

When You Don't Know What To Pray.

Part 3: Why Does Life Feel So Unfair? What to Do When Others Seem to Have It Better

Psalm 73

Summary: When life feels unfair and other people seem to have it better, Psalm 73 shows how to overcome envy, comparison, and bitterness by finding a deeper security in God.

Main Ideas:

Life isn't fair. But we think it should be.

If you feel it, you can pray it.

When we compare, life almost always starts to feel unfair.

Envy is resenting that they have it... because somewhere inside us, we believe we deserve it more.

Our proximity to God helps shape our perspective.

Temporary success is not the same thing as a secure life.

Comparison and envy blind us to reality.

Comparison keeps us staring at what others have until we forget what we have in God.

If life has ever looked unfair... It looked unfair at the cross.

Life isn't fair. But God is still good.

Invitation:

Start noticing the comparisons that are shaping you.

- Whenever you catch yourself comparing your life with someone else's, write it down.
- Ask:
 - What am I believing their success could give me?
 - What have I forgotten about what I already have in Jesus?
- Then turn it into prayer.

Transcript:

IN: In raising three kids, there's a script that gets repeated pretty regularly.

Something happens, and one of them says... "That's not fair."

- And what does every parent respond with?... "Life's not fair."

But what's interesting is that we grow up... and the feeling doesn't go away.

We look around at our lives and circumstances, and it becomes blatantly clear that life is, in fact, not fair.

- Someone who doesn't deserve the promotion becomes your supervisor.
- You work hard, follow the rules, and try to do the right thing... but your life still hasn't turned out the way you thought it would.
- We watch rich and powerful people treat others horribly, get away with things we would never get away with, and continue enjoying lives of comfort and influence.

We look at people who have more, have better, or seem to have an easier life...

- And we think, "Must be nice."
- Why do they get that?
- What makes them better than me?
- And sometimes we even start looking for faults in them... reasons they deserve what they have less than we do.

After a while, the answer "Life's just not fair" doesn't really help...

- Because deep down, we believe life should be fair.
- If justice matters, if there really is a good God, shouldn't he care? Shouldn't he do something about it?

Life isn't fair. But we think it should be.

And the longer we live in that tension, the easier it is to become disappointed, bitter, and cynical.

In those moments, we have a choice:

- We can keep feeding the bitter spiral...
- Or we can bring it honestly to God.

And Psalm 73 (written by a guy named Asaph) gives us words to pray when life feels unfair

- Not polite words. Not religious words.
- Honest words for disillusionment, envy, and doubt.
- It reminds us... If you feel it, you can pray it.

This passage isn't telling us to ignore injustice or pretend it doesn't matter.

- Some unfairness should be confronted, resisted, and repaired.
- But it does show us what can happen inside us when the unfairness we cannot control turns into comparison, resentment, and bitterness.

So what do we pray when life feels unfair... Let's look at Psalm 73...

GOD: It begins with what Asaph knows is true.

Psalm 73:1 *Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure.*

Asaph says, "I know God is good."

- But then he tells us about a time when everything he saw made that truth difficult to trust.

Because if God is good... Why does life so often look like this?

Psalm 73:2-12 *But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone. For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness. They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else. They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty. These fat cats have everything their hearts*

could ever wish for! They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others. They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. "What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?" Look at these wicked people— enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.

Asaph looks around and sees arrogant, cruel people thriving.

- They have money, health, and influence.
- They're successful

But they hurt people and face no consequences.

- They mock God, and nothing seems to happen.
- The further they move from God's heart, the better their lives appear to become.

And he says, "I almost completely gave up."

- Not because he stopped believing God existed.
- But because what he saw seemed to contradict everything he believed about God.

He believed God was good... But life didn't look good.

He believed God cared about justice... But unjust people seemed to be winning.

He believed following God mattered.

- But the people who ignored God seemed to have everything he wanted.

And that contradiction nearly caused his faith to collapse.

***Psalm 73:13-16** Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain. If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to your people. So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is!*

Asaph looks at their lives, compares them with his own, and asks:

- "What has following God actually gotten me?"
- "I've tried to do the right thing, but they have everything I want while I wake up to more trouble."

What began as confusion about their lives becomes resentment about his own.

And we've all felt some version of that.

I know I have.

- I can look at other churches and other pastors and think:
- They have a bigger church, more opportunities.
- A bigger platform, a bigger paycheck, and an actual staff.
- But I've worked harder. I wasn't handed anything.

And I start wondering... "What's wrong with me?"

Maybe you see someone succeeding in ways you wish you were succeeding.

- Maybe they use methods you wouldn't use or treat people in ways you never would
- But they still seem happier, more successful, and more influential than you.

And the longer you stare at their life, the more resentful you become about your own.

- When we compare, life almost always starts to feel unfair.

Comparison trains us to notice what someone else has while becoming blind to what we have.

And that is where envy grows.

Envy isn't just wanting something someone else has.

- Envy is resenting that they have it... because somewhere inside us, we believe we deserve it more.
- "I've worked harder."
- "I've done things the right way."
- "I should have more than this."

At its deepest, envy turns our relationship with God into a transaction:

- "I did what I was supposed to do. So why haven't you given me the life I expected?"

Once envy takes hold, we don't just question their success.

- We begin questioning God's goodness.
- We start believing that if we were in charge, we'd be fairer than God

We would take something from them... And give something better to us.

So what does Asaph do?

