Journey to Intimacy

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[0:00] You good? How's it going? Thumbs up? Yeah. When someone comes up to you who you know and they say, how's it going? What do you say? What's the response? Good. Yeah, I'm good. Yeah. Dan, you heard the sermon this morning, can't answer any more questions. Everyone else has to get involved, but thank you. Our reflex answer is, I'm good. And it doesn't mean that we're putting a hand up and saying, I'm a good person. It's not a morality question or statement. What you're saying is actually quite profound. You're saying that, oh, my desires and needs are being satisfied. And in summary, yeah, I'm good. So how are you going? Normally, if you know the person, they'll add something. They'll add some authenticity to the I'm good. They'll say, yeah, I'm good, but I'm really busy. Or they'll add, I'm really tired.

Our declaration that we're in a good place is usually followed by the areas of our life where good is not being done to us. So how's it going? What's the extra thing you'd add?
I'm good, but... Has anyone asked you, instead of how are you going, have they asked, how's it going with God? It's a bit more of a challenging variation. But I wonder if someone asked you that, would you just say, yeah, we're good? Or would you go, yeah, we're good, but I don't always feel close to God.
Or good, but I'm so busy and overwhelmed, I feel like I have no time for Him. I was just talking to some guys up the front, and I think all of us pretty much shared that about what we're looking forward to in 2019. We're good with God, yeah, but we'd love to be growing in Him. And we were sharing ways that we thought we might be able to do that. I think every Christian feels a tension here. Yes, God is good and faithful to us, but our circumstances could be better. They're difficult. We all desire to be a safer, richer, more well-known, or to have less conflict in our life, or just be able to balance a budget. It might be so bad that you're screaming those desires into a pillow each night. But no matter our circumstance, we know that life can be really hard as we follow God through hard times. And it's the hard that challenges our view of God's goodness to us.
[2:49] So today, I want to say that we are in part of the Bible that will meet you right here in your hard times. Whether you're in hard times now, or whether you will be in the future, it'll prepare you, or it will give you word right now. So that's where we're headed. This psalm is a journey through our frustrated desires to satisfaction in intimacy with God. And there alone, you're going to be able to answer the question after church tonight when everyone's cheekily asking, how's it going with God?

You're going to be able to say, satisfied and joyful. You're going to be able to say, great. But before I dive in today, let's step aside and just talk about our summer in the Psalms, a summer of Psalms. This is what we've got for the next couple of weeks.
I put this image together and I was really excited about all the hot weather we were having, and it was going to feel like in the room, like it does in the picture, and then it was the coldest day of the year. Before I dive in, I want to talk a little about Psalms. They are songs that Israel used to sing together, and they cover all of these areas of human expression, of praise and depression, joy and grief. They've been carefully curated into this book of 150, and each psalm had a place in the day-to-day life of Israel. Each psalm had a purpose for them. And now, as God's people, each has a place in our day-to-day life too. They are for us poems without music. We only have part of their art, but we have the important bit. We miss nothing of the meaning of each song because we dive into God's words in the psalms. And even though you might not have the key change you're longing for as you're reading the psalm, or the melody to help ride the emotions of where it's going and help you understand it, God is speaking by his Spirit through the psalms. So let's look, I'm going to jump back into the psalm now, let's look at psalm, or song number 73, a psalm of Asaph. And make sure you've got that page in front of you.

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Grab a pen, scribble all over it. You can make spelling mistakes if you want to write notes. No one will see it. It's okay. Sometimes we process things better if we have a pen in our hand. We get to scribble on something.
That's why it's there for you now. Asaph was a Levite. He was a leader in King David's temple song team.
[5:51] And he is the man behind this psalm. We hear this psalm like it's his story. And sometimes, when you hear a Taylor Swift song, I turn the radio off, but you might listen and think, oh, I wonder which celebrity relationship that she's had this is about. For Asaph, we don't have all that information. But what's revealed to us is that we can be confident that he has put this story into our hands on purpose for it to be our story as well.

So here's how to place yourself in the psalm. Look at verse 14. Take up your page or look in your Bible. Verse 14. All day long I've been afflicted. Every morning brings new punishments.
So that's his life. Daily persecution and affliction. Is that your experience right now? Should we just flick to the next psalm, flick to 74, if that's not your experience? No. First, this psalm will prepare you for that day when verse 14 is exactly how you feel. When your life is just like Asaph's. But secondly, let's jump right up.
Look at verse 2. Asaph says that his persecution and affliction threaten his foothold.
He's nearly slipped from his sure footing and coping and faith. That verse is how Asaph invites you into his story. You can't experience his persecution, his circumstance, but you know what it's like to have circumstances in your life that just try and knock you down.
[7:56] Imagine a huge fight with your spouse or with your best friend. You don't know how to resolve it. It lingers for days.

