

Pouring into your “Whine” Glass, Psalm 73

God designed us in Genesis 1 with an intrinsic need for a sense of wonder and transcendence. He restored us through faith in Christ to rest in His relational presence with its vast freedom and generous blessings. The NT describes this freedom as “*abiding in the true Vine.*” It’s the same truth. How much distance can there be between the branch and the vine for separation? Just an itty bitsy tiny bit. But when a branch sinks its rootlets into the vine, oh my, what abundant fruitfulness!

You, my brothers, were called to be **free**. But do not use your **freedom** to indulge your [self-life]; rather, serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13, **emphasis**).

What an amazing freedom leading to an inward tranquility, like a mountain lake on a calm night reflecting the starry skies! It takes just a little wind to disturb that calm. Unfortunately for many Christians this may not be a moment-by-moment experience. What do we do, then, when that rest is disturbed, and we experience a measure of inward turmoil?

We want to *discover ourselves* in the Psalms. So picture a time when an event disrupted the blissful rest in the Lord’s presence. Feel the emotions, the sounds, the smells. Got it? Whether at home or work, at recreation or church.

Psalm 73 is a brilliant Psalm written by Asaph. He uses his experience to expose how often we **choose** to sow “*inner turmoil*” into our lives rather than “*inner tranquility.*”

“Jim, that’s crazy!”

Who would choose inner turmoil?

Yes, it’s wacky, yet we respond like this at times, of course unwittingly. It’s not always Reality that fuels our responses, but our perception of reality. Studies show that if we think on a disaster, our body actually responds as if we are in one.

Our enemy whispers, “*what you experience is all there is for you...and you don’t even deserve that.*” However, God is the God of “more.”

There are few more startling contrasts between portions of a Psalm than this Psalm that teaches “*we become what we behold.*” Whatever we focus the affections of our heart on draws us in with its magnetic pull whether towards inner turmoil or inner tranquility. You choose.

Launching Point (1): David begins well with a spot-on theological proclamation about God’s fundamental goodness. We embrace that God is good at His core so He can only do good. Asaph, the psalmist, also knew how crucial it is to begin all our thinking with an accurate answer to our first essential question, “*What’s God like?*”

“How Do I Develop Inner Turmoil?” (2-14)

Where do we default to when life assaults us?

When our theology intersects life, we can become practical atheists. Asaph denied God’s goodness as he turned inward. Let’s be honest with ourselves and admit that we can also respond like Asaph. Notice the first word in verse 2? “**But.**” Our “*yeahbuts*” cancel out the practical outworking in our lives of all that goes before. “**God is good.**” “*Yeahbut, I’m short on rent this month.*” “*Yeahbut, my neighbor has more.*” “*Yeahbut,....*”

How do we spiral downward into “inner turmoil?”

1. Don’t personalize truth so it can’t encounter life (v. 2). Do you belong to a church that has a strong heritage of the truth of Scripture? That’s great! However, simple exposure to truth is

insufficient. If we don't put truth into practice so it encounters our life, Jesus tells us we build on the sand. James tells us we deceive ourselves, especially when Scriptural truth cuts across some of our favorite personal Christian sins. It's not truth that we can recite that transforms us but truth actively put into practice.

Notice that Asaph has already put on his negative glasses. *"Almost."* *"Nearly lost."* Had he really slipped and lost his foothold. *No!* Negative exaggeration tips us off that we have a poverty mentality. Such a response often comes when some past disappointment with God is unresolved, and so festers.

The farther we spiral down, the more our downward momentum accelerates. *What is your early warning signal that you are spiraling down so you can break it quickly?* One of mine is that I start feeling negative about people, violating Philippians 4:8. Another is a lack of joy.

When you notice it, how do you break that downward spiral?

For me, *"One-minute Sabbath"* is a very simple and powerful tool (see my website: **JimFredericks.com**).

2. Envy others (vv. 3-5). Envy toward others, further skews our perspective, increasing our inner turmoil because we are self-focused. Our stomach churns. Our mind frets. Our rest in freedom disappears. The only true statement is his first, admitting his envy.

3. Focus exclusively on the faults of others (vv. 6-12). Asaph further escalates his downward spiral. Pride. Violence. Callous hearts. Iniquity. Evil imaginations. Scoff. Malice. Arrogance. Low view of God. All of these *may* be true of others. However, it's most likely some of our own stuff projected on others (see Matthew 7:1-5). At the least, this lacks the healthy awareness that each person also has *something* worth imitating. Our focus on negatives in others is a loud early-warning signal that *our* focus is off.

Although, please don't look down on Asaph. Look inward at yourself. Do you ever have these thoughts? Do you have any person or group of people that you primarily rail against their negative traits? This negative focus opens us up for inward turmoil.

4. Throw a pity party for yourself (vv. 13-14). Notice again the negative exaggeration. *"Always."* *"They go on amassing wealth."* *"In vain I..."* *"All day long"* *"Every morning."* And the bonus from the hyper-religious: *"I have kept my heart pure."*

I remember about six months into the COVID-19 outbreak my conversation with God. *"God, you know I'm an introvert in my flesh but you changed me to be also an extrovert. Because You changed me, I need more people contact for my spiritual tank to be full."* I had opened up my imaginary cupboard to take my *"whine"* glasses out to fill with the dregs of my complaints. *"It's not fair God that..."* That stopped me short, I put the *"whine"* glasses back and thanked Him that He has provided all I need in His presence. This Psalm was front and forward in my mind.

