

Pursuing God's Glory

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Text: Psalm 73 (New Living Translation)

A psalm of Asaph.

1 Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure.
2 But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.
3 For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.
4 They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong.
5 They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.
6 They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty.
7 These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for!
8 They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others.
9 They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth.
10 And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words.
11 "What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?"
12 Look at these wicked people—enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.
13 Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?
14 I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.
15 If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people.
16 So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is!
17 Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.
18 Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction.
19 In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.
20 When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.
21 Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside.
22 I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.
23 Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.
26 My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.
27 Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you.
28 But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.

A psalm of Asaph

Asaph was a minister, a minister of music in the temple of the Lord. He had been appointed by David to preside over the sacred choral services. It seems that this responsibility was then passed on to his descendants.

He was a man of good reputation and I believe was a man in pursuit of God's glory.

He opens this psalm with brief summary of his conviction about God.

**1 Truly God is good to Israel,
to those whose hearts are pure.**

God is good. His glory is his goodness.

This calls to mind that wonder story of Moses' encounter with the glory of God recorded for us in Exodus 33:

12 Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' **13** If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

14 The LORD replied, "**My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.**"

15 Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. **16** How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

17 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

19 And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. **20** But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

21 Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. **23** Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

The person with a pure heart has one great ambition, to know God.

Mat 5:8 - Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Is seeing God, knowing Him reflecting his glory our ambition?

2 But as for me, I almost lost my footing.

My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.

A number of situations have troubled me deeply.

I remember watching the news reports about the tragic shootings and grenade explosions in Liège. As psychological help was being extended to victims I wondered if the deep comfort of the message of hope was being given by Jesus' church. I was so saddened when the next report on the news was about the financial settlements being extended from the Catholic Church to victims of child sex abuse.

I have been concerned by what has seemed to be a trend in Christian ministries to set their focus on meeting social and psychological needs and neglecting the clear communication of the transforming gospel of Christ.

I have been troubled by the recent decommissioning of Saint Catherine Church in the center of Brussels and the plan to do the same with dozens of others.

I have been unsettled by the continuing secularization of our society. The general disregard for God.

3 For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.

I found my heart full of anxiety about the systematic marginalization of Christians and Christian values and the seeming life of ease of people who don't trouble themselves with these matters.

Skipping to verse 9:

**9 They boast against the very heavens,
and their words strut throughout the earth.**

Perhaps you are familiar with the growing number of books, articles, interviews, and YouTube videos by the so-called "New atheists," Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens among others. This seems to me a fitting image of their words, they "strut throughout the earth."

**10 And so the people are dismayed and confused,
drinking in all their words.**

Stuart McAllister of Ravi Zacharias Ministries wrote in an article in 2010 entitled "A Strange Feeling of Emptiness" the following:

"I'm at an age in life when enough of it has passed that I can make some comparisons. The last five to ten years have been strange. I recently read some essays by Timothy Garton Ash about the period he calls the decade with "no name"—the turn of the millennium to the present. It is indeed a decade in which we have seen some extraordinary events, some dreadful acts of violence, an ongoing range of catastrophes, and some of the worst economic and moral failures that burst the bubble of unending prosperity and further shuttered confidence in many of our institutions.

Many years ago, the Czech writer Milan Kundera wrote of "the unbearable lightness of being." Like many others, he sensed the hollowing out of existence, the thinning out of life, the emptying of meaning that seems to occur under modern conditions. One friend of mine calls this "cultural vaporization." The thing is, this is not some vague idea or esoteric notion. It is a description of how life is really being perceived. Many people today seem convinced that the point of life is that there is no point. We face what Nietzsche call "Das Nichte"—or, the nothing."

**11 "What does God know?" they ask.
"Does the Most High even know what's happening?"**

It seems to me that in this age of media fountains spewing enormous amounts of skepticism about Christ and Christian values and the immediate exposure to many different religious convictions and practices that a spiritual fatigue or laziness has set in. Perhaps there is a disregard for God because it seems impossible to really "know."

