

Psalm 73 "Made to Wonder, Prone to Wander"

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- What an amazingly honest song. I hope you followed the words of that incredible lyric, because it really does show us the wonder of what it means to be in this room today.
- The healthiest Christians I know, the healthiest churches I get to experience and be a part of are marked by two equally important realities, desperation and delight.
- One without the other simply is not the gospel. Both together represent what it means to know the kiss of God for us in Jesus.
- And we get to see what that looks like today through an extraordinary song from the Bible. Long before Andrew Peterson began crafting his amazing music, there was a great songwriter, equally honest, equally desperate, equally filled with delight as Andrew, and many like him.
- [1 : 3 1] Would you turn your Bibles with me or look on the screen? We're going to walk through an amazing part of the Word of God found right in the center of the Word of God, Psalm 73.
- And it's a great gift to us. You'll see in your bulletin or maybe somewhere you've noticed that I'm simply titling this conversation, Made for Wonder, but Prone to Wander.
- We've already sung that tremendous hymn that's one of my favorite. Prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.
- Do you see the desperation? Do you see the delight in that? Now, we need to know that's not spin. That's not immature Christian.
- That's not simply a bad hair day. It's an honest heart day for all of us in this room. I don't know what you feel like when you leave the parking lot to come into this context.
- [2 : 3 5] If there's a part of you, like there's been a part of me a lot of my life, that feels the need to pose or pretend. What's your Southwood Prez pose?
- One day I saw a horrible church marquee out front of a big Baptist church, and that's no slam on the Baptist, so don't email me or talk to me after the service.
- It's just they have big marquees sometimes. And it said, leave your problems in the parking lot and come enjoy Jesus with us for an hour and a half.
- Folks, you know what the early church called that? Gnosticism. Separating your true self from what you assume it means for us to be about when we gather as the people of God.
- We don't have to pretend. We don't have to pose. We can remember today and learn today afresh that the hymn we sang earlier, Just As I Am, was not just made historic at Billy Graham Crusades for people that were not Christians that might become Christians.
- [3 : 4 4] Which, by the way, I responded to that hymn at a Billy Graham movie 50 years ago this March. I walked the aisle as George Beverly Shea sang Just As I Am after Billy Graham preached the gospel in an old Billy Graham movie in 1968 called The Restless Ones.
- So, for many years associated, that's a song you sing to get people to the altar. Brothers and sisters, that's a song we sing every day of our lives.

Brothers and sisters, that's a song we sing to the altar. Did you notice the quote when you came in the room on the screen? Maybe it shocked you when you looked at the name, John Calvin, whatever your association is with John Calvin.

But it says, we need to hear about the grace of God. We need to have the grace of God preached to us every day so that we might truly find our hope and refuge in Him.

Now, what does that look like? Let's walk through this amazing Psalm 73. Let me invite you to consider what a gift it is.

[4 : 50] It's an honest psalm. Oh, that churches were as honest as this psalm. And let's remember the psalms were written for the corporate worship of the people of God.

So, we know that God intended this psalm, like all psalms, to be cherished by the people of God and utilized, enjoyed. It's an honest psalm.

It says, we are a mess and God is a merciful God. Hallelujah. It's a gospel psalm, like all of the psalms.

You remember when in Luke chapter 24, after the resurrection, Jesus was walking with some men on the road to Emmaus. He camouflaged himself until he could really engage their hearts and around a mill, let them know that he was a resurrected Jesus.

And then he said this, beginning with Moses and all the prophets and the psalms, he showed him all things concerning himself. Jesus is to be found in all Scripture, or that Scripture is not well understood.

[5 : 56] We want to consider today how this psalm will lead us to Jesus as believers. Pray that we will enjoy the good news and utilize the good news that the gospel is just as much for Christians as it is non-Christians.

It's not the beginning of the Christian life. It's the entire Christian life. Now, how do we see this in this psalm? Just a couple of thoughts about the psalm writer, and then we're going to walk through the psalm and the time we have to really to engage from our head and our hearts.

Who was Asaph? Well, Asaph was kind of y'all's version of James. Asaph was a great musician in the temple. And a very gifted psalmist, very gifted writer of Scripture.

