

Lesson 10 | August 4, 2024

Perplexed, Yet Confident in God

Study Text: Psalm 73:1–28

Central Truth: Christians receive hope and guidance from God during troubling and perplexing times.

Key Verse: Psalm 73:28

It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works (KJV).

As for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand that God’s timing is always perfect, regardless of circumstances.
- Students will evaluate their thoughts and emotions concerning perplexing situations in their lives compared to God’s Word.
- Students will seek God’s presence to gain His perspective on these confusing times.

Introducing the Study

Say: A common understanding of justice is that bad things should happen to bad people and good things, to good people. Despite how simple this seems, this principle is rarely how the world works. This lesson focuses on how to deal with the question, “Why do good things happen to bad people?” As you go through this lesson, try to put yourself into the place of the Psalmist and imagine what emotions he could have been processing.

Opening Activity—Defining Justice

Ask. What is your definition of justice? What is the role of grace in justice?

Say: When God hands out justice, it is often tempered with grace. Observers sometimes think He should have acted sooner and with greater force. When Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, God’s judgment was delayed until Lot and his family could be spared. Sometimes it appears that God is doing nothing to judge the wicked, but God’s perspective and timing are always perfect. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 73 deals with a wide range of emotions, such as guilt, anger, resentment, and hope. The psalmist Asaph struggled, thinking his good deeds were not enough, then was confused and angry that the wicked seemed to be blessed. His emotions are conveyed vividly through his visual examples, and readers can walk through his thought

process as they read. While studying this chapter, try to understand the words from the perspective of a man who is perplexed and exasperated and seeking God for answers to one of life's tough questions.

Part 1—A Righteous Person's Dilemma Comparison Takes Hold

Psalm 73:1–3

Say: Comparison is dangerous and causes people to lose perspective on their lives. They focus so intently on what others have that they minimize or even forget what they have. The Psalmist struggled with the idea that those whom he viewed as wicked were seemingly being blessed. Such comparison is dangerous and often leads to doubt and depression. We must be keenly aware of what our thoughts are focused on, because they can lead us down a path God did not intend for us. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Psalm 73 begins with the proper declaration of God's goodness, which is where the conversation should have ended. However, the Psalmist continued to look further at himself compared to the wicked people around him. In only two verses, the Psalmist's words go from the goodness of God to his own faults and envious thoughts about the wicked (verses 2–3). Christians should never use comparison to gauge themselves or their relationship with God. Paul wrote about Christians comparing themselves to others in his letter to the churches in Galatia: "Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else" (Galatians 6:4, NLT). The standard of comparison for Christian lives is God's Word. It details how we should live. The Holy Spirit also helps guide us into a deeper relationship with Him.

The Psalmist had forgotten God's character because his focus was on his own failures and comparison with those around him. People can easily draw a false conclusion from only viewing outward appearances. Christians must remember that it is God who judges, and He alone can see the inner workings of a person's heart.

Resource Packet Item 1: Comparison

Distribute the worksheet and take a few minutes to work through it. Then encourage students to reflect on the questions at the bottom of the sheet.

Discuss

- ? What are some dangers Christians face when they fall into the trap of comparison?
- ? How could a negative self-image impact how a Christian views God?

Perceived Blessings of the Wicked

Psalm 73:4–12

Say: As the saying goes, “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.” From the outside, the Psalmist could only see that the wicked appeared blessed and problem-free. Such feelings of jealousy and frustration are common for people who fall into the trap of comparison. We must be aware of this trap and be careful how we judge the perceived rewards of others. The apostle Paul tells the believers in Galatia that God’s justice cannot be mocked and that each person will reap whatever they have sown (Galatians 6:7). Christians must not judge based on the outward appearances of a situation but should trust in God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Filled with envy and resentment, the Psalmist listed what he saw as the blessings and lack of justice for the wicked around him. Through his jealous eyes, he observed that they did not feel any pain until death and did not have the troubles other people had (Psalm 73:4–5). In each of his accusations, the Psalmist compared the issues of good people to the perceived lack of difficulties of the wicked. This comparison caused him to overstate his description of their blessings. He described them as having strong and healthy bodies and not having the problems others had. He claimed they even spoke evil and boasted against the heavens (verse 9). They seemingly did all these wicked things and yet enjoyed life while their riches multiplied (verses 11–12).

