

# PRAYER and Psalm 73

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Over the summer I have been reading some of the psalms.

I started in Book III, Psalms 73-89, and I determined to **write them out** word for word in my journal and reflect as I went. I started here because these are some of the psalms that deal with the hard questions.

In particular one of the most disturbing questions raised is:

**How is it that the wicked so often prosper while the godly suffer so much?**

Then others like:

Why does it look like you have abandoned us? Ps 74

Heart cries: *Oh God, the nations have invaded your inheritance and defiled your holy temple and reduced Jerusalem to rubble. They have left the dead bodies of your servants as food for the birds of the sky. How long Oh God?* Psalm 79

*Oh Lord do not remain silent; do not stand aloof to the conspiracy against your people.* Ps 83

But there are also in these psalms a very strong balance of faithful instruction and godly wisdom - clear exhortations to fundamental covenantal loyalty to the Lord, reaffirmation of faith, declaring who they belong to and that only, only in God is found true refuge and true life. It is a wrestling with these questions and struggles in the Light of God's **goodness** not passivity or indifference.

**YES GOD IS GOOD- ALL THE TIME! And our lives also weigh these tensions.**

Let's look at how this pans out in Psalm 73.

**Surely God is good to Israel; to those who are pure in heart ( ? )**

<sup>2</sup> **But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.**

<sup>3</sup> **For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.**

<sup>4</sup> They have **no struggles**; their **bodies are healthy** and strong.

<sup>5</sup> They are **free from common human burdens**; they are not plagued by human ills.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.

<sup>7</sup> From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits.

<sup>8</sup> They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression.

<sup>9</sup> Their **mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.**

<sup>10</sup> Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.

<sup>11</sup> They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?"

<sup>12</sup> **This is what the wicked are like— always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.**

The Psalmist's opening statement sounds like a question: like he is trying to convince himself that its true. Surely God is good...??

What comes next in v2 is a description of an almost fatal trial of a godly man who went down a negative track - a cycle of painful thinking. When the psalmist envied the seeming prosperity and flowering of evil people and focused on this discrepancy and resented it, he says: I begin to lose my stability, my grounding in God and who I am. I start down a slippery slope that renders me faithless and impotent. I am deeply troubled.

It's because it seems like they have no worries, they can ignore God and get away with anything. From v4 on we get the description of the benefits of being wicked through the eyes of someone who has lost his perspective. It's an unreflected, unobjective dump of his self pity and envy and frustration. He says:

They have **no struggles**...they are **healthy** and strong, they are **free from human burdens** they seem to get away with saying anything, people follow them and free of care they go on gaining wealth. They appear to be in ascendancy and God does nothing about it though they mock God by saying: "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?"

SOUND FAMILIAR?

<sup>13</sup> Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure  
and have washed my hands in innocence.  
<sup>14</sup> All day long I have been afflicted,  
and every morning brings new punishments.

<sup>15</sup> If I had spoken out like that,  
I would have betrayed your children.  
<sup>16</sup> When I tried to understand all this,  
it troubled me deeply

<sup>21</sup> When my heart was grieved  
and my spirit embittered,  
<sup>22</sup> I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was a brute beast before you.

#### The Key Verse

<sup>17</sup> till I entered the sanctuary of God;  
then I understood their final destiny.

<sup>18</sup> Surely you place them on slippery ground;  
you cast them down to ruin.  
<sup>19</sup> How suddenly are they destroyed,  
completely swept away by terrors!  
<sup>20</sup> They are like a dream when one awakes;  
when you arise, Lord,  
you will despise them as fantasies.

So it seems to the Psalmist that keeping himself pure and innocent, doing the right things, believing in God and following his decrees has had no benefits at all...just pain.

Every day seems like one thing after the next with no respite and it goes round in the night, so I wake up feeling like a dog, or like a bus hit me and I'm going down the garden to eat worms.

When I try to figure this all out by myself, my head goes around and around and I get nowhere but in a deeper hole. And I am in danger of **giving public expression to this negativity** and betraying God to others and leading them down a faithless path too. A fountain of frustration and anger, faithlessness can spew out and taint the spiritual atmosphere and thus the soul and other's lives.

He sums it up in v 21-22 in a very frank confession. I have become no better than a brute beast before you like this. My bitterness and envy has sent me down this track of ignorance, my heart is hardened – I hold God out here and my spirit is bitter. I've dug myself a hole of self pity and faithlessness that shuts God out.

Until I got on my knees and entered into the sanctuary of my relationship with God and then I regained my perspective.

The truth is the position of the wicked is not sure, it is very precarious. They are suddenly destroyed, swept away. It isn't a true perspective that wickedness has benefits because they are all superficial and temporary. They are like fantasies with no substance when GOD ARISES.

**MAY GOD ARISE!! LET ALL HIS ENEMIES  
BE SCATTERED**

**Let's put this in our own context:**

I wonder whether the Yazidi people felt that God had abandoned them last year when they were overrun by evil men and forced from their homes onto a mountain and either died or were raped and sold into sex slavery or if they survived now live in a no man's land tent city. What happened to the salvation of God's people? This is a mirror of the picture painted in the psalms about Israel. And let's be honest we all have times of questions, doubts, anger with God and disappointments, stuff that's happened to us that we can't resolve that can put all sorts of strain on our pure and innocent belief in and trust of God. Disappointment with God is a biggie and it creates an underlying rift, a quarrel on the inside about the goodness of God and whether He can really be trusted. The stuff of doublemindedness and the enemy of a dynamic Christian life.

