

"Help! I'm Not Sure Following Jesus Is Worth It"

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[0:00] Have you ever had buyer's remorse? Buyer's remorse is walking away from a store thinking, I'm not sure if that purchase was worth it.

I recently walked into a coffee shop, and I saw that they had nitro cold brew coffee. And I am a coffee fan, I like coffee, but I had not as of yet tried nitro cold brew coffee, which is apparently becoming quite a thing.

So I was like, okay, I should try this. And I read the menu board, and I thought it said it was \$3. So I was like, okay, \$3, just like another cup of coffee, just cold, and all right, I'll give it a shot.

And the baristas were even nice enough to let me try a little sample to make sure I liked it. And when I did, my taste buds said, I don't know. That's a little too acidic for our liking.

I don't know if you're going to like that. But then the social side of my brain kicked in and said, well, these baristas are really nice, and they're really enthusiastic about this nitro cold brew coffee. And it would be kind of weird to just kind of like take a sample and then say no thanks.

[1:06] So I bought the coffee. And when the barista rang me up, and the cash register said something a lot more than \$3. Now, I'm sure there are many of you out there who would gladly pay whatever for nitro cold brew coffee.

But for me, I kind of walked away with this acidic taste of buyer's remorse in my mouth. And I was like, I don't know if that was worth it. I think I could have made a better choice.

Just a minute ago, our brother Terry read Psalm 73. And Psalm 73 was written by a man who is not doubting his recent coffee purchase, whether that was worth it.

He's doubting whether God is worth putting his trust in. Asaph is the author of Psalm 73, and he tells us a story, essentially, in this psalm of wondering whether being faithful to God is actually worth it in the end, whether there's a better choice.

He recounts how he was tempted to think that living life on his terms would actually be better than living life on God's terms. And I'm guessing that I'm not the only one in the room who has had that question pop up in my mind.

[2:28] I think we often wonder, is this whole following Jesus thing worth it? Is there a better choice to make, especially when we look around us and we see possible alternatives to following Jesus?

Well, let's jump in and let's see if this psalm for the helping is helpful for us to answer the question, is it worth it? To guide us through this psalm, I'm going to pause on each of the five stages of Asaph's journey of doubt.

And I'm going to hold off on giving us kind of the main point until the end of those five stages. And I think by then it will be abundantly clear what this whole psalm is about and what the answer to the question is.

And then after that, I'm going to unpack the main point with just a few concrete lessons that we can respond well to from God's word.

So let's look at the first stage of Asaph's journey in verse 1. And the first stage is conviction.

Conviction. Look at verse 1.

[3:33] So Asaph begins this little journey of his with a conviction.

It's a belief that he holds to be true, that God is good. It's a theological truth that he stakes his claim on. And not just that God is good, but God has aimed his goodness at his people, Israel, his covenant people.

But then he modifies it slightly at the second part of the verse. Did you see that? To those who are pure in heart. He clarifies what he means by Israel.

He's not talking about every single Israelite in the population of the nation of Israel. He's talking about those who are the faithful covenant members of Israel.

Those who are true Israel. Who are seeking to keep God's covenant. Who are seeking to obey his commands. And to remain faithful to Yahweh. There are plenty of Israelites who were not doing that.

[4:37] They might have given God lip service. But they were actually not following God. As we're going to see here in a moment. So in other words, Asaph's conviction. His core belief about God.

Is that God is faithful to his faithful ones. God is good to those who trust in him. And this is true. For example, Psalm 84 11.

No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Other parts of scripture testify to this conviction. To this truth about God. He is good to the pure in heart.

He's faithful. And that's Asaph's starting place. And it's going to kind of be the shadow that casts itself over the rest of the psalm. And it's about also to get challenged.

So that's stage one. His conviction. Stage two. Is Asaph's confusion. This is a longer and more painful stage. Asaph's confusion.

[5:36] Look at verses 2 through 14. In verses 2 and 3. Asaph tells us what caused his confusion. He was seeing something.

