

My dad valued good tools. Back in the day he was a slide-rule totting mathematician by vocation and a hammer-swinging carpenter by avocation. He loved his tools. He kept track of them, used them for their specific function, and returned them to their designated place. Nothing made a job go better than having the right tool. A few years ago, I was struggling with a rusty bolt under our kitchen sink and none of my wrenches worked. In frustration, I went to Home Depot, muttering to myself complaints against those who put bolts in inaccessible places. I explained my problem and was told, “Oh, that’s easy. You need a kitchen wrench.” I went home with the right tool and the bolt was off in no time.

The Psalms are the right tool for shaping our spirituality and giving substance to our communion with God. They are, to use Gregory of Nyssa’s metaphor, *soul-carving tools*. Each psalm is its own unique instrument, “and these instruments are not alike in shape,” but all share the common purpose of “carving our souls to the divine likeness.”<sup>1</sup> We have plenty of tools for doing and getting, but as Eugene Peterson insists, we need “the primary technology of the Psalms, essential tools for being and becoming human.”<sup>2</sup>

The Psalms are instrumental in the care of souls. John Calvin entitled the Psalms, “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul,” because there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious of that is not represented in the Psalms.<sup>3</sup> Like an MRI, the Psalms are diagnostic. They see deep into the soul, mirror imaging our true condition, whether good or bad:

“Though you probe my heart, though you examine me at night and test me, you will find that I have planned no evil; my mouth has not transgressed” (Ps 17:3).

Like a surgeon’s scalpel they can cut to the bone in order to heal:

“Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again” (Ps 71:20).

The Psalms render the soul transparent to God and ourselves. “The self is in sound health and free from despair,” wrote Kierkegaard, “only when, precisely by having been in despair, it is grounded transparently in God.”<sup>4</sup> Asaph, one of Israel’s worship leaders and author of twelve psalms, agrees:

“When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you” (Ps 73:21-25).

Asaph and his sons were worship leaders from the tribe of Levi during the reigns of David and Solomon. Asaph was the chief musician in charge of musical accompaniment when they

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995), 164-165.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer* (Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1989), 2.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: Vol. IV: Joshua; Psalms 1-35*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981, xxxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 163.

brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (1 Chron.6:39; 15:17; 16:5). In addition to being a conductor and instrumentalist, he was a poet credited with twelve psalms (50, 73-83). “The style of Asaph is distinctive, forceful, and spiritual. He is referred to as a prophet and poet” (2 Chron. 29:30; Neh.12:46).”<sup>5</sup> Although Asaph led the people in worship when the ark was brought into Jerusalem (1 Chron 15:16-19; 16:4-7, 37) and when the temple was dedicated under Solomon, most of his hymns focus on difficult times.

### *A Crisis of Faith*

*Surely God is good to Israel,  
to those who are pure in heart.  
But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;  
I had nearly lost my foothold.  
For I envied the arrogant  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*  
Psalm 73:1-3

Asaph finds himself in a deep dilemma – a full blown crisis of faith. His creedal sounding statement rolls off his tongue: “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” He has said these words in worship a thousand times before. He can say them in his sleep. But now this basic confession produces within him stomach churning conflict. “Surely God is good to Israel” is in danger of becoming an empty cliché for a troubled soul. His feelings are in turmoil.

Feelings pose a real danger when it comes to worshipping God, because “feelings lie. Feelings deceive. Feelings seduce.” Eugene Peterson claims, “Feelings are the scourge of prayer. To pray by feelings is to be at the mercy of glands and weather and digestion. And there is no mercy in any of them.”<sup>6</sup> Feelings are totally unreliable guides for true worship.

