

Doubting God's Goodness – Psalm 73

Approach –

As you come alongside people who are hurting and try to counsel them, you'll find that along with their painful circumstances and unsettled emotions, they may also be struggling with doubt as to who God is and where He is in the midst of their suffering.

The book of Psalms is not just a happy songbook, but is also a great book to use in counseling, because there are **53 Psalms** that are written in a minor key, so that they put on display some of the confusion and emotion of the human heart.

The Psalms of Lamentation give us a place where we can hear real people work their way through some of the mess of their emotions, out loud in the presence of God.

I. Give Your Counselee Permission to Admit Their Doubts and Then Help Them to Unpack It Because It Always Involves More than Just an Intellectual Problem

If your counselee has doubts about God's goodness, it'll only make things worse to try and pretend those doubts don't exist.

Notice how the Psalmist didn't wait to wrestle with this or pretend that it wasn't happening.

Psalm 73:2 “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.”

He didn't wait until he was completely down and out! He's trying to wrestle his way through what he know about God, in the face of what feels like little or no evidence in support of it.

So listen well, and love your counselee well enough that they feel safe to admit their doubts. But then help them to unpack their doubt, because doubts about God are never just cerebral. It's always personal.

Asaph's doubts had reached this emotional boiling point because of three things that we still struggle with today:

1. Something he saw
2. Something he was personally and painfully in the middle of going through
3. Something that was raging in his heart besides just sorrow and pain

A. Look at What He Saw in v. 3

Psalm 73:3 “For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

He saw something that threw him off balance spiritually and poked a hole in his theology, so that his faith began to leak, and doubt began to creep in.

In **v. 2-12** he unleashes an emotional torrent of what he sees going on all around him that makes no sense to him, because it looks like the wicked are doing better than the righteous.

B. Look at What He Was Going Through in v. 14

Psalm 73:14 “For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

We don’t know if Asaph was going through a prolonged sickness, facing trouble in his family, an economic disaster, or some kind of huge disappointment. But whatever it was, he says every morning the pain is there all over again, to the point that he finally says...

Psalm 73:16 “When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me”

He’s just having an intellectual problem here with his theology. He’s waking up every day in the midst of a personal experience that has driven him to the point of spiritual crisis.

Our doubts are never simply intellectual. They’re always personal, because they’re being fed and filtered through our own experience. Like it or not, our personal experience impacts the shape of our personal theology. It is our sinful, default setting to shape and filter our theology through our own experience.

C. Look at What’s Raging in His Heart Besides Just Sorrow and Pain

Psalm 73:2 “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

Yes, he’s suffering and in a lot of pain, but there’s another sinful emotion that has its tentacles wrapped around his heart. And it often does, even though we don’t like to admit it.

Envy. He’s envious of the wicked. He says, ‘My life should look like. I want that kind of power, and that wealth. Why do they have it and I don’t?’

Often our suffering is mixed with our own sin. And sometimes that’s what exacerbates the level of our suffering, and keeps it so raw for so long.

II. Help Your Counselee to Resist the Urge to Isolate and Instead Move Closer to God and His People

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Psalm 73:17 “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.”

What did he go into the sanctuary to do? He went there to participate in corporate worship with the people of God. In other words, he went there to not be alone in his crisis of faith. Plead with your counselee to stay connected to the body of Christ, because they will want to pull away and isolate.

Satan loves to isolate us and to shrink our world down to the size of our latest sorrow! Don't let it happen to your counselee.

Asaph was saying, “I'm not spiritually healthy enough to be alone. I need to be with the people of God!”

The people of God, together in worship, are a powerful place of reorientation and stabilization for the troubled soul. Your counselee is far more likely to press through their doubts and come out on the other side whole – in community with other believers, instead of holed up all by themselves, saying, “Until I get this sorted out, I can't go back.”

III. Help Your Counselee to Take a Giant Step Back Away from Their Immediate Circumstances so that They Can See Themselves and God in Light of Something Bigger

Psalm 73:17 “... then I understood their END.”

When we go into the sanctuary of God it helps us to look beyond this world and into the next. Asaph says, “Then I understood their end.” Their end is what he has in view now instead of the immediate circumstances.

Up close doesn't always mean greater clarity. Up close can be blurry, confusing, and misleading. When Asaph went into the sanctuary of God he was able to step back from his immediate circumstances and to see what's really going on. He says, “Then I understood their end.”

Psalm 73:18-19 “Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors.”

And the only way I know to keep this big picture in place is by reading the Bible! We don't just read our Bibles to gather more information. Reading the Bible is how you take the elevator back up to that observation deck that allows you to have the long view, and to get the big picture, because it only takes 24 hours of real life to get confused, and overwhelmed, and angry at all of the injustice in this world.

Great chapters of the Bible that can reorient you to the bigger view:

- o Isaiah 40
- o Job 37-42

- o Romans 8
- o 2 Corinthians 4
- o Revelation 5, 19, 21

IV. Get Your Counselee to Answer the Ultimate Heart-Revealing Question that We Have Here in This Chapter

Psalm 73:25 “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.”

Asaph realizes that when he was mad, confused, and gripped with fear, it’s because he was wanting something in this life more than he wanted God.

And the Bible has a word for that – IDOLATRY!

Psalm 73:27 “You have destroyed all those who desert you for harlotry.”

Harlotry is a word picture for idolatry.

Conclusion –

Psalm 73:21-24 “²¹ Thus my heart was grieved (embittered – Heb. ‘steeped in vinegar’), and I was vexed in my mind. ²² I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. ²³ Nevertheless I am continually with You; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”

He realizes that even while he was being so senseless, ignorant, and beastly God was still holding onto him!

Asaph is saying, “I acted like an animal but you’ve treated me like a son, and refused to let go of me!

For assurance that God will not let go of your counselee, take them to **Romans 8** – that also wrestles with the problem of suffering in this world – but it takes us back to the cross as the assurance that God loves us and will not let us go.

Romans 8:30-39 ³⁰Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. ³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? ³³Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written: *'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.'* ³⁷Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."