

# Spiritual Recovery

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[0:00] Good morning. Kind of sobering to hear about death and someone else's brother in severe physical difficulty. In the providence of God, we're going to talk about one man's bondage to stuff and love of ease and the things of the world.

That sort of thing, I think, becomes trivial immediately when we think about death and eternity and so on. But that's the topic at hand. It's Psalm 73 this morning.

Have you heard of the expression, keeping up with the Joneses? You know, that desire to have the same or better lifestyle is what your neighbor's got. And yeah, now that you mention it, why does he have it so easy?

He's not even a Christian. He's a godless man. And look at all the blessings he's getting. Why doesn't God, why is God blessing them? Well, that's part of the struggle we're going to see on the part of the psalmist.

In Psalm 73. As you may know, we lived in exile in Illinois for the last five years.

[1:10] Which is just south of Wisconsin. If you've ever gone into Wisconsin through Illinois, you know Illinois is a pretty flat country. And once you get into Wisconsin, it's very hilly. So then we moved to Indiana, where it's even flatter.

Then, last week I was in Iowa, Ames, Iowa. And I have to say that's flatter still. So I'm starting to think that we live on a flat earth here.

And so while I was flying, I looked out of the window. I tried to see, you know, is there any curvature to the earth or not? Do we really live on a ball?

And I didn't see any curvature to the earth. So based on these observations, I'm going to say the earth is flat. But this is relevant, I promise you.

So whether you agree with my view or not, I hope you can see that my belief is formed by a certain set of experiences. Things that I've seen and observed and now believe. Let's call that a body of evidence.

[2:10] So based on that body of evidence, I'm believing that the earth is flat. Well, let's say then that I get a trip into space and I look at the earth and I see, you know what, it's really a ball.

So I had that fact to my body of knowledge. And now I believe that the earth is a ball, as indeed it is. So what made the difference? Perspective. I'm out here looking down on the earth.

I have the perspective. I can see what it really looks like. When I'm just walking around on this thing, it looks flat to me. When I'm flying up in the air, it looks flat to me. When I'm out in space, I have enough perspective. I can see that it's a ball.

So I'm going to use that word, body of evidence, a number of times for that phrase through the talk. And by that, I just mean kind of the set of beliefs and assumptions that you have that you use to make the decisions that you make and the assumptions that you make.

So for Asaph, he looked around at the prosperity of the wicked and he comes to a pretty ugly conclusion. Then he gets a new perspective.

[3:11] And from this new perspective, his body of evidence has expanded. And now his envy of the wicked looks absolutely ridiculous. And he abandons that. Of course, this psalm was written over 3,000 years ago.

Yet it's amazingly relevant for today. I'm sure you've heard that this book is strictly irrelevant for us in this modern day and age. But I hope you'll see again today that it's not so.

So Asaph, too, struggled with keeping up with the Jones. There's nothing new under the sun. Make sure you keep the truth in this book as part of your body of evidence.

And let's consider that this morning. So let's turn to that psalm. We'll read most of it right now and then some parts of it verse by verse later on. Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in

heart.

But as for me, says Asaph, my feet had almost slipped. I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

[4:19] Then in verse 4 through 12, he makes a number of comments about the wicked and their lifestyle. And in verse, taking up in 73, 13 now. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure.

In vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued. I have been punished every morning. If I had said, I will speak thus, I would have betrayed this generation of your children.

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me. Till I entered the sanctuary of God.

Then I understood their final destiny. You can see there he's got his new perspective now.

He stepped back. He's been in the sanctuary. It's starting to fit for him. Surely you place them in slippery ground. You cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed and completely swept away by terrors.

As a dream, when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant. I was a brute beast before you.

[5:25] Yet, I am always with you. You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. And afterward, you take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Those who are far from you will perish. You destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign Lord my refuge. I will tell of all your deeds. Who is this Asaph? In 1 Corinthians 16, we read the account of David bringing the ark back to Jerusalem, putting it into a tent that he had pitched for the Lord.

And he charged Asaph to lead the people in the giving of thanks and of praise in that occasion.

Later on in 2 Chronicles 29, he's called a seer.

Spurgeon says with this psalm, the theme is that ancient stumbling block of good men, which Job's friends could not get over, namely the present prosperity of the wicked and the sorrows of the ungodly.