Asaph is disillusioned. He was ordained to lead a people in worship who did not know how to worship, nor did they care to learn. Their heart was not in it and their daily lives opposed it. His conflict was not over liturgical form or musical genre or aesthetics, but over what it meant to worship God. Asaph believed that real worship, that is, worshipping God in spirit and in truth, was meant to produce the fruit of justice and righteousness. Asaph believed that the human response to a personal saving encounter with the living God was intuitively simple and inherently sacrificial. But when he looked around that was not what he experienced. His creed was being challenged by his life experience.

Jeremy Moore is a singer/songwriter and worship leader from Birmingham who found himself voicing Asaph-like feelings. Moore explains,

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<sup>5</sup> C. L. Feinberg, “Asaph,” ZPEB, 345.

<sup>6</sup> Peterson, Answering God, 87.

“I was questioning the church culture I was currently experiencing. It was impossible for me to support the churchgoing experience that involved nothing more than an hour-long, simplistic service where many of the churchgoers used dishonest self-preservation tactics to maintain worth and value, where vulnerability was too much for God to handle. Because of these sentiments, God didn’t seem so real to me anymore – at least not like he did when I was a kid. I had become accustomed to operating on the fear that people might find that monster under my bed and mock it.”<sup>7</sup>

Unless worship calls us “deeper into God’s heart and deeper into the world for which Christ died” it is not very good worship. It may be safe and everybody in the congregation may be happy, but God, who is the primary audience of our worship, is not pleased. Religious people are capable of going to great lengths to perform high-powered worship services, but if they neglect the widow and the orphan, take advantage of the poor, and turn a blind eye to the needy, their worship is a sham. Mark Labberton writes, “That is the crux of the crisis. I and other Christians I know have been busy tithing the dill and cumin of worship forms while avoiding what Jesus calls the weightier matters of the Law: justice, mercy and faith.”<sup>8</sup>

Worship can be dangerous *negatively* when we make it about ourselves, rather than about God; when we essentially lie about God and make our “worship” a platform for showcasing our talents or our passions. When worship doesn’t change us or the world we serve, it is dangerous in a debilitating way. “Millions of American Christians spend hours in worship and yet lead lifestyles indistinguishable in priorities, values and practices from those in the broader culture.”<sup>9</sup> Worship is dangerous *positively* when we encounter the living triune God; when it isn’t safe, comfortable or convenient; when it opens us up to the word of God and lays us out in surrender to the will of God. Worship changes the way we see God, ourselves and the world—dramatically so!

“But as for me. . .” Honesty prevails in Asaph’s crisis of faith. He paints a picture. He’s in danger of slip, sliding away (like the Paul Simon song). He cannot go through the motions. He envies the arrogant because of their prosperity. Evil begets evil. Asaph cannot in good conscience rise in front of his people and lead them in worship. The evil around him is getting to him. He is tempted to internalize the aspirations of those around him. Evil triggers evil: bitterness, self-righteousness, envy. We fall prey to the world’s strategies for success. We envy the wealthy and powerful and aim for similar achievements at the expense of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We lust after money, sex, and power and continue to show up for worship and sing hymns.

Asaph confronts his doubts in the best way possible, through prayer. Someone has said,

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<sup>7</sup> Jeremy Moore, “My Perfect World,” *The Advent*, Editor, Matthew Schneider, The Cathedral Church of the Advent, vol. 2, 2016, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Labberton, 39

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

“unbelief does not doubt, faith doubts.”<sup>10</sup> “The questions asked in this psalm are still asked today: Why do the righteous suffer? Why do the wicked prosper? Why doesn’t God remove the wicked from the earth? Why does he look on as though he is unwilling or unable to deal with them way they deserve? How is the Lord good to the godly?”<sup>11</sup>

*The Beautiful Side of Evil*

*They have no struggle;  
their bodies are healthy and strong.  
They are free from common human burdens;  
they are not plagued by human ills.  
Therefore pride is their necklace;  
they clothe themselves with violence.  
From their callous hearts comes iniquity;  
their evil imaginations have no limits.  
They scoff, and speak with malice;  
with arrogance they threaten oppression.  
Their mouths lay claim to heaven,  
and their tongues take possession of the earth.  
Therefore their people turn to them  
and drink up waters in abundance.  
They say, “How would God know?  
Does the Most High know anything?”  
This is what the wicked are like—  
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.*

