



#9 *"Summer in the Psalms" Series*

It's Not Fair - Psalm 73

Forest Park Church

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By Jason Corder

We're all born with a fairness meter:

"It's not fair" might be the first full sentence some of us ever spoke.

- Nobody teaches a toddler that phrase — it comes standard. Set two cookies in front of one child and one in front of another, and watch the math happen instantly.
- We're born with a fairness meter, and it never stops running. We just get quieter about it as we grow up. The grown-up version doesn't shout across the dinner table anymore — it simmers on the drive home.

Picture the driver who roars up the shoulder, cuts back in three cars ahead of you, and sails right through the light you're now stuck at. No ticket. No consequence. Just gone — ahead of you. You obeyed every line painted on that road, and you're the one sitting still.

Now take that one intersection and stretch it across an entire life: I want to tell you about a man who almost walked away from God.

- He wasn't a skeptic.
- He wasn't a prodigal.
- He was on the worship team — he led God's people into His presence every single week, and privately, quietly, his own faith was slipping through his fingers.

And the thing that nearly took him out wasn't a tragedy, and it wasn't the kind of temptation you'd expect from the front of a church. It was a feeling most of us had sometime this past week.

He looked around at people who didn't care about God at all — and he watched them win. That's the world **Asaph** is staring at — and it nearly took his faith out.

The question this psalm invites us to consider is this: *How do we live in a broken world without growing cynical? How do we love broken people without our souls getting crushed?*

Psalm 73:1–2

*Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.*

² *But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.*

³ *For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

I. Surely God Is Good

The conclusion stated first — "Surely God is good."

- Asaph tells you where he lands before he tells you how close he came to falling.
- Like a friend who opens with "everything's fine, but—," he wants you to know the ending so you can analyze the middle of the story with him.
- It's the worship leader saying this, the one who's supposed to have it together. If he can almost slip, so can the person in the third row who looks fine on Sunday.

But he admits — this almost got me. "My feet had almost slipped."

- Not a fall — a slip. Not the dramatic, obvious collapse, but the quiet erosion.
- Nobody plans a slip. It's not a decision, it's a drift — the slow loss of footing while you're looking at something else.
- What almost took him down wasn't persecution or tragedy — it was a comparison. He nearly lost his faith not in a crisis but in a quiet moment of looking sideways.

In v. 3 he names the culprit plainly: envy.

- He watched the arrogant prosper, and something in him started to corrode.

Envy rarely announces itself — it wears disguises: "I'm just being honest," "it's not fair," "must be nice."

- It's the coworker who cut corners and got the promotion,
- the neighbor who doesn't darken a church door and just built the addition.
- That's the exact emotion Asaph is staring at.

The danger wasn't out there in the wicked — it was in him and how he looked at them.

Psalm 73:3

*For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

II. The Poison of Envy

Envy isn't merely wanting what they have; it's *resenting that they have it*.
It seems to be the one sin that gives its owner no pleasure at all, only ache.

The word in v. 3 (*qānā'* / the noun *qin'ah*) is one of the most morally two-sided words in the Old Testament. Same root, opposite outcomes — it all depends on the target.

Aimed upward, it's holy.

- God calls Himself a "jealous God" (*'ēl qannā'*, Ex. 20:5) — not petty, but rightly zealous for what belongs to Him: His people, His glory, His name.
- Phinehas is commended for it (Num. 25:11),
- Elijah cries, "I have been very *zealous* for the LORD" (1 Kings 19:10) — same word.

Aimed sideways, that identical fire curdles into envy.

- The intensity God designed to burn *for* Him gets redirected at the neighbor's driveway.
- Zeal wants God to have His due; envy wants *me* to have my neighbor's due — and resents that he got it first.

So envy isn't a foreign invader; it's a *good engine wired to the wrong thing*.

- The same heat that could have been worship becomes poison.
- That's why it's so hard to shake by willpower — you can't just extinguish the fire, you have to *re-aim* it.

The most famous use of this root is "*Zeal for your house has consumed me*" (Ps. 69:9) — **a line the Gospel puts on observers' lips as Jesus cleanses the *temple*** (John 2:17).

- The very word Asaph uses for his envy is the word used for Christ's holy passion for the sanctuary.
- Asaph's fire was pointed at the wicked man's prosperity; Jesus' fire was pointed at His Father's house.

