


2021.11.21



A publication of  the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- 1 Why do you think we have difficulty with the idea of wicked people living easy, prosperous lives? **Where** do we get the idea that things **shouldn't** be that way?
- 2 Let's get to know Asaph a bit. Read 1 Chronicles 6:31 & 39. Asaph was one of the song leaders King David put in charge. Psalms 50 & 73-83 are some of the songs he wrote. Skim them to get an idea of the issues he wrote about. What are some of his common themes?
- 3 Read Psalm 73. List the things (v. 1-12) that occupied Asaph's attention and drove his interpretations of life.
- 4 Let's identify the following **results** of Asaph's wrong focus. List the words and phrases which reveal Asaph's envy (v. 3), discontentment (v. 14), confusion (v. 16) and anger (v. 21-22).
Which of those do you see in your life?
- 5 Does Asaph's focus on **this** life (compare to Colossians 3:1-4) surprise you? Why or why not?
- 6 Read Psalm 73:13-16. Outline the contours of Asaph's belief about how life **should** operate.
- 7 What do **your** reactions to your circumstances reveal about **your** beliefs about how life ought to operate?
- 8 In v. 1-12, Asaph had a crisis of faith when life didn't go his way. How do you think the arrogant/wicked felt about how life was treating them **at that time**? Would they be pleased or disappointed?
- 9 Read Psalm 73:16-24. How do you think the arrogant/wicked will feel about their life **in the end**? **At the end of earthly life** will Asaph still be envious of the arrogant? Why or why not?
- 10 In your own words, tell how 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 sums up the lessons of Psalm 73.
- 11 What occupies **your** desires—**this** life or **the next**?

Application-Challenge

Pray that God will help you move from doubt to faith.

Review Psalm 73 to see how a man of faith worked through his own doubts.

Praise God that he does not let us go, even when we're filled with bitter doubts and complaining.



1 Ask these two questions together, then listen for group members' answers. This is a window into their "lived theology"—not what they **say** that they believe, but what they **actually** believe; the theology that controls their attitudes and actions. Many answers may smack of karma—the belief that good intent and deeds contribute to good future outcomes while bad intent and deeds contribute to bad future outcomes. This concept is totally pagan and foreign to biblical Christianity (as Jesus says in John 9:1-3).

2 Psalm 50: God is the judge of both the righteous and the wicked.
Psalm 74: An appeal to God against the devastation of the land by Israel's enemies.
Psalm 75: God humbles the proud and exalts the righteous.
Psalm 76: Yahweh is victorious.
Psalm 77: We gain comfort in our troubles when we recall God's past deliverances.
Psalm 78: God guides his people even though we are unfaithful to him.
Psalm 79: Lament over the destruction of Jerusalem; prayer for help.
Psalm 80: God is implored to rescue his people.
Psalm 81: God's goodness and Israel's waywardness.
Psalm 82: Unjust judgments rebuked.
Psalm 83: God implored to confound his enemies.

Similar ideas
are
color-coded.

3 v. 1 this is Asaph's basic belief about God. He sees the heart as central to gaining God's blessing.
v. 3, 6-9 Asaph isn't believing his own theology—now he says that God is good to the wicked of heart!
v. 3-5 Asaph's fundamental problem is that he is looking at externals, and he has short-range thinking.

- 4
- v. 3 he flat-out admits that he's envious.
 - v. 14 he's not liking his life—"stricken" and "chastened"
 - v. 16 pondering this situation was "troublesome" to him.
 - v. 21-22 "embittered"; he felt "cut"

Be ready to "prime the pump" on the second question: "Which of those do you see in your life?"

5 Have someone read Colossians 3:1-4, then ask this question.
Guard against folks "over spiritualizing"—Asaph was a real person. On the other hand, he was not a youngster in the faith—he was a leader in Temple worship for the whole nation of Israel.
Probe the "why or why not" question.

- 6
1. God, if He is good, will bless the righteous and punish the wicked.
 2. The wicked have been blessed by God while the righteous have suffered.
 3. Therefore, God is not good.

7 Honesty time! You likely will need to "prime the pump", so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)

8 They were loving life; it was going their way. More than that—they mocked God and heaven!
They were not living according to God's standards and they challenged God to do something about it.

9 The tables are turned! "He who laughs last, laughs best!" When the judgment comes, they are destroyed. Asaph, on the other hand, has learned the lesson of delayed gratification; he got the better end of the stick!
Let's hope that Asaph—and we—have learned the lesson to trust God's wisdom and timing.

10 Visible, temporary, earthly things scream for our attention—but we must not put our focus there.
Invisible, eternal, heavenly things ought to be our focus. Bad stuff now produces an eternal weight of glory.

11 Make sure you don't skip this question. Give it plenty of time. Our goal, after all, is life-change (not just becoming "smarter sinners"!). Be ready with your own (honest) answers. A good follow-up question is: "What evidence is there that _____ occupies your desires/attention?" How we spend our time and money is the irrefutable evidence of what we truly value.

Sermon Summary (Key Text: Psalm 73)

We are in a series called, “A Faith to be Shared.” There’s nothing more fundamental to who you are than your deepest held faith beliefs. So how can we bring our faith into the public square? Religious people often see doubt as a very bad thing, while religious skeptics tend to see spiritual doubt as the intellectually mature position. Skepticism, not faith, is their highest virtue. The Bible doesn’t view doubt as negatively as does the faith community, yet doesn’t celebrate doubt as does the secular community.

