

# WHEN MY HEART FAILS

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Meeting God in the Psalms: Psalm 73

October 17, 2021

*My heart and my flesh may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*  
Psalm 73:26

## Reading Psalm 73: Bookends of Gods' goodness

- A. Experience and Belief (vv. 1–3)
    - B. Prosperity of the Wicked (vv. 4–12)
      - C. Personal Reaction (vv. 13–17)
        - D. Affirmation of God's Justice (vv. 18–20)
          - C'. Evaluation of the Psalmist's Reaction (vv. 21–22)
            - B'. The Desire of the Godly (vv. 23–26)
              - A'. Experience and Hope (vv. 27–28)
1. Psalm 73 is a wisdom psalm of confession, but with more in common with Ecclesiastes
  2. Both 73:2 and 73:21 describe the psalmist's experience, but with very different results
  3. Find the pivot between despondency and trust – be sure to know how “sanctuary” works (see John Piper's sermon for more on this point)
  4. Psalm 73 finally identifies the real nature of sin: unfaithfulness
  5. Psalm 73 introduces the themes of Book IV: Finding God's promises in a real world (see the Bible Project's chart below)

## Asaph presents the problem:

- <sup>1</sup> Surely God is good to Israel,  
to those who are pure in heart.
- <sup>2</sup> But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;  
I had nearly lost my foothold.
- <sup>3</sup> For I envied the arrogant  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
- <sup>4</sup> They have no struggles;  
their bodies are healthy and strong . . . . .
- <sup>11</sup> They say, “How can God know?  
Does the Most High have knowledge?”
- <sup>12</sup> This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth.  
Psalm 73:1-12

1. Just knowing about God’s goodness is not an adequate starting point
2. Who are my “they”? Psalm 73 diagnostic: Who is taking my eyes away from God’s holiness?

## The pivot: meeting God in his sanctuary

- <sup>13</sup> Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;  
in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
- <sup>14</sup> All day long I have been plagued;  
I have been punished every morning.
- <sup>15</sup> If I had said, “I will speak thus,”  
I would have betrayed your children.
- <sup>16</sup> When I tried to understand all this,  
it was oppressive to me
- <sup>17</sup> till I entered the sanctuary of God;  
then I understood their final destiny.
- <sup>18</sup> Surely you place them on slippery ground;  
you cast them down to ruin.
- <sup>19</sup> How suddenly are they destroyed,  
completely swept away by terrors!
- <sup>20</sup> As a dream when one awakes,  
so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.  
Psalm 87:4-6

1. Human wisdom is ultimately “vain” (another connection with Ecclesiastes)
2. The psalmist understands God’s justice when he experiences God’s \_\_\_\_\_
3. The “sanctuaries” is where \_\_\_\_\_

## Grieved to Glory, then back to the Goodness of God

- <sup>21</sup> When my heart was grieved  
and my spirit embittered,  
<sup>22</sup> I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was a brute beast before you.  
<sup>23</sup> Yet I am always with you;  
you hold me by my right hand.  
<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will take me into glory.  
<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.  
<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion forever.  
<sup>27</sup> Those who are far from you will perish;  
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.  
<sup>28</sup> 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.

Psalm 87:7

1. Grief is replaced with glory when the pronouns (and my desires!) change

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will . . . . to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:3-14

2. We experience God's strength when we put on his armor

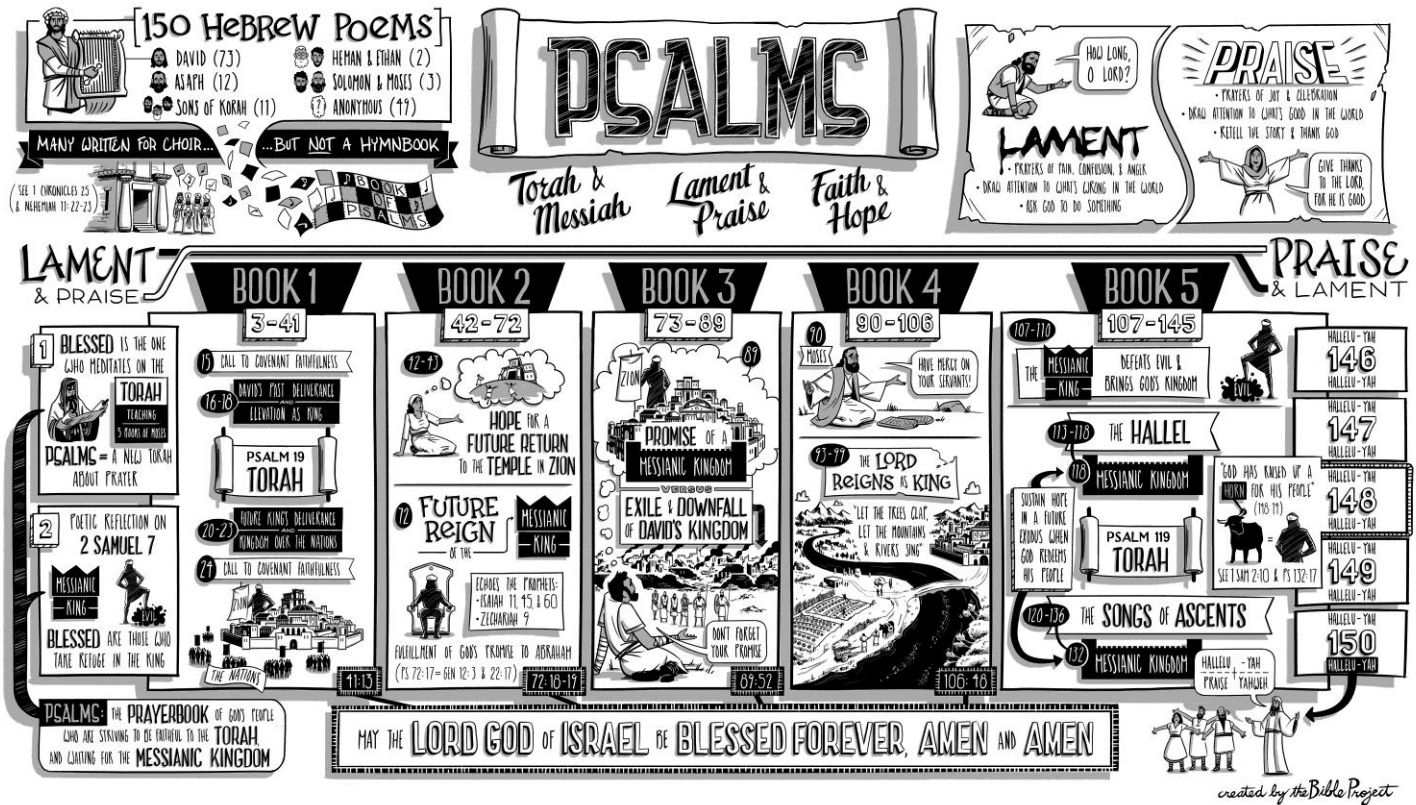
<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God . . . .