Comparison blinds people to the reality of what is happening. To the Psalmist, wicked people were receiving all the benefits of riches and health while doing whatever evil thing they desired. Such comparison and self-pity will lead to a wrong image of who God is and distorted self-evaluation. God’s thoughts and ways are much higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8–9). In the time of Abram, the Amorites were a wicked people that God had not yet judged. He explained it to Abram by saying, “The sins of the Amorites do not yet warrant their destruction” (Genesis 15:16, NLT). God’s plans are beyond the understanding of His people and require faith in His character and trust in His timing.

Discuss

? Have you responded similarly to the Psalmist when comparing your life to those who seem to be living a better life?

? Share a time when you had to trust God’s timing and you saw Him come through.

Part 2—Transition to Hope From Wrong Assumptions

Psalm 73:13–14

Say: The Psalmist’s thoughts about the wicked prospering alone were not enough. He went a step further and began to evaluate himself in comparison to the pedestal he had put the wicked on. The more he thought about the injustices, the more his mind spiraled into every negative thought. After listing every outward perceived blessing of the wicked, he then turned inward and began to judge his own actions. Christians must be keenly aware that comparison will often give a false image of others and a negative view of ourselves. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Although the source of the Psalmist's difficulty came from his perception of the wicked's circumstance, his actual struggle came from how he internalized and evaluated the situation. When we perceive injustice around us, it can make just actions feel pointless. In a world where it seems that wickedness is being promoted and celebrated, one might ask whether it is worthwhile to stand for justice. Focusing on the lack of punishment for the wicked caused the Psalmist to question whether his attempts to keep his heart pure and actions innocent were worthwhile (Psalm 73:13). He evaluated his day from this perspective and felt he only had daily trouble and pain (verse 14).

This feeling of futility is not lost on modern-day Christians. The current state of the world seems to be ever-increasing wickedness. The world has become so depraved that sins are paraded around in the street and celebrated as good, while those who attempt to uphold godliness are mocked and hated. Christians must understand that perception and reality are two very different things. Though righteousness may seem futile by today's standards, the Word of God has examples and reminders to encourage believers. As wicked as these days may seem, we must remember that during the rule of the evil Roman Empire, the Church grew exponentially. We are wise to remember these words from Proverbs, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take" (Proverbs 3:5–6, NLT).

Discuss

? Discuss a time when you were so frustrated with injustices that you, like the Psalmist, felt no benefit in keeping your heart pure.

? What Scriptures give you hope when you are discouraged?

To Right Thinking

Psalm 73:15–22

Say: The slippery slope of comparison often leads to one of two places: self-destruction or an awakening revelation. Many in this situation pull away from friends, family, and church due to these negative feelings. Thankfully, in the case of the Psalmist, he awoke to a revelation. After his thoughts spiraled almost out of control, he finally made his way to the place where clarity is found: God's presence. The first and most important step to transition from confusion to hope is to enter into God's presence. "The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you'" (Psalm 32:8, NLT). When believers are confused, hurt, or in need of counsel, God's presence is the only place to be. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After opening up his thoughts and feelings to the Lord, the Psalmist wisely admitted that saying these things to other people would have been wrong (Psalm 73:15). He understood that he was speaking from a place of hurt. He had done his best to understand the age-old question, "Why do the wicked prosper?" This question still confounds people today. Some things in life are beyond human perspective. At these times, we need to seek God's counsel in His presence.

Once the Psalmist entered the sanctuary, he could finally understand the situation from God's perspective (verses 16–19). The wicked seem to prosper, but their destruction comes swiftly and often publicly. Examples abound of celebrities who seemed untouchable, yet with one decision lost all of their influence. Having entered God's sanctuary, the Psalmist was able to see this truth. God also showed him that his heart had become bitter (verses 21–22). Christians can quickly become consumed with the injustices around them, which can cause them to become hardened and bitter. However, entering God's presence can help the godly gain perspective and heal the hardness of a bitter heart.

Resource Packet Item 2: In God's Presence

Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into two groups, assigning one half of the worksheet to each. Allow a few minutes for students to answer the questions, and then discuss them together.

Discuss

? How should our perspectives change when we enter God's house?

? Discuss a time when you were struggling and things changed when you entered God's presence.

