

SESSION 8

draw near to God

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Psalm 73

BUILDUP THEME**DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS**

God wants us to draw near to Him and tell those set on slippery places about His saving grace.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The students will determine ways to draw close to God so they are prepared to declare His greatness.

MEMORY VERSE

"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 thy works"
(Psalm 73:28).

Engage in the Lesson

- ☐ Have you browsed pictures on social media of someone's vacation or brand-new home? Did you catch yourself feeling envious of the person?
- ☐ Read Psalm 73. Note the process Asaph went through to stop feeling envious of the wicked and to start feeling content in the Lord's presence. Note also what he thinks of his enviousness when he puts his life and the lives of the wicked in proper perspective.
- ☐ Social media has led to widespread enviousness. And the tendency for people to make their lives appear like a fairytale, makes the problem worse. A typical social media user may feel like the only one for whom life isn't grand.
- ☐ Asaph, long before the days of social media, had envious feelings when he looked at the lives of those who had rejected God. From his limited perspective, they looked like they were the winners. He thought about joining them. He didn't, but many in his day and in the days since did. Challenge your students to replace feelings of envy with an appreciation for God's presence. Asaph's Psalm 73 will help them be content with being near God.

Engage in the Lesson

Asaph's envy of the wicked almost destroyed his relationship with God. But in the sanctuary, he saw things from God's perspective. He learned that the wicked are slated for destruction, whereas God is pleased with the righteous and will escort them safely to Heaven. Asaph concluded that spiritual blessings are far more valuable than material prosperity and that he needs to draw near to God so he might be a strong testimony of God's greatness and grace.

Session Starters

Option 1—Envy's Changing Landscape

Steps

1. Discuss the rise of envy.

ASK: In the days before social media and reality TV, to whom did you compare yourself? A neighbor, coworker, or relative? (Q1)

ASK: How have social media and reality TV shows about home remodeling and vacation rentals changed to whom you compare yourself? (Q2)

ASK: Have you ever posted something on social media in hopes others would be envious of you? (Q3)

Studies have shown that people often feel worse after scrolling through social media because they see posts that reflect the life that they want but don't have. Believers aren't immune to the negative effects of social media. We can all get vacation envy, career envy, kitchen envy, abs envy, and yard envy if we aren't careful.

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Thousands of years before the days of social media and reality TV, Asaph wrote Psalm 73. Yet, it applies directly to our lives today. In fact, it is as if he wrote portions of it for today. We will study the psalm to help us avoid the unpleasant sin of envy and to be content in God's presence instead.

Option 2—Stay off the Black Rocks!

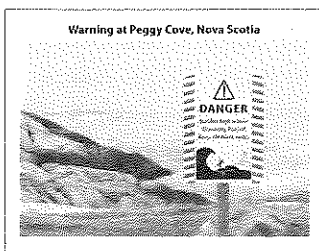
Gather

- Resource 68-R13.

Steps

1. Show resource 68-R13. The sign in the picture is posted near Peggys Cove, Nova Scotia.

There are 40 or so signs warning people to stay off the slippery rocks at Peggys Cove, Nova Scotia. The rocks are extremely slippery, the waves grow suddenly high, and the surf makes rescue nearly impossible. Another sign reads, "Dark rocks are slippery. Stay far back. Rescue here is unlikely due to conditions. Don't take risks. Leave here alive."



68-R13

Several years ago, two men in their twenties decided to ignore all the signs and walk on the black rocks. Only one of them survived, and barely.

2. Talk about warning signs.

ASK: Would you pay attention to the warning signs around Peggys Cove? Why?

ASK: How do you typically treat signs warning you of a slippery surface?

ASK: When have you regretted not paying attention to a warning sign about a slippery surface?

3. Transition to the Bible study.

In Psalm 73 Asaph included warnings about slippery surfaces. He debated on whether to heed the warning. He was glad he did for his own sake and for the sake of others. His psalm challenges us to be content to be close to the Lord and away from the danger of “slippery rocks.”

Bible Study

Asaph wrote Psalm 73. He was one of David’s chief musicians and therefore a worship and spiritual leader in Israel (1 Chron. 16:4, 5; 2 Chron. 29:30). He also wrote Psalms 74—83 and Psalm 50.

I. Asaph’s Overview (Ps. 73:1–3)

Asaph began his psalm with an introductory overview. The rest of his psalm presents the struggle he went through to come to the right conclusions concerning God, the wicked, and himself.

A. His confidence (73:1)

READ: Psalm 73:1.

Asaph’s theology was accurate. He believed that God is good to His people. The history of Israel proved his belief was true.

ASK: What did God do for Israel, particularly early in her history, that proved God’s goodness to the people of Israel? (Q4) *Made promises to the patriarchs concerning a Promised Land; made Israel a great nation; delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt and brought them into their Promised Land; gave them the Mosaic Covenant to guide their life in the Promised Land.*

Asaph expected God to be good to Israel, but he didn’t expect God to be good to the wicked. He made a confession about his confusion and near misstep.

