

Psalm 73 • My Only Desire on Earth

Introduction

We were already born with certain desires, grew up encouraged to seek the best things in life for ourselves, and every day endure the bombardment of every form of mass media to simply take for ourselves whatever we want to make us the most happy, comfortable, and/or secure. But the question really comes down to whether we want to satiate our earthly desires or allow our desire for Him to grow into something far more lasting than just the minutes ticking away in this life. What is your most earnest desire on this earth, and to what will it lead in the life hereafter?

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

²But as for me, my feet came close to
stumbling,

My steps had almost slipped.

³For I was envious of the arrogant
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴For there are no pains in their death,
And their body is fat.

⁵They are not in trouble as other men,
Nor are they plagued like mankind.

⁶Therefore pride is their necklace;
The garment of violence covers them.

⁷Their eye bulges from fatness;
The imaginations of their heart run riot.

⁸They mock and wickedly speak of
oppression;

They speak from on high.

⁹They have set their mouth against the
heavens,

And their tongue parades through the
earth.

[Read v.1-9]

Q: What is the distinction made in v.1? To whom is God's goodness said to be given?

A: "To those who are pure in heart!" The biblical definition of "pure in heart" is "unpolluted by sin". This is referencing those that make the life-choice to follow God's ways and not the world's ways.

Q: What is the contrast to this verse? What indicates that the psalmist is struggling with the condition of his heart, whether or not it is pure?

A: "But as for me" indicates the contrast of the psalmist with the conditions established in v.1.

Q: What is the problem? Has he completely failed in his relationship with God?

A: He states that he "came close to stumbling" and "almost slipped". (v.2) He has struggled, but the early indication is that he ultimately made the right choice and avoided falling completely.

Q: Why did he almost stumble and slip?

A: He'd become fixated on the circumstances of the wicked, of the seemingly good life being enjoyed by those embracing sin. He began to covet what they have in this life versus what he feels may be lacking in his own.

Q: How would you summarize the sinful lifestyle observed in v.3-9?

- Prosperous
- Luxurious
- Care-Free
- Proud
- Violent
- Boastful

Application: Do we ever desire or even envy certain attributes, conditions, or even possessions of non-believers? Do we wonder why they might have something in this life that we don't? Why do non-believers sometimes appear to be much better off in this life than us? Why do you suppose that is?

¹⁰Therefore his people return to this place,
And waters of abundance are drunk by
them.

¹¹They say, “How does God know?
And is there knowledge with the Most
High?”

¹²Behold, these are the wicked;
And always at ease, they have increased
in wealth.

¹³Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
And washed my hands in innocence;

¹⁴For I have been stricken all day long
And chastened every morning.

¹⁵If I had said, “I will speak thus,”
Behold, I would have betrayed the
generation of Your children.

¹⁶When I pondered to understand this,
It was troublesome in my sight

¹⁷Until I came into the sanctuary of God;
Then I perceived their end.

¹⁸Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.

¹⁹How they are destroyed in a moment!
They are utterly swept away by sudden
terrors!

²⁰Like a dream when one awakes,
O LORD, when aroused, You will despise
their form.

[Read v.10-14]

Q: What seems to be the focus of attention for the wicked?

A: Wealth and pleasure.

Q: What is the focus of the righteous?

A: Keeping both one’s heart and actions (“my hands”) free from sin.

Q: What is the seeming contradiction from the Believer’s point of view?

A: People who disregard God seem to be prospering in every way, whereas the ones clinging to Him seem to be experiencing constant problems and struggles. It doesn’t appear that God is rewarding or responding to the right people.

Q: What phrase clues us to the psalmist’s own thought that the situation is backward in his view?

A: “Surely in vain”. (v.13) It’s a revelation concerning his motives, that he had an expectation that following God’s way would have a specific pay-off in this life. He was expecting something that has yet to materialize.

Application: *What is it you expect in return for following Christ? Have you received what you believe is your due? If you believe there are inequities that exist today, what does that indicate about your walk?*

[Read v.15-20]

Q: According to v.15, why is the psalmist happy that he didn’t speak his mind publicly?

A: He would have led others astray, not just himself. His struggle would have, in effect, become contagious.

Q: What changed for him? How did the answer begin to come about?

