

INTRO:

If ya have a Bible or Bible app and I hope you do click it/open it to **Psalm 73/Psalm 73**...So this week I was doing one of these YouTube workout videos, which ya know always have some kind background music behind a trainer's voice right? So I'm following along when I realize that for like 6 or 7 minutes the same song's been playing. And so I start paying attention...UNTIL it gets to the hook...at which point I stopped the workout and wrote down the lyrics to share with you today. Cuz they're just indicative of the "toxic positivity" of our age. Listen to these: *"Ima be my best self. I'm lovin' who I be. Ima be my best self. There's no one else but me. Self love, self help, self care, self healing, self worth, self aware. Ima be my best self. Lovin every part of me."*?

And ya know, at the risk of sounding like I don't care about self awareness and health or something/I obviously do/the Bible does; one of the many problems with the "worldview" of lyrics like those is that, sadly, if we take em to heart, it eliminates our ability to deal with something with which we ALL struggle...**Doubt/doubt**. Cuz ya know, if you ALWAYS gotta be your "best self," you can't have doubts. You gotta suppress doubt/overcome doubt. Your best self can't have doubts...And YET, we all do don't we? One of the things I've found after talking with more-and-more people; both Christ-followers and non-Christ-followers alike is that doubt affects us all. AND it comes in all shapes and sizes right? We doubt if we have what it takes/if things are gonna work out. We doubt why God did or did not do something: Why we didn't get the job. Why he or she said "no." Why the pregnancy test came back negative...OR positive. Why life seems to be harder than it should...Why a loved one passed away. We ALL doubt! ***What kind of doubts are you wrestling with today?***

And see the problem with doubt is: ***it can either destroy or deliver you!***...Like, it can act as a catalyst to deliver you to new heights/ya know, strengthen your faith in God like a kind of tool that presses you into deeper dependence upon Him OR it can plunge you into the depths of despair, cynicism/even cause you to lose your faith...We all wrestle with doubt¹...So here's the question for us today: ***How do ya wrestle in such a way, as to let your doubt become a deliverer rather than a destroyer?...A deliverer rather than a destroyer!***...And to answer that, we're looking at one of my favorite books in the Bible. The book of **Psalms**. And it's one of my favorites for two reasons: **One**, because it's a book that just addresses/and gives language to almost every human emotion, including doubt. But **Two**, because like every other book/as I hope you've been seeing in our "Truth Myth" series, Psalms is ALL about Jesus. Really the Psalms show us that Jesus is the source of all our longings and the ear to all our pleas, especially those born out doubt. And that's certainly true here in **Psalm 73** which if you're taking notes, is gonna show you 3 Things: **One**, it's gonna show you **Two Unhealthy But Unfortunately Natural Ways We Tend To Deal With Our Doubts**. **Two**, it's gonna show you, **A Truly Healthy Way To Deal With Doubt**. And then **Three**, you're gonna see **Where You Get The Ability To Deal With Your Doubts IN That Healthy Way**...So, let's hear the reading of **Psalm 73** together: **???** would you be so kind as to stand and read **Psalm 73** out-loud to us, as we all following along...

¹ Sources consulted for intro: "The Confusing Experience of Faith" Psalm 73 // The Whole Story #18 - J.D. Greear + "Psalm 73:1-28 - Where is God When I Hurt?" - J.D. Greear

TEXT:

Thanks **Julie**... So clearly this is a psalm in which the Psalmist is struggling with immense doubt; specifically, doubting you see, God's goodness in the face of evil around him... It's pretty well documented that two of the main reasons why many people, especially high school and college students, lose their faith is because, **one**, their preferred lifestyle starts to conflict with their beliefs. So instead of letting the truth inform their lifestyle, they bend the truth in order to justify their lifestyle... But **two** is when they experience suffering/particularly of someone they know, that they just can't explain.² In many respects, THAT'S what the Psalmist is dealing with here. Cuz you see in **v.1** he says, *"Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart."* And that's what you might call His public belief - what he affirms publicly; "God is good." We all have public beliefs right? Ya know things we say in front of others, espouse in community, and maybe even really believe that we believe... Like, God IS good. That's what the Psalmist believes. But here's how he privately FEELS. **V.2**, *"But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."* In his mind, he knows God is good. But in his heart... he's envious/jealous of how those who are against God/not surrendered to God/not Christian, are nevertheless getting on in life... Ya know I find this in my own life/certainly in the church all the time/maybe you do too, where we say we believe things like, God is good/His ways are best and we don't want anything BUT God right?... UNTIL we do. Until, ya know, we see others living in a way that seems more free, more pleasurable, more comfortable. And so we start think to ourselves, *"why is it seem so hard for me?"*... **Ya ever been there?**... We all have! Which is to say, we all envy. Cuz as J.D. Greear says, *"envy is just doubt in the goodness of God."*³... Which of course is something for which we're all guilty. Cuz think about it; this goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, who found the Garden of Eden unsatisfactory. They literally lived in perfect circumstance and still managed to get envious and doubt... And so you can't say, *"well if my circumstances were better, I wouldn't be envious. I wouldn't doubt. If I just had a better job, better boss, better housing, different friends, was closer to family... a better church."*... No! It has nothing to do with the condition of your circumstances. It has to do with the condition of your heart. We BELIEVE God is good, but we don't always feel it... And too often we let our feelings guide our faith rather than our faith guide our feelings!

