



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V27 N24

June 15, 2025

## PSALMS: CELEBRATING CHRIST IN GOD'S HYMNBOOK

### "Psalm 73"

#### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

##### Humanity

I believe all people  
are loved by God and  
need Jesus Christ as their  
Savior.

*"For God so loved the world  
that he gave his one and only  
Son, that whoever believes in  
him shall not perish but have  
eternal life."*

John 3:16



## Q?

Why not envy  
wicked  
wealthy peo-  
ple?



"Only the good die young" is a somewhat ambiguous proverb that is attributed to Herodotus in 445 B.C., who wrote, "Whom the gods love dies young." At first it had a *positive* connotation, suggesting that virtuous people are favored by the gods and taken away at a younger age to be with them in the afterlife. In this sense it's often used to praise the virtue of one who dies an untimely death. In other words, it's a way of lamenting the loss of someone with great potential, who dies unexpectedly.

Billy Joel, however, gave it a *negative* connotation. In his song, he suggests that virtuous living might lead to missing out on experiences that life has to offer. In its opening lines addressed to Virginia, a Catholic girl in whom he was interested, Joel says, "Well, they showed you a statue, told you to pray. They built you a temple and locked you away. Aw, but they never told you *the price that you pay, for things that you might have done*. Well, only the good die young." Apparently, to miss out on "fun with sinners" for the sake of virtue is to die young.

One might say that the proverb explores the somewhat ambiguous relationship of *virtue* and *prosperity*. Do the righteous prosper and the wicked suffer, or is it the other way around? Perhaps the answer to that *either/or* question is *both/and*. Biblical wisdom suggests that both are true. On the one hand, the righteous do prosper and the wicked do suffer, but on the other the wicked do prosper and the righteous do suffer. The relationship of *virtue* and *prosperity* is not so simple.

The book of Proverbs frequently suggests that the first is true—the righteous (i.e., the wise) prosper, and the wicked (i.e., the foolish) suffer. The optimistic tenor of the book is reflected in the following passages—others could be cited: "The LORD holds *success* in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless" (2:7); "Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, *prosperity* and honor" (21:21; cf. 10:16); however, "One whose heart is corrupt *does not pros-*

*per*; one whose tongue is perverse falls into trouble" (17:20).

The book of Ecclesiastes frequently suggests that the second is true—the wicked prosper, and the righteous suffer. The pessimistic tenor of the book is reflected in the following passages—again others could be cited: "In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: the righteous perishing in their righteousness and the wicked living long in their wickedness" (7:15); "There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless" (8:14).

These puzzling incongruities tempt many to deconstruct their faith, as they did Asaph. In Psalm 73 he confesses: "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 . . . This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence" (vv. 2-3, 12-13).

Perhaps the way out of this quagmire involves broadening one's perspective—distinguishing the temporary from the permanent and the short-term from the long-term. Asaph testifies: "When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their *final* destiny" (vv. 16-17). And Solomon concurs: "Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that *in the end* it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him" (Ecc 8:12).

David gives good counsel in Psalm 37. "Don't worry about the wicked or envy those who do wrong. 2 For like grass, they soon fade away. Like spring flowers, they soon wither . . . 37 Look at those who are honest and good, for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace. 38 But the rebellious will be destroyed; they have no future" (vv. 1-2, 37-38 NLT).

## Read Psalm 73:1-28

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.
- 4 They have no struggles;  
their bodies are healthy and strong.
- 5 They are free from common human burdens;  
they are not plagued by human ills.
- 6 Therefore pride is their necklace;  
they clothe themselves with violence.
- 7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity;  
their evil imaginations have no limits.
- 8 They scoff, and speak with malice;  
with arrogance they threaten oppression.
- 9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven,  
and their tongues take possession of the earth.
- 10 Therefore their people turn to them  
and drink up waters in abundance.
- 11 They say, "How would God know?  
Does the Most High know anything?"
- 12 This is what the wicked are like –  
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.
- 13 Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure  
and have washed my hands in innocence.
- 14 All day long I have been afflicted,  
and every morning brings new punishments.
- 15 If I had spoken out like that,  
I would have betrayed your children.
- 16 When I tried to understand all this,  
it troubled me deeply
- 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!
- 20 They are like a dream when one awakes;  
when you arise, Lord,  
you will despise them as fantasies.
- 21 When my heart was grieved  
and my spirit embittered,
- 22 I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was a brute beast before you.

