

# ***Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life***

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★Write down one new insight you received today...

★Thinking...

- What unfairness catches your attention and distracts you?
- What are the rewards that you start to crave when you observe that unfairness?
- What is the better reward you may be giving up for that of the unfairness?

★Applying...

- Identify people, specific or general, of whom you are envious and consider why.
- Express your complaint to God, inquiring as to why you do not have what you think you should.
- Reflect on what God reveals He has given you instead.

★Praying...

- Father, I am upset that those who ignore or reject you seem to be prospering. Help me understand why you permit this.
- Father, reveal what you have given me and the value of this treasure in my life.

**Psalm 73** – Truly God is good to the upright, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant; I saw the prosperity of the wicked...

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end...

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

## **I) That's Not Fair...**

We want life to be fair. A level playing field to start, consistent rules, everyone receives what they deserve. We are sensitive to violations of this principle of fairness, which cause us to pay unwarranted attention to the lives of others. Unhealthy attention. Unhealthy because it distracts us from *our* lives. Psalm 73 is a form of lamentation addressing the tensions pervasive in life between what we *think* should be true and Truth itself.

◆**Ignorance is bliss:** It can be hard to ignore what is happening around us. Who appears to live rightly, who wickedly. Those who succeed, who struggle, who fail desperately. We *want* the relationship to show fairness, the righteous succeeding and the wicked struggling. Jesus told us this is not God's way as "he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the

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unrighteous (Mt 5:45).” When we give unhealthy attention to this perceived unfairness, we risk being “envious of the arrogant” because we see “the prosperity of the wicked (Ps 73:3).” We risk losing out on God’s goodness when our feet nearly stumble off the path of the upright (v1-2). These complaints may be legitimate. That’s not the issue. The issue is that the effort to observe the circumstance about which we are complaining is unhelpful and unhealthy.

♦**Can’t get you out of my mind:** Once our attention turns to the unfair, it can become stuck. Our heart and mind dwell on the details, absorbed by “the prosperity of the wicked (v3)” and the perceived poverty of the righteous. We ruminate on the promotion given to someone out of favoritism, the student rewarded for cheating. In this psalm the author lists many ways the wicked prosper including sound and sleek bodies, avoiding trouble, and being praised by many (v4, 5, 10). Watching others thrive despite ungodly ways weakens our resolve to live well. We may think “All in vain I have kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence (v13).” This demonstrates how observing unfairness can twist what we think of as good, relegating God’s being good to less than material wealth and fame.

## II) I’m Confused...

These serious gaps in fairness do more than upset us. They confuse us. Most civilizations believe there is a proper way of life that leads to prosperity. Christians know this flows from the holiness of God, who is loving and just. He rewards the righteous because “he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face (Ps 11:7).” We become confused as we compare our circumstances to others through the lens of their values. The Bible offers a practice to restore clarity.

♦**Keep your eye on the prize:** Noticing the unfairness of one promoted for favoritism, we may overlook the increase in work and scrutiny that comes with it. Many of us have seen others promoted into jobs for which they are unqualified and ultimately get fired. That student rewarded with a high mark while cheating may pass the class. We may not see how this leads to struggles as classes advance. The person complaining in this psalm is “envious (Ps 47:3)” of health (v4-5), wealth(v12), and power (v6-10). He has lost sight of the true reward of being “continually with [God] (v23),” that God “guide[s] [him] with [His] counsel (v24),” that “God is the strength of [his] heart (v26).” It is the substitution of the values of others for our own that leads us to frustration, anger, and jealousy.

♦**Wise counselor:** Some of us have terrific friends and family that teach us these perceived injustices are something else. Some minor unfairness. That earning a promotion leads to career success. Learning in class builds long-term educational achievement and preparation for life. Once we are deceived by the temptations of the world, only God clears the confusion. The work to “understand this” is a “wearisome task, until [entering] into the sanctuary of God (v16-17).” God reveals to us the perils of unfair rewards, how they lead us to be “swept away utterly by terrors (v19)!” He reminds us that being strong in heart, in character, is a true reward that leads to joyful life. This reminder reveals how in our righteous anger we were “stupid and ignorant...like a brute beast toward [God] (v22).” We take comfort that “it is good to be near God (v28).”

## III) Lamentation Prayers...

Prayers of lament are healthy expressions of our true condition before God. They are dialogues with God we initiate, complaining from a sincere heart over what seems to be injustice. God wants us to desire and “do justice (Micah 6:8).” Through these prayers He will respond with a proper, holy sense of justice, drawing our attention to all He has done for us. Lamentation prayers allow God to heal our spiritual wound, strengthen our heart in the justice and mercy He has given us by grace, and be restored to His peace.

♦**Get it off your chest:** Our complaints are perceived injustices of some degree. They question why we do not get what we deserve, or why another has got something undeserved. God desires we express these to Him so that He may reveal more of His nature, drawing us closer to Him. He wants us to know Him enough to declare “there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you (Ps 47:25).” Our effort to think “how to understand this (v16),” is fruitless as we cannot discover God – He must reveal Himself. Praying lamentation brings us “into the sanctuary of God (v17),” where He chooses to show His face.

♦**Abundant life:** Once our complaint is expressed, God can bring our attention back to what He is doing for us. His justice is to bring all who seek Him to full maturity. Maturity includes the ability to “be content with whatever [we] have (Php 4:11).” He illuminates the fruits of His Spirit present in our life. The strength and stamina to endure challenging circumstances. Our capacity to love others. The joy that permeates our lives when we are not distracted by the wicked around us. That God is our “portion forever (Ps 47:26).”