The cure for misfired zeal is to follow that fire back to where it belongs — into the sanctuary we will get to that in a minute..... (v. 17).

A: Envy magnifies (vv. 4–12)

The catalog reads like a highlight reel

- no struggles,
- healthy bodies,
- carefree lives,
- pride worn like a necklace
- and violence like a robe (vv. 4–6),
- even the nerve to mock God: "How would God even know?" (v. 11).

B: Envy edits reality

It hands the wicked a better life than they actually have and never shows you the footnotes.

C: Envy turns inward (vv. 13–14)

The poison meant for *them* ends up in *him*

- "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure."
- Not on the target, on the host.
- *Why am I even bothering to do the right thing?*

The corrosion of Envy:

1. Envy → cynicism → *why be good at all*.
2. *Envy isolates* (v. 15): a secret, lonely torture. Asaph *restrains his tongue* for the sake of God's children — he won't let his private crisis wreck other people's faith. (Cross-ref: James 3:1.)
3. *Envy can't be out-thought* (v. 16): reasoning it out was "oppressive" (*āmāl* — laborious, wearying).

You don't argue your way out of envy. You have to be *relocated* — which is exactly where v. 17 takes him.

Psalm 73:17

..... *until I went into the sanctuary of God;*
then I discerned their end.

III. Until I Went Into the Sanctuary

The whole Psalm changes with one word: “until”

- Everything before "until" is complaint; everything after is recognition, confession, and praise.

What changed wasn't his information — it was his location.

- **He stopped calculating and stepped into the presence of God.** That is the power of worship.
- He didn't get new data about the wicked; he got new *altitude*.
- He walked in carrying envy and walked out carrying awe.

This is the power of REAL worship:

- It doesn't hand you new facts, it hands you a new vantage point.
- The wicked's prosperity looked one way from the outside and another way from the sanctuary — like stepping in out of a storm and realizing only then how loud it had been.
- **Worship is where the volume of the world gets turned down enough that you can hear the truth again.**

"Then I understood their final end." Envy can only see the middle of the story; worship lets you see the end.

- Envy had him reading everyone's ledger but skipping the last column. In God's presence, he finally turned the page to the total.
- Notice it's not that his problems shrank; it's that God got *bigger* — and everything else returned to its true size.

Why worship and not just study?

- v. 16 already tried thinking, and it landed him in exhaustion.
- Perspective is restored in God's presence — not in the classroom.
- And notice *where* this happens — the sanctuary is where God's people gather. He didn't reason his way back alone in his study; he was carried back in the company of worshipers. This is the argument for showing up.

The sanctuary Asaph entered pointed forward to a better one.

John 2:19–21

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

We "go in" not to a building but into God's presence through Christ.

- The veil is torn (Matt. 27:51) — the door Asaph could only step near; we walk all the way through. He got a room; we get the throne.
- Where Asaph got perspective, we get a Person who transforms our perspective from the inside out..... and worship is how we come near Him.

Psalms 73:18–22

*Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.*

¹⁹ *How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!*

²⁰ *Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as*

phantoms.

²¹ *When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,*

²² *I was brutish and ignorant;
I was like a beast toward you.*

IV. The Hidden Reality of Sin

In vv. 18–20, Asaph reframes "them."

- He recognizes the prosperity he envied is "slippery ground." The very thing that looked like their security turns out to be the least stable ground of all.
- Here's the irony he didn't see from the outside: it turns out *they're* the ones on thin ice. He envied people standing on a trapdoor.
- What looked like a mountain was a mirage. God "sets them in slippery places" and they're "swept away" — the ascent he resented was really a setup of their own choosing for the fall.
- Their whole life is "like a dream when one awakes." Vivid while you're in it, gone the second the light comes on. **Asaph had been losing his faith over a life that evaporates at sunrise.**
- Everything he'd been measuring by was temporary; **he just couldn't tell until he saw the ending (v. 17).**

In vv. 21–22, Asaph reframes himself.

- "I was senseless and ignorant" — now that he sees clearly, he turns the verdict inward. The problem was never God's justice; it was his own blindness.
- "I was a brute beast before you" (*băhēmôt* — an animal). The very envy that judged everyone else ends up being the thing that convicts him.
- Envy hadn't just been wrong; it had made him less than human. **Comparison had turned a worshiper into livestock — all appetite, no perspective.**
- I appreciate the honest confession — no self-pity, no excuses, no blaming the wicked for his own bitterness. He owns it.