Stop now. Let this truth intersect your life. Have you experienced any of these recently? Be fiercely honest with yourself. God already knows!

"Where Do I Find Perspective?" (15-17)

Although Asaph described four steps downward, he focuses on three aspects for restoration and a return to sanity.

1. Remember the power of community (v. 15). From self-pity to otherly centeredness. The first turn was from self-pity to remember basic community responsibilities in which we discover life afresh. Others are watching our actions.

2. Reflect deeply on life (v. 16). This is a good thing to be troubled with his inner turmoil, if it leads us back to the LORD.

3. Receive God's revelation (v. 17). We need light from above to break us free from encrusted patterns and hidden strongholds. God's presence rested in the sanctuary the OT.

"Then I understood the final destiny of those in verses 2-14."

For years, I could not understand why God met Asaph in such a low place, focusing on the final destiny of the lost? Then I saw again how brilliant and caring God is! God always meets each of us where He finds us in the moment.

"How Do I Develop Inner Tranquility" (18-28)

This pathway to "*inner turmoil*" was a process of downward choices. So we "*bounce well*" through a series of upward spiritual responses. Even though God launches us toward transformation with a deepening experience of His presence, life is still a process.

1. Reframe events from God's perspective (18-20). So, why did Asaph begin his recovery at such a low spot? God begins restoration from the GPS point on our journey where *we are* at this moment. Where else can a compassionate God intersect a life except where we are? No matter how far you spiral down, God can and longs to meet you right there to help you *bounce well*. In 17, Asaph gets insight and understands their final destiny, so God in His kindness also begins at this point where He rescued Asaph, although He doesn't leave us there.

Our caring God meets us right where we are, the God who "*never-leaves-or-forsakes*" in this life and on into eternity. You may find some of the words puzzling. Feel free to dig in deeper yourself. But for now, take this as a dramatic expression of how temporal and fleeting life is without God. There is no substance in their lives, like with fantasies.

2. Repent honestly before God (21-22). "*I lost perspective and acted like a brute beast.*" When did this happen? Asaph is authentic, a necessary quality for intimacy with God. Now he sees that he acted like a brute beast when he was developing *inner turmoil*. Such responses are an affront to the God who made us in His image.

As a ministry tip. When people are in the midst of a downward spiral, they have lost perspective. Grief and bitterness characterized Asaph. Don't come alongside with judgement, but with whatever is necessary for them to "*enter the sanctuary*" with God.

3. Replace crippling deceit with freeing truth (23-24). Soak in the Reality of our blessings. Notice how Asaph now has perspective and is personalizing the four blessings he lists from the LORD. "*I,*" "*me,*" "*mine*" for us and "*You,*" "*Yours*" for God 5 times each in the four blessings. Relationship! And they are power-packed! *Companionship, comfort, guidance* and *security*. Which do you need the most tonight? This is not positive thinking, it's God-Reality and all are freely available as God's free gift to you.

4. Revel in intimacy with God (25-28a). Asaph focuses in on what is most essential, intimacy in relationship with the LORD (see 24-25 + 27-28a). Asaph uses nine personal pronouns in this short section. God initiates, but we must respond to enjoy our heritage as God restores an eternal perspective.

- "*Whom have I in heaven but you?*"
- "*And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*"
- "*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*"

- “Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.” God draws close to His own, but those who rebel will perish, receiving the consequences of their actions. This is not harsh vengeance, but sure justice.
- “But as for me, it is good to be near God.” Most Christians would agree with Asaph’s theological statement that God is good. And they could also spiral down if they don’t personalize God’s goodness. Can we say, however, in the midst of life-challenges, inviting others to our pity-party to drink the dreges of wining...can we still say this? “God is still good to **me** now, during my pain.” Now God’s goodness is no longer a theological statement, but a personal experience. WOW! *How about for you?*
- “I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge.”
“If you are not grounded in the goodness of God, you will lower your theology to match your pain.”

This is the push-point, all-in, wholehearted allegiance to our Lord. When I came to Christ at 25, I had little Christian background and had never heard the prayer I prayed. “Jesus, I know I can’t live my life the way I want. Here is all my life as it is, lock, stock and barrel, and I take Yours back in return.” Instantly I was transferred out of the dominion of death into life...without any accompanying emotions. Simply an all-in commitment to Jesus. This is still our daily response to Him. Have you chosen the Sovereign Lord as your all **today**

5. Retell God’s good story (28b): Once the LORD is enthroned again in our lives, give-it-away to others. You have a life-story that others need to hear. Don’t hoard the Good News. Who is there tomorrow in your daily activities with whom you can share one thing from the Psalms? Pass it along! Retell God’s good story.

Now What?

What’s your choice today, “inner turmoil” or “inner tranquility?” Yes, it sounds crazy. How often though do we or friends we love unwittingly choose the inner turmoil we discover in Psalm 73? Asaph gives us a better way.

God designed us as worshippers, so “we become what we behold.” What is your focus?

But we all with unveiled faces beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the LORD, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Read 23-24 twice. 25-28 twice.

Then ask yourself: “Do I believe it?” If so, “tell others of all God’s deeds.”

Can you tell this is another of my “deep spiritual wells” where I plunge in when my life nosedives into self-pity!?