

Preventing Heart Failure

Psalm 73

October 4th, 2026

1. God is _____, right? (73:1)
2. Heart failure can set in when life doesn't meet our _____. (73:2-16)
3. Heart failure can be _____. (73:17-28)
 - a. See with _____ eyes. (vv. 17-22, 24, 27)

*Heart failure comes when we have
_____ expectations based on a mistaken
understanding of God's promises.*

*Heart failure comes when we look only at the
_____ and are blind to the big picture.*

- b. Remember the _____ of God. (v. 23)

*Heart failure comes when we live as practical
_____.*

- c. Set your heart on the _____ (vv. 25-26, 28)

*Heart failure comes when we put our
_____ in untrustworthy things.*

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Psalm 73

1. In what situations are you most likely to feel like Asaph in Psalm 73:2-14?
2. What can we learn from Asaph's honesty about his own heart struggles?
3. What changed for Asaph in v. 17? How can we develop a similar perspective?
4. How is God's faithfulness described in vv. 23-24?
5. What is necessary for us to say like Asaph in v. 25, "besides You, I desire nothing on earth"? Can we say that if there are other, legitimate things that we do desire?
6. What does it mean for God to be our "portion" in v. 26? (see Psalm 16:5; Lam. 3:24; Nu. 18:20)
7. What leads to the final conclusion of the last line in Psalm 73?

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Intro:

Do you ever get discouraged? Does your heart start to fail?

This Psalm is for you.

The Bible is real. It shows people as we are, not the foyer faces we put on when we around others.

Psalm 73 gives you an inside peak at a discouraged man – His heart was on the edge of failing

v. 26 – “my flesh and my heart may fail”

“my flesh” – physical aspect to discouragement – you feel fatigued, exhausted, like you just want to sleep

“my heart” – emotional aspect to discouragement – dejected, down

Piper - It's like your life is a tank and in it is water that you need for refreshment. And somebody pulls the plug at the bottom and it just all runs out.

This is heart failure – we'll see it described, we'll diagnose the causes, and we'll see how it can be prevented.

1. God is **good**, right? (73:1)

- a. Surely – introducing a truth that is about to come
- b. God promises to be good to Israel, specifically those who are pure in heart
 - i. **Psalm 1:1-3** How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.
 1. Introduction to the rest of the psalms and often we see the principle at work or repeated.
 - ii. If you were a Jewish person well versed in the poetry of the Psalms, you would know what to expect next.
 1. An upbeat psalm about the character and goodness of God.
 2. Perhaps reciting different ways that God has been good, different incidents of Him delivering people or providing for them.
- c. Psalms often follow a pattern.
 - i. Usually the first verse sets the tone for the rest of the psalm.

Like, “Once upon a time” – you have an idea what to expect
- d. Yet this Psalm breaks the patterns
 - i. Starts with a declaration of confidence so you expect an upbeat psalm, but it turns to a message that is anything but upbeat.

- ii. Like a story that begins “Once upon a time” but turns into a calculus text book – the intro doesn’t fit the genre.
 - iii. Or movie that starts as a romantic comedy but turns into a zombie thriller.
- 2. Heart failure can set in when life doesn’t meet our expectations. (73:2-16)
 - a. There is a conflict between what is supposed to be true and what he was experiencing
 - i. “But as for me. . . ”
 - 1. I’m struggling, I’m doubting, I’m on the edge
 - ii. The wicked shouldn’t prosper while the righteous struggle
 - iii. Came to the edge of disbelief
 - b. The prosperity of the wicked almost led to heart failure.
 - i. Not just that they prospered but that their prosperity seems to be in direct contrast to what God promised in Psalm 1 – prosperity is supposed to come to the one who delights in God’s law and acts with righteousness. The wicked are to be like chaff that are driven away by the wind, they aren’t supposed to stand strong.
 - c. Seems like a description of doubt.
 - i. On one hand, he knows this is true – God is true and He is good to Israel. On the other hand, something happened that caused some doubt and almost pushed him over the edge.
 - d. Their prosperity is described. (v. 4-12)
 - i. Healthy and carefree until a painless death (v. 4, 5)
 - 1. “body is fat” was a good thing – showed that they had plenty to eat
 - ii. Characterized by pride, even against God (v. 6, 9)
 - iii. They are violent (v. 6b)
 - iv. Mock the existence or awareness of God
 - v. V. 12 summarizes
 - 1. Behold (see) these are the wicked, always at ease and prospering
 - 2. Such a detailed summary because he wants us to see that this should not be so!
 - e. Surely my attempts at purity have been wasted (vv. 13-16)
 - i. Which “surely” is true?
 - 1. That God is good to those who are pure in heart
 - 2. Or that I’ve wasted my attempts at purity because it makes no difference
 - 3. Evidence for the first seems lacking at the moment
 - 4. Evidence for the second seem overwhelming based on present circumstances
 - a. They prosper, I suffer
 - ii. He wanted to blow the whistle but knew he would have disillusioned others (v. 15)
 - iii. Still, his own heart was troubled (v. 16)

f. What leads to your heart failure?

i. Like Asaph, is it when you see wicked people prosper?