And the result?... **vv.4-12**... We get discontent and start complaining! Cuz you see the Psalmist over-and-over there complaining that these wicked people are not only NOT being punished/ they're prospering... And there's a couple things you gotta see there: **First**, you gotta see that the Psalmist is complaining because he perceives that these people are a kind of proud elite. Ya know the 1%. He says, *"They have no pangs until death,"* meaning they don't deal with common, human burdens like figuring out parking and childcare... He says, *"Their bodies are fat and sleek,"* meaning, they're healthy and beautiful. Supermodels and social media influencers... He says, *"pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment."* They think life is all about them, and so they don't care if the run roughshod over people... And to make matters worse, he

² Reasons for why people lose faith from "Psalm 73:1-28 - Where is God When I Hurt?" - J.D. Greear

³ "The Confusing Experience of Faith" Psalm 73 // The Whole Story #18 - J.D. Greear

says, *“They scoff and speak with malice...set their mouths against the heavens, their tongue struts through the earth...They say, ‘How can God know?’ Translation? ‘We don’t need God.’”* And sure, maybe some of em give a tip of the hat TO God. *“Ya know, God thanks for giving me all these riches and comfort. Thanks for my victory/my gold medal.”* But at best they’re just using God to get what they really want, something other THAN God!...***What’s that for you? Where might you be, NOT serving God, but using or even ignoring God today?***

And I’ll tell you, it’s an important question, because if your relationship WITH God is about getting FROM God rather than getting GOD, then when you DON’T get from Him, you’ll question why you’re even FOLLOWING Him...which is exactly what the Psalmist begins to do. He says, **v.13**, *“All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands...all the day long I’ve been stricken and rebuked.”* *“God what is the point of trusting and obeying you? I mean I tithe, but I’m still financially strapped. I conduct my relationships with integrity and sexual purity, but I’m still single and lonely. I try to love my wife as Christ loved the church or respect my husband as the church is to do with Christ and yet my marriage is still rocky. I try love and serve folks IN the church, but even they misinterpret me, cancel me, or just hurt me. I sacrifice for you Lord and all it seems to do is put me in more dire straights...WHAT...IS...THE POINT?”*...***You ever felt that?***

The Psalmist certainly did, and if you keep going you see he says two things: **First**, he says, *“If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’ I would’ve betrayed the generation of your children,”* meaning he knows what he’s feeling isn’t ultimately true. But that’s the thing about our feelings; They FEEL like ultimately reality, when ultimately, they’re just a limited and biased perspective ON reality. And so your feelings can’t be the final arbiter of truth. Feelings aren’t Facts. As John Piper says, *“Our feelings are not God. God is God. Our feelings don’t define truth. God’s word defines truth. Our feelings are just echoes and responses to what our (limited) minds perceive...which is WHY we have to work hard not to bend the truth to justify our imperfect feelings, but to plead with God to purify our perceptions of the truth so that our feelings can be in sync with IT.”*⁴ The Psalmist knows that what he’s feeling isn’t the whole picture. And so there’s sense in which he’s going, *“I can’t say this stuff out loud. Good Christians don’t do that. Be better.”* In other words, he’s doing what lots of us do. Feeling ashamed about our doubts/feeling **condemned!**

But then **Second**, you see he says, **v.16**, *“BUT when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task.”* In other words, *“if I’m not gonna condemn myself, I might as well just condone how I’m feeling, cuz frankly trying to parse through why, and who, and when, and motivations and what-not...it’s exhausting. So I’d rather just not deal.”* **Condoned!**

That’s where the Psalmist is: FULL of doubt AND on a kind of emotional see-saw of **Condemning** or **Condoning**. **Condoning** or **Condemning**...UNTIL you see, in **v.17** it says, *“he went into the sanctuary of God; (and) discerned their end.”*...He he came into God’s presence/ tabled his doubts and made space to hear from God ABOUT his doubts... Ya know, one of the

