

Booklet ~Series, Stand Firm & Pray Fiercely. Praying Our Doubts

Psalms 73. A psalm of Asaph.

1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.
3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
4 They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.
5 They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills.
6 Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.
7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits.
8 They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression.
9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.
10 Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.
11 They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?"
12 This is what the wicked are like— always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.
13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence.
14 All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.
15 If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children.
16 When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply
17 till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.
18 Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.
19 How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!
20 They are like a dream when one awakes; when you arise, Lord,
you will despise them as fantasies.
21 When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,
22 I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.
23 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.
27 Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
28 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.

Prayer doesn't change **GOD**; it changes **US**.

1. Doubts happen to **ANYBODY**.

Psalms 73:1-2
A Psalm of Asaph.

1 Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.

Doubts can lead to **STRONGER** faith.

"If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties." — Francis Bacon

John 20:24-28

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

2. What causes Doubt?

A. Doubt happens when what you **KNOW** in your head **CLASHES** with what you **FEEL** in your heart.

Psalms 73:3-16

3 For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.[a]

5 They are free from common human burdens;
they are not plagued by human ills.

6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence.

7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity[b];
their evil imaginations have no limits.

8 They scoff, and speak with malice;
with arrogance they threaten oppression.

9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.

10 Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.[c]

11 They say, "How would God know?
Does the Most High know anything?"

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

13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.

14 All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.

15 If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.

16 When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply

3. How do we overcome Doubt?

A. Pray, "Lord Jesus, help me to **DOUBT** my **DOUBT**."

Psalms 73:3

3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

"Your motives are not often pure when it comes to doubts. Asaph is really saying, "I never would've been angry at God for allowing the wicked to prosper if I hadn't started wanting a piece of the same pie they had. I'm angry because I'm not getting my part. I'm not getting the comforts. I'm not making any money. I'm not moving up in the world..." — Tim Keller

B. Pray, "Lord Jesus, help me to **ENTER** the **TEMPLE**."

Psalm 73:16-17

*16 When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply
17 till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.*

C. Pray, "Lord Jesus, help me to **CHOOSE** my **FOOTHOLDS**."

Psalm 73:18-19

*18 Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.
19 How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!*

"I saw a gap between the possible and the proved. How was I to cross that gap. I didn't want to jump in faith. If I was going to stake my whole life on the risen Christ, I wanted proof. I wanted certainty. I wanted letters of fire across the sky. I got nothing, but then I realized ... my God! Then I realized there was a gap behind me as well."

"I suddenly realized, of course, there'd have to be a leap of faith to acceptance because I couldn't prove Christ was God, but by God there was no certainty or proof that he was not. Therefore, to even go back was a leap of faith. This was not to be borne. I could not reject Jesus without great faith. When I realized it would take enormous faith just to reject Jesus, I knew what to do. There was only one thing I could do. Once I saw the gap behind me, I flung myself over the gap toward Jesus."— Sheldon Vanauken

D. Pray, "Lord Jesus, help me to **FEEL** for your **HAND**."

Psalm 73:23-24

*23 Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.*

Further Applications:

1. What did you hear?
 2. What do you think and feel?
 3. What will you do?
 4. Now, talk to Jesus Christ...
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Soul Food Day 1

Psalm 73:1-3

A psalm of Asaph.

*1 Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.
3 For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

John 20:24-29

24 Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." 26 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Doubts happen to anybody.

Doubts are not just things for unbelievers. If you're a person who is looking at Christianity and you've been sort of seeking and trying to figure it out, you say, "I have a problem with doubts. I consider myself outside the Christian faith. I don't think I am a Christian," of course, you have doubts, but I have news for you. If you're a believer, very often doubts come along too. Doubts can happen to anyone.

