to admit when we don't understand what God is doing. Our job is not to figure everything out; our job is to trust the God who knows all things.

Family Prayer Prompt

Gather your family and pray for a steadfast heart that does not grow weary in doing good.

Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have viewed your obedience as a transaction, expecting earthly rewards for your faithfulness. Pray that He would keep you from ever concluding that keeping your heart pure is in vain. Ask God for the wisdom to guard your tongue, that you would never speak words of doubt that might harm the faith of your children or other believers. Pray that when life is too painful to understand, you would humbly submit to His sovereign will.

Day 4: The Sanctuary and the Justice of God

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, so, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You." (Psalm 73:17-22, NKJV)

Everything changes in verse 17. The confusion, the envy, and the painful crisis of faith abruptly end with a single, massive turning point: Asaph went into the sanctuary of God. He did not solve his theological problem by staring at the wicked, and he did not solve it by looking inward at his own feelings. He solved it by coming under the authority of the Word of God in the presence of God's people. In the sanctuary, his vision was finally corrected. He stopped looking at the immediate prosperity of the ungodly and began to look at their ultimate end.

In the light of God's truth, the illusion shatters. Asaph realizes that the ease and wealth of the wicked are not signs of God's favor; they are the exact opposite. God has set them in slippery places. Imagine a man walking blindfolded along a cliff edge that is covered in smooth ice. He may feel fine in the moment, he may even be laughing, but his destruction is absolutely certain and could happen in a split second. The justice of God is perfect. Unjudged sin is merely a fattening for the slaughter. When the wicked are finally brought down, it will be in a moment, and they will be utterly consumed with terrors.

When Asaph finally sees the terrifying reality of God's justice, his envy evaporates, and he is filled with grief and deep conviction. He looks back at his own jealousy and is disgusted by it. He confesses that in his envy, he was senseless and ignorant. He had been acting like a beast before God—reacting to raw instinct and physical appetites rather than eternal truth. He had envied men who were standing on a trapdoor to hell simply because they had comfortable lives.

We must let the terrifying reality of God's justice cure us of our envy. When we go into the sanctuary of God—when we open the Scriptures and gather with the saints on the Lord's Day—we are reminded of the final judgment. The world is not getting away with anything. God's justice will be perfectly satisfied. Knowing this should rid us of our jealousy and replace it with a desperate urgency to see the lost saved before their feet slip.

Parent and Adult Reflection

It is a humbling thing to realize that our own reasoning is often beast-like. When we function merely on what we can see, feel, and calculate in the natural world, we are no

different than an animal reacting to its environment. It is the Word of God that elevates our minds to see reality as it truly is.

1. How heavily do you rely on corporate worship and the preaching of the Word to correct your perspective on life? Do you view gathering with the saints as optional, or as the necessary sanctuary where your mind is renewed?
2. When you consider the final, sudden destruction of the wicked, does it produce a sense of self-righteous satisfaction, or does it grieve your heart and produce a desire for their salvation?
3. In what areas of your life have you been acting "like a beast"—driven by earthly appetites, comfort, and immediate circumstances rather than the eternal truths of God's Word?

We must learn to view the ungodly not as rivals to be envied, but as souls in desperate need of grace. Let the justice of God sober your mind today, and thank Him for the sanctuary of His Word.

Questions for Children

Asaph couldn't figure out why bad people had easy lives until he did one very important thing: he went to the house of God. When he heard God's truth, he realized that he had been looking at things all wrong. He saw that the people who ignored God were actually in terrible danger. It was like they were standing on slippery ice right at the edge of a cliff, and they didn't even know it.

1. Why is it so important for our family to go to church and listen to the preaching of the Bible? What happens to our thinking when we skip church?
2. How did Asaph feel about himself when he realized he had been jealous of people who were actually in terrible danger? (He felt foolish, like an animal that doesn't understand anything!)
3. Instead of being jealous of people who do bad things, how should we feel about them now that we know they are in danger?

Going to church and reading our Bibles is like putting on glasses when everything is blurry. It helps us see the truth. We should never be jealous of people who don't know God, we should pray for them.

Scripture Memorization

The turning point of the entire psalm, and the turning point for our own hearts, is found in verse 17. Memorize this verse to remind yourself where truth is found.

"Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end." (Psalm 73:17, NKJV)

Discuss what your family's "sanctuary" time looks like. Talk about your preparation for Sunday worship and why it is the most important day of the week.

Family Prayer Prompt

Let this be a time of confession and thanksgiving. We need God to continually correct our vision.

Pray and confess any times this week you have acted "like a beast"—reacting with anger, jealousy, or frustration based only on what you can see in the world. Thank the Lord for His perfect justice, knowing that He will make all things right in the end. Ask Him to give you a deep love and reverence for the local church and the preaching of the Word. Finally, pray for the lost people in your life who are currently standing in slippery places, asking God to save them before it is too late.