⁴ https://www.allchristianquotes.org/quotes/John_Piper/1764/

most arresting things, I think, in the Bible is how often it talks about the fact that you and I are in the middle of a battle. And not a battle primarily against political enemies, ideologies, or even difficult bosses, co-workers, spouses, or yourself. But rather, a spiritual battle. Just listen to these verses from 3 separate NT men, including Jesus Himself: **2 Corinthians 10:3-4**: “*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh*”...**Ephesians 6:10-11**: “*Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil*”...**1 Peter 5:8**: “*Be sober-minded; watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*”...And **John 10:10**: “*The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I came, Jesus said, that (you) may have life and have it abundantly.*” Why do I reference those and mention that we’re in the middle of a spiritual battle?...Because if it’s true (and it is), then you not CONSTANTLY making space to hear from God through His word and in prayer/ya know being here every week that we gather/committing to the life of a Missional Family Meeting and DNA group/personally spending time in your Bible everyday/heck just joining a few of us on Zoom every-other Tuesday at 6pm, for 30min, to pray...If you’re not making that kind of space...it means you’ve already lost the battle! You’re the walking dead! Or at least the walking-about-to-be dead! Cuz those doubts you have? If they’re not catalysts for getting you before the Lord and wanting nothing other than to hear from the Lord/if they’re not a catalyst, they’ll become a cancer! I’ve seen it too many times: where one doubt not taken to the Lord, becomes a nagging anxiety. And that nagging anxiety not taken to the Lord blossoms into a full-fledged belief. And that belief not checked BY the Lord ends up directing your behavior. And that behavior spreads bitterness, criticism, anger and division! ***What plans do you need to put in place/things do you need to rearrange today to more consistently make space to hear from God?*** Cuz as the Scottish Preacher Andrew Murray said, “*Prayer is the power by which Satan is conquered...*” So naturally, “His one concern is to keep (us) FROM praying!”⁵

And here’s why: If you keep going you SEE the impact making space to hear from God had on the Psalmist. He’s totally transformed as God reminds Him of two things: ***One, that eternity will right all wrongs.*** You see in **vv.18-20** God reminds the Psalmist that wicked people he’s so envious of? They might be doing ok now, but it’s not gonna last. They’re in, as it says, “*slippery places;*” “*they’re destroyed in a moment;*” they’re like “*a dream or a phantom,*” meaning they’ll quickly vanish. I love the way Tim Keller says it. He says, “*The rich WITHOUT God are on their way to being eternally poor; celebrities WITHOUT God are on their way to being eternally ignored.*” Like, have you ever thought about how really short life is? Parents you know this as you watch your kids grow up. This life is just a blip on the radar. And as one person says, only when you learn the brevity of life will you look at life the right way/see that you don’t have to go crazy when THIS life doesn’t give you everything you want. Eternity restores the balance!

But ***Two***, he’s reminded that ***God’s grace is enough.*** In **vv.23-26**, he says, “*Nevertheless, I’m continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you’ll receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? There’s nothing on earth I desire*

⁵ Samuel Chadwick

besides you...” Ya know, one of the greatest coaches in sports history was Vince Lombardi with the Green Bay Packers. And he was famous for constantly taking his teams back to basics. In particular, he became known for holding out a football at the beginning of practice each year and saying, “*Gentlemen, this is a football.*” I mean, these were accomplished NFL athletes. BUT he understood that the deeper he took them into the basics, the greater they became. That’s why the Packer’s UNDER Lombardi went on to be one of the great sports dynasties of all time...Friends, the same is true in Christianity. Martin Luther used to say, “*To progress (in the Christian life - whether that’s your spiritual growth or wrestling with doubts) is ALWAYS to begin again.*” To go deeper into the basics. I’ve heard Christianity described like a well. The best stuff’s not found by digging wider/ya know trying harder and new tips, tricks and techniques for things, but by going deeper⁶... You understand the basic but deep truth of Christianity is that by mere faith YOU... GET...GOD! God with you! Christ in you! The people of God alongside you! The Spirit guiding you! The Father always loving you! The Son interceding for you!... The church supporting you! THAT’S the secret not only with respect to doubt, but to joy! Jesus is always with you/His grace is enough, and He’s better than anything life can give or death can take away? ***Do you believe that?***...I’ve told you before about Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic, who lost complete control of her arms and legs in a diving accident as a teenager. She says this, “*I’m OK with losing the use of my hands and my feet for the last 60 years...(Actually) I wouldn’t change a thing - What? - because, she says, it brought me nearer to God.*”⁷... “*I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you...(But now I see) there’s nothing on earth I desire besides you...(You) God (are) the strength of my heart and my portion forever...(So let) me (just) be near (you) (and) tell of all your works.*” ...28 verses/it only took 28 verses, and this is a man totally transformed/***a man whose doubts became a deliverer rather than a destroyer!***

APPLICATION:

And so real quickly, HOW can that happen for you and me? **Well, two ways it doesn’t happen: By either *condemning* or *condoning* your doubts.** And depending on your upbringing, we all prolly lean toward one over the other. For example, if you come from a more conservative/maybe religious background, you likely default toward ***condemning*** doubt, which is to say ***suppressing*** it; thinking things like, “*good Christians don’t doubt!*” ... While if you come from a more liberal/maybe secular background, you likely default toward ***condoning*** it, which is to say, kinda ***surrendering*** to it; ya know, thinking, “*my feelings are my feelings. I’m just being honest. I gotta be true to myself.*” **BASICALLY**, thinking if you feel it, it must be true.