Who is praying Psalm 73? The Bible says the man's name is Asaph. He was one of the authors of the Psalms. The Psalms weren't all written by David. Here we have one of Asaph's psalms, but here's the point. Even though you may have never heard of him, I would suggest to you he has gotten a little further in the spiritual life than you or I will ever get. For he's an author of Scripture. That's pretty high. Is that on your goals? "Write some Scripture before I die." It's not even on my goals. I don't even aspire to it. Here's a godly man, more godly than you or I, who says, "I was about to blow everything. I was ready to throw it all over." "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

This man is obviously a man of high spiritual attainment, great wisdom, and yet he's filled with doubts, doubts so severe he was ready to throw it all over, yet he's an author of Scripture. Doubts can happen to anybody.

**In fact, in some ways your faith doesn't grow without doubts.
Prayer doesn't change GOD; it changes US.**

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus...
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Soul Food Day 2

Psalm 73:11-17

*11 They say, "How would God know?
Does the Most High know anything?"*

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

*13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.*

*14 All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.*

*15 If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.*

*16 When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply*

*17 till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.*

Doubts come because we can't believe the evidence in light of what's happening in our hearts.

What causes this man's doubts? It says in verse 3, "For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." What he says here is two things. "... I saw the prosperity of the wicked." There are many things that can create doubts. In this case, it's injustice, evil and suffering. He looks out there and he sees the injustice. He sees people who are wicked and who are selfish.

He talks about very self-promoting people, many very ruthless people, many very smart people, but people who are basically promoting themselves and cutting throats and being very ruthless, and they're doing very well. A lot of people who wash their hands in innocence and are trying to live just lives and generous lives and simple lives and humble lives find their lives aren't going well at all. So he sees the injustice.

He says, "I saw it." If you want to understand doubt really, you have to realize doubt is never just a matter of thinking. No, look what happened in verses 13 and 14. It says, "Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued ..." He always knew about injustice, but recently it hit him. This is what real doubt is like. Most people think faith is opposed to reason, but Paul doesn't say that. 2 Corinthians 5:7, "For we walk by faith, not by sight ..." He doesn't say we walk by faith, not by reason. He doesn't say faith is opposed to reason, not a bit. What he's actually saying is faith is holding onto what you know to be true in spite of how things appear to your heart.

Faith is not holding onto something in spite of the evidence. Faith is holding onto something in spite of the appearances. Doubts come when personal experience makes what your mind knows unreal to your heart. For example, you might say, "Look, I know there's suffering in the world, but do you know what? God is so much wiser than we are. Therefore, there might be some purpose. There's probably some purpose in the suffering we don't know," until it happens to you. When the suffering actually hits you, you haven't really gotten new information that undermines the logic. What happens is it just doesn't feel real. It doesn't seem real.

**Faith is holding onto something in spite of the appearances.
Prayer doesn't change GOD; it changes US.**

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus
-

Soul Food Day 3

Psalm 73:3

For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Psalm 139:23-24

*Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Doubt your doubts.

You mustn't just doubt the faith. You also have to doubt your doubts about the faith. What do I mean by that? Look what the Psalmist does. "For I envied the arrogant ..."

Your motives are never pure when it comes to doubts. You might have a real intellectual issue. He looks at injustice, and the Bible insists that injustice is a great problem for believers in God. The injustice and suffering and evil in the world is a real problem, but he admits if he wasn't actually having personal problems, if his life hadn't been going badly, he never would have been bothered by it. He's really saying, "I never would've been angry at God for allowing the wicked to prosper if I hadn't started wanting a piece of the same pie they had. I'm angry because I'm not getting my part. I'm not getting the comforts. I'm not making any money. I'm not moving up in the world."

There's an interesting place in *The Great Divorce* where C.S. Lewis ... It's a fiction novel about a busload of people from hell who go to the outskirts of heaven. People from heaven come down and meet old friends who are now living in hell. They try to get the people in hell to repent.

One of the most interesting parts is where, let's just say, two academic spirits, a spirit from heaven and a spirit from hell meet. The academic spirit from heaven, who had once been an atheist talks to the academic person from hell and says, "One of the reasons you're in hell is you don't believe." The academic spirit from hell says, "That's ridiculous. These are just honest opinions I have. Who would be penalized for an honest opinion?"