Verse 3. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Asaph was observing a disquieting phenomenon.

He was seeing the wicked prosper. Remember Asaph's conviction. We just read. God is good to the pure in heart. But now what he sees is that God is apparently being good to the wicked.

To those who are not pure in heart. And so his reality. His perception. Is now challenging his core belief. Core conviction. And that is causing all sorts of turmoil in Asaph.

His core belief about God's goodness is being challenged. Because he is seeing proud. Boastful. Self-seeking. Immoral people. Doing just fine in life.

[6:42] In fact that word translated prosperity. In our Bibles. Is the Hebrew word shalom. And shalom is a really important theological word in the Bible. It points to the wholeness and the harmony of all those who put their trust in God.

Of those who come under God's blessing. And so it seems that God is blessing the wicked. And he's getting really confused.

He's getting disoriented. These people who have no regard for God. No regard for others. They're experiencing a sense of well-being. And wholeness in their lives. Or at least they seem to be. And according to Asaph's conviction.

That should not be. And if we look at verse 2. That is causing Asaph to stumble. His feet are about to slip. He is losing his footing. He's getting disoriented.

And he's not sure what to do next. And that confusion is manifesting itself in a particular sin attitude of his heart. Envy.

[7:41] He's starting to think that being faithful to God just isn't worth it. And I might as well be like those guys. Why not too?

Look at verses 4 and 5. These guys have got it made. Asaph is describing them as living healthy, pain-free, and stress-free lives. Nothing bad ever happens to them. They don't suffer any illness or bodily ailment.

They walk around breathing deeply out of both nostrils. Their heads held high. Feeling strong and confident about life. Who wouldn't want that kind of life? But as Asaph goes on to describe the wicked.

It's not just that they're seemingly prospering. That prosperity. That absence of suffering and hardship in their lives. Is encouraging their already puffed up egos.

They assume that their success and their health and their well-being. Is now something of their own making. And something that they deserve. Therefore, verse 6. Sorry.

[8:39] Therefore, verse 6. Pride is their necklace. Violence covers them as a garment. So pride is the defining characteristic of their hearts. And their internal thoughts in verse 7.

Their speech. Verse 8. Their behavior. Verse 6. It's all arrogant. It's destructive and foolish. And above all. They are functional atheists. They might be members of the Israelite nation. But they don't regard God. Look at verse 11. How can God know? There's their knowledge in the Most High. And tragically. As we see in verse 10. It seems that other members of the Israelite community.

Are looking up to them. And joining their parade. Of self-importance. And arrogance. And so not only are they living this way themselves. But they're getting groupies to come along with them. And as we see. He sums it up in verse 12. Behold. Look. These are the wicked. Always at ease. [9:42] They increase in riches. And look what that does to poor Asaph. In verses 13 and 14. All in vain. I have kept my heart clean.

And washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long. I have been stricken. And rebuked. Every morning. What did he just say? About the wicked in verse 5. They are not stricken.

And then he describes himself as being stricken. You can just picture Asaph. With his head in his hands here. This is the lowest point. That he gets to in the Psalms.

I might as well. Have not been pure. I might as well. Have not been faithful to God. Because these guys are doing well. And I'm not. Notice that. That purity of heart language.

It brings us right back to his conviction. From verse 1. Why did I keep my heart pure? God's not being good to me. That was my conviction. That God is going to be good to those who are pure in heart.

[10:36] And he's not doing that for me. And because it's not just that the wicked are experiencing shalom. It's because he is not experiencing shalom. They should be the ones stricken and rebuked.

But I'm the one being stricken and rebuked. So God what's going on? I'm guessing I'm not the only one in the room who can relate to Asaph's confusion.

When I was in high school. I was a good kid. I didn't get into trouble. I was growing in my relationship with God. I was seeking to be faithful and obedient to my parents. Yes.

But. How does the saying go? Nice guys finish last. There are plenty of these other guys. Who seem to have all the fun. And all the looks.