If you take all 12 psalms that are attributed to Asaph, it means he ended up writing more of the Bible than several of the minor prophets and several of the New Testament writers.

12 psalms. It's a follow-up to this day. You can Google his name. Didn't think I would say that 10 years ago. Google his name. But you'll find all 12 psalms.

[7 : 16] And he had a long ministry as a musician, as a worship leader. He served both under King David and under Solomon. Now, think about that for a minute.

That meant that he was alive through the transition from Solomon into David, right? Now, think about Solomon and David for a moment or two. What might that mean that this worship leader, this believer, what he got exposed to?

That's right. A lot of crazy. The end of Solomon's life was not very pretty. The one that built the temple. David's life.

We know him as the king from whom the greater king Jesus would come. David wanted to build the temple. It was for his son Solomon.

Asaph saw crazy among the people of God. Hold on to that thought because as we walk through this picture today, we're going to see a hurting man, an angry man, a confused man.

[8 : 22] A man that throws back the curtains on a season of his life that we don't know how long a season was. Was it weeks? Was it days?

Was it years in which he found himself disconnected from the God that he loved? But we also get to see that in his wandering days, he returned to true wonder.

What does that look like? Let's walk through these words together. Verse 1, Psalm 73. Surely God is good to Israel. To those who are pure in heart, Psalm begins with a great affirmation letting us know that this will be a story Psalm.

He's looking back on the season of life and as he writes these words, he's in a good fresh place. There's been some running back to the home and heart that is God and yet he's not going to minimize what he went through.

That's for our benefit. Please know whatever battle you're fighting this morning, whether it's one of anger, sadness, depression, disconnect, whether you, like Asaph, experience more pain in the family of God than by any pagan you ever worked with, lived with, or played with.

[9 : 49] He now shows us what that. He now shows us what that looks like and what we do with it. Look at verse 2. Here's his wandering self.

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped. I had nearly lost my foothold for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

They have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man. They are not plagued by human ills.

Therefore, pride is their necklace. They clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity. The evil conceits of their minds know no limits.

They scoff and speak with malice. In their arrogance, they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore, their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.

[10 : 55] They say, how can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge? This is what the wicked are like. Always carefree.

They increase in wealth. Stop for a moment. What do you hear in this scripture? Again, a hymn Israel sang.

What you see is an honest confession of a worship leader, of a leader among the people of God. Many times, those of us that have this vocational calling of preaching and teaching and leading the people of God, we feel in two minds.

We feel the pressure to be better than any of you guys. And we know the reality of the fact that sometimes we feel so clueless, so worthless, such a contradiction to what we want you to believe when sometimes we're struggling to believe it for ourselves.

What a gift! I wish I had seen that earlier as a follower of Christ. I wish I had seen that earlier as a pastor. We went through a very difficult season.

[12 : 13] What does Asaph say in the first parts of this psalm that help us connect? Well, it's obvious that he was in a season of life that felt horrible in comparison to other people that did not seem to care about God like he cared about God.

And he saw people, and probably a lot of them were those that showed up to worship in the temple where he was leading worship.

He probably observed people out in the culture that did not give a flying Houdini about God and Torah, but he also saw believers. And what he saw was this.

They have prestige I don't have. They have power. They have hell. They have wealth. They have wealth. They have the good life. And look at what I have.

Now, we don't know everything that was going on in his life, but it's fair to assume it was a season of just hardship for him. Again, how long we don't know.

[13 : 20] Maybe everything that was going on in the Bible, but it was going on in the Bible. Maybe everything felt broken to Asaph, and it was highlighted by looking at people that seemed to have it so much better than himself.

Comparison kills the same. Comparison is a burden. Comparison is a burden too heavy for us to bear.

And we see that in a godly man that went through an incredible season of bitterness. What do you do when you're bitter? What do you do when you're feeling that God is treating a lot of other people a lot better than you, and you deserve better?

Did Asaph think he deserved better? You betcha. Look at verse 13. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure.

In vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued. I have been punished every morning.

[14 : 30] Do you know the phrase pity party? Pity party is probably the best biblical example of a pity party with self-imposed confetti flying up in the sky, blowing your own kazoo, looking in the mirror, feeling really bad about you.

