

# Guard Your Heart

(Psalm 73)

## Introduction

Have you ever envied non-believers? Have you ever been discontent with your life? Have you ever thought, “It doesn’t pay to do right? Why should I tell the truth and get in trouble when my friend can lie and get by with it?” Who is it that puts thoughts like that into your mind? It is Satan, isn’t it! But you are not the only one who has had those thoughts. Asaph had them, too, and he wrote about them in Psalm 73.

Today we’re going to learn that we need to guard our hearts from discouragement.

## Opening Prayer

Lord, sometimes when we look at other people in the world it seems like they are living a higher standard of life. Their houses look bigger, their toys look like more fun, or their clothes look more stylish than ours. But, when we look at You, Lord Jesus, we realize that You are all we need. Help us not to desire anything else in this life except You! Help us to be truly thankful for all that you have given us and all that you have done for us in our lives. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

## Memory Verse

*So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. (Galatians 6:9)*

## Lesson

We see in the title of this Psalm, that it is not written by David. It was written by Asaph, a musician that provided music for worship during David’s time.

Asaph realized that God was good to those who obeyed Him.

Psalm 73:1-2

*Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure. But as for me, I almost lost my footing. My feet were slipping, and I was almost gone.*

Yet Asaph almost gave up living for God because it didn’t seem to be working for him. He looked around and noticed that those who were not followers of God seemed to be better off than he was.

Psalm 73:3

*For I envied the proud when I saw them prosper despite their wickedness.*

Asaph became envious because it seemed that God treated bad people better than God treated him.

Psalm 73:4-7

*They seem to live such painless lives; their bodies are so healthy and strong. They don't have troubles like other people; they're not plagued with problems like everyone else. They wear pride like a jeweled necklace and clothe themselves with cruelty. These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for!*

It seemed that non-believers were living better lives than the believers. It seemed that they had care free lives and that they had better health and didn’t seem to have as many troubles as he did. Life was going so well for them that they even became puffed up with pride and were often cruel to other people. They didn’t even try to cover their pride, but displayed it as boldly as someone would display a fine gold chain or nice clothes. Many of them had more money than they could ever want or use.

Asaph realized these people were blessed even though they were wicked, and it just didn’t seem fair to him.

Psalm 73: 8-12

*They scoff and speak only evil; in their pride they seek to crush others. They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut throughout the earth. And so the people are dismayed and confused, drinking in all their words. "What does God know?" they ask. "Does the Most High even know what's happening?" Look at these wicked people—enjoying a life of ease while their riches multiply.*

They were not just indifferent to people who were trying to live a life that was pleasing to God; they were truly wicked. They made fun of those who tried to do right. They even laughed about God. They took advantage of others and said, “How can God know what I’m doing? He doesn’t know anything.” Yet these people kept getting richer. They seemed to have it better than he did even though he tried his best to be kind to others and obey God.

Asaph was discouraged, but refused to hurt others by voicing his doubts.

Psalm 73:13-15

*Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain. If I had really spoken this way to others, I would have been a traitor to Your people.*

Asaph thought perhaps it didn’t pay to live for God. In fact, he thought that maybe it was useless to stay away from wrong and resist temptation.

Even though you are a Christian, you may think, as Asaph did, that it doesn’t make any difference if you do right or not. Others do wrong and get by with it, yet you do right and it seems God is continually punishing you. “This isn’t fair!” you say. Asaph didn’t dare tell anyone his thoughts because he didn’t want to be a bad influence on others.

Have you ever had secret doubts about whether or not it pays to be honest? Say you got a “D” on your test. Have you ever thought that you could have cheated like one of your friends and gotten an “A”?

Or, it may seem unfair when you pay for something in a store while others just steal it. Satan uses such doubts to get us to quit obeying God. But you need to remember that doing right is always worthwhile. Even though you can’t always see the value of it right away, at some point God will reward your efforts.