And all the glory on the field. And all the swagger. And of course they had all the girls attention too. So it was easy for me to be confused. And to be envious. It seemed like all the good things were happening to these guys.

[11:37] And not to me. I was trying to be good. And what happens in high school as we know. Is just a microcosm of what happens in the real world. Right? Maybe it's the foul mouthed and brown nosing co-worker of yours.

That got the promotion instead of you. Or it's the friend on social media. Who is not living for the Lord. But man she sure looks good. And her family always looks happy.

Or it's perhaps that neighbor who just bought a new car again. And he's the guy who's constantly saying negative stuff. Or it's the politicians.

The millionaires. The celebrities that our culture seems to be so obsessed with. And they obviously don't fear God with their lives. And they're often brazenly opposed to God. And yet their lives seem to be pleasant.

And prosperous. And stress free. It can make us wonder whether being faithful to God. And keeping our hearts pure. Is worth it. Because those who don't fear God.

[12:38] Seem to be experiencing a good life. And we seem to be seemingly always surrounded by trouble. Well we certainly feel Asaph's confusion.

At the prosperity of the wicked. Let's move to the third stage of his journey. Don't get too excited.

I'm not quite there yet. Let's move to the third stage of his journey. We've seen this conviction.

We've seen this confusion. Here comes clarity. Verses 15 to 20. There's a shift that happens in verses 15. Asaph tells us that he would have been acting treacherously to God's people.

If he had taken his feelings. His vent. And vented them out loud. Because he's hinting that he was wrong. And he's about to tell us in verses 16 to 20.

Why he was wrong. Asaph is banging his head against the wall in verse 16. When I thought to understand this. It seemed to me to be a wearisome task.

[13:41] Until. Look at that beautiful word at the beginning of verse 17. Until. He went into God's sanctuary. This is the turning point of the

psalm.

Asaph turns a corner here. He enters God's holy dwelling place. He enters the tabernacle. It's the tent where God's presence was manifested. To the Israelites in the ark of the covenant.

And he came to meet with God. To pray. To purposefully seek God's face. To submit his own turmoil. And his thoughts. And his will to God.

And just cast the confusion onto him. That's what he's doing there. And as he trained his thoughts on God. And he beheld God's majesty. And his eternal power.

And his wisdom. And his glory. Asaph's perspective changes. He is granted clarity. What kind of clarity? Clarity about God's goodness.

[14:40] Specifically. God's good justice. Look at verse 18. Truly you set them in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin.

I love that word truly. It's the same word way back in verse 1. That introduces Asaph's conviction. That God is good to his faithful ones. And now here's reality.

And it's in our face again. Asaph is telling us what reality is. Truly. This is the way things are. And it's reality not as Asaph was seeing it.

As his perception was showing him before. No it's reality as it truly is. As God sees it. It's a God eye view. God is just.

He will bring the wicked and the arrogant to justice. He will set them in the slippery places. And they will fall before they even know what's happening. In verse 19.

[15:40] Asaph sees their fall will be sudden and terrible. He might have been envying the wicked before. He's definitely not envying them now. And they will fall terribly because verse 20 shows us they're nothing to God.

Nothing. God is infinitely greater than they are. Asaph sees the wicked as they truly are in comparison to God. When God is finished with them. They'll be like a dream.

Like a dream when one awakes. Oh Lord. When you rouse yourself. You will despise them as phantoms. The wicked. What wicked? Jeffrey Epstein has been in the news a lot recently.

And tragically. He seems to have been the classic modern example. Of Psalm 73. His self-promoting pride. His life was characterized by greed.

And appetite for wealth and sex. And he rode the wave of wealth and worldly pleasure. And exploited many for his own selfish ends. And yet in God's justice.

[16:43] God brought him to a sudden and tragic end. This isn't just in Bible times. This is today. Now of course that doesn't always happen. It's not always as dramatic as Jeffrey Epstein. Mao Zedong.

The brutal communist dictator of China. In the last century. Was responsible for the death of millions. And he died peacefully in his sleep. But whether it's in this life. Or in eternity.