Psalm 73:4-12

Asaph is in ethical shock. He is not troubled by the pimp or prostitute. Ordinary thieves, drug pushers, thugs, common criminals, and the like are not the ones provoking his envy. He’s looking at the beautiful people, athletic, intelligent, photogenic, and enviable. He is asking himself, “Why am I writing psalms when I could be building a palace?” He’s eying the elite, the affluent upper east side of a sophisticated culture. What makes these people what they are? They have pride! They believe in themselves. They radiate their own special self-assertive, self-aggrandizing style. They are all dressed up in ego-power. Their vitality is in their vanity. They cloth themselves in the violence that sheds no blood, but destroys lives. They are armed with deception and dishonesty. Occasionally good will and kind gestures are part of their deception.

They believe in no-fault morality and insist on making up the rules as they go. They redefine morality to suit their tastes and whims. Lying is advertizing; manipulation is public relations; infidelity is flexibility; cheating is evening the odds; immorality is an alternative lifestyle;

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<sup>10</sup> Perowne (II:6), quoted in Ross, *The Psalms*, 555.

<sup>11</sup> Cyril Okorochoa and Francis Foulkes, *Africa Bible Commentary*, 678.

fornication is nothing more than a handshake. “Their mouths lay claim to heaven,” Asaph writes, “and their tongues take possession of the earth.” Talk is everything: flattery, scoffing, threatening, bullying, cursing, sneering, malicious sarcasm, and cynical disregard for the truth. And amazingly, people drink in their dogma of success. They have long since written God off. “They say, ‘How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?’” They have exchanged the living God for their version of therapeutic deism. Asaph concludes, “This is what the wicked are like-- always carefree, they increase in wealth.”

In the Book of Revelation the apostle John’s description of the great prostitute and the great city captures the beautiful side of evil. Evil’s hideous strength is not only fearsome and tyrannical, it is also thrilling and beautiful. There is a seductive side to evil that the inhabitants of the earth find attractive and compelling. The beautiful side of evil is personified in the great prostitute, who is “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.” She seduces the world with the intoxicating wine of her abominations and adulteries. “We become ensnared by our spiritual idols in much the same way that people are snared by drink and drugs.”<sup>12</sup> Sitting on top of the beast with all her glitz and glamor she wears her title proudly. Sometimes evil comes charging at us like the four horses of the apocalypse threatening to trample us under foot by conquest, terror, starvation and death. And at other times, evil comes to us as a seductress, riding a scarlet beast, representing a counterfeit glory and symbolizing the gorgeous and glamorous allure of evil.

Ironically, it may have been Solomon and his lavish lifestyle and moral compromise that provoked Asaph’s spiritual struggle. Under Solomon the character of worship changed, from the relative simplicity of David’s time to the elaborate splendor of Solomon’s temple. The success of the kingdom was becoming its weakness. Solomon made 500 shields out of solid gold and a magnificent throne “covered with ivory and overlaid with fine gold” (1 Kings 10:16-19). He imported 12,000 horses and a zoo of apes and baboons from Africa. He married Pharaoh’s daughter and built a new palace for her because the palace of David had at one time housed the ark of the Lord. He felt uncomfortable bringing a foreign wife into his father’s palace (1 Kings 11:2). He reportedly had 1,000 wives and concubines. To please them he built shrines to Ashtoreth, Molech and Chemosh. One can only imagine the difficulty Asaph and his sons must have experienced in leading worship in this pagan pluralistic atmosphere. Solomon’s behavior alone may account for Asaph’s crisis of faith.