It pushes you into dejection and just despondency and it's you're lonely. Finally, I have this feeling of loneliness in situations like that.
Asaph's description of faith-shaking difficult season in his life invites us to bring our own into it, into this psalm. As we fear that like him, we feel like we're going to fall.
So look later over at verse 21 and 22 when he says, My heart was grieved. My spirit embittered. I was senseless, ignorant, like a beast.
And then in verse 16, jump down the bottom, verse 16. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply. I know that in hard seasons of my life, I've felt exactly like that.
[9:10] I'm sure you have too. If someone asked me or asked you right then in that hard season, how's it going with God? Would your painful, difficult, real circumstances creep into the way that you answered that question?

So let's look at verse 1. God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.
That's a promise of God that Asaph seems to be questioning during his hardship. He's opening challenge to his heart.
But soon we'll find out if Asaph finds that God is good, like he has been taught. Here, in verse 1, pure in heart is more than just the washing of hands, or the doing the right things, or the keeping pure in mind and body, like in verse 13.
It's more than that. It's a description of someone pursuing God on his terms. And we heard from Sam Lowe last week, talking from John 8, about exactly that. It's a description of someone who's obeying God and caring for others.
[10:34] And for Asaph in Israel, that meant obedience, sacrifice, and selflessness. And for us, it means following Jesus, trusting in him and his pure heart, trusting in his sacrifice, as we love others more than we love ourselves.

Asaph thought that he was following God on God's terms, but his life wasn't working out. This challenged the promise that God is good.
So, do you feel that God is good to you? If you understand good to mean peaceful, blessed, and prosperous, then you might say no.
That's why Asaph wonders, in verse 13, he says, surely in vain.
Is it all in vain that I've been following God? For Asaph, God doesn't seem to be doing to him the good that he expected.
[11:42] So, he's at this turning point. Okay? He's in this horrible circumstance, and he's challenging that promise in verse 1.

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He feels like he's falling and slipping. And then verse 3, Asaph sees the prosperity of those who do not follow God, and he is envious.
Friends, envious is so dangerous. Longing and yearning for a way out of circumstances. It turns our eyes to those who have the circumstance that we wish that we had.
Look at what Asaph sees in the world as he turns in verses 4 to 12. And just underline them as I go through. I'm just going to summarize a few of them. Because he sees in the world, as he turns, and is envious.
He sees their health, their strength, their safety, their freedom, their riches, their fine clothing, jewellery, influence, ease, wealth.
[12:53] Now, those, on their own, are not bad things. But what would the cost be for Asaph to get all of those things?

Now, in Eastern and Western cultures, we have songs that talk about prosperity like Psalm 73, just in a totally different way.
We just wholeheartedly throw ourselves in at verse 3 and go, that's amazing! Can you think of a song that does that? Longs after prosperity?
Money, money, money, always sunny, in a rich man's world. Abba's beautiful, great song that, it was one of my mum's favourites.
If not favourite, then why was she playing it? It was painful. But it is about a woman who doesn't care about what it costs, just has to get prosperity.
[13:58] She's willing to just take any guy who can say, hey, I'm worth a decent amount of money, she's like, problem solved. Adrian, my brother over here, shared with me another song, and we're going to play it and absorb it and enjoy it together right now.

Can you hit play on that, Sarah? We're going to, just, just, turn it up. Turn it up, just absorb the greatness. Does anyone know what tin means?
Money, that's right. Just keep it going, keep it going, because we've got to enjoy what this is about. One of the lines in there is literally, no money, no talk, which means, you've got no money, I've got no interest in you at all.
And I asked Google Translate to help me with some of the translation. Just keep it playing while I read some of these. I always want more money. I want more money in my day. Borrowing money is the most demeaning.
If you have money, you'll be less guilty driving down the street and stealing other people's things. It's trying to poke fun at Hong Kong's pursuit of prosperity, and yet, it doesn't provide an alternative.
[15:13] It just says, in Hong Kong, we love money. That's just the reality. I think all cultures agree, and I think we're, we're brought up to pursue prosperity as a good thing.

