

Possessions

A Psalm of Asaph.

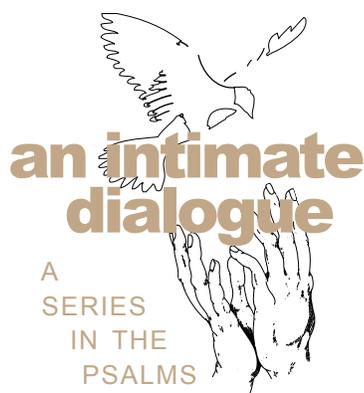
Truly God is good to Israel,
To such as are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
My steps had nearly slipped.
For I was envious of the boastful,
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

For there are no pangs in their death,
But their strength is firm.
They are not in trouble as other men,
Nor are they plagued like other men.
Therefore pride serves as their necklace;
Violence covers them like a garment.
Their eyes bulge with abundance;
They have more than heart could wish.
They scoff and speak wickedly concerning
oppression;
They speak loftily.
They set their mouth against the heavens,
And their tongue walks through the earth.

Therefore his people return here,
And waters of a full cup are drained by
them.
And they say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge in the Most High?"
Behold, these are the ungodly,
Who are always at ease;
They increase in riches.

Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain,
And washed my hands in innocence.
For all day long I have been plagued,
And chastened every morning.

Psalm 73:1-14 nkjv



part
one



mY GRADE SCHOOL, Franklin School, was located on Main Street, just through the block on which I lived. The normal way for me to get to school each day was to go out the back door, cross our back yard, "cut through" Wigand's back yard, down their drive, and cross Main Street to the school yard. The return trip was the same, but reversed, and never took more than two minutes for the entire journey. Mom could always expect me home just a few minutes after the school bell rang.

One day after school a classmate, one of the Nelson boys, invited me to join him catching crawdads down at Linn Creek, instead of going right home. The creek (or "crick," as we called them in those days) ran east and west along the backside of the football field and track that was behind Franklin School, then angled north to define the boundaries of the park that was our summer playground. The creek was a tiny tributary, shallow, muddy, and smelled not unlike

the sewer that crossed its path—but the Mississippi never held more fascination for Tom Sawyer than did Linn Creek for us.

I knew it was wrong. I knew I'd get into trouble for it. And I did it anyway. Instead of going right home after school that day, I went down to the creek with the Nelson boy. We caught crawdads, looked for garter snakes and frogs, and generally got wet and muddy and had a wonderful time.

The Nelson boys had parents who didn't really care where they were or when they got home from school. I envied their freedom, their ability to search out adventures without the burden of overprotective parents. It seemed like they could get away with murder. When we eventually decided to leave the creek they probably headed off to some other adventure.

I went home to my sure execution.

I was one half-hour—all of thirty minutes—late getting home from school, and my mom was beside herself. Where have

you been? What happened to you? Are you hurt? Boy, did I get a licking that day. And I learned the rather painful lesson that no matter how much the creek beckoned, I was always to come right home after school.

envy

The Nelson boys seemed to have so much freedom—they could go where they wished, do what they wished, and never had to answer to any discipline. I, on the other hand, had more restrictions, more rules—and a burning sensation in my posterior. How was *this* fair? I mean, I was a pretty good kid. I didn't cuss or sass back at my parents. Every Sunday I attended church and Sunday School. I even sang in the children's choir. I was a good kid—so why was I getting the short end of this harmless after-school adventure?

Asaph expressed a similar level of frustration in one of his psalms.

I know You are good to Your people, O God. I know You are good to those whose hearts are innocent. As for me, however, well, I came this close to falling flat on my face. You see, I envied those in the limelight—those who think so much of themselves. I know their hearts are not innocent, yet they seem to have everything they desire. Even their deaths seem to be easy.

Even on their last bed they remain strong and well-fed. Their body has not wasted away. They enjoy lives of ease, and are never stressed by worry or anxiety. Nobody lays a hand on them. Because of this, they swell with pride—they wear it like a bright, shiny necklace—and they openly wear like a cloak that which they have gained through violence. They have everything they want—even anything they can conjure in their wildest imaginings. They have become so gorged with plenty, their eyes bulge out. They are not afraid to blaspheme, and openly talk about how they will take advantage of everyone. They look down on everyone when they speak. They think themselves so high and mighty that they

consider their words to be straight from the heavens, and with those words they march through the land telling everyone what to do.

demigods

As considered through the clouded prism of this world's perspective, it would seem that we have every reason to be envious of the wicked, the powerful elite, the spoiled rotten. They enjoy all the advantages of life, but few of the disadvantages.

When the rest of us are queued up, they get to cut in line in front of us. They are lousy parents, but their kids have everything they want, while our kids go without. They get all the breaks, the promotions at work, while we plod along in impoverished anonymity.

Worse, these spoiled brats hold only a sneering disdain for God. Even as they, arrogant demigods, attract drooling sycophants to themselves, their behavior mocks the true God and infects the weak-minded with a distorted, cancerous view of holiness.

Because of this, many are drawn to their power and influence, seeking to share in some of the leftovers. They are sure they are getting away with it. "If there is a God, He doesn't know or care what we are doing. Anyway, He isn't so smart after all." Their words and behavior demonstrate that these people are wicked, and do not know You at all. In spite of this, they haven't a care in the world. They enjoy lives of comfort and opulence.

remaining true

It is enough to discourage even the strongest believer. What's the point? Where is the percentage in being a faithful disciple of God if the scalawags and ne're-do-wells keep getting away with murder?

Why should we bother remaining true to the Lord if He is not going to do a better job of taking care of us—or at least evening the proverbial playing field for us?

Oh, woe is me! Why have I bothered to keep my heart open to You? What has it served me to keep my hands clean, to use my power only for Your good? It has accomplished nothing for me. For I have been "beaten up" over this from dawn to dusk, and slapped down at break of every day.

the answer

What is the answer for those times when we see the wicked gain while the righteous lose?

In the face of such apparent inequity, how can we subscribe to Solomon's proverb?

Do not let your heart envy sinners,
But live in the fear of the Lord always.

Proverbs 23:17

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Continued March 24
in *Part Two*
(Psalm 73:15-28)