- 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.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "Surely" in v. 1.
- Bracket "But as for me" in vv. 2, 28.
- Underline "almost slipped" in v. 2.
- Box "For" indicating *reason* in v. 3.
- Circle "envied," "arrogant," and "wicked" in v. 3.
- Box "Therefore" indicating *result* in vv. 6, 10.
- Circle "necklace" in v. 6.
- Circle "lay claim" in v. 9.
- Circle "their people" in v. 10.
- Bracket "drink up waters" in v. 10.
- Circle "in vain" in v. 13.
- Box "If" indicating *a condition* in v. 15.
- Circle "slippery ground" v. 18.
- Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 20.
- Bracket "with you" in v. 23.
- Box "But" indicating *contrast* in vv. 26, 28.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Psalm 73 has two parts. Where would you divide it—between which two verses? Explain.
  2. Give a contemporary example of the psalmist's struggle. (See vv. 2, 3.)
  3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with his description of the wicked (vv. 4-9)?
  4. Who are "they" and what's the point of their *rhetorical* questions in verse 11?
  5. In what sense do you think the psalmist was "afflicted" and "punished (v. 14)?"
  6. Explain the *comparison* in verse 20, and put the point of verses 18-20 in your own words.
  7. The word "yet" (v. 23) indicates a soft *contrast*. What is being contrasted?
  8. Record your reflections on verse 25.
  9. Explain the *metaphors* used in verse 26. God is "the strength of my heart" and "my portion."
  10. **Discussion:** Can you identify with what the psalmist said in verse 28? Talk about it.
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### Commentary On The Text

Psalms 73 opens Book 3 (Pss 73-89) of the book. On this section of the book of Psalms, one commentator writes: “A man (or men) named Asaph wrote 11 of the psalms in this book (Pss. 73–83; cf. Ps. 50). Other writers were the sons of Korah (Pss. 84–85, 87), David (Ps. 86), Heman (Ps. 88), and Ethan (Ps. 89). Men named Asaph, Heman, and Ethan were musicians from the tribe of Levi who were contemporaries of David (1 Chron. 6:39, 42, 44). Most commentators believed that they were the writers of these psalms” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Psalms,” 2025 ed., 293, [soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf](http://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf)). Book 3 has been called the Psalter’s “dark book” (Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 886) – perhaps because, contrary to the promise made to David (2Sa 7:16), seventeen of its psalms speak of the defeat of God’s people at the hands of international forces (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Message of Book III: Psalms 73-89,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174:694 [April-June 2017]:140).

According to the Teacher of Ecclesiastes, life is filled with crooked things that can’t be made straight (Ecc 1:15), not the least of which is the prosperity of the wicked. How can God let *bad people prosper* and *good people suffer*? It’s a timeless question that casts doubt on God – a question you yourself have no doubt asked. If God is truly righteous, how can he tolerate such injustice?

The psalmist summarizes the problem in these terms, “This is what the wicked are like – always free of care they go on amassing wealth” (Ps 73:12). From all appearances, “They seem more carefree (vv. 4-5), proud and violent (v. 6), as well as unrestrained (v. 7). They speak proudly (vv. 8-9), lead others after themselves (v. 10), and act as if God does not care how they live (v. 11; cf. Ps. 94:7). With few cares, they continue to prosper (v. 12; cf. vv. 4-5). [They] never concern themselves about God and at the same time get on better” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Psalms,” 2025 ed., 295, [soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf](http://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf)). And that being the case, the psalmist laments, “Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence” (v. 13). In other words, I’ve been good for nothing. It pays to be wicked; righteousness isn’t worth the effort. Left unanswered, the problem injustice robs us of our peace with God and leaves us with serious doubts that try our faith. The psalmist openly confesses, “My feet had almost slipped; I had nearly

lost my foothold for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (vv. 2, 3).