And if you get prosperity, it'll solve all the problems of your heart. I think that's universal. But in Psalm 73, prosperity is paired with moral poverty.
Prosperity costs everything to get it. The prosperous here, and you can circle these ones if you've underlined the first ones, circle these. The prosperous here are wicked and arrogant, prideful, violent, malicious, oppressive, blasphemous.
They spread heresy. They lead people astray and away from God. These are not those who are pure in heart. From verse 1.
But even as Asaph sees this, right, he seems to be angry at them, yet he can't help feeling pulled into how they pursue the world.
[16:31] That's what envy does. It leads us to look for satisfaction outside of our circumstances. And we're constantly bombarded by envy-fueling advertising.

Get a new car that we bus next to you that's helping you pursue envy, not God. Turn on your phone. There'll be an advertisement on there as well doing the same thing. Or on Facebook and there'll be someone's beautiful cruise holiday photos from Vanuatu like Wendy's this morning when I turned on Facebook.
look, it's never been easier to envy the prosperous. But it always costs us. Because if we have to stop following God to pursue prosperity.
And as that reality dawns on Asaph, he feels like he's got nowhere to go. So look at verse 16. When I tried to understand this, it troubled me deeply.
In other translations it says life was wearisome. It seems that hopelessness has set in. It's like he either gives into envy or gives up in despair.

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[17:58] But in his weariness he turns to God. There are two points here where Asaph, he just stops in his tracks. He doesn't give into envy or give up in despair.

He stops. Verse 15, just above where we were. If I had spoken out like that, he deliberately ceases that expression of envy and trades it for silence.
He turns away from giving in. And then in verse 17, he enters the sanctuary of God.
The psalmist went into the temple to be as physically near to God as he could. Perhaps even to question God himself on verse 1.
God, you said you were good. But we don't get to see what happened. But we see the result. That near to God, Asaph's envy was turned upside down.
[19:06] Now his envy turns to pity for the prosperous. of those who follow prosperity, he says, then I understood their destiny. Verse 17, I came near to God and I saw their future.

There's something coming to those who sin, who abuse power and lead humanity astray, who perpetrate injustice in the world, and it's God's judgment. It's fair and it's coming to them.
Maybe not now, but it certainly will come. But when God sees evil, he does not see it like Asaph did. He doesn't look at it in envy. Rather, it's perpetrators. When he sees them, they're like ghosts or fantasies to him.
They're mists and phantoms that he just brushes aside and all that's left is justice. You can see in verse 20 there, it's quite a difficult verse to grasp, but that's the imagery the psalmist is using for God's judgment.
[20:20] Notice as well that Asaph went from slipping and being knocked down in verse 2 to his persecutors being completely knocked down and swept away and destroyed.

Their destiny is awful because it's away from God completely. See, this is the worst of the punishments mentioned. Look at verse 27.
It's horrific. Those who are far from God will perish. Nearness to God is safety. Without him, anyone's future is destruction, no matter their prosperity.
authority. So what's the insight into Nearness to God that Asaph is clinging to? I think that he got a glimpse in the temple that day of his place with God that God had graciously given him.
Listen to the impact of God's promises to him. This is where I find that idea in verse 23. And this is Asaph talking to God.
[21:28] Yet I am always with you. You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will take me into glory. It's a beautiful promise.

And as we follow Jesus it's our promise too. Nothing had changed for the psalmist in his awful situation but God had affirmed his unshakable place with him right now in his mess but also into his afterward.
For the Israelite hearing this they did not have the view of eternity in heaven that we get from the New Testament. Jesus brought that promise but Asaph was relying on God for deliverance from his circumstance right now and trusting in God's nearness to him to be the only good that he would ever need regardless of what that would look like in the future.
Glory in verse 24 have a look at verse 24 and afterward you will take me into glory. The afterward Asaph hoped for was the end of this season in his life.
A future beyond there. He did not know certainty on into eternity but for him there is so much more to God's promise there in verse 24. Asaph's hope was in God's sovereignty and plan.
[23:01] You see that in 28. His sovereign Lord is his refuge. The one who understands all things who orchestrates all things the sovereign Lord and that sovereign Lord's plan is Jesus and though Asaph knew not how God would save him he trusted in the God who had drawn into him but for us we see Jesus.