Now, I'm not disparaging his pity party. I know what that looks like, and I know when I'm having one of those emotionally, but I'm pretending.

How are you doing? Oh, great. Great. Made a good week. How can I pray for you? You know, the duplicity of heart. Brennan Manning, a follower of Jesus that came from the Roman Catholic tradition that discovered a lot of grace before he died as a recovering alcoholic, he used to say, too many people that know Jesus and love Jesus end up should-ding all over themselves.

I shouldn't oughta. I should oughta. Living under the burden of truly Christians don't think, feel, or choose like I do. The heck they don't.

Look at the leader of Israel's worship. I don't know this morning in this season of life. What you're envying, what envy looks like, you know, who is it that seems to have a better marriage or a marriage?

[15 : 56] Better kids or no kids. Better kids or no kids. It's amazing. 40 years of ordained ministry. I've met with single people that so wish they were married and married people that so wish they were single.

I've met with parents that wish they had your parents and parents that had no kids that just wonder why they've been infertile. I mean, you know, we're longing. I mean, you know, we're longing, and that's not a bad thing.

It's what we do with our longings. Not wrong to long at all. God gave us incredible longings, and they're not to be denied. They are to be stewarded.

Here we find a very honest worship leader, a believer, coming to the point that really, verses 13 and 14, this is what life felt like to him.

And I'm thankful for that because, you know, as the brothers that met with me yesterday from 9 to 4 heard, a lot of my life was right there, but I just really faked it in the plate.

[16 : 58] I just kind of put on this pose, even as a pastor in downtown Franklin, preached a lot of grace that was very helpful to a lot of people, not understanding how much I needed that grace for parts of my heart and story.

And I kind of played this silly game of trading off life. Life. Looking at my list, well, God, you know, this is what's really broken about me, but you know what?

It's trumped by the fact that I'm being useful to you over here. So we play these silly games to try to keep an equilibrium until, fortunately, the pretending just becomes too heavy to carry.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. This should be the easiest room in your week where you can be authentic and honest.

All morning long, what have we been? A people crying out to God for mercy who promises daily mercy. We've been confessing not only our sin, but God's Christ.

[18 : 14] We have so many on-ramps to be congruent, but we just don't know what to do with our own heart disconnect. Again, we're made for wonder, knowing, loving, delighting in the God of all grace, the God of all hope, the God who made us, who's redeeming us and restoring us, and yet that default mode of wandering is everywhere.

This is such good news for us. Let me tell you right now this morning, if you're a struggler, if you're having a hard time concentrating on anything, this Tar Hill redneck accent is communicating with you, you are so welcome here.

Your salvation is not bound up with your understanding and following everything I'm saying. Your salvation is bound up with a God that's pursuing you this morning. As believers and non-believers.

What did Asaph do? Let's just follow along because he's not giving us a formula. He's giving us beauty. He's giving us a picture of what does a gospel-shaped lifestyle look like.

He did not begin the psalm with the veritable, I'm on the front cover of Guidepost magazine now. I'm so glad I'm over any of this.

[19 : 39] The beauty of the Christian life is we're not primarily called to get over stuff, but to grow through all things. Some of your deepest hurts and wounds and pains are going to make you a conduit of grace and mercy and kindness.

Life in Jesus is not primarily about relief, but a changing heart, which oddly enough proves to be the greatest relief.

So what did that look like? Verse 15 and 17 begin to show us the transition. Again, the storyboard time-wise, we don't know.

When we're in heaven, we can ask Asaph, so Asaph, can you give me some backstory here? And we'll have that joy. But we have enough of his story right now.

Notice a couple of things. One, notice that in verse 15, we'll see that he has not become so bitter, so over the edge, so off the radar screen that he's just simply spewed.

[20 : 52] No, there's still a part of him that shows the tetheredness to the God that with kindness binds us to himself. Look at verse 15. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed this generation of your children.

What does that mean? Well, it means Asaph understood, God, I was a horrible contradiction. It was so hard to be with your people in your word and leading them because I knew on the inside that I envied, I was angry, I knew you to be an unfair God.

I felt, perhaps he felt very much like the elder brother in Luke 15, so smug, so self-righteous, on the premises but a stranger to Abba's promises.

