

**August 27, 2017**  
**How Do You Keep Score?**  
**Psalm 73**

How do you keep score? What are the important things in life?

Listen to Asaph, who wrote Psalm 73:

*<sup>3</sup> I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
<sup>4</sup> They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.  
<sup>5</sup> They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills.  
<sup>6</sup> Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.  
<sup>7</sup> From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits.  
<sup>8</sup> They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression.  
<sup>9</sup> Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth.  
<sup>10</sup> Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.  
<sup>11</sup> They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?"  
<sup>12</sup> This is what the wicked are like – always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.*

Sometimes it seems that is the case, doesn't it? The arrogant and the wicked prosper. People idolize them. It seems like they live free of care. It seems like they just go on and on amassing wealth ...

Asaph continues:

*<sup>13</sup> Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence.  
<sup>14</sup> All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.*

Sometimes it seems like that, doesn't it? Those of us who try to do right, who try to live with integrity, who try to be honest, who try to be good people don't succeed. In fact, bad things seem to happen to good people while evil people prosper.

***What are the score cards we DO use?***

- 1. Money** – this was certainly true in Asaph's day. It's true in ours. Someone once observed most people believe they would be happy if they earned 20% more than they do – it was true for people earning minimum wage and it was just as true for those earning over \$1,000,000 per year.

Is money – your wage or your portfolio – the measure that really matters? If wages accurately reflected a person's value to society, then the most valuable people in the country would be pro athletes, entertainment personalities, physicians and dentists, lawyers, politicians, professors, plant managers and miners/oil and gas drillers. With

all due respect, are those the “most valuable” people in Canadian society?

- Do you know people with money who are good role models? I do.
- Do you know people with money who are not good role models? I do.
- Do you know people who have less money who are great role models? I do.
- Do you know people with less money who are not good role models? I do.

As I think of some of the most influential people in my life, their occupation, income and net worth has been irrelevant (some have had lots, other very little).

Money is just not a good measure of the worth of a person.

**2. Power and Influence** - often (though not always) those with money often have power and influence, too. Somehow we think that if someone has money (even if they just inherited it from Mom and Dad), they are good leaders. Is that true?

Sometimes power and influence is a function of personality. Some people just have natural charisma, an intangible ability to instill vision and passion, and innate skill to cultivate loyalty and to inspire hard work for their cause. These leaders can use that for good, to build bridges, and to cultivate a more just society (people like Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, and Pope Francis come to mind). Or they can use those skills for evil, to build walls, and to cultivate injustice (alas there are lots of examples of despots and despicable people who fit into this category).

Power and influence are not good measures; they can be used for either good or bad ...

**3. Ticking off the Right Boxes** – sometimes we measure people by whether they meet up with some criteria we have established. This may be how they dress. How they talk. What colour their skin is. What religion they believe in. What level of education people have ... Within church/Christian circles we sometimes add theological checklists of things we think are critical: what people believe about eschatology (end times), the age of the earth, musical preferences, evolution, political affiliation, and so forth. Do those things matter?

We do need to reflect on “salvation issues” – BIG things that Jesus talks about, like the fact that *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:16-17).

We don’t need to get fussed about non-salvation issues – things Jesus never talks about – like premillennial dispensationalism, or the precise dating of Genesis 1. Those make for interesting and intriguing speculative conversations, but if people want to make those tests of theological orthodoxy, they have gone way beyond

anything Jesus says. They have left behind the Bible and added other criteria.

Some people who have a whole list of these “other” things they consider so important are just not happy people. They can become bitter, judgmental, arrogant, self-righteous, and unloving. The Bible does have lots to say about those things. It reminds us that if we are feeling those sorts of emotions – angry, judgmental, ticked off – we need to repent. We need to rediscover the love of God for us and in us.

Asaph reflects,

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

The reality is that those measures really don't matter in the bigger picture.

- Money doesn't matter. The markets are a fickle mistress. Wealth cannot save you from your own mortality. As a dear saint in Edmonton used to say, *"You don't see many hearses pulling U-hauls now do you?"*
- Power doesn't matter. The most powerful people in world history – the Caesars, King, Czars, Presidents, and Prime Ministers – all die. And are forgotten.
- “Salvation issues” do matter; the other non-salvation stuff doesn't. We are saved by faith in Jesus. Not in the “right” interpretation of the beast in Revelation 13 or the “right” meaning of the word “day” in Genesis 1. Those things just don't matter.

### ***What are the score cards we SHOULD use?***

Think about the people you respect the most?

For me, the people I respect most are:

1. ***People who love God*** – sincerely, genuinely, authentically. They may/may not have money/power/definite beliefs about some of those non-salvation issues. They do have a deep, deep, deep love for God. These are people who are not “there” yet, but have a hunger and a thirst to know God more and more. These, invariably, are people who pray (talk with God). They are people who read Scripture (God's Word). They are people involved in church (with God's people).
2. ***People who have godly character*** – people who you know are people of integrity, honesty, and dependability. To quote Paul's fruit of the Spirit, they are people who, in general, model love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). They are not perfect

people. The one other quality of character they model is the humility to confess their sin, ask forgiveness (of other people and of God), and to try, try again. The Bible talks a lot about people who stay faithful to God through thick and thin. I have tremendous respect for those who endure tough times – financially, family-wise, with their physical health, with their mental health – and keep the faith.

3. **People who are wise** – people who know God and seek Him also find wisdom. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge. They are a lot of knowledgeable people who lots of information but don't know what to do with it. Wise people know important things AND know how to live it out. Wise people prayerfully wrestle through how God's character, God's Word, and God's principles shape their lives, their choices, and their responses.

Asaph comes to terms with the seeming unfairness in His world by asking us to rethink our scorecards along these same lines. Asaph is a person I respect as he prays to God:

*<sup>23</sup> God, I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.*

*<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*

*<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*

*<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

*<sup>27</sup> Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.*

*<sup>28</sup> 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.*

How do you keep score? What matters most? At the end of the day, what will people respect about us? Our money? Our power? Whether we believed all the "right" stuff? All of that is really a slippery slope, fading dreams, passing fantasies amounting to nothing ...

Or is what matters our love for God? Our character? Our perseverance? Our wisdom? Those are rock solid foundations, things that really last.

If I want it to be the latter, what do I need to do? Who do I need to be? How do I need to change my priorities? What things do I need to do? What things do I need to STOP doing? If I want to know God more, love God more, and follow God more closely,

- What one thing do I need TO DO, today?
- What one thing do I need to NOT DO/GIVE UP, today?