So we look forward to God aiding us in our circumstance now but we can also look beyond it through our circumstances to eternal life to complete nearness with God forever as well as help injustice and our circumstances today.
The psalm is a foreshadowing of God's bigger plan a plan for our eternity to fully provide the desires for the desires of Asaph's heart even beyond what he could see.
That makes me think of the C.S. Lewis quote from mere Christianity which I only know through a song. So I'm going to share the song version because that's what I remember.
But C.S. Lewis says he supposes that if I find in myself desires that no thing in this world can satisfy I can only conclude that I was not made for here.

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[24:40] Our desires call us to eternity with God not to the envy of the world. And with God with us we have the only good we'll ever need right now and for eternity overriding our circumstances and our future worries.

Hear that reality inspire Asaph. Look at the joy that's in verse 26. My heart and my flesh may fail. There's no may in the original language.
It's just my heart and flesh fail. They just do. But God hear that. but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
He can see that God steps in to be with us in our frustration and lead us to joy. There's no gap in nearness to God in that. He's our strength of heart when our hearts fail.
And we're left in our psalm with this stark contrast of verse 27 where it says people who are those who are far from you will perish. But Asaph declares in the midst of his horrible situation as for me it is good to be near God.
[26:08] I have made the sovereign Lord my refuge. God is a refuge a safe foundation that can never be shaken enough to break and cause us to fall.

The psalm doesn't have the answer in there for how to find God or how to come near to him. We have to look to Jesus for that. And there are many places I could go and I just want to go to one. Matthew 7, 24 and 25, Jesus is telling a story. he says, everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. So hear and do Jesus' words and you will not be swept away no matter the tide or storm.
Your feet will never slip. They will never lose their footholds. Jesus is the way to finding intimacy with God as we follow him through his word to the cross and to his resurrection and into a life with him forever.
[27:34] It's through Jesus' death in our place that he takes us off the sand so graciously takes us off our slippery ground and establishes us firm on him the rock himself.

So we find our strength as he is lifted up in weakness on a cross as he took our sin away to give us back our intimacy with God.
God. Let's see something wonderful here in verse 26. Verse 26 go back there. Where it says God is the strength of my heart.
The Hebrew word for strength there is rock. God is the rock of my heart. We stand on rock only when we depend on Jesus himself.
Today if your heart is embittered or weak or failing or you just can't understand what's going on in your life run to him. The true rock of your heart and your portion forever.
[28:46] Rely on him as your foundation and strength for eternity. And join the psalmist in verse 25 and shout to God, who have I in heaven but you?

There is nothing on the earth that I desire besides you. I have all I could ever desire with Jesus says Asaph if he saw the whole picture.
Is that enough for you? To be near God? The psalm has given us a process to walk through when we're frustrated in our circumstances and on our way to envy of the world.
So open your Bible when you're bitter and weary. Learn to take this journey in prayer and come near to the counsel of God. Seek his word. Read of Jesus in the gospels.
Wonder in his love as he comes near to you to bring you to God. How's it going? Follow Asaph and share this journey with other believers.
[30:02] Remember that. Remind each other of this psalm and journey through it together. If someone says how you're going and you're not good, talk to them.

Recall everything that's going on in your life so that you're given the opportunity for someone else to remind you of all you've got in Jesus. Ask each other, how are you going with God?
Ask the question that matters because life is hard, but hard does not mean wrong. I'll say that one more time because it's late in the sermon.
It's important. Life is hard, but hard does not mean wrong. Hard can still be good with God.
Last thing. Have this worldview of Asaph, right? He didn't see only his life in the balance as he wrestled with envy, as he stood in this circumstance.
[31:12] No, he could see in verse 15. Just have a look at verse 15. I would have betrayed your children if I had spoken out like that.

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He deliberately changes course because he does not want potential believers to be led astray.
Those who he might have been talking about in verses 4 to 12.
Those who don't yet know the benefits of nearness to God. And then as he finishes, Asaph reaffirms that commitment in verse 28.
He ends the psalm with this verse that feels like it's on its own. If you don't see that it's on his heart in the midst of his trouble and wrestling with God.
The very end of the psalm, it says, I will tell of all your deeds. Would you respond to your joy in God as he fulfills all your desires in him by sharing that good news?
[32:16] Go tell the world. Go tell of his deeds. As we go, this psalm can help us be ready for hard times, armed with readiness to turn to God in Jesus and rest in the relationship of intimacy that Jesus himself has won for us.

God will not have the music to sing Psalm 73 as they did in Israel 3,000 years ago.
We're blessed with songs to help us turn back. Things that people have written with the same heart and the same intent to turn us away from envy and to call us back to God.
We're going to sing some of those right now.

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