He hadn't quite, Asaph, got to the point that he just threw it all away. But what did he do? Look at verse 16.

This is kind of where we think about this morning and maybe this next season. For us individually, again, those of you just beginning to look over the fence at who Jesus is, trying to figure out, can I trust anybody?

[22 : 13] What's this God stuff? Or whether you are absolutely elders in this church or pastors. What do we do? Where do we go? When I tried, verse 16, to understand all this, it was oppressive to me.

I mean, what a great declaration. Lord, finally it weighed me down. See, that's a part of my story as I shared with the men yesterday. One of the greatest gifts God gave me as a pastor was a burnout in the year 2000.

I'd just turned 50 years old. And finally, a lot of that internal contradiction and a lot of what I did not understand, the anger, just so much stuff, it finally just wore me out.

Hallelujah. It's what the Bible means by a broken and contrite heart. God will not despise. I personally needed to cry uncle that I might cry Abba.

I had to come to the end of myself as a pastor of a church that was just growing out the wazoo. Finally got to the point that the pastoral cocaine of a big growing church was not enough.

[23 : 32] Thank God. Asaph says, it was too much till, and I love this, it's such a unique picture, till I entered the sanctuary of God.

Now, what would that have meant for Asaph? It did not mean, of course, that he got in his chariot and drove down the block to Solomon's temple.

He worked there all day long. He did not need a building. He needed God. See, the first sanctuary was the Garden of Eden, and it wasn't a building.

It was the thick presence of the God who does not shame. And Asaph knew, I need, in our terms, a come-to-Jesus meeting.

I don't need to be religious. I don't need to rededicate my rededications. I don't need to man up, woman up, believer up. I need to collapse on God. I don't even have the strength to throw myself on God.

[24 : 36] I entered the sanctuary. That's just the presence of God. Where do we find the presence of God? In the gospel of his grace.

We'll come to that in a minute. Second part of verse 17 needs to be understood as these next several verses. Till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood their final destiny.

Now, let me explain this to you. Asaph saying, God, when I finally got quiet, when I really owned my bitterness, my anger, my anguish before your face, rather than pretending like that wasn't who I was, when I got quiet, when I heard you say to me, be still, I know that I am God.

I could hear you say, be still and know that I am good. When he says, I understood their destiny, he's not now beginning to relish his thought that all these bad guys are going to get their end.

This is not now a self-righteous man becoming even more self-righteous. He's saying, Lord, when my heart began to drift, I started envying, coveting, wanting, and all that internal stuff.

[25 : 49] Now, as I spent time with you, I understood that if you gave me what I was demanding, it would have killed me.

That's what these next verses look like. Verse 18, 18 through 20, describe an understanding of where if you throw your heart into cruise control and simply live out the demands of what you think you deserve or need, here's where it will take you.

Surely you place them on slippery ground. You cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors as a dream when one awakes.

So when you arise, oh Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. He's seeing himself in the company of those who try to live as though there is no God or Jesus is not enough.

This is not Asaph now condemning others. How do we know that? Look at where he goes next and talk about honesty. Verses 21 and 22.

[26 : 51] When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant.

I was a brute beast before you. I never heard a pastor talking like that growing up. Thank God I began to see as a seminarian in 1975 a man named Jack Miller that began to be that authentic and honest.

A man that went on to be my spiritual father for 21 years. A man who had been successful professor, church planter, but finally in his own words became disgusted with his disconnected heart and self-righteousness.

Maybe that's a gift to you today. You're thinking, wait a minute, a writer of the Bible serving God felt this kind of grief, this kind of embitterness to the point that he even knew that his actions, thoughts, choices were beginning rather to be rather beastly.

I am so thankful for that. Because where does that take you when we own our brokenness?

[28 : 16] It takes us into the beauty of our God. It takes us again and again and again back to gospel sanity. I'm a carrier of wounds.

An eight-year-old little boy sexually abused by a neighbor. The carrier of a huge heart wound called the death of my mom when I was 11. Went through a head-on car crash.

She was taken from us and my dad was so depressed he didn't speak her name for 40 years. I've had deep wounds that have needed to be understood and named. I also have had deep wounds as a pastor and I've been betrayed and I've been used.