I. What is doubt? Psalm 73:2 uses a great metaphor for doubt: “My feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.” We’ve all lost our foothold, slipped on ice, or gotten our feet tangled up in something. You lose balance; it’s not a good feeling. The Greek word for doubt means “to have conflicting opinions about something.” From this Psalm we learn that anyone can have doubts—even biblical authors! We also learn that doubt can be a positive thing (by the end of the psalm, the author has attained a higher level of faith, see v. 26). Doubt needs not be fatal to faith—it can be an aid to faith. If you just accept everything that you are told, you’ll never grow. Doubt invites inquiry. Certainties stifle inquiry. The resurrected Christ appeared to the disciples, but Thomas wasn’t there. Thomas said, “unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” A week later Jesus appeared to Thomas and invited him: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” Thomas did so, and responded “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:25-27). Thomas’ doubt led to a more mature faith. But note that while Jesus doesn’t scold Thomas, he did say: “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (v. 29). So, doubt isn’t as bad as some religious people think—but neither is it as admirable as secular people would have us believe!

II. What causes doubt? The psalmist admits: “I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (v. 3; v. 4-11 elaborates on the prosperity of the wicked). It didn’t jive with the psalmist’s expectations: “God is good to those who are pure in heart” (v. 1). Does it pay to be pure in heart, to worship and serve God?! The psalmist complained: “All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning” (v. 13-14). His troubles were spiritually disorienting. And, as he tried to figure it out, it was a “wearisome task” (v. 16). He believes in the love and goodness of God—but he is not experiencing them. Doubts arise when our beliefs about how things should be don’t line up with how they appear to be in the real world. Both our doubts and our faith beliefs are the product of a combination of reasoning and our social and personal experiences. Our beliefs are influenced by the people we hang out with. We find most plausible the beliefs of those people we want to like us. Wanting to be liked precedes our adoption of their viewpoints. We aren’t just rational creatures, we’re also social creatures.

If you’re doubting things that you were once certain of, it’s probably because a combination of reason and experiences. I want to help you avoid falling into either of **two opposite mistakes**: [1] One is to think your doubts about Christianity are **strictly intellectual** in nature—as if the books by atheists are full of air-tight arguments. Yes, they make some good arguments, but it’s not that simple. Your social context preconditions you to find certain arguments more plausible. [2] But also don’t conclude that your beliefs are **merely the product of your environment**, that you cannot intellectually weigh the evidence for Christianity. Today people are saying that all beliefs are socially constructed, but that’s self-defeating: the belief that all beliefs are socially constructed then also becomes simply a social construct and cannot be trusted either! It is difficult to think outside the box of our social setting; we must try very hard to do so. Our doubts, whether about race or religion, come from a combination of our experiences and reason. To process those doubts, you have to really think, and not just rely upon your experiences.

III. What transforms doubt into a mature faith? The psalmist used a three-step process to move beyond doubt to a triumphant faith. He used [1] **experience**, [2] **thinking**, and [3] **an enlarged view of God**. This is going to be kind of counterintuitive, but it was the **experience** of worship that led to an “Ah-ha!” moment. If your doubts came, to some degree, because you were in social and personal locations where God seemed **less** real, then it’s only fair to level the playing field and go to some place where God seems **more** real. Go to a place where people believe in God, where they talk about him, where there’s Christian art and biblical teaching. The psalmist wasn’t content to try to figure things out in his mind; he surrounded himself with people who believed. Next he did some profound **thinking**: he evaluated his motives and admitted that he was envious of the wicked (v. 2-3). He was honest enough to admit that it wasn’t just an intellectual problem; he’s struggling with envy. Motives and desires are involved. There are all kinds of reasons why people don’t want Christianity to be true. If there is no God, you can do what you want. To the doubter or the skeptic I would say, “Your objections to faith are not solely intellectual. You are personally invested in Christianity not being true. And you need to understand that. You will never be able to think objectively about faith, until you identify those ulterior motives that make Christianity seem less plausible, or less appealing.” Finally, the psalmist **expanded his view of God**. He realized that a God who is powerful enough to create the universe might also do things that he couldn’t understand. He realized that it was arrogant to demand that everything happen just the way he thought it should. He also saw that even when he was embittered against God, God was still gracious to him (v. 22-23)! This is what I want you to know today: despite your doubts, God loves and cares for you and wants to walk with you through your doubts. And if you’ll do that, you too can come out on the other end with a triumphant faith. A faith which cries out,

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

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (v. 25-26).

Group Leaders!

If you want the men in your group to grow, they need to take advantage of opportunities we've created for them.

But they likely *won't* go unless *you* are going, and you *ask them personally*.

Think back to question **11**—our schedules and checkbooks reveal what we truly value.

Please give leadership in this area.



2 WEEKS TO GO

PointMan Breakfast at the fire pit!

- Saturday, December 4
- 9⁰⁰-10³⁰am
- Just \$10
- Bring a camp chair
- Chick-fil-a breakfast (gluten free option available)
- To register: tcc.org Keyword: **firepit**