Galatians 6:9-10

*So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we*

*have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.*

But Asaph hadn’t come to understand that yet.

Asaph was miserable inside, struggling to decide what he should do.

Psalm 73:16

*So I tried to understand why the wicked prosper. But what a difficult task it is!*

Asaph went to God with his questions.

Psalm 73:17

*Then I went into Your sanctuary, O God, and I finally understood the destiny of the wicked.*

Asaph did the thing all of us should do. Though he felt he couldn’t talk to anyone else about his doubts, he knew he could talk to God about them. So he did. Then he began to see things the way God sees them. There may be times when you feel as if you don’t have anyone who can really understand the frustration you feel about what is fair and what isn’t. But God understands and cares about you very much.

1 Peter 5:7

*Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.*

No matter what others may do, God wants you, as His child, to remember that doing right is always worthwhile. When it seems easier to cheat on a test or steal something from a store, talk to the Lord about how you feel. He understands and will give you the strength to do what is right. Then in His time He will reward your obedience to Him. Ask God to help you begin to see things the way He sees them. When Asaph talked to the Lord, he began to realize it was better to do what was right than to be like those who despised.

God showed Asaph that later he’d be glad he had chosen to do right.

Psalm 73:18-19

*Truly, You put them on a slippery path and send them sliding over the cliff to destruction. In an instant they are destroyed, completely swept away by terrors.*

Understanding this, Asaph felt guilty for having doubted God.

Psalm 73:20-23

*When You arise, O Lord, You will laugh at their silly ideas as a person laughs at dreams in the morning. Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. I was so foolish and ignorant—I must have seemed like a senseless animal to You. Yet I still belong to You; You hold my right hand.*

The Bible tells us that he felt foolish and stupid. Often we feel the same when we realize that we have sinned. But Asaph realized that God still loved him and was willing to forgive him. God loves you and will forgive you, too. God has already paid for your sin by sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross. Jesus is the One who loved us and died to wash us from our sins in His own blood (Revelation 1:5b). Because Jesus came to life again, He will hear you when you ask Him to save you. If you have never asked Him to do that, ask Him today. Then you will belong to God. Asaph belonged to God, and his doubts did not change the way God felt toward him.

Asaph realized that he had God's own presence and help to do right.

Psalm 73:24

*You guide me with Your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny.*

Finally, Asaph decided that doing right really is worthwhile; he saw that his relationship with God was his most valuable possession.

Psalm 73:25

*Whom have I in heaven but You? I desire You more than anything on earth.*

Asaph learned that God would help him with his frustrations. Is there a desire in your heart like Asaph's? His greatest desire on Earth was to find God's purposes for him in life.

Psalm 73:26

*My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever.*

He decided that he would share with others all the wonderful things that learned by coming to God with his secret questions.

Psalm 73:27-28

*Those who desert Him will perish, for You destroy those who abandon You. But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things You do.*

Will you choose to do the right thing this week—even when others are doing wrong? Sometimes you will be tempted to think it isn't worth it to do right. When Satan temps you with those foolish thoughts, remember Galatians 6:9 and say it to yourself. At the moment, it may seem better to do wrong as others do. But doing right is always worthwhile. God is pleased when His children obey Him. You will receive special good things that He has planned for you in this life as well as future rewards in heaven. Talk to the Lord about your struggles to obey. Thank Him that He is with you, and ask Him to give you His strength to keep doing what is right.

When life is over, people will be very glad they have accepted Jesus as their Savior. If they haven't, they will wish very much that they had. Now is the time for you to make that very important decision.

John 1:12

*But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God.*

## Closing Prayer

Father, guard our hearts from being discontent with our lives. Please help us not to look with envy on other people. Help us realize that You are our greatest gift. We are truly thankful for everything that You have provided for us in our lives. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

## Learning Activities

### Craft Corner

### Game Center

#### ***Guard Your Heart***

(Proverbs 4:23: Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.)