The psalmist readily admits that he “envied the arrogant,” those whose prosperity had led them to the conclusion that God is of no consequence. He’s irrelevant. One commentator writes: “The godless boast of their practical atheism (cf. 10:11; 14:1). They do not deny the existence of God but limit him in his knowledge and wisdom. From their perspective God is only concerned with religion, piety, and good deeds and does not punish those who by their own scheming and plottings take advantage of business and political opportunities . . . The confidence of the wicked enticed many who did not have strong convictions” (Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, vol. 5, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 562) – see verse 10.

It isn’t until he enters the sanctuary of God that the psalmist gains understanding and relief from his oppressive musings. Till then his thoughts plague him day and night, but once he sees that the wicked are living high on borrowed time, he regains his spiritual footing. Prosperity only gives the illusion of security. In reality, the wicked live on the brink of destruction. Their fortunes can turn on a dime, and as soon as God chooses to deal with them, they’re toast. “Whereas they assumed that they had chosen an impregnable position, God had let them choose, as it were, a very insecure footing. The result of this sooner or later was a sudden and catastrophic overthrow . . . Because God let it happen suddenly, it was made all the more impressive” (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 529).

Then he realizes how foolish he has been to question God (vv. 21-22). After all, he lives in God’s presence (v. 23), enjoys his guidance (v. 24), and one day will be taken into glory (v. 24). God is his strength and his portion – all he needs (v. 25). In heaven and earth, God alone truly matters to him (vv. 25-26). After all is said and done, nothing compares to being near to God (v. 28).

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 **Surely** One commentator paraphrases verse 1 this way, “‘Yes, it is so; after all, God is good, notwithstanding all my doubts’” (J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, vol. 2, *Book III*, 8). “One may very properly conclude that these words were written after the problem had been solved and the difficulty had been overcome” (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 524).

v. 2 **But as for me** Cf. verse 28. Also in verses 22 and 23 in the Hebrew text.

v. 2 **almost slipped . . .** “The language is metaphorical. As the following context makes clear, the psalmist almost ‘slipped’ in a spiritual sense. As he began to question God’s justice, the psalmist came close to abandoning his faith” (*The NET Bible*, 4sn on Ps 73:2).

v. 3 **envied . . . arrogant** “‘To envy’ in this context, is not so much to begrudge the good fortune of the wicked as to question God’s government of the world. Consequently there is the danger that one might forsake ‘the fear of the LORD’ (Prov. 23:17). The arrogant are those who consider themselves to be self-sufficient and who see no need for God (cf. 5:5); therefore the term is synonymous with ‘the wicked’ (75:4)” (A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, NCBC, 2:530). “Why should the people who *oppose* God be better off than those who trust Him?” (Allan P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 847).

v. 6 **necklace** “The metaphor suggests that their arrogance is something the wicked ‘wear’ proudly. It draws attention to them, just as a beautiful necklace does to its owner” (*The NET Bible*, 11sn on Ps 73:6). The metaphors, “necklace” and “clothe,” may allude to the source of their wealth since in their arrogance they oppress others (cf. v. 8). In other words, they typically prosper by exploiting the weak and powerless in society.

v. 9 **lay claim** Cf. “They speak as if they rule in heaven, and lay claim to the earth” (NET). “*Heb* ‘they set in heaven their mouth, and their tongue walks through the earth.’ The meaning of the text is uncertain. Perhaps the idea is that they lay claim to heaven (i.e., speak as if they were ruling in heaven) and move through the earth declaring their superiority and exerting their influence” (*The NET Bible*, 18tn on Ps 73:9).

v. 10 **their people** Lit., “his people.” Does the pronoun refer to godless people or God’s people who turn to the prosperous wicked to emulate them? If the psalmist is thinking of others like himself, the answer would be God’s people. The prosperity and consequent self-sufficiency of the wicked amounts to an open invitation to others to follow in their footsteps. On the face of it, they sin with impunity and grow rich. Actually, not all of

the wicked flourish, but enough of them do to raise the question, “Why does God let good people suffer, and wicked people prosper?” “The behaviour of the wicked had a corrupting influence upon many Israelites who were drawn to copy their evil example and adopt their manner of thought and speech” (A. Cohen, *The Psalms*, SBTB, 232).