This is what the spirit from heaven says: "Wait a minute. My opinions were not completely honest. You know. When we were in college, we found ourselves in contact with certain currents of ideas, and we plunged into them because they seemed modern and successful. At college, we just started automatically writing the kinds of essays that got good marks and saying the kinds of things that won applause.

We were playing with loaded dice, though. We didn't want the faith to be true. We were afraid of crude salvationism. We were afraid of a breach with the spirit of the age. We were afraid of ridicule of our smart and intelligent friends, afraid (above all) of real spiritual fears and hopes." He's just saying there are always a lot of dishonest motives in doubts, even when you experience evil and suffering.

There's always some dishonesty in our doubts. Even in suffering, if you're saying, "I can't believe in a God who would let this happen," what you're really saying is, "Because I can't see a purpose in it, there can't be one." There's always some pride. There's always some desire to control. There's always a setting of self up.

**There's always some dishonesty in our doubts.
Prayer doesn't change GOD; it changes US.**

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus...
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Soul Food Day 4

Psalm 73:16-17, 27-28

*When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply
till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.
Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
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.*

Mark 9:21-24

*So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?"
And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."
Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"*

Enter the temple.

Verse 17 says to enter the sanctuary. What did he go into the sanctuary to do? When he went into the sanctuary, he went in there and participated in worship. Here's the principle. You do not get into doubts only by thinking only. Therefore, you're not going to get through the doubts only by thinking. You got into the doubts, as we've been trying to show you previously, through experience.

You might say, "When I was at University, I was reading all these skeptical books, and that's why I lost my faith." No, not just that. You also had all these intelligent friends around you who were laughing at Christianity too. And you certainly didn't want to look like a jerk.

It's never only just thinking. You're a whole person. There's personal experience involved. If that's the case, if you don't get into doubts only through thinking, you'll never get out of doubts only through thinking. What did the Psalmist do? He prayed. He sang. He approached God. If you're a skeptic, even if you're a skeptic who says, "I don't even believe in Christianity. Are you suggesting I come to church or I pray to God?" Absolutely, it's not fair otherwise.

This world gives you all kinds of sense experience that says God is not real, so you have to do something to engage your senses as well as your intellect. You need to sing, for example. You need to sing a hymn. You need to actually at least sit down every so often and say, "Lord God, I don't know if you're there, but if you are there, you're a person and you can hear me. I need your help."

**This world gives you all kinds of sense experience that says God is not real,
so you have to do something to engage your senses as well as your intellect.**

Prayer doesn't change GOD; it changes US.

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus
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Soul Food Day 5

Psalm 73:23-26

*Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And 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.*

Feel for Jesus' hand.

The doubter says in verse 23, "Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand." If you pray through your doubts, you'll start to realize, "The bottom line is I'm afraid of meeting God. A lot of my doubts are not just intellectual. I don't want to meet him. I'm afraid of what he's going to do to me. I'm afraid of what he might command me to do. I'm afraid of not being accepted. I'm just afraid."

Yet this man says in verse 23 ... The word *yet* means nevertheless. "I was grieved. I was embittered. I was like a beast toward you. Yet I realized you have been holding my hand all through the doubts. I acted like an animal. You've treated me like a son." How can he know that? Ultimately, unless you get assurance of a gracious God, you're never going to get through your doubts. How can you know that? How is it possible to know that?

The psalmist went into the temple, and what would he have seen? He would've seen the sacrifice for sins. How can you know in spite of all your doubts, even being bitter, even acting like a beast, how can you know if you actually get to God he's going to take you in? Here's the answer. There's a hymn that has a really great depiction of doubt. It goes ...

"When darkness hides his lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace."

