

Walking Humbly

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[0 : 00] So if you have your Bible, go ahead and turn to Psalm chapter 131. We finished our Thessalonian series. Next week we are kicking off our Advent series, which is gonna carry us through to the end of the year.

But today we're gonna be in this Psalm, and I love this Psalm. What it does, it causes us to pause and consider what is on offer to those of us who know and who know and abide in God, as Dallas Willard calls those who live the with God life, walking with Him.

And so this text that we're gonna read today, I believe what it does, it poses some really important questions that we need to wrestle with and think about for ourselves.

And so for you as a believer in Jesus, do you believe the reality of peace in your life is important? And do you even believe that it is possible?

For any of us in the room, whether we are those who would consider ourselves followers of Jesus or not, would you describe your private thoughts, would you describe your emotions, your inner life as one that is calm and tranquil?

[1 : 09] Or do you find it to be full of anxiety, if you feel erratic and obsessive? Are you experiencing contentment in your present circumstance and with the things that you have and the things that you don't have?

See, this world, it knows little of peace because it knows little of contentment. It knows little of contentment because it knows little about living humbly.

It knows little about the Christian ethic, the Christian virtue of humility. As one pastor describes it, the world looks at Christian humility kind of like a cow looks at a gate.

But nevertheless, it is important and abiding peace requires that we walk this humble path. And what does it mean for us to walk the humble path?

And so our passage today, from our passage today, we are gonna consider the desires of humility, the destination of humility, and the hope of the humble. So Psalm 131.

[2 : 10] We can read this together if you have your Bible or if you can follow along. They'll be up on the screen as well. Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

My eyes are not raised too high. Do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Oh Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. This is God's word. Humility, like every Christian virtue, isn't something that you earn like a Boy Scout merit badge, right?

It's not something like, hey, I did the thing and I get this patch and I get to wear this patch forever and ever. It is mine. Humility is a condition of the heart. It waxes and it wanes.

And those who walk the humble path are those who are driven by the desires of the humble heart. And so let's first consider what those desires are. And the psalmist here, he teaches us what they are by naming what they aren't.

[3 : 20] We see all of that in verse one. And he states it quite poetically, but I'm gonna be more straightforward because in essence, what he states are three sides of the same sin problem that is in our hearts that exhibit in different ways and all these ways oppose humility.

And they are that we want to be in charge. We want what we don't have and we want to live beyond our limits. And so as we enter into this understanding of humility, let's begin with the first line of the first verse.

Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. As one commentator said, it is our heart's insatiable desire to be the king of the mountain. We want things to go our way and we want to be in charge.

And we think we're better at it than everybody else, so we should be in charge. But standing against that desire, humility, what it is is the practice of yielding and deference.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthian church, he talks about love, right? That first Corinthians 13, if you've been to a wedding, I'm sure you have heard of this, right? It's read all the time.

[4 : 32] And it says what love is and what love does, but it says love does not insist on its own way. That's one of the truths of love, the central truths about love. And Paul, he writes to the Philippian believers in chapter two and verse three, he says, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

That is deference. This practice of yielding and deference, you look at it and you say, man, that's what Jesus did. That's what we should be. This is amazing.

Let's all go out and do it. And then we try and we realize it's a lot easier said than done. It's why we have quarrels and we have fights. Yes, Christians have quarrels and have fights, believe it or not. And why do we have quarrels and fights amongst each other? It's because we have competing passions and desires. I want Italian for dinner. My spouse, Haley, she wants Mexican.

Who wins? I never eat Italian. I'm just kidding. Relational strife results when differing preferences arise and no one is willing to yield.

[5 : 43] Sometimes that'll manifest itself with passive aggressive forms, right? We use manipulation to get our way. We might throw out sarcastic barbs. We might try the silent treatment, remove ourselves emotionally, shut down.

Or it can manifest itself in aggressive intimidation, right? We raise our voice and we shout and we scream and we slam doors and we can even get into really destructive behaviors like hitting and more things.

We can call names. We can demean people, all those things. We can do that. And anytime those sins manifest, it is proof that peace, the peace of God that is meant to abide and guide our hearts has been disrupted.

Humility has been traded for control. It is the proof of the sin of an exalted heart, aka pride. Because we see ourselves as great.

We see ourselves as king of the mountain. We see ourselves as deserving of everything that we desire, even the things we don't have, which is the second line in verse one.

