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Psalm 73

Praying with God: An Example of Honest Prayer

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Honesty is **refreshing**. In our current culture people aren't honest. I don't think it's because we're intentionally dishonest. We just want to put forward our **best selves** forward and we do that by posting happy photos of ourselves on **Facebook** and **Instagram**. **Have** you ever posted a photo of how you're **actually feeling**? How did people respond? Did people **want** to see it?

When I climbed **Long's Peak** back in **2010** I posted this picture of my face from the top of the mountain. The beauty of this photo is that my face displays exactly how I felt after reaching the peak at **14,259** feet. I felt **terrible**. My friend **Nick** climbed the mountain with me and he said this when I posted it.

- **Nicholas**: Mom says, "I can't believe he put this picture of himself on here." (to which I replied...)
- **Jonathan**: I'm all about transparency Nick. I think this will also attract women.

Full transparency. I was **single** at the time and this photo **did not attract** any women. Although Monica says it's cute. I'm going to put up a blank slide so my mountain face isn't staring at you. We know it's **good** to be honest but that hard part about being honest is that honesty often **doesn't make us look good**.

Today's Psalm is an **example of honesty**. It's an example of a man named **Asaph** who lived 3,000 years ago taking a **picture** of his own **heart** and writing about it for others to see. It's not always pretty, but it is authentic. This Psalm is written down for us to **meditate** and **pray** on, and can become for us a **template** of what it means for us to be honest in **our prayers** before God.

An Example of Honest Prayer

Before we begin to go through this Psalm, you need to know who **Asaph** is. He's a **musician** who was employed by King David and was tasked with ministering before the **ark** of the **covenant** in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:37). So when David writes at the beginning of many of his Psalms "For the **director** of music. With stringed instruments." he was likely writing notes for Asaph and those who **followed** him. Asaph himself is **credited** with having written **12 Psalms**; including Psalm **73 through 83**.

By today's standards he was a **successful worship leader**. We often assume those who lead us in worship, the singers, the worship leaders, the band, they must really love and enjoy God all the time. But that's **not fair** because they're **human** and they **struggle** too, which leads me to the **first way** Asaph sets an example.

1. Admit your struggle. (v1-12)

Asaph admits his struggle. As we read **Psalm 73:1-3** watch for Asaph's struggle.

1 Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.

2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.

3 For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (NIV®)

By our standard, Asaph has everything, a successful career, he's a gifted and talented musician, but he's still not happy. In fact, he's **envious** (aka. jealous). **Envy** is wanting what others have. It's **coveting** what doesn't belong to you (Exod 20:17). **Timothy Keller** gives a fuller definition, "To envy is to want someone else's life. It's to feel not just that they don't deserve their good life but that you do and God hasn't been fair." Envy, is **ugly**. Asaph's envy is extra-tricky because he's envying the **wicked**.

The **wicked** are people who live their lives **in disobedience** to God. They ignore God's **rules** and God's **laws** and live life however they want. And as Asaph looks at them, it seems like they're not just getting away with it. They're actually **getting ahead** because of it.

- (v4) They're **successful** and **healthy**.
- (v5) Their lives are **easier** than most.
- (v6-8) They're **prideful**, **arrogant**, and **greedy** and aren't afraid to **use others** to get ahead.
- (v9-10) They **have it all**.
- (v11) They **deny God** and don't believe in him.

Verse 12 is a **summary**, "This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth." (NIV®) Do **you** struggle with whether God can be good and true when you look into this world and see evil people going unpunished? Maybe you have a **coworker** who doesn't mind **lying** or **cutting corners** and they keep getting **promoted** when they should really be **fired**. They just bought a nice **new car** and it makes you a little jealous. Maybe you have a **family member** who has **stolen money** from you and lives life for themselves, making it hard on the rest of the family. Maybe you think of a **politician** or **government official** who lies and is corrupt and yet they keep getting **re-elected**. Can God still be good if he's letting bad people get ahead? This is a **struggle**; and Asaph admits it. But this struggle **leads** him to **confession**.