But here’s the problem with both of those: Automatically ***condemning*** your doubt leads you to hide in your own skin; which we all know, when we’re NOT honest and transparent about reality, it amputates our ability to change. That’s certainly true with God. If you’re constantly suppressing and hiding in your own skin because you’re ashamed or feeling condemned, it amputates God’s ability to speak-to, re-order and transform your doubts. It’s not unlike how a lot of people treat green spaces here in the city, meaning, because grass in the city is prone to weeds;

⁶ Sports and Well Illustrations adapted from J. D. Greear, “[Finding the Assurance of Salvation: John 2:23-3:16](#),” in *J. D. Greear Sermon Archive* (Durham, NC: The Summit Church, 2017), Jn 2:23-3:16.

⁷ Cited in “The Confusing Experience of Faith” Psalm 73 // The Whole Story #18 - J.D. Greear

instead of treating those weeds to preserve the green space, folks'll often tear up the green space and replace it with concrete or some kind of fake turf. So while they've removed the possibility of any weed ever sprouting, they've also removed the possibility of ever enjoying a nice, lush green space... When you immediately condemn or suppress your feelings, it's akin to throwing concrete onto your heart! You bury the negative feelings, but in the process eliminate any possibility of God cultivating a nice, lush, transformed heart... And the same is true with **condoning**. When you simply give into your feelings, it leads you to be tossed about, because of course our feelings are fickle. And so you become NOT a concrete plot, but more like a tumbleweed. Rootless and blown around by every emotion, doubt and difficult feeling... Neither condemning nor condoning help.

What you have to do is what the psalmist did: Practice what I call **curious compassion**. And what I mean by that is when the psalmist says, in **v.17**, "*that he went into the sanctuary of God; AND THEN discerned their end...*," what he's saying is that instead of letting himself go down the path of either condemning or condoning, he simply brought his raw desires, pains and doubts to God! In other words, he allowed himself to be aware of what he was feeling, without prejudging OR neglecting those feelings, so that he could then take em to God in order for God speak into and transform them. That's what **curious compassion** is! It's about having a kind of neutral but inquisitive posture that says, "*God, what I'm dealing with might be ugly, sinful, and nasty, but if I don't bring it to you/make space to let you speak into it, I'll never be changed!*" That's the only healthy way to deal with your doubts!

Now let me clear: This is NOT a kind of Christianized version of "positive thinking." No! You understand, there's no real power in just thinking good thoughts/that's called "spin." No! The power to deal with your doubts in this way comes from understanding the Gospel. And you see the Gospel in **v.23**, when the Psalmist says, "*Nevertheless, I am continually with you.*" **See that?** He's just said that he's been like a "beast"/awful to God...and YET God has not left him/even continues, he says, to "*hold him.*" How can he say that?...He can say that because this is the same God, who hundreds of years later would rather go to the Cross and be humiliated and tortured than to lose YOU! AND be willing to do that NOT when you were doubt-free and feeling great about God, but when, as **Romans 5:10** AND **Ephesians 2:1** say, "*we were still God's enemies...and dead in our trespasses and sins.*" THAT'S how great His love is for you today! And friend when you understand that, what you see is that/the Gospel, **it eliminates your ability to condemn yourself OR be condoning WITH yourself**. Because on the Cross Jesus Christ took all your condemnation. There's now no room for you to condemn yourself. It's like a sponge that's totally saturated with water, so that it can't absorb a single drop more. On the Cross, Jesus Christ absorbed every drop of your condemnation in order that you would be free from having to absorb any of it. You can't condemn yourself anymore...But neither can you condone doubt and disordered desire. Cuz if those were no big deal, Jesus woulda never needed to die! But they are a big deal to the point that He HAD to die for your sin and mine! **You see?** The Gospel **eliminates your ability to condemn or condone**. And so the only thing left is to allow yourself to be aware of your doubts and desires/no matter, how ugly they might be; take them to God, and let Him remind you through His Word of what's true, UNTIL those things are

reordered and your heart transformed! Imagine, if you/if WE were a community where doubt positioned us/and those around us for deliverance rather than destruction! THAT'S a church I wanna be a part of and I think my neighbors wanna be a part of too!...***Let's Pray...***