[6:39] So let's turn directly to verse 1 then, where we read his statement of conviction. Surely, God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. Let's put that in context.

In verse 2, he says, My feet had almost slipped. In verse 13, In vain I have kept my heart pure. In verse 14, he says, I've been plagued, punished every morning.

So this had gone on for some time in his life. Then in verse 17, when he entered the sanctuary, he gains perspective. In verse 25, he says, And being with you, I desire nothing on earth.

Verse 26, God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. So you can kind of see a progression there, can't you? Where he's starting off envying the wicked, depressed, struggling every morning.

And then he goes into the sanctuary. He gains perspective. And in the end, he's testifying in faith of his reliance on God.

[7:42] Three weeks ago, I challenged you and I from Psalm 53 to ask the question of faith, or to ask ourselves the question, what should be the response of faith in this or that situation?

And we saw that David said, When I'm afraid, I will trust in you. That was his response of faith.

Asaph was tempted by the prosperity of the wicked.

His response to this temptation is to transparently share with us what he has learned. Picture in your mind Asaph trying to figure out how to write down this psalm, how to record what has happened for the benefit of God's people.

He knows he wants to walk us through the whole process. He knows he's going to share with us transparently even those self-incriminating thoughts that he had. He's sitting there with a quill in his hand and a piece of papyrus rolled out in front of him.

How should I start? And he says, I'm going to affirm my faith up front. Surely, God is good. There's Dave Wessner.

[8:49] I thought we were on to something, brother, when we were doing the conclusion thing up front, but it turns out that we're about 3,000 years late. Asaph himself starts his psalm with the conclusion of the matter.

But perhaps there's something for us to learn here when we're in the midst of it. Let's affirm truth up front. And so respond in faith. We may not know the details between now and the end.

There's probably going to be some rough going in between here and there, but we do know what the end is. Ecclesiastes 12, 13. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep His commandments.

For this is the whole duty of man. In 1 John 5, everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

Surely, in overcoming the world, your trial and my trial is included in that. Verse 2, Asaph says, But as for me, my feet had almost slipped.

[9 : 54] I had nearly lost my foothold. Let me go back to... Yeah, no.

So verse 2, but... And the first word he starts with there is but. But as for me. Remember in verse 1, he talked about the pure in heart. Now he's contrasting the pure in heart with himself. He's saying, The pure in heart are here, but as for me.

He's distinguishing himself from the pure in heart. There's a sense in which we are never... A real sense in which we are never pure in and of ourselves. We can never claim that. Indeed, even our righteousness is as filthy rags.

But in Christ, we are pure. Colossians 1 tells us, You who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he is now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless.

So in Christ, we are holy and blameless and above reproach. So, I just want to say here, although we're never really... We're never pure in and of ourselves and we are pure in Christ, I think what we're learning here is that there is a sense in which when we are walking in sin, as Asaph was walking in sin at this point, that we're impure.

[11 : 12] We experience that impurity in a different way than we normally do. In other words, we're always pure, but when we're walking in sin, we feel that impurity and the weight of that impurity in a different way.

And I think that's what Asaph is saying to us when he says, Surely, God is good to Israel, but as for me, my feet had almost slipped. In the older versions, it says, my steps had well nigh slipped.

Certainly, this sin of envy as Asaph is talking about here is a sin of the heart. It's an inside sin.

It's a distraction or a misapplication of our affections. But very quickly, it comes out in the way that we walk, in the way that we live.

And the Bible's full of this kind of language. Our author is entitled the book, Walking with God. And the progression of the spiritual life is commonly called a walk.

[12 : 13] Asaph would certainly know Deuteronomy 5.33 where it says, Walk in the way the Lord your God has commanded you. And probably he is David's chief musician. And he knew Psalm 1 also which said, Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked.

Likewise, in the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 5, we read, We live by faith or more literally, we walk by faith and not by sight. And there are many more. What's happening to Asaph? Metaphorically speaking, he's stumbling along in his spiritual life.

Why? Well, let's jump ahead to verse 3 here. He tells us why. I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. He's envying the arrogant.

He's coveting their prosperity. In verse 13, we read more stumbling. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. In vain I have washed my hands in innocence.

He's basically accusing God of unrighteousness here. Philip says, Asaph was disgusted with God's providential ordering of the affairs of the wicked. But back to our point, the close connection between the affections of our heart and the purity of our walk.