[6 : 52] My eyes are not raised too high, which is saying for the problem here is that our eyes are raised too high. But in response to that desire, the path of humility, humility, it rejects entitlements.

It rejects that heart of I deserve this. And instead, humility finds contentment in every circumstance. Now admittedly, this is a hard one to defend as we think about this more deeply, because we can think of a myriad of circumstances where contentment seems ill-fitting.

Uncertainty, right? An abusive marriage. Slavery. Unjustly, being unjustly imprisoned. Terminally ill.

And the list can go on. How do victims in those circumstances find contentment? And the question following on that, should they find contentment? And these are good things to wrestle with and consider.

And it would also be helpful for us to define in the face of those realities what we mean by biblical contentment. And so, contentment, according to the Bible, doesn't mean we should settle for the status quo when the status quo is evil and unjust.

[8 : 02] For the wife whose husband pushes her around and hits her, contentment isn't, let me keep finding any good reason to stay. Contentment is satisfaction in the sufficiency of the good things that you have.

Being content with evil is not biblical contentment. Paul writes about this. In Romans, he's telling the believers, and he commands them, hey, bad things are gonna happen to you.

Don't repay evil for evil. However, if possible, he says, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Which means, if you can't, you need to extricate yourself.

He also speaks to slaves, and he encourages them, look, man, if you are a slave and have the opportunity to get your freedom, don't pass on that opportunity. Take it.

Think about the apostles themselves as they went about preaching the gospel in various cities. Sometimes those cities well received them. Sometimes their lives were in danger.

[9 : 03] And you know what they did? They would sneak out of those cities to save their lives. So there needs to be some biblical wisdom here when we think about contentment. If you're facing

anything dangerous and destructive to you as a person, mind, body, or soul, the Bible gives you freedom to avail yourself, to get out.

Abuse spouse, you can leave. And make a plan to do that and do it safely. If you have cancer, avail yourself of modern medicine. The civil rights movement of the recent past was an availing of people of color to eradicate themselves from the evils of prejudice and racism that had been codified into law and into society.

And all of those are good things, and none of them violate biblical contentment, like responding in those ways to those things. It was good for them not to just say, ah, status quo, no big deal.

Biblical justice and biblical contentment are not at odds with each other. You can pursue justice, you can pursue righteousness while being content.

Like Paul, when he went to Jerusalem and was imprisoned, shackled in chains, and put on trial, he appealed to Rome. He was pursuing justice and righteousness for himself on his behalf in the manner that was available to him.

[10:25] So those are good things to do. And at the same time, I just want to say, everything you may think you lack is not a matter of injustice. If your car is older and smaller than your neighbors, that is just a contentment issue.

That's not a justice issue. If you rent a two-bedroom apartment but could really benefit from living in a three-bedroom house, but you can't really afford that, that is not a justice issue. That is a contentment issue.

You got to sort out. When we lack contentment, what happens is we tend toward two responses. We overextend ourselves to get what we want.

That looks like overworking. We end up working too much, or we overconsume. We rack up debt. I knew of a lady who landed up in bankruptcy and she was making \$100,000 a month.

She had a contentment issue, not a cash flow problem. Or we grow bitter and envious toward those who have what we want.

[11:27] And that can end up hurting us in a lot of ways. It makes us entitled. It could even make us kind of lazy in a way. Or it can justify why it's okay for me to steal the Amazon box on my neighbor's front porch.

Where there is lack of contentment, there will be jealousy and envy in our hearts. And Dorothy Sayers sums up envy very succinctly. She says, Envy begins by asking plausibly, Why should I not enjoy what others enjoy?

And it ends by demanding, Why should others enjoy what I may not? You think about the Apostle Paul. He prays three times for this thorn in his flesh.

He said, I have this thorn in my flesh. And we don't know what that is. We don't know if that was a physical ailment. We don't know if that was just a difficult person in his life. We don't know what that is.

But he prays for this thing to be taken away and God doesn't. And so he had to learn to be with God's, he had to learn to be content with God's plan for that. Despite that abiding affliction, whatever it was.

[12:34] And he says in 2 Corinthians 12, 9, about this thorn in the flesh, he said, I prayed to God three times. He didn't take it away. God answered my prayer and said to me, My grace is sufficient for you. Paul, my grace is sufficient for you.

For my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, Paul says, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses. So that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

See, when our eyes, when you and I, when we raise our eyes too high, what are we gonna be fixed on? We're gonna be fixed on the things that we can see but maybe we don't have.

