

PSALM 73: SEASON OF CYNICGIVING SERMON-ALIGNMENT CURRICULUM

by Kevin McGill

Happy Cynicgiving

We see joy everywhere—people excited about goodwill, peace, family, and community—and instead of lifting one up, for some of us it deepens a sense of loss. Other people's happiness seems to highlight what feels unfair. You might say, *I'm not perfect, but I've tried to do things right. So why are my holidays harder than theirs? They're not even better people than me.*

This is exactly where Psalm 73 begins. It is an honest psalm. Asaph does not pretend he has pure motives or flawless theology. He shows how petty he can be, how jealous he has been, and how envy nearly ruined him. His honesty becomes the doorway to revelation, and that revelation serves us well in seasons where life feels out of balance.

Group Discussion Questions:

- Asaph gives his list that sets off jealousy and envy. What is yours?

Psalm 73 opens with a confession that God is good (v. 1), but Asaph immediately admits that his feet had almost stumbled because he was envious of the arrogant (vv. 2–3). He sees people who do not walk with God experiencing ease, comfort, and success (vv. 4–12). Meanwhile, he is suffering and discouraged, feeling “stricken” and “rebuked every morning” (v. 14).

This gap between belief and experience opens the door to cynicism. He feels as if he has kept his heart clean “in vain” (v. 13). Many of us know that feeling: I do good and get bad; they do bad and get good.

This reveals the collapse of a moral reward system he assumed was true. The same system the hotel cleaning woman expressed years ago as she wept over the loss of her child: *I'm a good person... I don't understand why this happened to me.* A deeply human attempt to make sense of the world.

But the moral-reward system—if I do good, I get good; if I do bad, I get bad—is a fantasy in a fallen world. When that fantasy breaks, cynicism is waiting at the door.

Group Discussion Questions:

- Where do you feel this “backwards” reality most intensely—the place where your effort or faithfulness seems to have produced less than others who don’t honor God? (See: Jeremiah 12:1–2)
- Write one paragraph beginning, “Lord, this feels unfair because...” and name the specific situation where you feel overlooked or disappointed. (See: Psalm 62:8; 1 Peter 5:6–7)

Worship Wipes Away Cynicism (Psalm 73:15–22)

Asaph realizes that this reward system isn’t just flawed—it reveals something flawed in him. His obedience has been driven not by love for God, but by a quiet expectation that God should reward him. As Tim Keller observed, **his obedience was not to please God but for God to please him.**

That motivation is no different than the wicked. They do what they do to get what they want. Asaph has been doing good to get what he wants. The means are different, but the heart is the same.

In Psalm 73, he admits that his soul became bitter and his heart was pricked (vv. 21–22). He says he was “brutish” and “ignorant,” like a beast toward God. That’s a crucial realization: cynicism hasn’t just made him bitter toward others; it has made him beast-like toward God. He has treated God as a machine—expecting outcomes, resenting Him when He doesn’t deliver.

Then everything changes with a single pivot: “until I went into the sanctuary of God” (v. 17). He had exhausted himself trying to understand the unfairness (v. 16), but the moment he enters God’s presence, his reality shifts. He sees that the wicked are set in “slippery places” and that their seeming stability is temporary (vv. 17–20). He sees that God—not success, not comfort, not fairness—is the center of reality.

Most importantly, he sees himself clearly. He realizes that his bitterness has distorted his relationship with God. Worship reveals what analysis never could. It exposes the heart and reorients the soul.

Group Discussion Questions:

- Where have you seen bitterness or disappointment distort the way you view God or the way you relate to Him? (See: Hebrews 12:14–15)
- Asaph realized that God—not success, fairness, or comfort—is the center of reality. What would it look like for you to recentre your week around God’s presence rather than the outcomes you hope He will produce? (See: Matthew 6:33; Psalm 27:4)

Point 3: The Cure for Cynicism—Not What I Get, but Who I Have (Psalm 73:23–28)

Here is where Psalm 73 reaches its most beautiful moment. After acknowledging his envy and bitterness, Asaph says, “Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand” (v. 23). That “nevertheless” is the gospel. Despite his jealousy, anger, and cynicism, God has held his hand the entire time.

Asaph sees that what he has in God is far better than what the wicked seem to enjoy. God guides him with counsel and will receive him into glory (v. 24). The wealthy and influential have everything except the one thing that matters. They do not have God holding their hand at their deathbed. They do not have the quiet, steady voice of God when every human voice around them seeks advantage. They do not have the promise of being received into glory.

This is why Asaph can say there is nothing on earth he desires besides God and that God is the strength of his heart and his portion forever (vv. 25–26). Bodies fail. Careers end. Plans collapse. People disappoint. But God remains. God is the portion that cannot be taken.

Allison’s story embodies this truth. Two weeks after giving birth to her first child, she is told that she has a tumor in her spine, and the necessary surgery will almost certainly result in lifelong deficit or paralysis. Yet she and her husband say, “Even if... God is good.” She defines a flourishing life not as everything going right, but as loving God, loving her family, and encouraging others. That is Psalm 73 in flesh and blood.

Even if the circumstances remain dark, even if the body weakens, even if the future looks different than imagined—God is good, and she has Him.

Asaph ends where she ends: “It is good to be near God” (v. 28).
That is the cure for cynicism.
Not that God explains everything.
Not that He evens the score.
Not that He finally makes life fair.

The cure is the presence of God Himself.
It is not what I get—it is who I have.

Group Discussion Questions:

- Alison and her husband chose to say, “Even if... God is good” at the very moment when their future felt most fragile. What does that kind of faith reveal about how they see God? And what makes that posture so difficult for most of us? (See: Daniel 3:16–18; Psalm 73:23–26)
- Alison’s response shows that trust in God is not rooted in outcomes but in His presence. When you think about your own life, what “outcomes” are hardest for you to release to God, and why? (See: Proverbs 3:5–6; Philippians 4:6–7)

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