- And notice the mercy buried in the wording: he was a brute beast "*before you*" — even at his most senseless, he was still in God's presence. He never actually left the hand that was holding him (v. 23). **The confession is humbling, but it's not hopeless.**

Psalm 73:23–26

*Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.*

²⁴ *You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.*

²⁵ *Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.*

²⁶ *My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength^[b] of my heart and my portion forever.*

*For behold, those who are far from you shall perish;
you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.*

²⁸ ***But for me it is good to be near God;
I have made the Lord God my refuge,
that I may tell of all your works.***

Conclusion: Good to Be Near God

The verdict:

"But as for me, it is good to be near God" (v. 28). Not "good to have the answers" — good to be *near*.

- The world says winners take all; Jesus says *I am your portion*. The whole psalm has been the distance between those two sentences.
- So the sermon can't end in the sanctuary and leave you in the parking lot. Two honest questions carry it home.

Question 1: How do I worship? (How do I actually "go in"?)

Gather. Asaph didn't get his perspective back alone in his study — he got it in the sanctuary, among God's people.

Sunday isn't maintenance; it's where the vantage point gets restored.

1. Open the Word. The sanctuary is where God speaks and we listen.
2. Come to the Table. The Lord's Supper is the gospel's "holy unfairness" you can hold in your hand — take and eat, and be reminded of what God has given you.
3. Sing before you feel it. Worship re-sorts the loves (v. 25); praise is how the heart gets re-tuned. You don't wait to feel it to sing — sometimes you sing your way back to feeling it.
4. Be honest, Bring the envy in. Asaph's worship included brutal honesty (vv. 21–22). You don't have to clean up before you come in; you come in *because* you're not clean.

Question 2: Where do I find sanctuary?

- Not first a place, but a Person. Asaph's sanctuary was a building that pointed forward; ours is Christ (John 2:19–21). The veil is torn — the door he could only step near, we walk all the way through.
- Which means sanctuary is *portable*. "Near God" is available to a farmer in the cab of a tractor, a mom at the kitchen sink, a man who feels the ice cracking under him at 2 a.m. If Christ is the temple, you're never far from the door.
- Build a habit of quiet time and keep the place. A daily time and a literal spot to "go in," and a weekly gathering you refuse to miss.
Perspective is perishable; it has to be renewed!

And notice where worship finally sends him: **"that I may tell of all your works"** (v. 28).

Going in isn't the end — the rescued worshiper walks back out as a testimony.

You become sanctuary-access for the next person on thin ice.

The two questions we started with:

1. How do I live in a broken world without going cynical?

Keep your focus on what God is *doing*, not just on what the wicked are getting away with. Cynicism grows when you stare at the problem; hope grows when you watch the Worker.

2 Peter 3:9 — "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

What looks like God being *slow*:

- the cheaters unpunished,
- justice delayed

Isn't absence; it's *patience*.

The same delay that makes you cynical is the delay that's leaving the door open for people to come home.

- Even the wicked man's unpunished afternoon is mercy in motion — time God is spending trying to save him.
- The pause you resent might be the very thing that saves someone you love.
- It might be the thing that once saved you.

So the ending you can't see yet (v. 17) isn't just their judgment — it's a rescue window still open.

That turns bitterness into prayer: not "why haven't you dealt with them?" but "Lord, reach them before the door closes."

And we don't hold that perspective by accident; Christ demonstrated it for us, and sometimes we have to be reminded of it.

- Not because the news gets better, but because you need the vantage point again — every week, every morning.

2. How do I love broken people without my soul being crushed?

Because of your relationship and the leadership of the father "you hold my right hand" (v. 23) and God is your portion (v. 26), the math is completely different.

- You're not loving out of your own crushable reserves.

- The person running on empty gets brittle and resentful;
- the person who's already full can spend and spend without going bankrupt.

Broken people are draining precisely because we try to be their source. But you're not the well — you're a pipe. You give what's flowing *through* you from a supply that never runs dry.

- The led can lead others. You can help sort through someone's mess without being undone by it, because your footing isn't in their gratitude or their progress — it's in a grip that was never yours to maintain (v. 23).
- This is how Asaph loves the very people he just envied: from security, not from scarcity.

Envy asks, "Why do they get so much?" Worship walks you into the sanctuary until you can finally answer, "Look what I already have."