I find it easier to cope with these attitudes when I find them in people who are distant from me. But I confess to being deeply emotionally impacted when those who I love deeply live life in apparent disregard of God.

The pain of this can at times seem unbearable. The temptation to abandon not God, but to abandon the fight can be strong.

13 Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? 14 I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.

15 If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people.

16 So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is!

For Asaph, it was the prosperity of the wicked that caused him consternation. For me, it has been when I look at those who don't walk in the fear of the Lord and yet seem to be at ease in life that my heart can be deeply troubled. Maybe your thoughts have been captured by the cyclone of other troubles. Such a prolonged godless meditation can profoundly weary the soul.

17 Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.

Understanding came to Asaph. How important it is that we find rest, protection and right perspective in the sanctuary of the Lord. When we turn to once again pursue God's glory it changes everything. The confusion, the fear, the fatigue dissipate. As God said to Moses, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest."

Perhaps the dilemma I've described is something you can relate to now or at some point in the past. Or maybe you are struggling with other issues. How essential it is that our ambition be the pursuit of God's glory and that our refuge be his sanctuary.

Do you remember that powerful scene of Jesus' response to the temptation of the devil in the hot, dry and dusty wilderness? "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:4) He did not say that man does not need the nourishment of physical bread. He was not advocating some sort of mystical detachment from the material world. But, the material world can not provide all that is needed for life. The words, the truth, the perspective that comes from the mouth of God is essential.

Faith is essential in order to see the glory of God

Through faithfully entering into prayer, scripture reading, fellowship and service we leave the confusion and begin to experience clarity of thought and a settled heart. I have found that the door to the sanctuary of God is worship. I have tried to develop the habit of beginning each day:

1. With worship
2. Turning from regrets of the past or anxiety regarding the future and affirming the present reality of God's love for me.
3. Choosing to sustain the strength and perspective gained with thanksgiving throughout the day.

We behold God's glory and we worship him.

What is the glory of God?

It is the nature and acts of God made visible; what He essentially is and does. It is the intersection of heavenly perfection with our created but fallen world.

We find Isaiah's vision of God's glory.

Isa 6:3 - They (that is the seraphim) were calling out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!"

Notice the shift from "holy" to "glory" in this declaration of worship. His holiness is His uniqueness, his total otherness, his nature that sets him apart from all else that we know, all that has been created. His holiness is manifested and it is called glory.

John Piper says, "The infinite is shining in the created."

This is exhibited in whatever way He has chosen to reveal Himself:
And the greatest revelation of his glory is in Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 4:6 - "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

We find refuge and peace when we enter into the sanctuary of his glory. We find rest and right perspective when the light of his glory shines in our own hearts. His light shines in our hearts dispelling the darkness, panic and confusion.

The glory of God is the goal of all things.

1 Cor. 10:31 - So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (Isa 43:6-7)

Skipping to verse 20:

20 When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.

Remember that little depressing phrase in verse 13 "Every morning brings me pain?" Often as I worship I find that God seems to laugh away my pain, not in a spirit of disregard. Instead He helps me look at my anxious thoughts from an eternal perspective.

As Ravi Zacharias so correctly has said, "So your mind is framed fresh in the morning rather than looking at God through the challenges you're going to face; it's you looking at your challenges through the eyes of God whom you've already met with in the morning."

21 Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside.

As we glimpse of God's glory we are better positioned to understand our own sinfulness and repent and be cleansed of it. Again in Isaiah 6 reading verse 5:

Isa. 6:5 - "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

22 I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.

23 Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. 25 Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.

Pursuing God's glory will inspire us to continue a journey of faithfulness. To gaze upon his glory will take us through the immediate crises of life no matter how serious. Look at the example of Stephen, the stones of the angry mob raining down on him:

Acts 7:55 - But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

A commitment to the pursuit of God's glory will sustain us for the long haul. We see this in the life of the apostle Paul and this passage I adopted as life verses when I was 18.

Php. 3:10 - I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

26 My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.

27 Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you.

28 But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.

My prayer is that God grant each one of us each day the grace to pursue his glory.

Amen.