

Nearsighted – Psalm 73

July 31, 2016 - Pastor Alex Kranjec

¹ Truly God is good to Israel,
to those whose hearts are pure.
² But as for me, I almost lost my footing.
My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.
³ For I envied the proud
when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.
⁴ They seem to live such painless lives;
their bodies are so healthy and strong.
⁵ They don't have troubles like other people;
they're not plagued with problems like everyone else.
⁶ They wear pride like a jeweled necklace
and clothe themselves with cruelty.
⁷ These fat cats have everything
their hearts could ever wish for!
⁸ They scoff and speak only evil;
in their pride they seek to crush others.
⁹ They boast against the very heavens,
and their words strut throughout the earth.
¹⁰ And so the people are dismayed and confused,
drinking in all their words.
¹¹ "What does God know?" they ask.
"Does the Most High even know what's happening?"
¹² Look at these wicked people—
enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.
¹³ Did I keep my heart pure for nothing?
Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?
¹⁴ I get nothing but trouble all day long;
every morning brings me pain.
¹⁵ If I had really spoken this way to others,
I would have been a traitor to your people.
¹⁶ So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper.
But what a difficult task it is!
¹⁷ Then I went into your sanctuary, O God,

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and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.

¹⁸ Truly, you put them on a slippery path
and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction.

¹⁹ In an instant they are destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors.

²⁰ When you arise, O Lord,
you will laugh at their silly ideas
as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.

²¹ Then I realized that my heart was bitter,
and I was all torn up inside.

²² I was so foolish and ignorant—
I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.

²³ Yet I still belong to you;
you hold my right hand.

²⁴ You guide me with your counsel,
leading me to a glorious destiny.

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you?

I desire you more than anything on earth.

²⁶ My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,
but God remains the strength of my heart;
he is mine forever.

²⁷ Those who desert him will perish,
for you destroy those who abandon you.

²⁸ But as for me, how good it is to be near God!

I have made the Sovereign Lord my shelter,
and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do.

So about 8 years ago now, I was working as a sound producer at a ministry called the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. Part of my job was working the sound console in our larger auditoriums. I began to notice that from about 30 feet away I had a hard time clearly seeing what was going on on the platform. I never had any vision problems, so this was strange for me. I also began to notice issues

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with reading street signs at night and even just watching TV from across the room. It turned out, I had developed the need for glasses and contacts to correct my nearsighted vision. I could see what was immediately in front of me, but without contacts or glasses, I had a hard time seeing the distant horizon.

Near sighted, also known as myopia, is a vision problem, effecting nearly 30 percent of the population, that prevents one from seeing clearly that which is far away. What's even more prevalent however, is spiritual nearsightedness. The person with this problem can only see that which is temporal, physical and earthly. Without a means of correcting this vision problem, one's perspective is limited to that which can be seen right in front of him. We hold on to the temporary and physical, because it's all that we can see.

Enter the writer of Psalm 73, Asaph. Asaph was a deeply committed leader to Israel. A gifted musician and leader of music in the temple. It would have been expected of him to have great faith and confidence in God. After all, he spent a majority of his time ministering to God in the temple. Yet, Psalm 73 tells of a time when **Asaph took his eyes off the eternal and focused his attention on the temporal. This caused him to lose the right perspective on life.**

Asaph had a perspective problem - he was only able to see the here and now. Viewing life around him through the eyes of the temporary led to the development of anger, bitterness, and rage toward God in his heart. Verse 22 says he was like a senseless animal. Even though he had committed himself to the way of God, life just wasn't going as he planned. He was mad at God.

Like Asaph, we also have a nearsighted condition. We often find ourselves fixated on temporary things, clinging to the here and now. It's led us to be dismayed, confused, to wrongly view God and people, and if we're honest, we're mad at God. "Oh, not me Pastor Alex, I'm not mad at God." Seriously... look at the world around us, look at injustices that exist, and that you've personally experienced, and tell me you've never thought, "what are you doing God?" As The Message paraphrase puts it, "God! what's going on here, are you out to lunch?" We aren't being honest with ourselves

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if you think you've never asked that question. We all experience injustice of some form or other.