B. His confession (73:2, 3)

READ: Psalm 73:2.

Asaph confessed that he had almost stumbled spiritually. He staggered around and nearly fell. He was off the beaten, secure path and on treacherous ground. The picture is of Asaph burdened by questions about life. These questions pressed him to consider abandoning God for the life of the wicked.

READ: Psalm 73:3.

Though Asaph knew in his heart that God is good, he envied the prosperous wicked. He could not understand why God allowed them to enjoy the good life. He listed his observations of the wicked. None of which made sense to him.

II. Asaph's Observations (Ps. 73: 4–12)

A. The wicked avoid problems (73:4, 5)

READ: Psalm 73:4, 5.

The wicked seemed to possess good health. Even in death, they appeared to avoid painful disease or a slow, agonizing death. They had strength they enjoyed throughout their lives. They were not troubled as other men were, or so it appeared to Asaph.

ASK: Was Asaph's perception of the wicked entirely accurate? Were all the wicked people exceptionally healthy, strong, and trouble free? Explain. (Q5) *No. Some of the wicked no doubt experienced debilitating diseases and painful deaths.*

ASK: What does an envious attitude do to our perception of those we envy? Do we see them as they are, or do we tend to see only what will build our case? (Q6) *We tend to see only the good they experience because it builds our case that their lives are better than ours.*

Asaph's envy must have caused him to become fixated on anything uncomfortable or painful in his life. He had a negative view of his experience in life.

We too may find it difficult to align our theology and life experiences. We ask why God allows hardship and suffering to pound us while everything seems to go so well for so many unbelievers. Envy seizes us and threatens our relationship with God. We, like Asaph, focus only on the wicked who seem to be living trouble free, ignoring those with serious problems.

B. The wicked disregard God (73:6–9)

READ: Psalm 73:6–9.

Asaph described the wicked from his perspective. The first characteristic he noticed was their shameless pride (73:6). They wore it as their necklace. They were proud of their arrogance.

Second, Asaph noted that “violence” covers them as a “garment.” The wicked showed off their violence as if it were a piece of fine clothing. Their prosperity gave them power, which they abused by being harsh and aggressive.

Third, the wicked had bulging eyes from their fatness. They had a lot and boasted that they couldn’t even wish for the abundance they had (73:7).

Fourth, Asaph noticed that the wicked used their mouths to brag about evil, threaten oppression, and scoff at righteousness (73:8).

Fifth, the wicked brazenly denied God’s abilities and place in Heaven. Their dominance of those they oppressed and the seeming lack of reprisal from God for their actions gave them boldness to speak against God (73:9).

Finally, their tongues strut around through the earth. In other words, they recruited people to their line of reasoning.

ASK: Which of the characteristics of the wicked have you seen most predominantly in society? Explain. (Q7)

ASK: What part do you think social media plays in recruiting people to join the wicked in their ways? (Q8)

Like Asaph, we may wonder why so many ungodly people fare well while we suffer. The situation tests our faith. We may wonder whether it pays to serve God.

C. The wicked attract followers (73:10–12)

READ: Psalm 73:10.

The Hebrew for verse 10 makes it difficult to understand. It seems from the context that it is referring to the drawing of people to the wicked to drink of the power and wealth they enjoy.

READ: Psalm 73:11, 12.

The wicked claimed God didn’t know what was taking place on earth. After all, they reasoned, they were prospering, whereas the saints were suffering. The wealth the wicked enjoyed and the lack of trouble they faced made their way of life attractive. That troubled Asaph, for it nearly caused him, a leader in Israel to fall. There were some of God’s People who joined the wicked. At times in Israel’s history, it was hard to find individuals who hadn’t embraced the life of the wicked.

III. Asaph's Decision (Ps. 73:13–17)

A. His conflict (73:13–16)

READ: Psalm 73:13–16.

At the height of his confusion about the wicked, Asaph reasoned that the internal cleansing of his heart and the external cleansing of his hands seemed worthless (73:13). He was plagued and chastened while the wicked prospered. God didn't seem to be helping him (73:14). Asaph knew that if he voiced his thoughts, he would harm God's people (73:15). So, he kept silent and continued to ponder the question of the prosperity of the wicked. Asaph couldn't come up with a solution. He tried to reason his way to an answer, but all he got was a colossal headache (73:16).

ASK: Will the person who believes life has to be fair ever be satisfied with life? Explain. (Q9) *No. Life is not fair, and it will never make sense from our limited perspective.*

Our goal is not to earn health and wealth by being good. Our goal is to glorify God's name. Sometimes God uses hardships and persecution to bring glory to His name.

In reality, every good thing that God allows into a person's life is a measure of His grace because no one is good and deserving of anything good from God. Instead of worrying about how much the wicked are getting from God, we should be grateful that God is gracious to some degree to all people, including ourselves.

B. His choice (73:17)

READ: Psalm 73:17.

