

19-73-01 Almost Slipping

doubt, discouragement, theodicy, judgment, God's nearness

Ps.73:1-28

Focusing on the trials of life is fertile ground for discouragement.

INTRODUCTION:

–The Hares and the Frogs (Aesop): Some Hares, persecuted by other beasts, were driven to despair. As soon as they saw another animal approaching, they used to run off frightened. One day, seeing a troop of wild Horses stampeding about, they all panicked and headed for a nearby lake. Thinking themselves the most miserable of creatures, they decided to drown themselves rather than live in such a continual state of fear. But just as they got near the lake, a troop of Frogs seated along the bank, were frightened by their approach. In great alarm and confusion, the Frogs all leaped into the water. “Truly,” said one of the Hares, “things are not so bad as they seem, for here are some other poor creatures more desperate and faint-hearted than ourselves.” **You see, there is always someone worse off than yourself.**

–**Psalm 73** expresses a certain kind of *discouragement* that believers can have: **HOM.idea**. It puts us in a condition of “Almost Slipping.”

I. Slippery Ground Starts with a Wrong Confession

A. Faith’s confession is solid ground– v.1, Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

1. It puts 2 facts together: *God's goodness* and *our heart’s purity*.
2. Solid ground *feels* right [terra firma, after boating all day].

B. Faith’s confusion is slippery ground– v.2, But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. (...on slippery ground.)

1. Slipping into envy– v.3, For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked (Prov 27:4, Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but **who is able to stand before envy?** (WHY is this so?))
 - a. Envy shapes a view that is askew– v.4-5, They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. (Sometimes we are “unable to see the forest for the trees” [in telescopic vision of a house: everything is a brick wall, or roof, depending on where we focus.])
 - b. Envy paralyzes our discernment– (re-read v.6-12)– “Maybe a sinful life is not so bad after all!” [The bumper sticker that says, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” is a popular American philosophy.]
2. Slipping into self-pity– Just as *envy* exaggerates the *sinner’s happy state*, so *self-pity* exaggerates the *saint’s misfortunes* &

unfavorable or uncomfortable conditions:

- a. Self-pity says, “Nothing good I do counts!”– v.13, Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
- b. Self-pity says, “My suffering has no end!”– v.14, All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. [Contrast this with Two Blind Women: the hymn writer, Fanny Crosby, at age 8 wrote this poem, “Oh what a happy soul am I,/ Although I cannot see./ I am resolved that in this world/ Contented I will be.// How many blessings I enjoy/ That other people don't./ To weep and sigh because I'm blind?/ I cannot and I won't!” – Helen Keller, who was both *blind* and *deaf*, wrote this about the sufferings of life, “The muscles must be used or they lose their strength. . . . It is by fighting the limitations, temptations, and failures of the world that we reach our highest possibilities.”)

TRANS: Focusing on life’s trials is fertile ground for despair– v.15, “If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed your children.” (“No man is an island.” What we say can affect others adversely, even betraying an atmosphere of Christian fellowship. It’s a case of “almost slipping.”

II. But Solid Ground Is Regained by a Reality Check

A. For reality, we must go to God for the answers:

1. We fail to reason out the problem of evil on our own– v.16, When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me [theodicy: from *theos* “God,” and *dike*, “justice”; trying to justify the ways of God to man, or explaining why bad things happen to good people: very tough theological work, to some “an endless exercise in juggling uncertainties.”]
 2. To find a proper viewpoint, we need to find the proper location– v.16-17, When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. (Getting into God’s holy presence has a mysterious effect on us [as it did on Job, who complained about his sufferings until God finally showed up]– Ps.63:1-4, O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.
- B. What is God's perspective on those who resist Him?– v.18-20, surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.
- C. We need insight on grief and where grief can take us– v.21-22, When

my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. (*Good grief is a healthy good-bye* to what we've lost; *unhealthy grief is a lingering, unresolved anger or bitterness toward God.*)

D. God Himself is our *Solid Ground* (We *stop slipping* by confessing the truth *that...*)*

1. * **God's Presence** actively upholds us— v.23, *Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.* (We need to choose an attitude of being “with” God, who said He would never forsake us.)
2. * **God's Protection** sustains us by guiding us to ultimate safety—v.24, *You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.* (Can you think of a safer place than His eternal Kingdom?)
3. * **God's Person** is the true longing of our hearts— v.25, *Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.* (We need to glance briefly at our troubles but gaze continually at the Lord.)
4. * **God's Provision** for us is Himself— v.26, *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.* [from **Great is Thy Faithfulness**: “*Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.*”]— 2 Co.4:16-18, Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

CONCLUSION:

—**Focusing on the trials of life is fertile ground for discouragement**, but focusing on God puts us on solid ground, where we regain a proper perspective on reality. What do we see and learn on that solid ground? —v.27, *Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.* The consequences of a godless life is ultimately a dissolution of all that seemed so secure and lasting. (“*You can't take it with you!*” But if we're not careful, the “it” we try holding on to can take us with it!) —v.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.* The confidence of a godly life is the abiding nearness of a Sovereign God, the God Who is our Refuge, and Whose watch care over us can be told to others who need Him.

Psalms 73:1-28 (NIV)

- 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 the burdens common to man; 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; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.**
- 8 **They scoff, and speak with malice; in their 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 can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?”**
- 12 **This is what the wicked are like— always carefree, they increase in wealth.**
- 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.
- 15 If I had said, “I will speak thus,” I would have betrayed your children.
- 16 When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me
- 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 As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O 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.