Real quick, I want to define justice. This is a word that's being thrown around a lot right now. **Justice in it's purest, original intent, is a world of right relations.** And by *right* we mean, how God designed and intended those relations to be. Recall, that in the garden God created, we saw all components of creation in right relationship with each other - male and female, human and animal, humanity and the rest of creation. That was a world of just relations. Sin ultimately spoiled that. But God has a plan of redemption that will ultimately end with the city of God in which there's no more war, pain, death, and all ethnicities come together to worship. Evil will be defeated, the wicked punished, and God's redeemed will enjoy a world of justice realized. That's the big picture - one that Asaph sees here.

But like Asaph, we all have experienced some form of injustice, some affects of sin tearing apart the right relations God intended. Maybe like me, your parents divorced, or maybe you've lost a loved one to cancer, or you've been the recipient of racial injustice, or you've been physically or emotionally abused by someone you thought you could trust, or you had to bury a child, or you're in constant physical pain... the list goes on.

I'd venture to say that in the midst of that, somewhere, if we're honest, we've been mad at God. You probably, like Asaph, said something like, "God, did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason?" I've lived a good life, served You, done my best at this thing. Yet, here I am with this pain and trouble.

And at the same time, we look at the world around us and see those making no effort to live a godly life - they are living lives consumed with pride, violence and corrupt speech. Out of their mouths come scoffing, malice and ego. They do whatever it takes to get their way. They're well liked, attract a following, and lead others astray. They act as if God doesn't exist. Yet, it seems as if they are winning! They look good, their stomachs are full, wallets padded, they enjoy life.

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In verse 16 we read that Asaph tried to understand, but in trying on his own he only became more perplexed and troubled. He realized the limitations of his own perspective. Verse 2 tells us that he almost lost his footing. His confusion and anger led him to just about give up on everything. The image is of one climbing a mountain and suddenly you lose your foothold and begin to slip. It's the loss of your foundation, of your basis for life.

All of us have something we base our lives on, we have a perspective that we live by. A way of viewing everything that happens to us and around us. We have a lens, that we look at the world through. We call this perspective our worldview. It not only informs how we view the world, but also how we act in the world.

Asaph struggled to find the right perspective. But by the end of the Psalm he's back on stable footing. How did he get there? How was he able to conclude, amidst the injustice and pain, that God is good? What if in the midst of all your pain, troubles, and injustices of life you were able to say, "truly God is good..."? I want to look at four truths that I believe will help us in this.

Firstly, Asaph is honest about his feelings and weaknesses. The first step of the 12-step AA program, which has been applied to countless other addiction recovery programs reads, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol-and that our lives had become unmanageable." The underlying principle here is honesty. For any person or organization to grow, we must be honest about where we are. You see, our natural tendency is to appear as we are not. Think about it. We add fluff to all sorts of things. We post the photo to Instagram that shows us in our best light, we dramatize events of our lives to get a certain emotional reaction out of someone, we slightly falsify work documents, we hold the truth back to "save face" with others, and so on.

To come to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ requires brutal honesty. 1 John 1:8-10 - If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We have to confess of our need for a savior and have to bring

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our sin and weakness into the light. By doing so we experience the power of Christ working in our weakness. But if we misrepresent ourselves, we limit the power of God in our lives.

Earlier in 1 John it states God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. God can only exist in pure light. He cannot exist in misrepresentation. He cannot exist in lies. Remember, God looks at the heart, not the outward appearance. His nature requires that he deal with things in the light, in the reality of what they are. Charles Spurgeon said this, "The Lord cannot stand with us on the platform of seeming and appearance, but only on the ground of what we really are, and therefore in proportion as we are untrue we cut ourselves off from God."

Asaph was honest about his struggle. Rather than ignoring them, he brought his doubts, emotions, and pain into the light.

Then there's verse 15, this is interesting - "If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people." He's saying, "though I have these thoughts, I waited to conclude these thoughts were certain. Had I done that, I would have betrayed the community of God, and everything it stood for." Asaph resisted jumping to speculations and conclusions. It's not whether we have doubts or perplexities. If you serve God, eventually you will be perplexed by him. That's a good sign! A mature person, even in the midst of confusion, anger and perplexity, is able to stop and consider his perspective before jumping to conclusions.

