

RESILIENT FAITH IN A TURBULENT WORLD



When the Stool Wobbles

"We might define a 'theological problem' as a moment in which reality as we are experiencing it does not fit into—align with, or correspond to—our current knowledge, theology, or perception of reality.

In general, for the Christian, there are three triangulated realities that shape who we are and who we are becoming: the Bible, our theological beliefs, and our experience. When two or three of these do not align with one another, we are facing a theological problem."

(from *Slow Theology*)

You can't stop being
the "you" that you are
when you read the
Bible.



Bible

Theological Beliefs

Experience



Psalm 73

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

² But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

⁴ They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.

Psalm 73

⁵ They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.

⁷ From their callous hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits.

⁸ They scoff, and speak with malice; with arrogance they threaten oppression.

Psalm 73

⁹ Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. ¹⁰ Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance.

¹¹ They say, "How would God know? Does the Most High know anything?" ¹² This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.

Psalm 73

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

¹⁵ If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. 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.

Psalm 73

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.

²¹ When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, ²² I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.

Psalm 73

²³ Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

Psalm 73

²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

²⁸ 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.

“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... When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply” (v. 2-3, 16)

Proverbs 3:3-34

³³ The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. ³⁴ He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.

Deuteronomy 28:2, 11, 15

All these blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God... The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity... However, if you do not obey the LORD your God ... all these curses will come on you and overtake you.

Psalm 24:4-5

⁴ The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god. ⁵ They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God their Savior.

“When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” (v. 16-17)

“When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.” (v. 16-17)

When Asaph stumbled upon a theological problem, he didn't ignore it, bury it, or run away from it. He pressed into it... and brought it into the sanctuary of God.

"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." (v. 28)

"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." (v. 28)

"Asaph doesn't have a perfect answer to his theological questions. Asaph has a perfect God who is with him as he ponders those questions."
(from *Slow Theology*)

“When we encounter theological problems—especially when we find difficult things in Scripture—we must remember that not all problems are meant to be solved. Some problems are intentional and are to remain. We call these ‘tensions’... The ‘problem’ isn’t really a problem. Our discomfort with tension is the problem.”

(from Slow Theology)

“The widespread mistaken assumption that the best way to deal with tensions is to ‘resolve’ them. It can feel like walking by a crooked picture hanging on the wall. You feel the urge to fix it, to make it “normal.” But a key to engaging with Scripture is understanding that not all tensions are bad, and there is something important in the discomfort.”

(from *Slow Theology*)

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Think of Scripture's tensions not like binding that holds us back from precise truth, but more like a stringed instrument... like a guitar.



“Given the cacophony of voices out there who offer a million different solutions to life’s problems, it can be overwhelming to discern who to listen to, for how long, and to what effect. YouTube, TV, books, podcasts, teachers, pastors, pundits, politicians: We are constantly bombarded by advice, and we need to discern how to filter all the noise into a system of learning, thinking, and processing that will move us in the right direction of faith, hope, and love.”

(from *Slow Theology*)

The Surgical Knife



The Surgical Knife



The Steak Knife



The Surgical Knife



The Steak Knife



The Butter Knife



Augustine's "Law of Love"



“Augustine went as far as to say that even if you don’t quite understand what a passage from Scripture means, or if you happen to get the interpretation wrong, as long as your heart and life are moved to love God and neighbor, you have done right by the gospel and by Christ.”

(from *Slow Theology*)

Closing Reflections

Think back to a time when the “stool” of your formation wobbled. What caused it? What did you do in response? How did you find steadiness again?

Closing Reflections

Is there an area of tension you're dealing with right now? Who do you approach to help you "tune the tension?"

Closing Reflections

Who gets to hold each of your “knives?” How much time are you giving to each of them?

Closing Reflections

Ask the Spirit to help you center your bible-reading, your theology-building, and your life experiences under the banner of the “law of love.”

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