Ephesians 6:10-13 (see 1 John 2:15-17)

3. Being "with" and being "near" are the life of \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Ephesians 6:18 (see Matthew 26:23 and Jesus' prayers, then Spurgeon's "Let Us Pray")



## Resources for the Psalms

Please be sure to have a copy of the [Bible Project's poster](#) on the Psalms.

I appreciate the [bibestudytools.com](http://bibestudytools.com) study of Psalm 87 in the "Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary" series. I've attached this study to my notes.

Dr. [Ron Allen has a wonderful study](#) of Psalm 87 in "Biblioteca Sacra".

James E. Smith's *Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (College Press, 1995) has been a very helpful resource.

The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1991) has a helpful commentary on the Psalms.

I can see Dr. Ron Allen's influence in the study notes on the Psalms in the *Nelson Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 1997). This is a NKJV text Bible which gives a wonderful new translation to read.

John Piper has an interesting message on Psalm 73:26 at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/battling-the-unbelief-of-despondency>

Maclaren has some helpful comments on Psalm 73 at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/mac/psalms-73.html>

Spurgeon's "Let Us Pray" from Psalm 73:23 at <https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0288.htm>

AN ASAPH PSALM (from *The Message*)

- 1-5 **73** No doubt about it! God is good—  
    good to good people, good to the good-hearted.  
But I nearly missed it,  
    missed seeing his goodness.  
I was looking the other way,  
    looking up to the people  
At the top,  
    envying the wicked who have it made,  
Who have nothing to worry about,  
    not a care in the whole wide world.
- 6-10 Pretentious with arrogance,  
    they wear the latest fashions in violence,  
Pampered and overfed,  
    decked out in silk bows of silliness.  
They jeer, using words to kill;  
    they bully their way with words.  
They're full of hot air,  
    loudmouths disturbing the peace.  
People actually listen to them—can you believe it?  
    Like thirsty puppies, they lap up their words.
- 11-14 What's going on here? Is God out to lunch?  
    Nobody's tending the store.  
The wicked get by with everything;  
    they have it made, piling up riches.  
I've been stupid to play by the rules;  
    what has it gotten me?  
A long run of bad luck, that's what—  
    a slap in the face every time I walk out the door.
- 15-20 If I'd have given in and talked like this,  
    I would have betrayed your dear children.  
Still, when I tried to figure it out,  
    all I got was a splitting headache ...

Until I entered the sanctuary of God.  
Then I saw the whole picture:  
The slippery road you've put them on,  
with a final crash in a ditch of delusions.  
In the blink of an eye, disaster!  
A blind curve in the dark, and—nightmare!  
We wake up and rub our eyes.... Nothing.  
There's nothing to them. And there never was.

<sup>21-24</sup> When I was beleaguered and bitter,  
totally consumed by envy,  
I was totally ignorant, a dumb ox  
in your very presence.  
I'm still in your presence,  
but you've taken my hand.  
You wisely and tenderly lead me,  
and then you bless me.

<sup>25-28</sup> You're all I want in heaven!  
You're all I want on earth!  
When my skin sags and my bones get brittle,  
GOD is rock-firm and faithful.  
Look! Those who left you are falling apart!  
Deserters, they'll never be heard from again.  
But I'm in the very presence of God—  
oh, how refreshing it is!  
I've made Lord GOD my home.  
God, I'm telling the world what you do!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Ps 73:title-28). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.