v. 10 **drink up** The meaning of this verse is obscure. It might be translated: “God’s people turn to them and swallow everything they say” (cf. TEV), that is, “eagerly believe everything they say” (GNT), or paraphrased: “People actually listen to them—can you believe it? Like thirsty puppies, they lap up their words” (*The Message*).

v. 13 **in vain** I.e., “for nothing” (cf. GNT, HCSB, NLT). “After observing the wicked, Asaph had felt that his commitment to follow God faithfully was a mistake. Instead of prospering, he experienced more problems. God seemed to be punishing the pure in heart and prospering the proud (cf. Job 21:7-15)” (Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Psalms,” 2025 ed., 295, [soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf](http://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/pdf/psalms.pdf)).

v. 15 **If** “It has been well said, ‘instead of telling his painful misgivings, [the Hebrew psalmist] harboured them in God’s presence till he found the solution . . . In forbearing unnecessarily to shake the faith of others’” (Perowne, 12). “If I had publicized these thoughts, I would have betrayed your loyal followers” (NET); “I would have been a traitor to your people” (NLT).

v. 18 **slippery ground** The wicked appear to be secure in their prosperity, but in fact their fortunes can turn on a dime (cf. v. 19). Moreover, wealth offers no security against death; remember Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus the beggar.

v. 20 **like a dream** The simile means, “When God arouses himself as from sleep and deals with the wicked, they vanish like the shadowy character of a dream” (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on 73:20). “The wicked are ‘like a dream’ which has a sense of reality when one is asleep but is gone in the moment of awakening. The wicked are a phantom—here today, gone tomorrow. The coming of God’s righteous judgment brings all thing into perspective. In the meantime the godly live with the vision that the wicked are nothing but ‘fantasies’” (Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, vol. 5, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., 565).

v. 23 **with you** The psalmist failed to consider the value of his relationship to God and its eternal benefits when he envied the wicked rich.



## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE

Don't envy the wealthy wicked because they will perish along with their riches,  
but you will continue to live in God's presence forever.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



## 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## PARENT CONNECTION

When our kids were little, we could get away with throwing hand-me-down shoes on their feet. Honestly, they didn't care, they just wanted to go play and shoes were entirely optional. But as they grew older, they began to see the difference in what they were wearing and the how the other half lived. Oh, the glittery tinsel that tempts and corrupts and burdens our innocents with envy. Whether it's Lululemon or the latest Jordans, our kids want the best and they clearly need it to fit in with the hip crowd. Every person on the planet has been tempted by envy, that little voice that whispers, "God is holding out on you." Satan actually isn't very clever; it worked in the garden, and it still works today. I've certainly looked across the street and wondered why that family gets a new car every other year while I drive mine until it dies. I wonder how they can afford to go to Hawaii or Fiji when we have to save every last penny for a two-hour road trip down to Waco. Envy takes root and manifests itself in bitterness, especially when comparing our Christian walk to another's lack thereof. It's a slippery slope when we begin to allow our spiritual maturity to propel us into entitlement, as if God is required to bless us with riches and wealth because we woke up and read our Bible that morning. God "... sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). If envy tempts, faithfulness trusts. Let's help our kids (and ourselves) learn to turn their eyes toward Jesus and remember His faithfulness. We're praying for you!

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Psalm 73.

1. Why did Asaph's feet almost slip?
2. What are the wicked like? (v. 12)
3. How does Asaph describe God faithfulness in vv. 23-26?

### What Do You Think?

Asaph writes about the nearness of God. How can a person be near God?

### What Do You Do?

Play the comparison game. What do other families have that your family does not? What does your family have that others do not? How can you celebrate differences and recognize God's blessings?

## CORE COMPETENCY: Faithfulness

I am loyal to God and others, so they know they can count on me.

### MEMORY VERSE: Hebrews 4:12

*"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)  
*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)  
*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)  
*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)  
*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)  
*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)  
*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)  
*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)  
*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)  
*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)  
*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)  
*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)  
*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)  
*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)  
*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)  
*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)  
*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)  
*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)  
*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)  
*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)  
*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)  
*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)  
*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)  
*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)  
*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)  
*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)  
*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)  
*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)  
*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)  
*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)  
*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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**OUR MISSION**  
Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.