Don't pity me. Grandmothers, don't come hug me. Follow me into the God who says, I understand. And I will heal your heart and I will sustain your bitterness and I will take all of that which you don't understand.

Lastly, let's see what that looks like. Verse 23. Here's where we wind down. Yet, and this is a picture of when we enter the sanctuary, when we ourselves have a come-to-Jesus meeting just exactly as we are, not making promises to do more, try harder, but being and owning the emotions, the feelings, the confusion, the sin, all this stuff.

[29 : 54] Here's what we discover again and again. Yet, I am always with you. You hold me by your right hand. You guide me with your counsel.

and afterward, you will take me into glory. Do you see in verses 23 and 24, as we center in sanctuary, how we come to understand, God, you've got my past.

You've grasped me. So, many years as a pastor before I understood it was God's grasp of me with His grace, not my grasp of Him that mattered.

Lord Jesus, you laid hold of me. You got a hold of me. I didn't invite you into my life. You gave me a new heart. You grasped me.

We forget that. We feel so alone, so orphan-like. You grasped me. My past is covered. My present is in your hands. You guide me.

[30 : 57] You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. Jesus is a good shepherd right now whether you are ignoring Him or not. Asaph, like his mentor David, needed to learn about still waters and green pastures rather than just assuming the grass is always greener on the other side.

What would it mean for you in this season right now the nest that you are with no clear predictable outcome to be taken by the hand of Jesus into His right now pastor of grace for you and the future, past, present, future, and after would you will take me into glory.

See, sometimes when you're really hurting, really angry, really sad, really disconnected, you don't think at all about the end of the story. All you do, all I do, is marinate in our own self-righteous muse.

And we need to know the Father will complete the good work you began. None of you are beyond the reach or need of God's grace today and neither am I.

Finally, what does that look like as we realize the fulfillment of this psalm? Who alone could bring to bear in reality for Asaph and all of us the beauty of being this honest, this desperate?

[32 : 30] If we're this desperate, where would the delight be? Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth.

My flesh and my heart may fail. Do you see the honesty in that? Asaph assumed pragmatically if he did it right, he would always have good health and plenty of wealth.

Look at the honesty. God, the point is no longer you baptizing what I think I deserve or have to have. Lord, I may lose my health.

I may lose a lot of stuff that actually were more my treasure and trust than you but you know what? Oh God, now I see, I believe, I understand, I taste, I realize you are enough.

Being with you, I desire nothing on earth. God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[33 : 37] Those who are far from you will perish, you destroy all who are unfaithful to you 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.

In completion, how do we see Jesus taking that on for us? You know why we will not be destroyed for our sin? Because in time, this Father, this God, sent His Son to be crushed under the weight of the judgment we deserve that we might say today, oh God, thank you for not giving me a second chance but the second Adam.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming to die for all of my sins, past, present, and future, not just the few that I'm aware of. Thank you now that through your perfect life of obedience, your death, absorbing my judgment, your resurrection for my justification, your ascension to the right hand of the Father, I can dare to believe and risk that just as I am, you welcome me, you envelop me, you receive me, and what you want to give me is a merry heart and a Martha world.

It's not about me trying harder now, it's about me believing in your love afresh. Let me pray for us, let's just pray that God would apply this word to His heart, all of our hearts, my heart.

Father, it's been a gift to me to be back at Southwood Press this weekend. Thank you for those precious brothers that engaged in a very long, full day.

[35 : 26] Thank you for their welcome, thank you, Lord, when I felt shame in recounting parts of my story, they gave me their tears, their attention, their hearts. I thank you, Lord, for this morning.

I thank you just sitting over there watching my brother, Will, with such kindness and gentleness lead your people. Lord, thank you that it is your kindness that leads us to repentance.

Thank you, Jesus, that you say, come to me, all you are weary and heavy laden, and you will find rest. Rest for the bitterness.

Rest from the beastly acting out. Rest, peace, my peace I give you, not as the world gives. Jesus, come and be our peace.

Come, Lord, and apply this word to us individually and corporately as a people. We pray with thanksgiving and anticipation, Jesus, in your name.

[36 : 26] Hallelujah, what a Savior. Hallelujah, what a salvation. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](https://yetanother sermon.host).

God bless you. Amen. Wolf, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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