But, what I find interesting here is this line, "I would have been a traitor to your people." In the midst of his personal doubt and anger, he was concerned about the people of God. He was able to think of people besides himself. What's that tell me? That tells me of the importance of our community. We're saved into a family. And sometimes the first thing we can grab onto in the midst of our doubts and anger is our family. (That's why you need to be in a life group this fall!)

Asaph resisted misrepresenting himself. He was honest about his weakness. And, he grabbed hold of the family of God.

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Secondly, Asaph entered the sanctuary. Verse 17 tells us, he choose to worship. Having grappled with his weaknesses and attempting to understand in his own strength, he went to the sanctuary. For Asaph the sanctuary was the place of God's presence. It was the place that housed the altar and the word of God. A place of sacrifice, hearing of the word, worship, prayer, and the celebration of the feasts. As John Calvin put it, it was the "school of God" on earth. It was the hub of God's perspective "on earth as it is in heaven" and the key to proper understanding.

You see what happened when he went to the sanctuary? "I finally understood" Asaph says. He went for understanding, for right thinking, for a new perspective. He didn't come into the sanctuary for good music, or an inspiring message, or to have an uplifting experience. We have to be honest about this, because this is a real challenge in today's culture. We don't come to the sanctuary, we don't practice Christian disciplines, we don't gather in Christian community, and we don't participate in Christian service for a pleasing experience. We don't do these things to forget our troubles, we do them to transform and redeem the way we see our troubles. If you're looking at Christianity as a means to make yourself feel better, or to make your troubles hurt less, then I like the advice of Pastor Tim Keller, "A nice sherry by the fire will do the same thing." Now, that was his advice, so don't go saying Pastor Alex advised you to drink away your troubles...

Worship's primary purpose isn't to make us feel better. Worship is about connecting with the eternal God. And when we encounter eternal God, he confronts and corrects our nearsighted perspectives. It's about God changing the way we think, the way we see. Worship ultimately should confront the embedded perspectives of our lives that stand in contrast to the knowledge of God.

In 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, Paul states that our struggle is ultimately not one of flesh and blood, but of the mind. So "we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

Worship, the Christian life, it confronts the way we see and think about life. It changes our perspective! That's why our worship team vision is to *see, savor, and*

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share the glory of God. We recognize that unless we first see God, nothing else in life will really make sense.

In his book, *The Vision and The Vow*, Pete Greig tells of how a distinguished art critic was studying an exquisite painting by the Italian Renaissance master Filippino Lippi. He stood in London's National Gallery gazing at the fifteenth-century depiction of Mary holding the infant Jesus on her lap, with saints Dominic and Jerome kneeling nearby. But the painting troubled him. There could be no doubting Lippi's skill, his use of colour or composition. But the proportions of the picture seemed slightly wrong. The hills in the background seemed exaggerated, as if they might topple out of the frame at any minute onto the gallery's polished floor. The two kneeling saints looked awkward and uncomfortable.

Art critic Robert Cumming was not the first to criticize Lippi's work for its poor perspective, but he may well be the last to do so, because at that moment he had a revelation. It suddenly occurred to him that the problem might be his. The painting had never been intended to come anywhere near a gallery. Lippi's painting had been commissioned to hang in a place of prayer.

The dignified critic dropped to his knees in the public gallery before the painting. He suddenly saw what generations of art critics had missed. From his new vantage point, Robert Cumming found himself gazing up at a perfectly proportioned piece. The foreground had moved naturally to the background, while the saints seemed settled – their awkwardness, like the painting itself, having turned to grace. Mary now looked intently and kindly directly at him as he knelt at her feet between saints Dominic and Jerome.

It was not the perspective of the painting that had been wrong all these years, it was the perspective of the people looking at it. Robert Cumming, on bended knee, found a beauty that Robert Cumming the proud art critic could not. It was the posture of worship that enabled Robert Cumming to find the right perspective.

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From the vantage point of worship, Asaph too was able to find the right perspective. His nearsighted vision was corrected and he was able to see the whole picture.