### *Moral Pain*

*Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure  
and have washed my hands in innocence.  
All day long I have been afflicted,  
and every morning brings new punishments.*  
Psalm 73:13-14

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<sup>12</sup> Keller, *Center Church*, 128.

For Asaph the arc of devotion began with confession, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart,” and then descended into confusion due to distraction and envy. At this point in the psalm he has hit the murky bottom of despair. Asaph’s critique is both valid and dangerous. He is aware of the tension between authentic worship and the world’s strategies of success. He is honest with himself and he is sensitive to moral pain. He discerns how the evil around him, the arrogance, callousness, and injustice is producing evil within him, envy, cynicism, and despair. It is good for Asaph to bring these dark feelings out into the open. His critique of the beautiful side of evil needs to be heard. Honesty is required at every point along the arc of devotion. But Asaph’s spiritual despair is also dangerous. He feels like a fool for refusing to go along with the ways of the world. “I’ve been stupid to play by the rules; what has it gotten me? A long run of bad luck, that’s what – a slap in the face every time I walk out the door” (Ps 73:13-14 The Message).

We may need to be more honest with ourselves and our children and allow this dilemma – Asaph’s dilemma – to surface in our conversations and discussions. I imagine that many of us have felt either empty or stupid for following God’s way and at some point said to ourselves, “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. . .” What Asaph is feeling is complex. He senses the loss of his community. He feels alone and insignificant. He feels the futility and frustration of his longstanding efforts toward faithfulness. He is tempted buy into the world’s quick fixes, fame, wealth, and power. It is at the low point of the arc of devotion that one contemplates alternative paths to significance and self-worth. Impulsive choices are a special threat: an affair, extravagant purchases, a distancing between friends, a hardening of one’s heart toward worship and others.

### *The Turn Around*

*If I had spoken out like that,  
I would have betrayed your children.  
When I tried to understand all this,  
it troubled me deeply  
till I entered the sanctuary of God;  
then I understood their final destiny.  
Surely you place them on slippery ground;  
you cast them down to ruin.  
How suddenly are they destroyed,  
completely swept away by terrors!  
They are like a dream when one awakes;  
when you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.*

Psalm 73:15-20

Asaph’s first line of defense against falling away is his loyalty to the people of God. If he were to say what he was thinking, that obedience to the will of God is pointless and that faithfulness were stupid, then he would betray the fellowship of believers. This is sobering because many of

us have been raised in a highly individualistic culture. Many Christians feel isolated, disconnected, anonymous, and out of close fellowship with other Christians. In the western church this first line of defense is often weak if not non-existent. The author of Hebrews understood the importance of Christian solidarity. He exhorted believers:

“. . . *Let us* draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that *faith* brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

“*Let us* hold unswervingly to the *hope* we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”

“And *let us* consider how we may spur one another on toward *love* and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

Hebrews 10:22-25

Asaph's solidarity with the believing community keeps him faithful, but does not change how he feels. He holds his tongue, but his heart is still in turmoil.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately whether or not we betray “this generation of God's people” depends on our relationship with God. Not letting others down only works for so long. Asaph admits, “When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” Asaph’s decisive move from “destructive doubt” to “reassuring faith” is made in the sanctuary of God.<sup>14</sup> In worship, Asaph regained perspective. He discovered the importance of faith over feelings. “Worship is an act which develops feelings for God, not a feeling for God which is expressed in an act of worship. When we obey the command to praise God in worship, our deep, essential need to be in relationship with God is nurtured.”<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes the confusion so real and complex that we can’t understand any way out of our pain. Jeremy Moore, the worship leader I quoted earlier, came to the conclusion that God is not overwhelmed by our experiences and God hears our simple yet profound cry, “Lord, have mercy.” “Perhaps the answer is simple,” writes Moore.