Part 3—The Promise of Lifelong Guidance Corrected Perspective

Psalm 73:23–26

Say: Upon entering the sanctuary, the Psalmist's attitude and thinking were quickly corrected. He went from questioning the futility of purity to being humbled before God. This drastic change aligned his thinking and corrected his perspective. Focusing on our problems can make them seem almost impossible to overcome. However, focusing on God's plans can give us the strength to climb any mountains that rise before us. With a corrected perspective, the Psalmist began to remind himself that the promises of God do not change. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

After realizing how foolishly he had been acting, the Psalmist made a very bold and comforting statement: "Yet I still belong to you" (Psalm 73:23, NLT). Despite being confused at the prosperity of the wicked and questioning the futility of righteousness, the Psalmist knew he still belonged to God. He was reminded that his questions, confusion, and even frustration did not separate him from God.

We can also be comforted in the realization that God is not angry at us when we ask Him questions. James encouraged us by saying, "If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking" (James 1:5, NLT). The Psalmist continued to remind himself that God would guide him with His counsel and lead him to a destiny filled with glory (Psalm 73:24). The wisdom and counsel of God always lead to a pathway of hope.

Christians should learn from the end of this chapter and take the perspective of the Psalmist. He knew that all he needed was God (verse 25). He understood that everything in his life might fail, including his health and spirit, but God would be the true strength in his heart (verse 26). Christians may become weakened and downtrodden trying to solve all the problems around them. However, understanding that God will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), that wisdom and strength can be found in His presence, and that God is for us can rebuild our confidence and boldness to stand firm in His goodness.

Resource Packet Item 3: Living by God's Perspective

Distribute the worksheet, read the Scriptures, and discuss ways to apply God's perspective to our own situations.

Discuss

? What are the benefits of reminding yourself of the truths about God even when you don't feel like it?

? Share about a hard time when God gave you strength.

Supreme Justice

Psalm 73:27–28

Say: Having taken a journey through the emotions of a righteous person in an evil time, the Psalmist came to two conclusions that shaped his understanding: God will destroy those who abandon Him, and it is good to be near God. These two statements brought clarity and finality to the ever-evolving emotions and thoughts of the Psalmist. Christians must also come to a decisive position regarding their belief in God. Jesus declared, "Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me" (Matthew 12:30, NLT). Christians must decide whom they will serve. Will we follow the path of the wicked and pursue easy riches? Or will we follow God and stand up against darkness? (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Once the Psalmist gained a godly perspective about his situation, he understood that the wicked seem to be living an easy life of riches that would ultimately end in their destruction. The author of Proverbs stated, "There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death" (14:12, NLT). The path the wicked chose was one of convenience and leisure; this would have seemed like the right path to a sinful mind. However, all who abandon God and His laws are subject to His judgment at the end of the age (Psalm 73:27). The Psalmist's final declaration was that it was good to be near God, that God was his place of safety, and that he would tell everyone of the great things God did (verse 28).

Regardless of the world's oppression, injustice, or sin, Christians have a security and a promise that can always be a reminder that in the end, God wins. God is the ultimate Victor and will be the Judge of all things. No power on the earth can overcome the

supreme justice of God. The apostle Paul asked, “If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” (Romans 8:31, NLT). We must remember that we are not to fight against people, because the true fight is against principalities, powers, and the forces of darkness behind people’s evil actions (Ephesians 6:12). Keeping these facts in mind, we need not be discouraged by the evil around us. Instead, we must remember that we serve the God who always wins and is guiding our path.

Discuss

? Share a time when God shifted or corrected your perspective about the world around you.

? How does your knowledge of God’s ultimate victory affect your decisions now?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Life is full of complicated and messy situations that we all try to understand. However, some things can’t be reasoned out with our limited understanding. Trying to do this will only result in confusion, frustration, and depression. Christians must depend on God as their source of wisdom, understanding, and hope. In God’s presence, we can find the fullness of joy, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and a godly perspective to guide and deliver us. Only when we view world events through the lens of God’s Word can we truly begin to understand and realize that our steps, no matter how difficult, are ordered by God.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Schedule regular times throughout your week to enter God’s presence privately and lay your needs before Him.
- Make a list of God’s promises of protection and guidance throughout Scripture.
- Reach out to other believers going through challenging and confusing times, and share a testimony of how God has brought you through.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Judah Turns to God for Help.

2 Chronicles 20:5–15

Tuesday:

Hope in the Lord.

Psalm 31:19–24

Wednesday:

Song of Confidence in God.

Isaiah 26:1–4

Thursday:

Comforting Words of Jesus.

John 14:1–3

Friday:

Singing in Jail Ends Well.

Acts 16:25–34

Saturday:

God's Grace Is Sufficient.

2 Corinthians 12:6–10