A: According to v.16 it was a personal struggle. It wasn’t until he “came into the sanctuary of God” that the answer became apparent. What changed was going from struggling alone with the question to bringing it before God to be settled.

Application: *Do we ever publicly announce our struggles too soon? Do we realize that not everything is a matter to be shared publicly? Do we bring it to God before we bring it to man?*

Q: How would you summarize the answer revealed, how he “perceived the end” results of all that was happening to those pursuing sin instead of God?

A: “Like a dream”. (v.20) Their position—when compared to all of eternity—is very short on earth. They will awaken to find that they mis-spent a tiny sliver of time to make themselves happy for a moment, but destroyed for the rest of time.

Application: *Are we seeking things eternal or temporal? Are there earthly pleasures on which you place more value than God’s ways?*

²¹When my heart was embittered
And I was pierced within,
²²Then I was senseless and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You.
²³Nevertheless I am continually with You;
You have taken hold of my right hand.
²⁴With Your counsel You will guide me,
And afterward receive me to glory.

[Read v.21-24]

Q: What is our condition when we allow ourselves to be consumed by desires for riches and pleasures in this life?

A: As described in v21-22, we are allowing ourselves to be driven as completely by emotion as an animal that has no brain, no ability to see beyond the emotions of the moment.

Q: What is the key behavior on the part of Believers that best assists in overcoming these feelings and/or tendencies?

A: "I am continually with You". (v.23) We may see things going on around us, but we must never leave Him for those ways. The key is to remain with Him.

Q: What is the difference in the end result for the Believer versus the wicked as expressed in v.24?

A: After this life we will be received into the glory of God's second life, whereas those who experienced only temporary satisfaction on earth will not.

Q: Whereas the key for Believers is to continually remain with God, what does He do in response?

- "You have taken hold of my right hand."
- "With Your counsel You will guide me".

In other words, He directs us in the ways and on the path leading to His glory.

Point: *The teaching here is clearly emphasizing faith in action, whether to react strictly according to our emotions or to choose to subjugate our feelings to His ways and trust His leading. He allows us to come to Him with our mixed feelings, and will help us deal with them as long as we remain with Him and don't leave to pursue them.*

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You, I desire nothing on
earth.
²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and
my portion forever.
²⁷For, behold, those who are far from You
will perish;
You have destroyed all those who are
unfaithful to You.
²⁸But as for me, the nearness of God is
my good;
I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
That I may tell of all Your works.

[Read v.25-28]

Q: What happens to those who choose to live separated from God, what the psalmist terms “far from You”?

A: They “*will perish*”; they will die the second death, judged and separated from God forever.

Q: What happens to those “who are unfaithful” to God?

A: They are all destroyed by God.

Point: *The end result is the same if you live completely separately from him (“far from You”) or with a conscience knowledge of Him but not following with a whole heart (“unfaithful”).*

Q: So what are the qualities WE want to embrace?

A: “...*the nearness of God...*” and to make “*the Lord God my refuge...*”
Not just aware of Him but steadfastly clinging to Him as our Protector and Guardian.

Q: What should our focus be in order to deal with this life in the context of obtaining eternal life?

A: “*Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.*” We don’t merely focus on Him but cut off everything that even attempts to distract from Him.

Q: What are the stated promises that inspire us to live not by our emotions but in faithfulness to His ways?

A: “*My flesh and heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*” (v.26) and “*But as for me, the nearness of God is my good*” (v.28)

Q: What is significant about the final line of this psalm, “That I may tell of all Your works”? Is God concerned about getting some kind of credit?

A: One of the common characteristics about all the righteous people provided to us as examples throughout the Bible is that they have an overriding concern for God’s name and glory far and above their own. This psalm closes with that sentiment. This should be our highest priority on earth.

Overall Application

- *Do you struggle with questions or issues? Have you really brought them before the Lord or are you still mainly keeping them to your self? What is the first step towards getting the answer?*
- *Do you feel that some of the conditions and issues in your life aren’t fair? Do they cause you to remain focused on the circumstances of this life rather than seeing things from God’s eternal point of view?*
- *If in what you’re currently going through, you became more concerned with His name than your own, would your perspective and attitude begin to change? Would you run toward Him faster? Could you better endure the current circumstances?*