

When I Have Doubts
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In your Care Groups I posed some questions:

- “What are examples of times that we ask God WHY?”
- “If God had chosen that His people would never suffer..how might that be a BAD thing?”
- “How have you dealt with it when you have struggled with DOUBTS as a believer?”

One of the great WHY questions we ask God is:

- “Why do the wicked seem to prosper and God’s people seem to suffer?”

Let’s take a poll. How many think that God should give an easy carefree life to those who are obedient to Him and make it hard on the wicked? Show of hands? Me too!

- Guess what?: He’s God and we’re not.
- Guess what?: He didn’t ask our opinion.

- “Why do the wicked seem to prosper and God’s people seem to suffer?”
 - That’s what Psalm 73 our lesson text today is all about.
- It won’t answer that question because God hasn’t chosen to share that with us yet.
- It WILL show us how a well known servant of God dealt with his doubts and left us a prayer to help us deal with ours.

This Psalm is one of 12 written by Asaph. He was the CHIEF WORSHIP LEADER for King David. You might say he was like the Scott White in David’s church. But as much as we think of Scott White, Asaph was even bigger than that. He was not just a great worship leader he was a famous SONG WRITER of praise music. He was like the Steven Curtis Chapman or Michael W. Smith of his day. He was a WELL KNOWN figure in praise and worship in the whole country of Israel!

That biographical sketch is important because we need to understand that even God’s most dedicated servants have their doubts. Asaph wrote a Psalm about his. Let’s look at it.

Let’s look at Psalm 73 beginning with verses 1-3

Psalm 73

A psalm of Asaph.

- 1 Surely God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
- 2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.

3 For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

- Look at verse 1. Asaph SPOILED THE ENDING of his story! What does he make clear in verse 1?
 - God is GOOD to those who are PURE IN HEART

Hebrews 11:6 (New International Version)

6And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

- Then in verses 2 and 3 Asaph sets up what this Psalm is all about. What CRISIS of Faith did he have?
 - His faith almost slipped when he
 - Envied the wicked
- Then for the next nine verses he DETAILS how the wicked seem to prosper:
 - They have no struggles
 - They're healthy, strong, tanned, well rested (okay I added the last two)
 - They wear their "pride like a necklace"
 - They're conceited; malicious; violent; and arrogant
 - They don't even think God knows the evil they do
 - And what's more they get all the money too!
- It reads like an episode of the LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH, FAMOUS, and EVIL!
- Look at verse 10:

10 Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance. [c]

Here's how THE MESSAGE paraphrase renders it:

People actually listen to them—can you believe it?
Like thirsty puppies, they lap up their words.

- Even though these people are wicked, they don't just get all the STUFF they get all the publicity too!
- He said every night I see 'em on TMZ and Entertainment Tonight and The Insider and people (even God's people) take it all in like these people are ROLE MODELS!
- Then in verses 13 and 14 he really starts feeling sorry for himself:

13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;
in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

14 All day long I have been plagued;
I have been punished every morning.

- He's saying: I've been having my quiet time and writing worship music and keeping my nose clean and what do I get for all my obedience?
- He's saying: God's people get made fun of and these people get all the STUFF and all the PRESS...And I'm SICK OF IT!
- Maybe I want to get out of Christian music and get me a POP music deal!
- But then in verse 15 his conscience got the better of him:

Here it is in the New Living Translation:

15 If I had really spoken this way to others,
I would have been a traitor to your people.

- What is he saying in verse 15?
 - He didn't confess his doubts about God and how the wicked prosper to others...He kept it between him and God!
 - Why would he keep his doubts between him and God?
 - Imagine the negative influence it would have had on thousands if word got out that Asaph the great Christian songwriter and performer had DOUBTS!
- As great a man of God as he was, Asaph had his doubts.
- Can you think of another famous RELIGIOUS figure a few years ago who we discovered had some SECRET DOUBTS about God?
 - Mother Teresa – After her death some SECRET LETTERS came to light that showed that for decades this woman everyone saw as an ICON of goodness and light struggled with doubts in her relationship with God.
 - The letters were discovered when the Catholic Church was doing research to make her a saint.
 - Here are a couple of quotes from her letters:

"Where I try to raise my thoughts to heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul. Love -- the word -- it brings nothing,"

In another letter, Mother Teresa wrote, *"In my soul, I can't tell you how dark it is, how painful, how terrible -- I feel like refusing God."*

Church officials said the letters strengthen Mother Teresa's case for sainthood -- the struggle with her own spirituality and purpose showing her humanity.