There's a perfect example of doubt, because doubt is when you don't feel God there, when it just doesn't feel he's there at all. Darkness is hiding his face. How do you know if you go to God, God won't hide his face from you? The answer is because there is one Person who experienced greater doubt than anybody in history. There was a Person who was completely faithful to God and yet God hid his face from him.

When Jesus Christ was on the cross, he experienced the greatest spiritual separation from God than anybody has ever experienced. On the cross God let go of Jesus' hand. God let him slip. God gave him what doubters deserve so we doubters can know in spite of all we do, God never lets go of our hand. God let go of his hand and so in our spiritual separation He will never let go of us.

You have to know that. You have to know there is grace, that Jesus Christ substituted himself and took upon himself everything we deserved. Otherwise you just are not going to have the ability to work through your doubts. Are you ready for that then?

**When darkness hides his lovely face, you can rest on his unchanging grace.
Prayer doesn't change God, it changes us.**

Application

- What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
 - What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
 - What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
 - Now talk to Jesus...
-

houseChurchMaterial

1. Have different readers share the verse from 2 or more translations

2. Reflect between each reading Scripture

Psalm 73
A psalm of Asaph.

- 1 Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.*
- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.*
- 3 For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*
- 4 They have no struggles;
their bodies are healthy and strong.[a]*
- 5 They are free from common human burdens;
they are not plagued by human ills.6*
- Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence.*
- 7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity[b];
their evil imaginations have no limits.*
- 8 They scoff, and speak with malice;
with arrogance they threaten oppression.*

9 *Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.*
 10 *Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.[c]*
 11 *They say, "How would God know?
Does the Most High know anything?"*
 12 *This is what the wicked are like—
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.*
 13 *Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.*
 14 *All day long I have been afflicted,
and every morning brings new punishments.*
 15 *If I had spoken out like that,
I would have betrayed your children.*
 16 *When I tried to understand all this,
it troubled me deeply*
 17 *till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.*
 18 *Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.*
 19 *How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!*
 20 *They are like a dream when one awakes;
when you arise, Lord,
you will despise them as fantasies.*
 21 *When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,*
 22 *I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.*
 23 *Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.*
 24 *You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.*
 25 *Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*
 26 *My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.*
 27 *Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.*
 28 *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.*

Application

1. What did you hear? What did the Holy Spirit say to you?
2. What do you think and how do you feel about what the Holy Spirit said? How do you feel comforted, convicted & challenged?
3. What does the Holy Spirit want you to do now?
4. Share any of the above discoveries with your houseChurch. Ask each other, "What is your nugget?"

Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel about the statement, "Prayer doesn't change God, it changes us?"
2. "Doubts happen to anybody. In fact, in some ways your faith doesn't grow without doubts." Would you agree this assertion? Why or why not? Offer your personal experiences.
3. Reflect on verse 3 and share why the psalmist is being tempted to doubt?

"Faith is not holding onto something in spite of the evidence. Faith is holding onto something in spite of the appearances. Doubts come when personal experience makes what your mind knows unreal to your heart. For example, you might say, "Look, I know there's suffering in the world, but do you know what? God is so much wiser than we are. Therefore, there might be some purpose. There's probably some purpose in the suffering we don't know," until it happens to you. When the suffering actually hits you, you haven't really gotten new information that undermines the logic. What happens is it just doesn't feel real. It doesn't seem real."

4. Meditate on Psalm 73:16-17, 27-28. We need to engage in acts of faith in order to overcome our doubts. This world gives you all kinds of sense experience that says God is not real, so you have to do something to engage your senses as well as your intellect. You need to sing, for example. You need to sing a hymn. You need to actually at least sit down every so often and say, "Lord God, I don't know if you're there, but if you are there, you're a person and you can hear me. I need your help." Share your thoughts these.
5. Reflect on Psalm 73:23-26. Feel for Jesus' hand when you doubt! On the cross God let go of Jesus' hand. God let him slip. God gave him what doubters deserve so we doubters can know in spite of all we do, God never lets go of our hand. God let go of his hand and so in our spiritual separation He will never let go of us.

Now talk to Jesus...