Becoming a Christian may just be the start of more complexities and struggles than you could ever imagine, while life looks pretty simple for everyone else. They can go to parties, get drunk, get up in the morning carefree and go to uni or work and generally have a good time. They always seem to have enough money and it seems sweet.

In the light of Psalm 73 we should be very careful of our envy of those around us, and not worry about the seeming ascendancy of ISIS and evil men because in the big picture God will arise and bring justice. The Psalmist says: it's a fantasy, a ruinous path to take in the long term.

<sup>23</sup> Yet I am always with you  
you hold me by my **right hand**.  
<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will take me into glory.  
<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And **earth has nothing** I desire besides you.  
<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my  
portion forever.  
  
<sup>27</sup> Those who are far from you will perish;  
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.  
<sup>28</sup> But **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.

**What do you do when you get like this?**  
the psalmist now is clear

**When I entered the sanctuary of God;  
then I regained my perspective and I knew**

I am always with you;  
**you hold me by my right hand.**  
<sup>24</sup> **You guide me with your counsel,**  
earth has nothing I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my  
portion forever.  
<sup>28</sup> **it is good to be near God.**  
I have made the Sovereign LORD **my refuge;**  
I will tell of all your deeds.

Prayer is a context.

It's a home. A relationship.

It's our place to be. Prayer emanates from being found by God and being found in Christ.

From the sanctuary of a life hid in Christ.

It comes out of crossing the line of who is in charge and who I obey and progressively develops relational intimacy on a daily basis. It's real.

Over the long haul that's where true perspective about my life and this world comes from.

It's the ongoing declaration: **Despite what everything else appears to be, despite how I felt when I got up this morning, despite my trials -God is good and it is good to be near God.**

**How lovely is your dwelling place oh God, my soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Better is one day in your courts than a 1000 elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.**

**Psalm 84**

But I wonder if I could encourage you in this manner this morning about your relationship with God and especially as it concerns prayer.

I don't know where you sit, everything will be represented here.

- You may not yet be a follower of Jesus. You may not know that friendship and how to pray. Can I invite you to ask for help and we will establish a group for people seeking and wanting to learn about Christian life.
- You may have just begun to know Jesus and you feel pretty excited about the change He is making in your life. Don't ever lose that freshness.
- But let me warn you may have hit a rock and wonder where on earth or heaven God has gone. This is normal. God tests us and causes us to seek Him more, in different ways so we grow up. If He was always giving you fluffy ducks you would soon tire of that too. God knows we need hard things to make us grow. Pursue the sanctuary.
- You may be a gnarly, ancient or even young Christian with quite a few growths attached.

I wonder if over successive years God has seemed silent to some of us and as though he has abandoned us.

You have put to bed your former faith and passion because nothing that seemed to have been of God has come to pass. Now you languish in a neutral place and go through the motions of being a good Christian.

What has successively disappointed you? Angered you? Or been a source of doubt making you double-minded.

What have you put to bed in your spiritual life that God graced and anointed you with? For time after time you have said no choose someone else, I am unable to speak, I am too embarrassed, they will never hear me. I might get it wrong.

What have you settled for? What is sleeping in your spiritual walk that ought to be front and centre in your present active life?

What are you sitting on? What have you put to rest that stirred you up in your Christian life? What prophecy was prayed over you that you have never seen fulfilled and is now a source of disappointment?

What about the words over Dunedin and over the nation? We need to remind God and ourselves of what was said and stir it up. The day is not over, but maybe we are living like it is. I am wondering if we can collect these prophecies. Both the ones we've heard about Dunedin and the ones we have heard in this church. We have let them fall away, but I believe God wants us to pray them out. Next week I will talk about the power of declarative prayer.

Whichever one you are do something about it.

**Rekindle and fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 2 Tim 1: 6-7**

Do not quench and let slumber that which God has gifted you with.

Has God changed? Is he unfaithful? the Psalmist would say. No.

**Here's the summary: 1. Light the match.** This is a call to relationship, to enter the sanctuary and listen to the Word- Christ and the written Word.

**2. Nurture the flame.** Make prayer your foundation and fan that flame every day. Students don't lose sight of the Truth in the midst of other's behaviour when it looks like they can get away with anything. Don't lose sight of God in the face of atheism in your studies. In the big picture our faithfulness is critical.

**3. Join with other flames:** pray with others this week in prayer partnerships, as couples in the bigger meeting opportunities.

If anything let's not pray harder or with more prayer points or for longer this week but let's listen to the whispers of the Spirit,

let's scrutinize what's been placed in our hearts by the Spirit and bring forth some prayers that come out of relationship with Jesus ones that have strategy and purpose in them.

*For when two or three agree together about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. Matt 18:19.* This might raise our ability to pray better prayers when we don't know what to pray on our own.

How would this begin to inform our focus in mission, in serving the city, in growing our own life together?

**4. Spread the Flame!** Next Sunday we join to share prayers over the Leith Valley, our neighbourhood and Dunedin.

### **PRAYER EXERCISES: Week 3**

**Rekindle and fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 2 Tim 1: 6-7**

Take some time this week to allow the Spirit (maybe journal it)

- to remind you of what first excited you about being a Christian.
- to remember what impassioned you about serving God
- what verses leapt out that stirred you up or
- what was prophesied over you that you have forgotten.

Ask Jesus to rekindle your faith in Him and in the power of prayer and declare what is still true.

If there was someone or some incident or your own questions and doubt have silenced you, know that God wants to heal this more than you.

- confess your need for change and declare a new day.
- Forgive those who hurt you
- Let God off the hook and declare your dwelling place is still in HIM

Please send in the prophetic words over Dunedin that you have kept over the years and let's collate them. [helen.harray@gmail.com](mailto:helen.harray@gmail.com)