Verse 17 in The Message says, "I entered the sanctuary of God, Then I saw the whole picture." That's our third truth **Asaph saw the whole picture!** He saw the destiny of the wicked. They were on a trajectory toward death and destruction, a slippery slope. Though it appears they prosper now, they build their lives on sinking sand that could give way at any moment. Ultimately God is in control. Just like the images of a dream fade shortly after waking, so will the perspectives of the wicked.

When we suffer from spiritual nearsightedness, we can only see one side of things. We only see what's right in front of us. We can't see the whole picture.

2 Corinthians 4:18 - "So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."

A lot of our sin, confusion, and anger exists because we cannot see the whole picture. Take the sin of prejudice and racism. What's ultimately going on there? At the root of prejudice is nearsightedness. Prejudice only sees one side of things. It misses the experience of the other and fails to see all humanity as created in God's image. You have to look at all sides. Tim Keller suggests it's best to see things as a cube rather than a square. A square has one perspective, but a cube must be looked at from different angles.

If you're struggling with life today, with doubts, sin, understanding the injustices we experience, than you might be in too close. You might be too focused on what's right in front of you. Picture a cube - if you're in too close it will appear as a square. But pull back and you see the other sides of the thing. Go to the sanctuary, gaze at eternal god, ask for understanding, then you'll be able to see differently. That's what Asaph does. He sees the other side of the wicked.

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Not only does he gain a new perspective on the wicked, **Asaph gained a new perspective on self**. This new perspective shed light on the condition of his heart. He was hurt, torn up, pierced. His anger, pain, and envy led to bitterness on the inside. He was stupid, senseless, and devoid of clear thinking. He uses the image of losing his foothold on a mountain.

You've seen this scene in hundreds of movies... Imagine you're hanging off a mountain, clinging for life, and just as you are about to fall to your death, somebody grabs you by the hand and pulls you up. How do you feel toward that person? You were on a trajectory toward death, your own strength could not save you, and God snatched you out. That's an encounter with God's grace.

Asaph says, "you hold my right hand." In Hebrew culture, the right hand was a symbol of strength and honor. Asaph saw that God alone was his strength. God alone was his source for life. Even when he was senseless, envious, and mad at God, slipping off the edge of that mountain in despair, God was grabbing his right hand!

I believe Asaph encountered the grace of Jesus in the sanctuary. He looked at the altar, he sees that his ultimate glory is found in that sacrifice. He sees he's nothing apart from the sacrifice of Jesus. Then he comes out and says, "whom have I in heaven by you? And there's nothing on earth that I desire besides you." He sees that he's nothing apart from Jesus, and the ultimate reward of life is God! "If my heart and flesh fail, God is still the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

To say God is our portion, is to say in Him alone we are content. John Calvin states, God alone is our portion, because "in him the perfection of our happiness consists."

God is what we receive. God is not the means, he's the end. He's not just the means to receive eternal life or blessings in this life. He's the reward. He is the prize of life!

If God is our prize, than everything else can be taken away, even our life, and we would still receive the prize!

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That kind of perspective impacts our life. Looking at Jesus, the one who encountered the ultimate injustice. The one who really was innocent. Finding our portion in Him will change the way we look at life. It's the only place that provides the right perspective on life, that corrects our spiritual nearsightedness.

Lastly, Asaph ends the Psalm by saying, "and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things you do." From this new vantage point, seeing life from this new perspective, he says he will share the good news of what God has done. Rather than being caught up in fear of what the wicked will do, Asaph chooses to herald the works of God!

How is your life heralding the works of God? When people encounter you, do you challenge the way they look at life, offering a perspective of hope? Or are you caught up in worldly ways of thinking? Look, the world will challenge our perspective. But, it's how we respond that matters. How we respond to the injustices of life around us often will expose our perspective.

I'd venture to say by the looks of many Christian's Facebook timelines, we're in too close. We're holding on to ways of thinking about life that ultimately reflect a temporal perspective. Like Asaph, **we've taken our eyes off the eternal and focused our attention on the temporal. This has caused us to lose the right perspective on life.**