**Object of the Game:** To guard your own heart, while trying to capture others.

Give each child a cut out heart about 4" wide with their name on it. Have them tape it to the middle of their back.

Provide boundaries for the game, either a large circle they must stay within, or a room with walls that are not cluttered or blocked with stuff. (So they can stand at the edge to protect their back, but DON'T suggest this, or they all will.)

Spread them out evenly throughout the game area, at least arm's length apart from each other. Explain that on 'GO!' they are to Guard Their Hearts while trying to collect as many of the other players' hearts as possible. Say, "When time is up, I will say STOP (or blow whistle) and we will see how many hearts some of you have collected." Explain that they cannot grab, turn, push or even touch the other players or they are immediately 'out' and lose. They can only grab the hearts of other players. Notice: You do NOT say that those who have collected the most hearts will 'win', only that you will see who has collected a lot. Most will assume that is the object of the game, even though the name of the game is "Guard Your Heart" and you said the object was to do just that. Most of the kids, if not all, who have managed to collect several, will have lost their own! Those who 'Guarded Your Heart' probably collected none or few of the others.

You can determine when the game is over by watching - be sure to stop while a few still have their heart. When the game is over, announce that the **winners are those who still have their heart**, regardless of how many (and if any) hearts they collected.

Do not award prizes, as the game is a lesson, whose point will make every kid a winner. There will be some cries of confusion, or 'unfair' so awarding candy or other prizes will only reinforce those negative feelings and distract them from the point.

#### **Why we played this game**

Your 'heart' is the part of you that loves and enjoys life. There are a lot of people and things in this world that are after your heart. There are also a lot of things that we chase after, but just like in this game, when chasing those things, we lose our own heart in the process.

There are some people in this world that while guarding their heart, look like they are missing out on getting a lot of things, but the truth is, they haven't lost anything, they had it to start with - and in the long run, they will be the happier ones!

Or, use the following review questions in a time of discussion:

1. What was the problem Asaph had in this psalm? (Worldliness.)
2. What caused Asaph to doubt the goodness of God? (It didn't seem fair.)
3. This psalm suggests three major stages in Asaph's thinking. The progression is indicated by his use of pronouns.
  - (vv. 3-12) How many times do the words *they*, *their*, or *them* appear? Who is the object of Asaph's focus in these verses? What is the result? (He's focusing on other people.)
  - (vv 13-22) How many times do the words *I*, *me*, and *my* appear? Who is the object of Asaph's focus? What is the result? (His focus is on himself.)
  - (vv. 23-28) Count every use of the words *You* and *Your* (Thee/Thy KJV). Who is the object of Asaph's focus? What is the result? (His focus is on God.)

4. (vv. 2, 21-22) What does Asaph experience when he compares himself to the unbelievers? (Almost lost his footing; realized he was bitter.)
5. What verse is the turning point in Asaph's struggle? Where was he finally able to get the proper perspective on his struggle? (When he went into the sanctuary of the Lord.)
6. (vv. 23-26) What blessings did Asaph have that unbelievers will never have? (A glorious destiny.)
7. (v. 28) How does nearness to God help us maintain a proper perspective on the seemingly trouble-free lives of many people who do not walk with God? ("God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God." Matt 5:8)
8. Why is it so harmful for us to compare ourselves to others? (v. 3, you envy them.)
9. (v. 15) In the midst of his doubts, why did Asaph determine not to tell others about his struggles? (He didn't want to stumble others.)
10. (vv 17-19) What do the children of the Lord have to look forward to? (God is just.)
11. Have you ever struggled with the feeling that it doesn't pay to obey God, like Asaph did? Describe the circumstances that made you feel that way.
12. Have you ever told anyone else about your doubts? Do you think that could cause other believers to doubt the goodness of God? (Remember, your words can either encourage others to have more faith or give them reason to doubt the goodness of God.)

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