Day 5: The Omnipotent Grip and Our Eternal Portion

"Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:23-26, NKJV)

After confessing his foolishness, Asaph marvels at the breathtaking grace of God. Despite his doubts, despite his envy, and despite acting like an ignorant beast, God did not abandon him. Asaph says, "Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand." This is the great security of the Christian life. We are not preserved because our grip on God is so strong; we are preserved because His omnipotent grip on us will never fail. When we stumble in our understanding, our Father tightens His hold so that we will not fall away.

Not only does God hold us, but He guides us with His counsel through every trial in this wilderness. We are not left to figure out this life on our own. And the promise does not end there. God promises that afterward—after the struggle, after the discipline, after the fading prosperity of this world has vanished—He will receive us to glory. The wicked are cast down to destruction in a moment, but the righteous are guided safely home.

This realization brings Asaph to the grand conclusion of the psalm, one of the most beautiful declarations of love for God in all of Scripture: "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You." Asaph finally understands what true wealth is. What is the true reward of heaven? Is it merely the absence of physical pain? Is it reunion with loved ones? While those are wonderful realities, the true Christian prefers God before everything else in heaven and on earth. If God were not in heaven, the godly person would not want to be there.

Our flesh and our hearts will certainly fail. We will face sickness, weakness, and eventually death. But when everything else is stripped away, God remains the strength of our heart and our portion forever. Whatever changes a godly person goes through in this life, we are ultimately secure because God, who is unchangeably good, is our chosen portion. We may be deprived of many earthly comforts, but we cannot lose Him, and He will never lose us.

Parent and Adult Reflection

We must ask ourselves a hard, searching question to evaluate the true condition of our hearts. If you could have all the prosperity in the world forever—perfect health, immense wealth, obedient children, and absolute peace—but God was completely absent from your life, would you take it? For the child of God, the answer must be a resounding no.

1. Is God truly your portion, or do you view God merely as the provider of your portion (wealth, comfort, security)?
2. How does the promise that God is holding your right hand change the way you face your own spiritual failures and doubts?
3. Are you actively cultivating a desire for the presence of God in your home, teaching your children that knowing Christ is better than any earthly success?

Rest today in the omnipotent grip of your Father. He has held you through your darkest doubts, and He will certainly guide you all the way to glory.

Questions for Children

Even when Asaph was complaining and doubting God, God never let him go. God held his right hand the whole time. Just like a father holds his little child's hand when they are walking through a dangerous place, God holds onto His people. Our strength might fail, and we might get scared, but God is always strong enough to hold us.

1. What does it mean that God holds us by our right hand? If we slip or make a mistake, will God drop us?

2. The verse says, "Whom have I in heaven but You?" What is the absolute best part about going to heaven? (Hint: It isn't streets of gold, it is being with God!)
3. How can we show God that we love Him more than anything else on earth?

We don't have to be afraid of hard things or even getting older and weaker, because God is our strength forever. He is the best reward we could ever have.

Scripture Memorization

Let this glorious confession be the final verse your family commits to memory this week. It is a perfect summary of a faithful Christian heart.

"Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You."
(Psalm 73:25, NKJV)

Challenge your family to say this verse when you are tempted to want things you cannot have, reminding yourselves that you already possess the greatest treasure.

Family Prayer Prompt

Conclude your five-day study by going before the throne of grace with profound gratitude.

Thank God for His preserving grace. Thank Him that when your faith was weak, His grip was strong. Praise Him for being your portion and your eternal reward. Ask the Lord to make Himself your greatest desire—that you would truly prefer Jesus Christ over any path of sin, self-satisfaction, or temporal pleasure. Finally, pray for the preaching of the Word this coming Lord's Day, that your whole family would hear it with open hearts, ready to declare His great works to the world.

Conclusion: Declaring His Works Together

We have walked through the deep spiritual struggle of Psalm 73 together as a family. We have seen the dangerous illusion of unsanctified prosperity, the foolishness of our own envy, and the terrifying perfection of God's justice. But most importantly, we have seen the unchangeable goodness of God to His people. We have been reminded that our safety does not rely on our own strength, but on the omnipotent grip of our Father.

Psalm 73 ends with a call to action. Asaph declares, "But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works." (v. 28). We are not meant to keep these truths to ourselves. One of the clearest evidences that you are a Christian is that your mouth moves. When you have seen the goodness of God in the sanctuary, you must go back out into the world and speak of it.

As you prepare for the Lord's Day, let this be the commitment of your household. In a culture that worships wealth and despises God's law, you are called to cultivate a home that values the nearness of God above all else. When you are placed in situations where God and the things of this world stand in competition, make the decisive choice. Prefer God. Trust His providence. Rest in His justice. And together, as a family, declare His great works to a desperate and dying world.