2. Confess your doubt. (v13-15)

13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.
14 All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.
15 If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children. (NIV®)

Asaph puts all of his doubt on the **table** before God. He doesn't **sweep** it under the **rug**. He says it's vanity. In the original vanity means "**emptiness**" or "**nothingness**." In other words, he's saying, "It'd done me no good to live a life of obedience to God." In fact, in verse **14** he suggests that this decision has actually made his life **worse**, "All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments."

See we can do **everything right**. We can live **moral** lives. We can **love** Jesus. We can read our **Bibles** and **pray**. We can go to **church** and give **tithes** and **offerings**. We can serve on **missions** trips and tell our **frontlines** about Jesus We can obey Jesus in all things and we still get **sick**, our loved ones still **die**, and we still experience **disappointment**, **heartache**, and **loss**. I think we've all had those moments where we've looked up into the sky and shaken our fists and asked "**Why?**"

God would rather have us **confess our doubts** to him than for us to run away and hide. God is not interested in our Instagram or Facebook faces. He's interested in our **haggard beat-up honest faces**. **What** does your honest face look like? Where are the **creases** and the **worries**? Are you willing to come before God and to say, "Here's my envy. Here's my doubt."? If I wasn't willing to let Nick see me at my worst, I couldn't have gone on that hike with him. We couldn't have experienced the **beauty** of the **summit together**. Honesty allows us to enter into **relationship**. Honesty creates **intimacy**.

3. Go into God's presence. (v16-28)

16 When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply
17 till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny. (NIV®)

Asaph goes to the **sanctuary** of God. This is the **tent** that housed the ark of the covenant (1 Chron 15:1). The ark was a chest made of **acacia** wood and overlain with **gold**. According to **Hebrews 9:4b**, "This ark contained the gold **jar** of **manna**, Aaron's **staff** that had budded, and the stone **tablets** of the covenant." On top of the ark were **two cherubim** with **outstretched wings** that served as the Lord's **throne**. So the ark acted as a **footstool** for God. It's in the sanctuary near the ark that Asaph encounters the presence of God. He **worships** God and it completely **changes him**. **God's presence**:

1) (v18-20) Helps him see God's **final plan** for the **wicked**.

Asaph realizes that the wicked aren't going to get away with it. Have you ever had a **dream** and you were absolutely convinced it was **real**? I really can **fly**! And then you wake up and just as quickly realize it **wasn't** real? That's how it's going to feel one day when all who follow Jesus wake up and the wicked **go away** like a **bad dream**. God is going to **judge** the wicked. They may get away with it in **this life** but not the next.

2) (v21-22) Helps him see his **own sin** and **repent**.

Just like Asaph had enough **courage** to express his **struggle** and his **doubts** he has enough **confidence** to express his **sin** and **repent**. "I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you." (v22) When we're open and honest with God, it opens up a **space** for him to work in our heart and change us from wanting sin for **seeing** what it really is, **worthless**.

3) (v23-28) Helps him see God has always been **with him**.

23 Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand. [...]
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever. (NIV®)

God has not **left** Asaph and God has not left **you**. God **isn't scared** by our envy or doubt. If you know him, he's always been with you and will never leave you no matter what. When we remember that, it **changes** us.

Today we can't go to the **ark** of the covenant to sense God's presence, but we have something even **better**. We have **prayer**. We have the **Holy Spirit** inside of us who speaks to the Father on our behalf. We have Jesus. We have Jesus who stepped into our **struggle** and was **exposed** to our **doubts**. He was the **best of men** who **suffered** the **worst of fates** at the hands of **wicked** men. He died on a **cross**, but God used that for good to win our **salvation**. Jesus promises **eternal life** to all who **repent** of their sin and **believe** in him. He died to

change wicked men and women into **children of God**. He brought God's **presence** down into this world so we could **step into** God's presence.

I hope today's Psalm will **encourage** you to bring your **honest face** before God. When we're honest with the ones we love it gives us the opportunity to be in **relationship** with them. The same is true of God. We come before him honestly in prayer to be in relationship with him. **Bring your honest prayers to God.**

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church.
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