

**GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Experiencing the Psalms” Lesson 8. (Psalm 73).**  
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Primary resources: James L. Mays, *Psalms*, 1994, John Knox Press; *Shepherd's Notes on the Psalms*, 1999, Broadman & Holman Publishers; *Life Application Study Bible*, NIV, 1991, Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan Publishing House.

**Introduction:** Psalm 73 moves us into “Book Three” of the collection of the Psalms. Notice that it is not by David. Instead, it is attributed to Asaph, one of the chief Levite ministers appointed by King David to minister before the ark of the LORD (1 Chron 16:4-5). The Psalm continues similar themes read before, e.g., the problem of the dark night of doubt felt by God’s people as they confront the “wicked” and their apparent prosperity.

**Now read Psalm 73 completely through.** As you read, note the apparent movement from: assurance ..... to skepticism ... to faith ... to witness.

**Re-read 73:1:** This is the opening vision.

- What does this verse suggest to you – confidence and assurance or something else? Briefly discuss.
- Note also the apparent linkage between God’s “goodness” and the community of the faithful. According to this verse (comparing also Psalm 1:6), do you think it is reasonable to conclude that this Psalmist surmises certain things about God by virtue of his doctrine (teaching) and tradition? What do think he does know? Briefly discuss.

**Re-read 73:2-10.** Now note the change in the Psalmist’s mood after his opening thought. As we have seen in other Psalms, the Psalmist appears to take his eyes off God, looks at those around him, and draws certain temporary conclusions – particularly about the “wicked.”

- Look again at verses 2 & 3. How does the Psalmist describe his thoughts and actions and to what does he attribute that change? Have you experienced something similar? Briefly discuss.
- Re-read verses 4-10. What picture does the Psalmist draw of the arrogant and the wicked? What appears to bother him about all this? Briefly discuss.

**Re-read 73:11:** Compounding the Psalmist’s view of the wicked in the previous verses, he now notes that in addition they openly mock God. Have you experienced something similar? How did it affect you? Briefly discuss.

**Re-read 73:12-13:**

- After expressing all that he has been seeing around him, what effect does it appear to have on him? Briefly discuss.
- Do you think it is reasonable to draw from these verses that when what you are “seeing” contradicts your belief/understanding, it can lead to a doubt in faith? Does that appear to be true in the Psalm? Briefly discuss.

**Re-read 73:15-16:** Now note the apparent two-fold quandary facing the Psalmist.

- First, if he voices his doubts and potentially plants seeds of distrust (according to verse 15), what effect does he think it will have on the larger community of the faithful?
- Second, according to verse 16, when the Psalmist tries to reason out the dilemma according to his own understanding, what happens?
- Mini-lesson: Facing the two-fold dilemma, do you think one could reasonably conclude at this point that it is difficult to find the truth of faith within human intellect or even according to traditions of religious heritage? Briefly discuss.

**Re-read 73:17:** If there is a hinge verse in this Psalm, this appears to be the turning point for this Psalmist. It is possible to interpret entering the “sanctuary of God” as meaning “entering the Presence of God.” What does this verse signal to you? Discuss.

**Re-read 73:18-20:** When the Psalmist puts himself back into God’s Presence, he appears to have been given new insights.

- In what way does the Psalmist now “see” the wicked? Briefly discuss.
- Now re-read Psalm 1:4 and compare it to 73:18-20. Is it safe to say, as the Psalms suggest, that the wicked live their lives in a world of illusion? Why or why not? Discuss.

**Re-read 73:21-22:** According to these verses, when the Psalmist allowed the reality of God to flood his inner being again, what does he conclude about himself and how he has viewed God? Has anything similar happened to you? Discuss.

**Re-read 73:23-26:**

- According to these verses, when the Psalmist allowed the reality of God to flood his inner being again, what does he conclude about his relationship with God? Briefly discuss.
- Is it safe to suggest, according to these verses, that by going back to commune with God it is possible to re-orient your life perspective into a broader context that minimizes or eliminates anxieties seen or felt daily around you? Discuss.

**Re-read 73:27-28:** What does the Psalmist finally conclude after moving through emotions including assurance, skepticism, and renewal of faith? Have you encountered a similar journey? Discuss.

**Final Reflections:** In review, one could suggest that 3 things happened when the Psalmist re-filled himself with God’s Presence (verse 17).

- (1) The actions of the “wicked” are revealed as an illusion – a dream world of counterfeit securities – a dream world that is not valid where God is sovereign
- (2) God’s Person/Presence sustained the Psalmist even in ignorance (verse 22), in turmoil (verse 23), and will continue (verse 24).
- (3) The new consciousness revealed to the Psalmist put God back as the core of the Psalmist’s strength (vv. 25-26).
- Do you agree or disagree? Has anything similar happened to you? Discuss.