“Return. Return to the childlike faith Jesus references in Matthew 18 that is free from judgment, insecurities, and walls guarding pride. Love without hesitation or reservation and live as children imitating their Father. Hold onto truth while allowing true, vulnerable emotions. Be slow to offer quick fixes to complex problems. For God does not lose sight of his children. The questions that baffle reason, the sadness that cries hard than listens, the anger that blows up calmness,

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<sup>13</sup> Okorochoa, Africa Bible Commentary, 679. Nigerian pastor Cyril Okorochoa, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Owerri, Nigeria, writes: “It is the mark of Christian maturity to use one’s tongue wisely, to encourage rather than discourage others (Prov 12:18). While it is healthy to share our burdens openly with others for prayer and counsel, we must be careful not to discourage others with an attitude of grumbling and complaining, especially if we are in a leadership position or have others to look up to us. Yet there is great blessing in the gift of friends with whom leaders, who are often lonely people, care bare their hearts and experience God’s holy refreshing (see Malachi 3:16).”

<sup>14</sup> Ross, The Psalms, 561.

<sup>15</sup> Peterson, Long Obedience, 49-50.

they do not catch God off guard.”<sup>16</sup>

Asaph’s eyes and ears had been focused on the arrogant, but now in the sanctuary he discovers the divine perspective. With his head and heart focused on the Lord “he was able to put everything in perspective.”<sup>17</sup> He took another long look at the human condition and this time he saw it in the light of God’s judgment.<sup>18</sup> Asaph gained a powerful new perspective. He understood the final destiny of those engrossed in the beautiful side of evil. His despair was stated emphatically, “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure . . .” but now he emphatically states his confidence in the judgment of God, “Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin.” Asaph was graphic in his depiction of evil (73:3-11), now he is graphic in his description of judgment. They will be destroyed suddenly, completely swept away. They will vanish like a dream. The wicked are like a nightmare that is over when you wake up. “When you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.”

Solidarity with the people of God protected Asaph from a quick fall. Then, worship revived his understanding of life’s meaning and destiny. He regained God’s perspective on true values and moral consequences. Finally, self-examination and repentance restored his personal relationship with God. Instead of being disappointed and disillusioned with God, he became disappointed and disillusioned with himself. The root problem wasn’t in God’s moral order nor was it found in the wicked he envied. The problem was in his heart and soul.

### *The Strength of My Heart*

*When my heart was grieved  
and my spirit embittered,  
I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was a brute beast before you.  
Yet I am always with you;  
you hold me by my right hand.  
You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will take me into glory.  
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.  
Those who are far from you will perish;  
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.*

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<sup>16</sup> Moore, “My Perfect World,” 75.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 561.

<sup>18</sup> Patrick Henry Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, 143, writes: “. . .One of the more characteristic features of the modern world is its growing inability to presume that the moral order, including the social order, is rooted in the metaphysical order. . . .Relatively few people in today’s culture seem any longer to presuppose that they live in a moral universe where the differences between right and wrong, justice and injustice, are fixed in the composition of reality.”

*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.*

Psalm 73:21-28

Because of sin and depravity there are times when we suffer in our souls the effect of the fall even though we refuse to eat the fruit of the tree. We run from the presence of God and hide in the garden like Adam and Eve because of our shame. Asaph never acted on his envy, but it ate away at his soul. He never changed course or joined the wicked in their self-indulgence. He never participated in their violent and malicious ways – never bullied and oppressed anyone, never played the me monster. But he thought about it. He didn't act out, but evil's malignance penetrated his thoughts and feelings. His heart and mind were twisted by the prosperity of the wicked. The tension between Asaph's vocational calling and his deep feelings of humiliation could only be resolved through repentance.