[13 : 27] When Asaph began to doubt the righteousness of God, he began to walk by sight. And his feet, that is his outward life, began to slip. So what is this doubting the righteousness of God?

It's unbelief. In Asaph's case, what was he not believing about God? Well, lots of things. Certainly, in Exodus 33, which he would have known, he could have read of the goodness of God.

In Exodus 34, where God speaks, where God reveals himself to Moses, he says of himself that he is the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means clearing the guilty. From these and other texts, Asaph would have known that God was a good God.

Of course, we're speaking now of goodness in the sense of the inherent purity of God, not in the sense of good to me. He says, I envy the arrogance when I saw their prosperity.

[14 : 37] I want to camp here for a few minutes and explore this issue of discontent and covetousness and unbelief and talk about a response of faith to that.

I think that's a major point and a warning to us in this psalm. Let's first note that Asaph's envy isn't an uncommon reaction to apparent injustice.

It's not even a uniquely Judeo-Christian problem. For instance, the Greek philosopher Plato wrote that the prosperity of wicked and unjust men may lead you, and I'm not surprised at your mistake, to believe that the gods care nothing for the affairs of men.

These matters disturb you. Being led astray by foolish thoughts, you have arrived at your present state of mind so as to think that the gods do indeed exist, but that they despise and neglect human affairs.

In other words, in his context, the gods are unjust, or in Asaph's context, God is unjust. But still, it was more of a problem for Asaph than it would be for those who are without the revelation of God, for God does reveal himself as a God of justice.

[15 : 54] No doubt, Asaph was familiar with the law in just a couple selections from there. God said, I am the Lord your God. I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers and the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

Or, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Based on these passages and others like them, Asaph may well have thought that God is being far too lenient with the wicked.

more so than he was with his own people. I think Asaph expected God to be just immediately, to exercise justice immediately, and to make life miserable for the wicked.

And since that didn't happen, he began to covet their life of ease and wealth. Contrast Asaph's envy with contentment, which we read about in that famous but little emulated book, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, where Burroughs says, Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

Notice, in every condition, that's when we're content, when we can accept that. It includes even those we don't understand, which is where Asaph was.

[17 : 23] So when we're discontented, it's actually God that we are himself with whom we are dissatisfied. So I've been claiming that Asaph's sin of envy or covetousness is rooted in unbelief in the goodness of God.

Webster says that to covet means to desire inordinately. We know that coveting is wrong from the Tenth Commandment among other places. If you think about it, clearly when I'm content, I'm not longing for the possessions or lifestyle for another.

When I'm satisfied, it's impossible for me to covet. It's when I'm hungry that food is attractive to me, not immediately after Thanksgiving dinner. So likewise, the Christian contentment precludes or is the opposite of covetousness.

What am I to be satisfied with? Jesus said in John 6.35, I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes on me will never thirst.

In other words, to believe in Jesus is to have the hunger and thirst of your soul satisfied. If my soul is satisfied, I will not covet.

[18 : 40] Conversely, if my soul is not satisfied, I will covet. In Psalm 53, remember, we saw that faith and fear were inversely related. When faith was high, fear was low.

When fear was high, faith was low. I think we can see the same sort of relationship in satisfaction. When our satisfaction in God is high, our covetousness is low.

When we're not satisfied in God, our covetousness, our desire for other things, our need to find satisfaction is high. So here we have Asaph.

At first, he's well balanced, satisfied with God, but he begins to look around. He sees the prosperity of the wicked. He begins to tip. He envies their prosperity, their ease, that everything goes well for them, that they never have trouble.

And soon, we hear him say, my feet had almost slipped. How is it for you and I? Let's face it, we live in the United States. People come from all over the world to get degrees in marketing, that special skill where we make people want things they don't really need.

[19:44] So we live in that kind of society. Or maybe you remember the words of Pilgrim's Progress when Christian and Hopeful were going through Vanity Fair and the tempters cried out, buy, buy, buy.

We're covetous people by nature and society certainly is not helping us. So what might a response of faith be to covetousness?

And it's pretty safe to say that the general answer to most problems in the Christian life is just the word and prayer. God's word is that cleansing and informing agent that shapes and strengthens our faith by giving us true information about God and his promises.

