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The Nearness of God Is My Good

Envy of the wicked, the view from the sanctuary, and learning that God Himself is the portion.

PSALM 73 & HEBREWS 13:5 (LSB) · A STUDY ON ENVY, DOUBT, AND CONTENTMENT

“But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had almost slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, I saw the peace of the wicked.”

PSALM 73:2-3, LSB

I love this psalm because it is honest about something I have felt and did not want to admit. You look up one day and notice that people who want nothing to do with God seem to be doing just fine, better than fine, while you are trying to walk with Him and getting knocked around for it. If you have ever felt that quietly, keep reading, because a worship leader felt it loud enough to write it down and God put it in the Bible on purpose.

What the passage says

Psalm 73 opens the third book of the Psalms, written by Asaph, one of the worship leaders David appointed. He starts with the thing he actually believes: “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart” (73:1). And then, in the very next breath, he tells you how close he came to losing his footing over it.

His problem was not some theory. He looked around and saw the wicked doing great. No pain in their death, bodies fat and at ease, not beaten down like everybody else. Pride worn like a necklace, violence draped on like a coat (73:4-6). They mock, they set their mouths against heaven, and they say the quiet part out loud: “How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?” (73:11).

What almost took him out was the comparison. Their ease sitting right next to his suffering made him wonder if all his obedience had been a waste: “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence, for I have been stricken all day long and reproved every morning” (73:13-14).

The honest part most of us skip

Watch this, because Asaph does not fake it. He names the envy flat out, and it is one of the most honest confessions in the whole book of Psalms. And here is the thing I want you to see: the doubt itself is not what the psalm warns against. What he refuses to do is broadcast it in a way that would trip other people

up: “If I had said, ‘I will recount thus,’ behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children” (73:15). He takes the struggle to God before he takes it to the congregation. Even in the middle of real doubt, there is a discipline to watching your words.

Until I entered the sanctuary

“When I gave thought to know this, it was trouble in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.”

PSALM 73:16-17, LSB

The whole psalm turns on one word: until. Nothing about the wicked changed. What changed was where Asaph was standing. In the sanctuary, in the presence of God, he finally saw the end of the story instead of the middle of it. “Surely You set them in slippery places... How they become desolate in a moment!” (73:18-19). The prosperity he was envying turns out to be a dream that vanishes the second the Lord wakes up (73:20).

That is exactly how envy does its damage. It crops the picture. It shows you their ease and hides their ending. Worship is where the frame gets pulled back out to the truth. I need that more than I want to admit, because my phone crops the picture down all day long.

Seeing straight again

Then Asaph turns the honesty on himself: “When my heart was embittered and I was pierced within, then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like an animal before You” (73:21-22). He does not make an excuse for the bitterness. He calls it what it was, beastly and blind.

And then comes the hinge word of the entire psalm: nevertheless. “Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand” (73:23). While he was busy envying and slipping, God was still holding on to him. The grip that kept him was never his own. Sit with that one, because it means He is holding you through the exact seasons when you are least proud of your own heart.

What he finally wanted

“Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever.”

PSALM 73:25-26, LSB

This is the cure for envy, and notice what it is not. It is not mainly “the wicked will get what is coming to them.” It is a reordered desire. When God Himself becomes the portion, the prosperity of the wicked loses its grip, because they are holding the one thing that ends and Asaph is holding the one thing that does not. He lands right back where he started the psalm, but now he means it all the way down: “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good” (73:28).

The same struggle in Psalm 37

Asaph was not the only one to hit this wall. David walks the exact same road in Psalm 37, and he opens with the very command Asaph had to preach back to himself: “Do not fret because of evildoers; do not be envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass” (37:1-2). Same envy, same short-sightedness, same way out: look at the end. “I have seen a wicked, violent man spreading himself like a luxuriant tree... Then he passed away, and behold, he was no more” (37:35-36).

Two writers, generations apart, hit the same crisis of faith and climb out the same way. Not by getting an explanation for the timing, but by getting a longer view of God's justice.

The follow-up: Hebrews 13:5

“Make sure that your way of life is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.’”