Albert Mohler wrote:

The recent revelations of Mother Teresa's spiritual struggle should remind all believing Christians that our faith is in Christ -- not in our feelings.

The disclosure of previous secret letters from Mother Teresa indicates that she was deeply troubled by doubts and a sense of Christ's absence. The fact is that many Christians struggle with doubt. Indeed, the most thoughtful believers are most likely of all to understand what is at stake, and thus to suffer pangs and seasons of doubt.

Doubt can be healthy. It can drive believers to a deeper knowledge of what we believe and a deeper embrace of the truth of the Gospel. It can deepen our trust in God and mature our faith. At the same time, doubt can be a form of sin . . . a refusal to trust God and his promises.

- Asaph had his doubts! But then look at verses 17-19:

17 till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.
18 Surely you place them on slippery ground;
you cast them down to ruin.
19 How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!

- What do you think he means in verse 17 when he said he “enters the sanctuary of God?”
 - The phrase “sanctuary” literally translates “holy places of God”
 - The PRESENCE of God
- Can you think of a time in your life when you REALLY FELT THE PRESENCE of GOD? What was going on in your life?
 - In Asaph’s case, when he was in the midst of his greatest DOUBTS and QUESTIONS he felt the presence of God the most.
- Then look at the second sentence of verse 17 and verses 18 and 19. What did he understand about the wicked?
 - Unrighteousness would not escape God’s judgment; His justice would ultimately prevail.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek the First Lady of China in the last century said:

True enough, the sun shines on the saint and sinner alike, and too often it seems that the wicked wax and prosper. But we can say with certitude that, with the individual as with the nation, the flourishing of the wicked is an illusion, for, unceasingly, life keeps books on us all.

- Let me correct her quote. It’s isn’t LIFE that keeps books on us all...it’s a JUST GOD.
- God WILL BRING JUSTICE ON THE WICKED if they don’t REPENT and turn to Him.
- That’s the bad news for the wicked. What’s the good news for you and me?

Verses 23 – 28:

- 23 Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
- 24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.
- 25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
- 26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.
- 27 Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
- 28 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.

- Coming into God's presence and FOCUSING ON HIM and NOT ON THE EVIL and INJUSTICE AROUND US will change our perspective.
 - Steve Brown story about his wife Anna... "Girls, LOOK AT ME...LISTEN to me."
 - In our chaos God is saying LOOK AT ME; LISTEN TO ME; FOCUS ON ME; TRUST ME.

PSALMS OF PAIN

Do you ask hard questions concerning your faith, or do you deny or dismiss your doubts? When you feel pain or disappointment, do you express it in prayer, or do try to wear only a smile when you approach God? Many of the psalms show that the Lord wants to hear our worst fears, doubts, and hurts. In fact, these psalms of pain, some of which are listed below, can help to give voice to our deepest feelings and enable us to bring them to the God who cares. Word in life study Bible . 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Ps 73:21).

Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What's the TAKEAWAY?

- It's OKAY TO HAVE DOUBTS. It's what we DO WITH THEM that matters!
- When we have doubts we can take them to God and confess them
- Focusing on the GOODNESS OF GOD helps us keep our footing when we are doubting
- Worship and just sitting quietly in God's presence helps us change our perspective so we can deal with our doubts
- God's blessings in our lives are not measured in STUFF and FAME but in terms of God's GOODNESS and PRESENCE in our lives

One of the most breath-taking and heart-breaking tragedies was the accidental death of Steven Curtis Chapman's little girl Maria. Steven and his wife Mary Beth were on Larry King Live sharing their journey through this double tragedy involving both their little girl and her older brother. At the end of the interview Larry asked Mary Beth:

KING: Ever doubt, Mary Beth?

M. CHAPMAN: I have no doubt where Maria is, and I have no doubt that I'll see her again.

KING: Never questioned your belief?

M. CHAPMAN: Never, never. You know what? I tell my closest friends, I told them when it got to the darkest, darkest point, and we went as far down as we could, we might not have even landed feet up, might have landed right on our face, but the foundation was solid and it was there. And we landed and it's a day at a time.

Steven and Mary Beth Chapman have been great examples of a couple and a family that knew how to take their WHY questions to God and they've clearly been to the SANCTUARY and RECALLED that even when we DOUBT we can be assured of God's GOODNESS!