As we take in the word, we build up that body of evidence that I referred to earlier, that set of criteria of facts, of beliefs that we use to make decisions.

In prayer, for without the Spirit and the sword of the Spirit we're dead in the water. We can pray with the psalmist with respect to covetousness. Then we can pray with the psalmist, Psalm 119.36, turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain.

[21:03] And we fight temptation by saying no to ungodliness. We say to Satan, godliness with contentment is great gain. What you are showing me is a mirage. I will be content in Christ and all that the Scripture says He is for me.

Hebrews 13.5, keep your life free from the love of money and be content with what you have for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Let's turn now to verse 4 where Asaph begins his list of complaints against the arrogant and the wicked.

He says, they have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong. So we notice, first of all, that Asaph is kind of selective in his envying.

He's not coveting the lifestyle of everybody but only of that select few. In today's society, that might be the Hollywood crowd or the sports stars or the movers and shakers.

In your life, maybe it's your neighbor's house or his wife or his ability to hire a manservant or something else that belongs to your neighbor. Spurgeon says something I found particularly insightful here.

[22:21] Listen carefully here. He says, they, that is the wicked, they are to have nothing, they are to have nothing hereafter. Let them have what they can here.

They, after all, only possess what is of secondary value and their possessing is meant to teach us to set little store by transient things.

If earthly good were of much value, the Lord would not give so large a measure of it to those who have the least of his love. Next, Asaph notes that they are free of the burdens common to men.

He looks around and sees a righteous enduring chastisement from God, agonizing over how to live, struggling to make ends meet. The wicked seem to have none of these troubles.

Rather, they seem to prosper no matter what. You might know somebody like this. Maybe it's the guy at work who hasn't filed a tax return in 10 years and he's gotten off scot-free and you've been audited twice in the same time period.

[23:30] Or maybe you're a salesman and you're competing against someone who's always stretching the truth about the capabilities of his product or the lead time. And he's getting all the sales and you're always shut out because you're honest.

No, it's really going to take 12 weeks. I'm sorry, I can't deliver it any sooner. Neither can the other guy, but he lies and says, yeah, we'll do it in eight. He's making money hand over foot. You're struggling to make ends meet.

Pretty soon, maybe you say like Asaph, I'm taking the moral high road for this. Is it really worth it? In verses 7 through 12, Asaph really pours on the coal here.

He's listing sin after sin, iniquity, covetousness, arrogance, oppression, pride. And to top it all off in verse 12, or verse 11 rather, they say, how can God know does the Most High have knowledge?

What blasphemy on their part? Consider something like this. You finally gather enough courage to speak a word in favor of the gospel to a co-worker or to a neighbor.

[24:41] As soon as he figures out what you're going to talk about, he says, be quiet. I've heard enough of that religion bunk. And then he says, don't ever talk to me about that blankety-blank religious stuff again.

And you just want to kind of step aside and say, Lord, go ahead, take him out. Prove yourself to be a mighty God. God. But I think with a little bit of consideration, we can see that it's justice we want when it applies to the other guy, but probably none of you have ever been pulled over for speeding,

but I have maybe once or twice.

I know when I'm sitting there on the side of the road, I want mercy, not justice. I'm praying, Lord, let it be a warning. Not a ticket.

In verse 12, the wicked are saying this. There isn't a God, or at least if there is, he doesn't know what I'm thinking.

Or if he does, he doesn't really care. Maybe he's really impotent instead of omnipotent. Let's go on now to verse 13.

[25 : 58] Here we reach kind of a low point in the psalm. Phillips rephrases verse 13 like this. It's not worth serving God, says Asaph. All my religion and faith is foolish if this is the way things are.

What's happened here? Now Asaph has joined the ranks of the wicked whom he was envying in the beginning. He's making mockery of God.

He's saying God isn't just. Indeed, Asaph is on slippery ground here. Think about Asaph processing all this that he's seen.

Maybe he's thinking something like this. Why do I bother with devotions? Why do I agonize about living for God? Why do I worry about where my kids go and what I look at and what my hands do and where my feet go?

It's not worth it. Forget it. Then maybe a still small voice said to him, What about your responsibility as a worship leader?

[27 : 02] Would you betray God's people? It would be one thing if I were to stand up here and to deny the faith. It would be quite another if someone in leadership in the church were to do so. So he begins to doubt and waver and thinks maybe my anger and disgust isn't right.

