



Part 4: Recalibrating Our Loves

Psalm 73:1-5, 23-26

How do we respond to discouragement when life doesn't make sense and it feels so unfair?

We all live in a broken world, and I truly believe we all experience brokenness in different ways. Life sometimes doesn't make sense and it can feel so unfair. Maybe it is walking through a never-ending struggle, or the heart wrenching loss of a loved one, or the end of a business or job, or the end of a dream, or maybe the heartache of wanting to be married and still waiting, or maybe you are married and it's not what you hoped for. Or maybe you have a deep aching desire to have kids and it hasn't happened yet.

"That initial deluge of loss slowly gave way over the next months to the steady seepage of pain that comes when grief, like floodwaters refusing to subside, finds every crack and crevice of the human spirit to enter and erode. I thought that I was going to lose my mind. I was overwhelmed with depression. The foundation of my life was close to caving in."

"The winter's loss leads to the spring of recovery." – Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised*

Psalm 73

- Written by Asaph, a Levite commissioned to lead temple worship or written in the style of Asaph. This Psalm is in the spirit of a lament and testimony. Over 1/3 of the Psalms are laments. A lament typically has four movements: *turn to God, bring our complaint, ask boldly, choose to trust*. Laments are a reflection that God is big enough for wherever we are at. We can bring our questions, our complaints, and even our anger to God.
- Verses 1, 2: Asaph's interior struggle is that God is good and yet he almost slipped, lost his foothold because of envy and comparison of others who seem to be thriving while he is struggling. Specifically, it appears he is struggling with health issues, "common human burdens, and plagued by human ills".
- Discouragement – two aspects we need to acknowledge
 1. Broken world – there will be suffering, Romans 8:20 – 21.
 2. Envy and comparison – backdoor to discouragement.

- The battle of comparison in our culture. We live in a hyper-consumeristic culture where we are bombarded by hundreds of advertisements and choices. This easily creates greater envy and comparison which leads to dissatisfaction and discouragement. This also seeps into our faith and the church.
- Skye Jethani in his book, *The Divine Commodity* says that consumerism is the dominant worldview of North America and it is competing for the hearts and minds of the church.
- Skye Jethani makes an insightful observation of Vincent Van Gogh's painting, "Starry Night" versus Ron English's painting "Starry Night Urban Sprawl." Vincent Van Gogh was a troubled soul and tortured artist. He had a volatile relationship with Christianity, oscillating between devotion and rejection. He once became a missionary but then became disillusioned and rejected the institutional church, finding God more in the transcendence of the stars. The "Starry Night Urban Sprawl" depicts the impact of consumerism on the church.



"Starry Night" by Vincent Van Gogh



"Starry Night Urban Sprawl" by Ron English

"Light diffuses through every window and door, but it is not the sacred yellow light of the stars above. Instead, the church repeats the electric white light of the franchised stores and restaurants around it. It reflects the values of the earth, not the values of heavens. This church is a corporation, its outreach is marketing, its worship is entertainment, and its god is a commodity. It is the church of Consumer Christianity." – Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity*

- I believe this is the great temptation of our faith and the church. We are becoming more formed by the world rather than by God.

Recalibrating and re-ordering our loves (two truths)

1. The fullness of God's presence gives us the eyes to see: verses 16 - 17, 23 - 24
2. The fullness of God's presence recalibrates our loves: verses 25 - 26

Practices – Two Practices: Solitude and Fasting

A. Solitude

- "Solitude is not a private therapeutic place...Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self." – Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*
- Solitude suggestions on Greenwood's [Practices](#) page.
 - Guard the "little solitudes" you have in your day
 - Boundary your technology
 - Set aside time each day to be alone with God
 - Schedule a half-day retreat

B. Fasting

- Historically prevalent practice: early Christians used to fast every Wednesday and Friday. And for Lent, they would fast for forty days from morning till sunset.
- It is probably an even more critically needed practice for today considering our hyper-consumeristic culture.
- “With fasting, we decide of our own accord to not give our bodies what they want (food); as a result, when somebody else decides to not give us what we want (or life circumstances decide, or even God decides...), we don’t freak out, rage, or go ballistic on twitter. We’ve trained our souls to be happy and at peace, even when we don’t get our way.” – John Mark Comer, *Live No Lies*
- Fasting from social media, TV, Netflix – abstinence. Fasting is abstaining of food.

Confession:

Lord we confess that we are so easily tantalized, distracted, and consumed by the things of this world.

Our loves and desires are often disordered and not centered in you and your desires.

When life is hard, we sometimes envy and compare ourselves with others.

Help us to enter the fullness of your presence so that we might see and recalibrate our loves, saying, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

Amen

Small Group Discussion Questions:

Head: How do you see consumerism in our culture and how has it impacted your faith?

Heart: Has there been a time in your life like Asaph where you were deeply discouraged and dissatisfied?

Hands: How do recalibrate your loves by entering the fullness of God’s presence? What has been your experience with the practices of solitude and fasting?