

Week 5- Psalm 73: Praying our Frustration

1: CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of Psalms from Week One. What kind of literature is the book of Psalms? Who is one of the primary authors? What is the book's main purpose? Where are we in the large story of Scripture? Share some of the main themes or learnings from the past weeks (lament, trust, sin).

Today's Passage: This is a psalm of Asaph, who was commissioned by David to sing in the house of the Lord. Asaph was a Levite (part of a priestly family) who would have known the rhythms of worship well. His tenure bridged the reigns of David and Solomon so he witnessed a lot of history. This psalm expresses his frustration that the wicked prosper while people seeking to live faithfully are afflicted with trouble.

2: CONTENT

Read Psalm 73 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, C, or D) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together and spend time sharing with each other what you drew and why.

Option C. Lectio Divina: Scripture is read four times, pausing after each reading:

1: HEAR the passage.

2: MEDITATE on the passage in the silence that follows.

3: IDENTIFY a word or phrase that stands out to you from the reading (leader may ask group to speak this out loud after the 3rd reading, or to share it as a group after the 4th reading)

4: REST in the presence of God.

Take time to share your reflections with each other as a group.

Option D. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. Asaph opens and closes this psalm with statements about God's goodness, but the middle of the psalm is full of doubts about this goodness. What specific things cause Asaph to doubt and to feel frustrated? Which of these things have to do with other people? Which of these things have to do with him?
2. There is a big difference in this psalm between how the wicked *appear* (vs 3-12), and their *reality* (vs 18-20). Discuss these differences.
3. There is also a big difference in this psalm between how the psalmist *feels about his life*- especially his efforts at faithfulness (vs 13-16)- and his *reality* (vs 23-26). Discuss these differences.
4. What do the differences you identified reveal about God? About the life of faith? About spiritual realities?
5. What role does worship (entering the sanctuary-vs 17) play in this psalm? How does worship seem to change the psalmist's perspective?
6. Verses 23-26 contain many truths about a life with God and God's character. Which of these images/statements stand out to you?

3: APPLICATION

No matter what method you used for content, spend some time talking about what this passage might mean to us now. Here are some questions to help guide this discussion. Feel free to use several or to just focus on one or two.

- It would be great to read this psalm and not understand Asaph's frustration. It would be nice if this were a problem contained to the time of David and Solomon. But it's not. Believers of all ages have looked around and seen that the wicked seem to be doing fine while those who dedicate themselves to God often struggle.
 - Do you have places (or can you think of specific people) where you see (or have seen) wicked people prospering? Good people suffering?
 - What does our frustration at this reveal about our theology= what we think about God?
- In verses 13-15, Asaph wonders if it is worth it to be and do good.
 - When have you wondered this?
 - Does obedience in the Christian life come with the guarantee of a "good life"? If not, what is the value or the point of obedience in the life of a believer?
- Talk about what "praying your frustration" looks like in your own prayer life. Do you talk to God this way? What kinds of things frustrate you related to your faith or the world you see around you?
- We often think of envy as primarily affecting our relationship with others, but the psalmist's envy (vs 3) puts a barrier between him and God. What has been your experience with envy? How is envy related (or is it?) with frustration?
- What does it mean to you that God included prayers in the book of psalms that invite us to express our frustration? What does that teach you about who God is? What does it teach you about who you are?
- We will likely never understand why "evil" people often seem to prosper and faithful people often seem to suffer. But are there any ways that this psalm either helps you to voice this tension, or respond to it?

4: PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your "wonderings" from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer.
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups.
- Use this written prayer:

God, you are the strength of my heart, my sure and steady refuge.

Purify my heart and cleanse me of envy, arrogance, and wickedness. Help me to see life from your perspective and open my eyes to the true riches of life. Give me a humble heart and drive pride far from me.

Infuse the earth with a knowledge of You. Cause even the wicked to understand your goodness and bring them to repentance, dear Lord.

Whom have I in heaven but you? My flesh and my heart may fail, but you God are the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

God, help me to tell of all your sweet works in my life. There is no one like you.

Glory be to you, Lord Jesus!

Amen