God's justice will be done. It will be evident to the entire universe. That justice has been done. The wicked are nothing compared to him.

And he will see that justice is done. Because he's good. Truly God is good to Israel. But it may take a while. So in light of who God is.

Asaph gets clarity. He never could have figured out on his own. So that's the third stage. Clarity. Let's move to the fourth stage. Very briefly. Confession. Confession.

[17:38] Look with me very briefly. Verses 21 and 22. Asaph realizes he's been an idiot.

He was confused. He was torn between his conviction about God's good character. And what he was perceiving in the reality around him. And now he sees that his emotional turmoil had destabilized him and disoriented him such that he had forgotten who God was.

He had forgotten that God is good and that he is just. And he had become no more rational than a dumb animal. And so he confesses his sin. And is honest with God.

And on the heels of this humble confession comes the final and glorious stage of Asaph's journey. He confesses his sinful attitude of envy for the wicked.

And now in these last verses he has a dramatic experience of God's grace. And it brings him joyful contentment. That's our fifth stage.

[18:43] Contentment. Look at verses 23 to 28. These are some of the most rapturous statements about delighting in God in all of scripture. We just need to savor them together.

Look at verses 23 and 24. Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. Afterward you will receive me to glory.

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.

Asaph realizes he has been beastly towards God. And yet God has not abandoned him. In God's grace he is still with God.

I am still with you. Even in all the confusion and the envy and the messed up thoughts. God in his grace has not left him. Don't you love that word with?

[19:44] It is my favorite preposition in the English language. In any language. Here that beautiful little word is showing us. That God's goodness to his people is not in the good things he gives.

Or in protecting them from the bad things that may happen. God's ultimate goodness to his people. To his faithful ones. Is that he will be with them no matter what.

That he will be with them. He will be near to his people. No matter what is happening around them. That is how God is good to his faithful ones. God's goodness to his people never ceases.

Because the greatest good he can give his people is not an easy, comfortable, trouble-free life but himself. And this is all of God's grace and his faithfulness.

It's got nothing to do with Asaph. And now he sees it. His perspective has changed. He experiences the joyful contentment of having God with him.

[20:43] Of being near to God. Look at the verbs in verses 22 and 23. God holds him. God guides him. And God will receive him into his glorious presence forever.

To be near to God by his grace means that God's going to hold on to him his whole life long and never let go. That he will lead and guide Asaph with good counsel his whole life long.

And when it's done, he will receive him into glory. And Asaph is so ecstatic at the thought of God's nearness that he breaks out into this rapturous praise of God's ever-satisfying and ever-presence.

Whom have I in heaven but you? There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength in my heart and my portion forever. So he's saying, if I had to choose between everything except God on the one hand and nothing but God on the other hand, I'd choose nothing but God every time.

God's all that I need. His confidence isn't in the health of his body or in his own soul's well-being because both of these can fail. The strength of his heart is God.

[21:57] Because God is the rock that carries him forever. And he says that God is his portion forever. The idea of a portion is that it's limited. So he's saying, if I have a huge buffet line of everything there is to offer in life before me, and I only have one thing to choose, one portion to put on my plate, it's God.

My nearness to God is the only thing I want because it's the only thing that lasts. So at the end of the psalm, Asaph puts everything into perspective.

Those who are far from you will perish. You put an end to all who are unfaithful to you. 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.

Does that word good look familiar? Look back at verse 1. Truly God is good to Israel. He ends his journey where he began.

His conviction that God is good to the pure in heart. But now it's strengthened and it's refined. Because God is indeed good to those who trust in him, even if their trust wavers and slips.

[23:04] God's goodness holds by grace. And now that conviction means something way more. Because God isn't good to his faithful people by always giving them good things and keeping bad things away from them.

He's good because he is all the good they need. No matter what happens. And being far from him for Asaph, that's not an option. Because those who choose to love anything else other than God and put their trust in anything other than God will meet a sad end.