1. Or are there other areas of life that have not met your expectations?

ii. Parenting expectations that aren't met

1. If I just control their environment, keep them in Sunday school, have family devotions, then everything will turn out well – but they don't.

iii. Prolonged singleness

1. Go to college, meet a nice guy or a good looking girl and get married, but you're still single.

iv. Unhappy marriage or unwanted divorce

1. Maybe you found someone but it quickly or eventually went south. Or they left and it wasn't something that you wanted at all.

v. Chronic health problems

1. Strong earlier in life but now your body seems to be your own worst enemy.

2. "Living with chronic pain is like having an alarm clock taped to your ear with the volume turned up—and you can't turn it down. You can't run from it; the pain goes where you go and stays where you stay. Chronic pain is the unwelcome guest who will not leave when the party is over. "

Harvard Law Professor and strong Christian William Stuntz who died of colon cancer in 2011

vi. Do you ever think, "Surely God is good . . . but as for me, it seems like He's not so good . . . so is He really good?"

1. Is His goodness theological theory but not practical reality in your life?

vii. These unmet expectations lead to discouragement and you feel like the water is draining out of your tank.

3. Heart failure can be **prevented**. (73:17-28)

At this point, the psalm begins to turn.

Provides a model for how we can prevent our own heart failure.

a. See with **eternal** eyes. (v. 17-22, 24, 27)

i. His outlook changed when he went into the sanctuary of God, the temple – the place of worship.

1. He needed to come someplace that awakened him to a reality that he was becoming increasingly blind to.

2. Everything he saw with the wicked was present tense. In the present tense he was discouraged.

3. The reality was that their prosperity was superficial and would be short-lived. Certain judgment awaited them for rejecting their maker and living in rebellion against Him.
- ii. Those who reject God in this life can expect to be judged in the next (v. 17-19, 27)
 1. V. 17-20 provide a good basis for a fire and brimstone sermon.
 2. Psalmist not rejoicing at this but sobered by the truth of it.
 - a. A heartless person who takes delight in talking about hell but a faithless and unloving person who ignores the topic.
 3. “Do I really want to trade places with those whom God will destroy in judgment?”
 4. Heard it said that that though we walk through the valley of death just once, we spend our whole lives in the valley of the *shadow* of death.
 - a. That “shadow” should bring us back regularly to a sober evaluation of our life.

By looking at his “solution” we can see more clearly what lead to his near heart failure.

*iii. Heart failure comes when we have **unrealistic** expectations based on a mistaken understanding of God’s promises.*

1. God did not promise to deal with the wicked immediately. But He will certainly judge.
 - a. The final “**surely**” that reconciles the other two – God is good and just even if we don’t see it immediately. When we see that eternal eyes, we see that he will do it.
2. We should be glad God postpones judgment – we would not have fared well ourselves had He not graciously given us time to repent!
 - a. **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.
 - b. Asaph’s unrealistic expectation was that the wicked would always be punished immediately. It lead to great discouragement when his expectation wasn’t met.
 - c. What are your unrealistic expectations based on mistaken understandings of God’s promises?
3. God did not promise you smooth parenting waters, or an early marriage, or an easy marriage, or life without pain – but we want these things!

*iv. Heart failure comes when we look only at the **present** and are blind to the big picture.*

1. Describes himself like a senseless animal that lives only for the moment. (v. 21-22)
 - a. My dog lives only for the moment and doesn’t understand the big picture.

- i. To him, I'm cruel for giving him a bath, brushing out stickers that get caught in his hair, cutting his hair. He would love to run free in the neighborhood, playing with the cats and squirrels.
 - ii. He doesn't understand that I do some of these things for him and limit him in some ways because I do care about him. That's just how animals are.
 - iii. Asaph said, "That's how I was."
 - b. People made in the image of God can't function that way because sometimes "the moment" is pretty crummy. That leads to discouragement and heart failure and doubt.
- 2. "The big picture" also means expanding your expectation of "prosperity"
 - a. Our hopes and expectations are sometimes delayed or denied for our good.
 - i. Charles Simeon
 - 1. 200 years ago, pastor in England, excited for his first church but they weren't excited about his evangelical convictions. The people protested by boycotting church and locking the pews so no one could come in and sit down! For 12 years others would come but they sat in the aisles or stood in the back.
 - 2. That delay refined and changed his heart and he ended up serving that church for 44 more years.
 - ii. My friend who married late telling me in his late 20's that although he wanted to be married God was so good to delay it at that point. He realized he wasn't ready to be a godly husband yet.
 - b. God's sovereignty and goodness are the first things to go on our internal witness stand when we don't get what we want in the moment.
 - i. Like the psalmist, our theology might not change but it seems disconnected from the reality of our circumstances.
 - ii. But could he be working in this delayed desire to transform us?
- b. Remember the ***nearness*** of God. (v. 23)
 - i. He has not abandoned His people, although we mistake invisibility for absence or lack of concern.
 - ii. ***Heart failure comes when we live as practical **atheists**.***
 - 1. On the one hand acknowledging God's existence but living as if He isn't really there.
 - 2. These people appeared to have everything, but they didn't have God. That was missing in his earlier discouragement.
- c. Set your heart on the ***Lord*** (v. 25-26, 28)
 - i. "Besides You, I desire *nothing* on earth" – nothing?!

1. Nothing compared to this desire – the desire to know God, to understand Him, to be transformed by Him

*ii. Heart failure comes when we put our **trust** in untrustworthy things.*

1. **Ps. 62:10b** – . . . if riches increase, do not set your heart on them
 - a. A lot of heart failure for those who trust in the stock market (worst quarter in three years)
2. **Psalm 49:10** For he sees *that even* wise men die; The stupid and the senseless alike perish And leave their wealth to others.
 - a. For the educated, sometimes their education doesn't secure the job they want or feel like they deserve

d. Make sure your eternity is secure

- i. This certainty of judgment sobered the psalmist but it should to more than that for us.
- ii. **1 John 5:11-12** And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.
- iii. **John 3:16-18** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
- iv. **John 8:24** "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins."

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