At this point he's at a crossroads. Will he deny the faith or will he affirm the faith? Will he respond in faith or unbelief? Will he turn his back on the prosperity of the wicked or will he turn his back on the children of God?

Of course we've read the story. We know how it ends. He gave us a conclusion up front. Verse 17, He enters the sanctuary of God and things fall into place for him.

We've gotten to that section of the book that Phillips calls the four steps to spiritual recovery. He says there, How important is the place of worship? When I encounter a Christian who has badly fallen, it is often the case that he has ceased attending worship or at least ceased to really participate in worship.

One of the reasons we must be constant in worship is because of what we find there. And this is Asaph's testimony too, isn't it? What if he had not entered the sanctuary of God?

[28 : 20] So step one of Asaph's spiritual recovery is to worship often in the presence of God's people. And when we do that, this helps us protect ourselves from our own foolishness.

It's also a response of faith. We go to the house of God whether we feel like it or not. We acknowledge God. I can't figure this out on my own.

And I don't know if you'll ever give me the answer, but whether, if I ever get one, I know it'll come from you. And if I don't ever get one, I still want to be with you as I go through this life.

That's a response of faith. Step two, his eyes are opened. He says, Then I understood their final destiny.

Now he has perspective. Probably on fellowship lunch days, you've seen people walking around with a tray of eight or ten cups of water or lemonade on them.

[29 : 18] The smart ones are kind of looking off into the distance. The inexperienced ones are looking at the tray and, you know, trying to make sure that it doesn't fall. And so this is that perspective thing.

When we're looking in the distance, we're better able to keep our balance. When we're looking off to the goal, to the end. And for the righteous, we can look a long ways into the future because there's an eternity in front of us.

But for those who have no God, they're looking at their tray the whole time they're walking because they don't have an eternity to give them perspective. When Asaph enters the house of God for worship, his vista is opened.

Eternity once more is a fact in his body of knowledge. and that affects the way he thinks and the way he walks. The natural man, we're told in 1 Corinthians, doesn't accept the things of the Spirit of God.

They're folly to him. And he's not able to understand them because they're spiritually discerned. A few weeks ago, Pastor John gave us the helpful categories of a theoretical and of a functional knowledge of God.

[30:26] Likewise, I'm going to say our body of evidence, that set of beliefs and assumptions we use to make decisions and shape attitudes, there's a theoretical set of that and there's a functional set of that.

The functional set being that set of beliefs out of which we act, out of which we make our choices. Hopefully, there's quite a bit of overlap between your functional and your theoretical set.

It's not like this. Of course, praise God, once we get to heaven, they'll be one and the same. There won't be a theoretical and a functional set of beliefs, nor will there be a theoretical and functional God or beliefs about God.

They'll be one and the same. But while we're here on earth, we have to pray with Paul as he did in Ephesians 1. Lord, open the eyes of our hearts that we may be enlightened, that we may see the hope to which you've called us to.

And we know that Paul is praying this for Christians. In other words, we often have our eyes, that is, our spiritual eyes closed, which is the same or not much different from being blind. Now that Asaph's eyes are open, he could see.

[31:38] And he could see that it was the wicked who were on the slippery place, that he, when he had his foot firmly implanted on the promises of God, he was steady, but it was the wicked who were on the slippery places.

He says of them, Surely you place them, you God, place them on the slippery ground. You cast them down to ruin. He knew that they would come to a miserable end.

And in understanding this, how much more should our hearts be inclined towards prayer for the wicked rather than towards envy? Step three, he applies these things to himself.

Verse 21 and 22, he says, When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant. I was a brute beast before you. This is the man who had complained in verse 13.

I'm sure he was referring to this. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. In vain I have washed my hands in innocence. Now he's saying something like, What was I thinking?

[32:45] How dumb can I get? Have you ever done something really dumb and you just kind of beat yourself up over that? Asaph is saying, that's what he was saying that to himself.

That was really dumb of me to think like that about the justice of God. We need this kind of awareness of our sin, not in a morbid, introspective kind of way, but in a realistic way.

We see, when we see ourselves in some measure, anyway, as we really are, we begin to see our need of Christ. It's also good to realize how easily we can get off track.