HEBREWS 13:5, LSB

What Psalm 73 diagnoses, Hebrews 13:5 treats. Envy of the wicked is usually envy of what they have, and the writer of Hebrews goes straight at the love of money with one prescription: contentment, grounded not in your bank account but in a promise. And that line is itself a quotation, spoken first to Israel and to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31:6, 8; Joshua 1:5). The reason you can hold your stuff loosely is that God holds you permanently.

And this is anything but a rare theme. Godliness with contentment is great gain, and the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:6-10). “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am” (Philippians 4:11-13). Do not lay up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-21). The rich fool gained the world and lost his soul (Luke 12:15-21). It was Israel's besetting sin in the wilderness too, never content with God's provision and always grumbling for more. So the question the passage puts to us is uncomfortably plain: is my heart set on His provision, or on getting what the prosperous have?

Why this is hard

Comparison is wired into us, and everything around us turns the volume up on it. We rarely envy strangers. We envy the ones close to us, the people our age who somehow skip the very hardship we are walking through right now. And here is the honest part: the wicked really do prosper sometimes, so the feeling is not based on a lie. Psalm 73 never tells you the feeling is crazy. It tells you it is incomplete. You are comparing your middle to their middle and calling it the end of the story.

Living it out

Take the doubt to God before you take it to people. Asaph refused to trip the flock with his struggle, but he did not bury it either. He carried it into the sanctuary. So go to worship, go to the Word, go to honest,

unedited prayer, the kind where you actually say the ugly part.

Widen the frame. When envy crops the picture down to their ease, make yourself preach the ending, theirs and yours. Reorder the desire. Ask for God Himself, not just for relief from the comparison, because “Whom have I in heaven but You?” is a prayer before it is ever a feeling. And hold your possessions loosely, practicing contentment as obedience on the strength of a promise you did not earn.

A deeper study: envy, justice, and contentment through Scripture

- **Psalm 73:** the full arc, from the almost-slip to “the nearness of God is my good.”
- **Psalm 37:** David's parallel struggle, “do not fret,” and the end of the wicked.
- **Psalm 49:** the folly of trusting riches; the wise and the foolish share one grave.
- **Psalm 16:5-11:** “Yahweh is the portion of my inheritance”; pleasures forever at His right hand.
- **Job 21:** Job's raw version of the same question, the wicked who spend their days in prosperity.
- **Jeremiah 12:1:** “Why does the way of the wicked prosper?”
- **Habakkuk 1:13:** how can a holy God look on the treacherous and stay silent?
- **Malachi 3:13-18:** “It is vain to serve God,” and the book of remembrance.
- **Hebrews 13:5-6:** contentment grounded in “I will never desert you.”
- **Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 and Joshua 1:5:** the original promise Hebrews is quoting.
- **1 Timothy 6:6-10:** godliness with contentment; the love of money as a root.
- **Philippians 4:11-13:** the learned secret of contentment.
- **Matthew 6:19-21, 33:** treasure in heaven; seek first the kingdom.
- **Luke 12:15-21:** the rich fool.
- **2 Corinthians 4:16-18:** momentary affliction and the eternal weight of glory.

Your challenge this week

Name the comparison. Write down the specific person or situation whose “prosperity” keeps pulling at you. Getting it out of the fog and onto paper is the first honest step Asaph took.

Take it to the sanctuary, not the group chat. Bring the envy to God in prayer and to His Word before you air it to people. Ask Him to widen the frame.

Preach the end. For each thing you envy, write the end of the story next to it, theirs and yours, in the light of Psalm 73:17-19 and 73:26.

Practice one act of contentment. Give something away, resist one purchase, or just thank God out loud for a provision you have been overlooking. Attach it to the promise of Hebrews 13:5.

Ask the heart question. Sit honestly with the psalm's questions and your own: Is my heart set on God, or on what the prosperous have? Do I trust that He will provide everything my family needs in this moment?

The Gospel underneath it

Asaph's cure was the nearness of God, and the whole Bible's answer to that longing is the Gospel. The nearness he reached for in the sanctuary came near for good in Jesus Christ, God with us, who left the true prosperity of heaven, was not envied but despised, and had nowhere to lay His head. He took the affliction Asaph feared and the end the wicked earn, dying in the place of sinners and rising so that God could be our portion forever.

The promise “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” is unbreakable only because Christ was forsaken in our place, crying “why have You forsaken Me?” so that we never would be. When He is your portion, the prosperity of the wicked is not worth envying, and the provision of God is always enough.