

June

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PRAYER IS ABOUT BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP

*Prayer is a response of faith to God
in an ongoing relationship.*

THE WORD

**PSALM
73:1-3**

Surely 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.

12-28

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.

KEY VERSE

²⁵**Whom 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.

ENGAGE THE WORD

We've all had close calls. Perhaps it was while trying to cross a busy street and you almost stepped into the path of an oncoming speeding car. Maybe you were driving while in deep thought and suddenly came alert just in time to put on the brakes before slamming into the vehicle in front of you. Apparently the author of Psalm 73 experienced a close call, described as "my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold" (v. 2). These are images of what it felt like for the psalmist as he faced an internal struggle trying to make sense of what was happening in his life. His beliefs about how God works in the world didn't match up with what he was seeing in his world, and this threatened his capacity to trust God. What do you do when there seems to be a disconnect between what you expect life to be and how it actually is?

Fortunately for us, this psalmist responded by praying honestly. This is one of the great gifts of the Psalms for believers—it is full of honest prayers. These prayers express what a real relationship with God is like. Let's look at this prayer psalm to see what we might learn about how our relationship with God might be deepened.

THE DILEMMA THAT CHALLENGES OUR TRUST

Psalm 73:1-3, 12-14

Psalm 73 begins with a simple yet profound declaration that reinforces the central message of the 72

Did You Know?

Psalm 73 repeats some of the key themes in Psalms 1 and 2, while also setting the stage for a number of communal psalms of complaint and lament—God’s people being honest before their God about their struggles. Faith does not preclude doubt, questioning, or complaint.

RELATIONAL CONNECTING THAT RESTORES OUR TRUST

psalms that come before it: that God is good to God’s people (v. 1) and, therefore, it is a good thing for us to be near to God. One could argue that this might be a central message through all of Scripture. Further, many of us have heard it declared in our churches—“God is good, all the time! All the time, God is good!”

The psalmist seemed to believe God is good. Yet, verse 2 begins, “But as for me . . .” (v. 2). Yes, he believed in God’s goodness, but when he looked around, he saw things that seem to contradict that belief—arrogant, wicked, carefree people are prospering and getting all the goods (vv. 3, 12). How could a good God allow that? Not only that, but this also troubles him so much that he became envious and doubted whether it is worth it to remain faithful to this “good” God (vv. 3, 13-14). We see here a common threat to active, relational trust in God: experiencing life in a way that puts to question (1) God’s character as good and (2) our desire to remain faithful to God.

Psalm 73:15-20

The psalmist’s questioning of his faith is ultimately a “close call” because the story doesn’t end there. Verse 15 marks an important turning point in that this prayer becomes a direct address to God, a sign that there has been a renewal in a relationship to God that had been put under strain. What enabled this renewal of relationship? In short, a renewed perspective.

This renewal of perspective—seeing things more clearly as they really are—came from an important shift in the psalmist’s understanding. Instead of seeing things only from his individual perspective, that is, based solely on the immediacy of his own limited thoughts and feelings, he reestablished his personal identity as grounded in both (1) his relationship with the community of God’s people, and (2) his relationship with God.

When he considered the negative consequences that abandoning his faith in God would have on others (“your children,” v. 15), it reminded him that

Think About It

John 14:27 reminds us that true peace, not as the world gives, but as Jesus gives, is based on presence; that is to say, on relationship. Faithful behavior brings with it a reward, not of material prosperity, but of the power of God's presence in individuals and communities. How might you and your community of faith be more faithfully present to each other and to your neighbors?

**A DEEPER
RELATIONAL
COMMITMENT**

he was, in fact, part of a community of faith. Faith was not just his individual possession. When he took the time to “enter the sanctuary of God” (v. 17) for prayerful reflection, he began to see his situation and the world he lived in from God's perspective; a God who knows how consequences play out in all of our lives and who is committed to the well-being of all in the long run. A reversal happened—in terms of who is on slippery ground and who is secure (vv. 2, 3, 12, 18-20)—not because circumstances changed, but due to a change in understanding who God is.

Psalm 73:21-28

The renewal of perspective and understanding that the psalmist experienced was not abstract. It was very personal and relational. He could “see” more clearly because of a deepening relationship with God and God's people. Notice the tight relational connection in the phrases of this closing section of the psalm: “before you” (v. 22), “with you” (v. 23), “have you” (v. 24), “desire you” (v. 25).

The psalmist discovered that there is something much more valuable than being prosperous, being free from trouble, or amassing wealth (vv. 3, 12). That is, God “is our strength and portion” (v. 26), and the essential goodness of life is found in simply being near God (v. 28).

The psalmist, now knowing that this is the truth, has been set free by this truth (cf. John 8:32) to proclaim it boldly to God and to any who will listen: “I will tell of all your deeds” (v. 28). Confidence and clarity of witness is one of the fruits of being anchored in a healthy relationship to God and God's people.

REFLECT

In what ways can your prayer life strengthen your relationship with God?

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