It's also good to realize that when we realize we've made this mistake, we're going to respond, how could I have missed that? This should help us recognize our frailty and our dependence on the Holy Spirit for anything good.

It should also help us be gracious when other people are going through their cycles of blindness, of near stumbling, and eventually recovery. So we've seen step one, worship, worship leading to step two, perspective, then applying it to himself, and finally, he appreciates with a new and fresh appreciation the blessings of God.

[34:03] Neither Asaph nor we deserve any favor from God. In fact, as Phillips notes, if you're disappointed with God's provision for you, I assure you that you have failed to appreciate your own sin and guilt.

We've seen that faith and fear are on a seesaw, faith and covetousness are on a seesaw, but these are not. When we appreciate our guilt, when our appreciation of how guilty we are, when that's high, that's when our thankfulness is high and the other way around.

When we forget about our guilt, when we forget how sinful and how unworthy we are, then our appreciation for God and His mercies is low.

In closing then, how does eternity with Christ sound to you? Is that attractive to you? Asaph says, in verse 25, whom have I in heaven but you?

And being with you, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Is heaven attractive to you?

[35:17] Is being in heaven for eternity with God attractive to you? If your answer is yes, praise God, you will find this to be your protection against covetousness and envy. You're feasting on

Jesus.

John 6:35 is your testimony. He has satisfied the hunger and the thirst of my soul. And so you are protected from longing after lesser things. Your testimony mirrors that of Asaph, which we just read in verses 25 and 26.

Or maybe you say, I know the right answer is yes. That's your theoretical body of evidence. But your functional body of evidence says, you know what?

I don't. I long for things. I long for the good life, as the world calls it. I long for the approval of others. But I can't really say I long for Jesus.

If eternity with Christ is not attractive to you, something is wrong. Maybe you're not a Christian. Or maybe with Asaph you are at a low point like he was in the middle of this psalm.

[36 : 30] I don't know which it is for you. But regardless of which category you are in, the answer in the Scripture is the same. Faith and repentance. Repentance and faith.

Look to Christ. You'll find your answers in Him. The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing from the Word of God. Fill your mind, fill your body of evidence with the truths of God's Word.

Or maybe you can say with me, oh, my testimony is so spotty. There are times when I love the Lord, but way too often my heart is cold. I'll just share with you what's been a help to me.

I won't say in getting through that, but in what my approach or what my attitude is towards this sort of thing. I first began to think about this when I came across a quote from C.S. Lewis in which he talks about how to deal with temptation.

And there he says, you must ask for God's help. Even when you've done so, it may seem to you for a long time that no help or less help than you need is being given.

[37 : 54] Can you relate to that? We pray for help. We want a lot of help, strong help. We want it all to be solved. But less help is given you than you think you need.

He says, never mind. After each failure, ask forgiveness. Pick yourself up and try again. And here's the insight. Very often, what God first helps us toward is not the virtue itself, but just this power of always trying again.

Perseverance. In other words, for however important a virtue, chastity may be, this process trains us in habits of the soul, which are more important still.

This always struck me as right, but it didn't really come home to me until I realized that what Lewis was doing here was he was really just restating Romans 5, where we read, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance or perseverance.

And endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

[39 : 01] Do you notice the production words there, the process words, that suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance produces character, and character produces hope.

And if you just think for a minute about those words, words like endurance and character don't make any sense at all in a snapshot. It's been said that the true test of your manners is how you eat chicken when nobody's looking.

Right? So, I mean, your character is what you are over time. Endurance doesn't make any sense unless it's plotted against time. Endurance is just something you do over time. And so these are things we have to take kind of a long-haul view, I think, of our Christian life.

We're not going to get an instant answer. God wants to build perseverance in our lives. In closing then, I just want to encourage you this morning to ask yourself, what is Jesus to you?

And be honest. Is he everything to you? Or is he like that birthday present you never really wanted as a kid? That one you got from Aunt Mabel and you just thanked her politely and then you put it away on the shelf and you never thought about it again.

[40 : 18] Is Jesus like that to you? If so, then God has this warning for us that we read in verse 27, those who are far from you will perish.

You destroy all who are unfaithful to you. If this is where you find yourself, I encourage you to ask God's word, what is the response of faith to my situation?

If you don't know the answer, seek out someone who does and don't rest until you have found him faithful who said, ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened to you.