

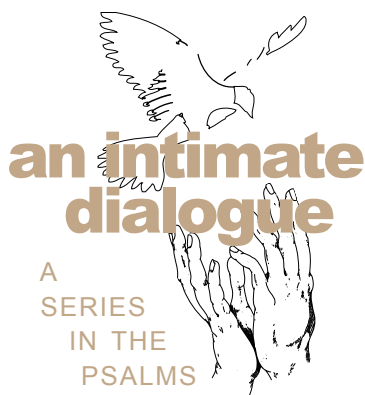
Possessions

If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
Behold, I would have been untrue to the
generation of Your children.
When I thought how to understand this,
It was too painful for me—
Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their end.

Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.
Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as
in a moment!
They are utterly consumed with terrors.
As a dream when one awakes,
So, Lord, when You awake,
You shall despise their image.

Thus my heart was grieved,
And I was vexed in my mind.
I was so foolish and ignorant;
I was like a beast before You.
Nevertheless I am continually with You;
You hold me by my right hand.
You will guide me with Your counsel,
And afterward receive me to glory.

continued...



part two



fOR THE INFRACTION OF SPENDING a half-hour down by the creek with one of the Nelson boys, and thus arriving home late from school, I received a rather thorough spanking. Through the pain I envied the freedom afforded my schoolmates. *They* weren't being punished for being late. *Their* parents didn't ride such close herd on their time and activities. Nevertheless, I learned the lesson of the spanking—that I was never to do the same thing again.

As young as I was, I learned another, even more valuable lesson that day. I learned that of the two sets of parents—the Nelsons and the Lampels—mine loved me more. 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—but I

had something they didn't: the deep and caring love of my mom and dad.

a higher perspective

For just a fleeting moment I was envious of those who appeared to get away with their transgressions. The psalmist, Asaph, experienced the same emotion.

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.

Psalm 73:3-4 NKJV

Asaph mulled it over, tried to reconcile for himself the seeming inequities of life.

I came this close to keeping score, and recounting all these inequities. But if I had, I would have been unfaithful to this generation of Your people. So, in my closet I mulled over all this in my mind, weaving together all the evidence that

has been so troubling to me. Alas, my conclusion gained me nothing; I was still worried—even pained—over the unfairness of it all.

But there was something he had not yet tried. Mired in the slough of despond, he had up till now been operating under his own steam, on his own intellect and reason—which is why none of it made sense to him. He remained confounded until he sought a different—a higher—perspective.

Ah, until, that is, I came into Your presence—into Your most holy place. Then I got it! Everything fell into place for me! Informed by Your perspective (instead of my own), I understood what lay in the future for them. Now I see: You have placed the wicked where their footing is precarious; the flattery of fools has become their undoing, and now they are sliding helplessly into ruin. Look how they are so quickly ruined! In terrible horror they are snatched away to their doom! Oh holy and terrible Lord, when You stir Yourself to judgment, You treat them as if they are nothing—like shadowy apparitions from a forgotten dream.

impermanence

Living with earthly vision is, for the believer, akin to living as a blind and senseless beast. Our spirit becomes numbed by the plodding futility of day followed by monotonous day. As one of God's own we are made for better things. We have been made anew, reconfigured for a higher perspective, one that sees and understands that we are surrounded by impermanence, by transient follies that will inevitably be burned up as chaff.

When I came near to forgetting You—when my very being had turned sour, and I was skewered upon my own bitterness—I was little better than a thick-headed bovine, brutish and ignorant; yes, like a wordless cow in Your presence. Even in my stupidity, however, I have not left Your side, for You have taken possession of me—You hold onto my hand. By Your word and will, O God, You take charge of my life, and when this life is

o'er, You will draw me into the glory that is Yours.

a more precious possession

The Nelson boys enjoyed liberties not afforded me. On the surface they seemed to have it made. They could do as they wished, go where they wanted, and stay out as late as they cared to. But at the end of the day, when they got home what awaited them was a cold supper and disinterested, apathetic parents. Their freedom came at a horrible price.

As a boy I had more restrictions placed on me, less freedom. But when I got home what awaited me was a hot, carefully prepared supper, and parents who loved me, and cared about my well-being. Even at such a young age I realized that when I took a higher perspective it was clear that the Nelson boys were impoverished, while I was rich beyond measure.

Even so, the believer need not waste time or energy envying those who seem to get away with murder while they spurn God and His ways. When we acquire the Lord's perspective we see that, compared to them, we have a Parent who not only loves us and protects us, but who—in His time—will meet out justice upon those who reject Him.

But transgressors will be altogether destroyed;
The posterity of the wicked will be cut off.
But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;
He is their strength in time of trouble.
The Lord helps them and delivers them;
He delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
Because they take refuge in Him.

Psalm 37:38-40

O God, I need not envy others, for as high as the high heavens, and as low as the soil upon which I walk, You, Lord, are my most precious possession, and the one delight of my heart. Why should I concern myself about what others do to me. I am made of flesh, and flesh is impermanent; it will waste away to dust. My hope is in You, O God, my Rock

and my eternal dwelling place. The wicked—those who have kept You at a distance—will keep wandering into their own desert, and perish. You have not held back Your wrath, but exterminate all who have gone whoring, instead of remaining true to You. But I will. I will draw near to God—my rock, my hope, my place of safety. Sheltered by the Lord God, I will recount all He has done for good.

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Whom have I in heaven but You?
And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.
My flesh and my heart fail;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish;
You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry.
But it is good for me to draw near to God;
I have put my trust in the Lord God,
That I may declare all Your works.

Psalm 73:15-28 NKJV