Asaph has finished his journey from confusion to contentment. I am so grateful that God inspired Asaph to put this in the Holy Bible.

But what's the point? Why is this here? Why are we reading this today? What does God want to come into our hearts for us to believe and to hold? I think it's this. No matter what we see around

us, our greatest good at all times is being near God.

No matter what we see around us, our greatest good at all times is being near God. Let that just kind of sink in for a minute.

[24:17] Nothing else is worth our trust and our confidence. Nothing else is our greatest good just being near God.

It was this truth that answered Asaph's question of whether serving God faithfully was worth it. He starts the psalm by thinking that it may not be worth it.

But he ends by saying, No way. My greatest good is not in an easy, healthy, comfortable, trouble-free life. My greatest good is being near God no matter what. So that's the reason this psalm is in the Bible for us.

But these psalms were written 3,000 years ago. In a totally different era of salvation history, how is that true for us now, here, today? For Asaph, he wanted to be near to God by being near to God's sanctuary.

Being near his temple. Where God's presence dwelt with his people. How is God near to us now? God had drawn near to his Old Testament people.

[25:22] He had initiated covenants with them. He had spoken to them by his prophets. He came down off the mountain of Sinai to dwell with them in the tent of the tabernacle. All of that nearness was just a taste of the fullness of the nearness to come.

Because God the Son, the eternal Son, who had always been near to the Father, became flesh to dwell with us. To be near to us. Not in a building made of animal skin or carved stone, but in a body. As a human being. And this God-man, Jesus Christ, demonstrated the Father's grace by drawing so near to us that he took all of our sin on himself.

So that we who were far from God, in our abandoning of God, in our trusting in other things, he brought us near.

He made it possible for us to draw near to God by faith in his Son. And the joy of this good news just gets even better.

[26:25] Not only has God brought his distant enemies, us, near through the death and resurrection of his Son, but he places his very presence within us in the Holy Spirit. We are able to be near to him, not by going to a building, but wherever we go.

We are continually with him, literally. What a privilege. Through prayer, through meditation, on his spirit-breathed word, we can keep very near to our greatest good, to God himself.

So how can we take this nearness to God being our greatest good? How can we respond well and concretely to this psalm this morning? I've got four brief lessons I want to help us see and put our energy toward this week so that we can put this into practice.

The first is this. Delight in the gracious nearness of God to you in Jesus. Delight in God's gracious nearness to you in Jesus.

I love what Asaph does at the end of this psalm. He confesses his beastly and unbelieving attitude toward God, and he just starts delighting in the fact that God is near to him by grace.

[27:38] Whom have I in heaven but you? There's nothing on earth I desire besides you. Our God is drawn near to us. So realize it. Believe it.

Delight in it. Rejoice in it when we sing to close our time together, but also through the week. God could have left you where you had chosen to go, far from him, without hope and without God in this world, but he pursued you by grace all the way to the cross so that you could be near to him forever.

So delight in it. Put energy toward that this week. Let it shape your affections and your convictions this week. Secondly, put your conviction to work.

Put your conviction to work. Asaph began the psalm with a conviction that God is indeed good to those who are committed to him. God is good to the pure in heart. And he put that conviction to work throughout the psalm.

Did you notice that? His feet didn't slip. They almost did. But it was that thread of conviction of God is good. I know he is. Even in the middle of all this, it kept him stable.

[28:44] And it was also this conviction that drove him to go to God. He wouldn't have gone to God if he didn't believe that God was good and that

God would answer his prayer and give him clarity. His conviction drove him to God.

Even in his messy, disoriented, confused state, his conviction drove him to God. He put it to work. So I have two questions for you about this. Is it your conviction, personally, do you really believe that your greatest good is being near to God?

Do you truly believe that? If that's your conviction, how are you putting that conviction to work in your everyday life?

How is that functioning in your everyday life? I don't know about you, but my flesh lies to me all day long. My heart lies to me all the day long. It tells me that my greatest good is in something else.