“When my heart was grieved,” Asaph explains, “and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.” His self-description is reminiscent of the patriarch Job, who became convinced that he “must hand the whole matter over completely to God more trustingly, less fretfully.”<sup>19</sup> Like Job, Asaph is humbled by God, not humiliated. He does not cower before God, he bows. God's presence is not intimidating; it's inviting; it's not repulsive; it's redemptive. When Job says, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6), he is not incriminating himself. He is admitting that he has been woefully ignorant of God's ways. He has misjudged God and drawn wrong conclusions. That is why in the awesome presence of God, Asaph, like Job, is both delighted and ashamed at the same time! He feels like a brute beast – a dumb ox, but whatever foolishness or awkwardness he feels is overwhelmed by the fellowship he experiences. Chastened, but cherished. Asaph has been learning obedience by the things that he suffered (Heb 5:8).

The author of Hebrews reminds us that there is open enrollment in God's graduate school of holy vocation. Our heavenly Father disciplines us in order to train us in holiness. God uses the hardships and disappointments of life “for our good, that we may share in his holiness” (Heb 12:10). The author asks, “Have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as *his* children?” He quotes from Proverbs, “My dear child, don't shrug off God's discipline, but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child he loves that he disciplines; the child he embraces, he also corrects” (Prov 3:11-12). The spiritual struggle encountered by Christ's followers is not intended to shake their faith but to strengthen their faith. In the providence of God, suffering serves as a discipline fostering spiritual maturity and holiness. The author of Hebrews distinguishes between the Stoic ideal of self-sufficiency and the true objective of deeper dependence upon God. “God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. He's treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's *training*, the

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<sup>19</sup> Anderson, Job, 287

normal experience of children” (Heb 12:5-7, MSG).

The arc of devotion climaxes with Asaph’s almost lyrical description of his relationship with Yahweh. The loving bond between them is intimate, informed, and enduring. Asaph has gone from distraction and disillusionment to discernment and devotion. “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.” Matthew Henry writes, “There is scarcely a verse in all the psalms more expressive than this of the pious and devout affections of a soul to God; here it soars up towards him, follows hard after him, and yet, at the same time, has an entire satisfaction and complacency in him.”<sup>20</sup> This is the Old Testament equivalent to the apostle Paul’s verse, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21) and again, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 5:20).

Asaph concludes where he began, “But as for me . . .” (Ps 73:2, 28). Only this time, instead of falling away, he’s holding God close. “But as for me, it is good to be near God.” He has come full circle. Now he can say with confidence, “Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” As Oliver Wendell Holmes famously said, “I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.” Asaph has reached the simplicity on the other side of complexity and he is grateful, “I will tell of all your deeds.”

Psalms 73 lies at the heart of the Psalms centered between the profound truth of Psalm 1 and the all out praise of Psalm 150.<sup>21</sup> Spiritual maturity requires that we experience Asaph’s arc of devotion. The journey from Eden’s fellowship with God to Christ’s rule and reign in the New Jerusalem goes through Calvary.<sup>22</sup> Asaph’s turning point came in the sanctuary (Ps 73:17). Our turning point is the cross of Christ. This is why the apostle Paul was resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). This is the critical truth that turns everything around. We say with Asaph, “God is the strength of my heart” and we set apart Christ as Lord of our hearts (1 Peter 3:15).

The apostles seem to echo the psalms at every turn, which makes me wonder if the apostle Paul did not have Asaph’s lament in mind when he wrote his powerful defense of the bodily resurrection. Paul concludes 1 Corinthians 15, “Death has been swallowed up in victory. . . . The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul adds an exhortation that echoes Asaph’s lament. Remember what the psalmist said at his lowest point, “Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence” (Ps 73:13). Was this line in Paul’s mind prompting him to write a pastoral conclusion? “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Henry, Psalms, 307.

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 189-213.

<sup>22</sup> Wilcock, *The Message of the Psalms, 73-150*, 11. Wilcock writes, “The glories of Psalm 73:24-26, and Psalm 150, and Job 42, and the last two chapters of Revelation, are the glories of Paradise, and Paradise is not Eden. You can get there only by way of Psalm 73:17, which in the New Testament terms is the encounter with God in Christ at Calvary.”

nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58).