Asaph finally found the answer he needed by going to the "sanctuary of God" (the tabernacle). The tabernacle was where Asaph often ministered, but in this case, it was the place God ministered to him.

In the tabernacle, priests offered sacrifices for sin and gave praise to God. There God met with those who interceded for the Israelites. While there in the presence of God, it dawned on Asaph that the wicked didn't have a relationship with God. They owned things but owned no access to God, the Judge of all the earth. Upon drawing near to God, Asaph saw beyond the temporal prosperity of the wicked and glimpsed their eternal end.

IV. Asaph's Affirmation (Ps. 73:18–20)

A. The wicked are doomed (73:18)

READ: Psalm 73:18. **ASK:** Why is "slippery places" a good

The tabernacle doesn't exist today, but a place is readily available where we can draw close to God and receive the answers and relief we need. It is the place of prayer. Further, God has invited us to approach Him boldly, promising us mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).

description of where the wicked stand? (Q10) *They are unable to stop their slide into their eternal destruction.*

The wicked are doomed to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11–15). None of the riches they accumulate during their lifetimes will save them from their end. God has sent them down a slippery slide. He is the only One who can rescue them.

B. The wicked are despised (73:19, 20)

READ: Psalm 73:19, 20.

The destruction of the wicked will come suddenly upon them. It will be like they have been dreaming their whole lives and woke up to find themselves in a nightmare.

If the wicked think God will change His mind and save everyone in the end, they are mistaken. Asaph wrote that when God awakes to judge the wicked, it will seem as if their lives have been a fantasy. All they built and cherished will vanish and be worthless to them. They will have no hope and no chance of rescue from eternal condemnation. God will despise them and most certainly judge them.

V. Asaph's Reflection (Ps. 73:21–28)

A. His regret (73:21, 22)

ASK: At this point, what might you expect Asaph to say about his consideration of joining the wicked who seemed to live with prosperity and ease? (Q11)

READ: Psalm 73:21, 22.

Asaph felt convicted about envying the wicked and doubting God's fairness. He confessed he had acted foolishly and had been as ignorant as a beast. An animal lacks a spirit and therefore cannot relate to God or understand spiritual truth. Asaph's personal analysis of his circumstances had been woefully lacking.

Like Asaph, if we fail to see a perplexing situation from God's perspective, we will flounder and perhaps pity ourselves. Thankfully, we can see things from God's perspective as we study the Bible, and our woe and envy can turn to songs of joy.

Perhaps every believer at one time or another judges a situation from a purely human perspective. We may perceive material prosperity as the good life and envy those who have it. But the truly good life is built on God's Word, not on the things of the world.

B. His renewal (73:23–26)

READ: Psalm 73:23, 24.

Possessions might have accompanied the wicked through life, but God would accompany Asaph. At the end of life's journey, the wicked would leave their possessions behind and cross into eternity alone, but God would walk with Asaph each step of the way and receive him to glory (73:23, 24).

The Lord's abiding presence can comfort us throughout life. Even when we fail Him, He stays with us. He is present at all times and in all places. He is present even when we doubt His Word, and He is present whether we feel His presence or not (Matt. 28:20).

READ: Psalm 73:25; Hebrews 13:5. **ASK:** Why should God's presence with us keep us content? (Q12) *God gives us peace in troubling times, strength to meet challenges, provision to meet our needs, and assurance that we are His forever.*

God gives believers many blessings, but the Giver of the blessings is greater than any blessing. We should rejoice in Who God is more than in what He gives us. He should hold the place of preeminence in our hearts throughout our lives.

READ: Psalm 73:26.

Asaph mentioned earlier that the wicked seem to die without pain. He came to realize the foolishness of such an observation. By contrast, Asaph was confident that God would be his portion forever. Asaph could look forward to stepping into glory to be with God.

C. His role (73:27, 28)

Rather than be content to live out his life with the promise of God's presence, Asaph understood he needed to be active in talking about God's greatness.

READ: Psalm 73:27, 28.

God will not save anyone who rejects Him, but He won't reject anyone who trusts in Him. That motivated Asaph to declare all God's works. To best declare God's works, Asaph needed to draw near to God. Drawing near to God means to learn about Him and talk to Him about what He is doing in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

ASK: What happens to the boasting of the wicked when believers start to talk about their God and His wondrous works? (Q13) *Their boasting seems so small and trivial when compared to God's greatness.*

Session Application

Steps

1. Challenge social media users to include God in their posts.

Unbelievers view their posts and pages. They should be moved to consider God rather than being moved to be envious of the believer. (Q14)

ASK: How else might you declare God's works to those who are sliding down the slippery slope to eternity without Christ? (Q15)

2. Encourage your students to continue to develop a close relationship with God, as has been addressed in previous sessions.

ASK: What would you predict for yourself if you replaced a half hour of social media scrolling with a half hour of Bible reading or study? (Q16)

3. Close the class in prayer. Thank God for the opportunity to draw near to Him. Pray your class would take advantage of their ability to know God so they might declare His greatness to those who don't yet know Him.