It's in ease. It's in amusing myself. It's in comfort. It's in an absence of anything hard. That's where my greatest good is. I'm particularly tempted along those lines. You may be tempted along others.

[29:47] So whether I'm being tempted to pursue my greatest good at looking at my phone and escaping, or shirking responsibility at my house, or being less than diligent in my work, or seeking escape in some other kind of entertainment, I have to have that conviction that God, my greatest good is his nearness.

I have to have that right here, close to me, plastered in front of my eyes, so that I don't pursue anything else except God first. His nearness is my good, nothing else.

I have to put that conviction to work. I have to strengthen my self-discipline with that conviction. I have to grab that temptation, wrestle it to the ground, and run after Jesus in prayer, and in meditating on his word.

So take some time this week to ask yourself, how can I put this conviction to work? Where am I tempted to move toward other things as my greatest good? And take your conviction and say, no, I'm going to run with this.

We have to be like Mary, not like Martha. We don't need to let the distractions of good responsibilities, however they might be good they might be, we have to keep them out of the driver's seat. Choose the one thing that cannot be taken from you.

[30:56] Sit at Jesus' feet. Drink in his nearness. Put the conviction to work. Thirdly, doubt your perception. Doubt your perception.

As the saying goes, perception is reality. Asaph went wrong when he allowed his eyes to affect his faith. We are a limited people.

We can only see so much, and we can only understand so much of what we see. Asaph was wrong in that he let his perception shape his reality, and that produced an ungodly envy for the wicked.

And we can do the same thing. It might produce envy in us. It might produce discontent in what we see. It might be pursuing an ungodly pursuit of ease.

We must distrust our perception of reality and let God's truth shape our reality. So, when you find your soul dull or troubled, bring your perception of reality to God.

[31:56] Let him bring you clarity, just like Asaph did. Seek nearness to him. Don't weary yourself out with trying to figure things out by exercising faith in yourself, but exercise faith in the one who sees all things clearly.

Our father loves for his children to humbly exercise faith and come to him and not spin their wheels in something that they don't fully understand.

Lastly, guard your speech. Guard your speech. This might seem like a small thing and like, eh, what? Did you notice the two times that Asaph mentioned his speech?

Verse 15 and verse 28. In verse 15, Asaph is about to vent his envy to those around him. He's about to spray everybody with his bad attitude of being envying with the wicked.

But notice what he says. If I had spoke that way, I would have betrayed the generation of your children. His venting of envious thoughts would have had negative effects. He would have betrayed the other faithful Israelites around me.

[33:04] But then after he's experienced the clarity and the contentment of being near to God, in verse 28, he says, I have made the Lord God my refuge that I may tell of all your works.

Now, instead of venting envy, complaining, bitterness, he is declaring God's faithfulness to anyone who will listen.

The next thing that comes out of his mouth is praise to God about others so that they can find their greatest good in God. Our words matter. So if there's more complaining and envy and bitterness and self-centered speech on your lips than the faithfulness of God on your lips, then something's wrong on the inside.

Nearness to God is not your greatest good. You need to ask yourself and ask God, where am I seeking my greatest good? Is it in God or something else? And then repent of it and receive the true contentment of knowing the nearness of God.

It doesn't mean you can't say anything about honestly struggling with things. Obviously, that's good. That's pleasing to God. But we're to avoid speech that infects and poisons the air around us with untrue assumptions about God and instead go to him with those things.

[34:19] Church, it is our good to be near to God. Trusting him is worth it. There is no better choice we can make. So if you are here this morning and you are aware that in some way, whether an attitude of your heart is off, you are feeling far from God in that way or there's something that is an obstacle between you and your nearness to God, act on it.

Go to him. Spend a few moments in prayer just now and draw near to God so that he may draw near to you. Let's pray. Your nearness, Lord, is our good.

We desperately need to be near to you. Give us the strength, the power that we need this week to put other tempting things away from our hearts that would say this is our greatest good and to put our eyes on you.

Help us to draw near to you this week in faith. In Jesus' name, amen.