- The unfairness is still real.
- The wicked still seem to prosper.
- And God still seems to be letting it happen.

As long as he looks at life only through comparison, he is trapped in that bitter spiral

But then comes the turning point of the psalm.

Psalm 73:17 *Then I went into your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.*

Notice what does **not** happen.

- The wicked don't suddenly lose everything.
- Asaph does not suddenly get everything he wanted.
- His pain does not disappear.
- And God doesn't answer every question.

Nothing around Asaph immediately changes.

- But something within him does.
- His perspective gets bigger.

Asaph had been consumed with looking around.

- At their success, comfort, possessions, influence.
- Then he enters the presence of God and begins seeing their lives, and his own, as part of a much larger story.

He stops looking around and begins looking at God.

- Our proximity to God helps shape our perspective.

Drawing near to God doesn't answer every question, but it widens our perspective.

Psalm 73:18-20 *Truly, you put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors. When you arise, O Lord, you will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning.*

The people Asaph thought were standing firmly were actually the ones on slippery ground.

- Their success looked permanent... But it wasn't.
- Their power looked secure... But it wasn't.
- Everything they had built their lives on would eventually slip through their fingers.

The things Asaph envied were real... But they were temporary.

And temporary success is not the same thing as a secure life.

Asaph doesn't receive an explanation for every unfair thing he's experienced.

- He receives a new way of seeing it.

Psalm 73:21-22 *Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to you.*

Asaph sees what envy had been doing inside him.

- Comparison had not made his life better.
- It had made his heart bitter and blinded him to reality
- Comparison and envy blind us to reality.

And he says, basically: "What was I thinking?"

But then he uses one of the most important words in the entire psalm: Yet.

Psalm 73:23-28 *Yet I still belong to you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever. Those who desert him will perish, for you destroy those who abandon you. 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.*

Even while Asaph was bitter, envious, and questioning whether following God was worth it, God had not let go of him.

Asaph had been so focused on what everyone else possessed that he had become blind to what he already had.

- He belonged to God.
- He was held by God.
- He was guided by God.

At the beginning of the psalm, Asaph believed that the wicked had everything he wanted.

But now he realizes:

- They have things they cannot keep... He has Someone he cannot lose.

Comparison keeps us staring at what others have until we forget what we have in God.

A good life isn't having the most money, the easiest life, or the biggest platform.

- It's knowing that whatever comes and whatever goes, you are still held by God.

The life we envy from a distance may not actually be the life that is best for us.

That doesn't mean every disappointment is secretly a blessing.

- And it doesn't mean injustice doesn't hurt.

We may still get overlooked.

- We may still be taken advantage of.
- We may still not have everything we want.
- We may never be considered successful by the world's standards.

But life stops being about what we think we deserve... And becomes about who we already have.

That is why Asaph ends by saying: "How good it is to be near God!"

He begins the psalm bitter about what he doesn't have.

- He ends it telling everyone about the goodness he's found in God.

Not because life suddenly became fair.

- But because he discovered that God's presence was better than the life he had been envying.

JESUS: And no one lived with this perspective more fully than Jesus.

No one lived with more goodness, faithfulness, and love than Jesus.

And yet he was misunderstood. Rejected. Mocked. Betrayed. Beaten, tortured, and executed while corrupt and powerful people appeared to win.

If life has ever looked unfair... It looked unfair at the cross.

But Jesus knew that what could be seen in that moment was not the whole story.

He knew power, status, comfort, and even death itself were not ultimate.

- He knew who he was.
- He knew he belonged to the Father.

And he entrusted himself to the Father's love.

Then, when it looked like evil had won... Jesus rose from the dead.

The resurrection showed that injustice and death don't get the final word.

- The people who appear to be winning don't get the final word.
- God does.

And through Jesus, we can have the same security Asaph discovered.

- We can know:
- "I belong to God.
- God is holding me.
- And my life is bigger than what I can see right now."

Nothing this world gives us, or takes away from us, can change who we are to him.

- That life begins when we choose to trust and follow Jesus.

YOU: And as we draw near to Jesus, his love begins changing how we see our lives.

- But that kind of transformation doesn't usually happen overnight.
- We have spent our entire lives being trained to compare.

So this week, start noticing the comparisons that are shaping you.

- Whenever you catch yourself comparing your life with someone else's, write it down.

Whenever you catch yourself thinking:

- "Must be nice."
- "Why do they get that?"
- "Why isn't that my life?"
- Write it down.

Ask: What am I believing their success could give me? / What have I forgotten about what I already have in Jesus?

And then Turn it into prayer.

You might pray:

- "Jesus, I'm envious.
- This feels unfair.

- Help me trust that what I have in you is greater than what I think I'm missing."

Your first step is not to talk yourself out of every feeling or pretend the unfairness doesn't hurt.

- Your first step is to bring your honest heart to God...
- And let him begin changing your perspective.

WE: Imagine becoming a community that can celebrate someone else's success without treating it as evidence of our failure.

A community that can admit when life feels unfair without allowing unfairness to turn us bitter.

Life will not always be fair.

- Some questions may never be answered.
- Some situations may never turn out the way we hoped.

But we don't have to live trapped in comparison...

Even when our hearts become bitter and our faith begins slipping...

- God hasn't abandoned us.
- He is still holding us.

So when envy whispers that someone else has the life you should have had...

- Stop looking around long enough to look at God.

Because life isn't fair. But God is still good.