The things that we see, man, those are good things. Those are the places I wanna be. Those are the things that I wanna have. And we won't be satisfied until we get them. And that can leak out of us as discontent where we enjoy little and complain often.

And that can also grow into the belief that life is just fixed against us. It can be kind of like a woe is me, I'm always the victim mentality. But another thing it can do, it can also deceive us into thinking that we're actually made to live without limits, which is a lie.

[13:45] And that's the third line that the psalmist addresses in 131. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. He says in verse one.

And this isn't promoting intellectual laziness. It isn't saying, hey, just settle for some like cheap pop theology about God. No, it's not. What it's implying is humility embraces and celebrates our limitations.

One of the most freeing moments of my life in following Jesus is when I realized that I should rejoice, not just in the ways that God made me and blessed me and had me good at things, right? He said, you know, Jesse, you need to learn to rejoice in your limitations, in the things that you're not good at, because I made you that way too. And that is so freeing.

That brought so much relief to me. Because you and I, we weren't made to be good at everything and know everything and dominated everything and solve every problem that exists. You and I are not going to be capable of bringing about world peace.

[14:51] We are not going to be capable about bringing out national peace or peace within our city or peace in our schools. We've got our hands full just trying to keep peace in our homes. Look, the world is full of a lot of trouble.

Bad things happen. Nations are at war. People don't get along. Politics are broken. Foreign affairs are complicated. Tariffs are confusing. Famines are still a thing. People are homeless. Mental health is on the decline.

Social media and unceasing news streaming at us are rewiring and saturating our brains with more than we can handle. And on top of that, I am sure that probably there is a massive asteroid out there that is on a direct collision course from the earth, right?

That is going to end all of humanity. I mean, all of those things are a possibility. We lift our eyes and we occupy ourselves with many things.

It's one of the great frustrations of life is the curse of sin has us trapped in a lot of futility. We see it all around us. It manifests in all those ways all around us all the time.

[15:57] And today, our instinct isn't to look away. Our instinct is to fixate on as many problems as we can. Now, is it good to learn and grow in knowledge?

Yes. Is it good to find solutions to problems that could make the world a better place? Yes. Is it good to know everything there is to know about what is going on in the world?

Well, that just can't be. There are things that I have learned in my life along the way that I'm like, didn't need to know that. Wish I didn't know that.

Wish I could go back and scrub my brain of that knowledge. And knowing those things have added nothing to my life. You and I were not made to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

There is a human limitation to the amount of knowledge that we are designed to handle. There are terrible things that God in his kindness shields us from.

[16:58] That's good. There are also wonderful things, marvelous things, too great for us to conceive and understand that he also holds back from us. In Romans 9 to 11, if you want to, if you are missing brain cramps, like go and like read Romans 9 to 11.

You will get a brain cramp because Paul gets into some very beautiful, wonderful, marvelous, lofty ideas of God's sovereignty and his great plan of redemption. And he names some very difficult concepts that he invites us to wrestle with.

Things like election, God choosing some and not others to salvation. And then he brings up all the objections surrounding that. Like, hey, that's not fair. How can God hold people accountable if he's making the choice for them?

And hey, go and read all those chapters. Paul brings up all the pertinent objections. He asks them all and he answers them as far as he can take them. But then he stops and he lands where Psalm 131 invites us to land as well.

Romans 11, 33 to 36, Paul stops at the end of his discourse and he says, Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how unscrutable his ways.

[18:11] For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen. For Paul, God has the right to keep some of those things clouded in divine mystery.

He recognized that some things were impossible to figure out when it comes to his redemptive purposes and how God governs the affairs over his creations. Sure, we get some insight into that.

We have the general plan there but God doesn't bring us into all the particulars of how he does that. Job landed in the same spot as Paul did.

This guy in the Bible, he has a whole book named after him. He endured some crazy suffering under God's sovereign watch and it confused him. And out of that confusion and pain, he asked God a lot of honest questions.

[19 : 10] And I just want to say, Job isn't there to teach us don't ask God hard, honest questions. It actually encourages us to do that but it also teaches us that you know what?

God's okay with you asking him those things but you know what? He's gonna give you some good, hard, honest answers as well. For 38 chapters, Job and his friends ask and answer these difficult questions around God and God waits 38 chapters and then stops and asks Job some better questions to see how limited his knowledge really was.

He goes to Job and he says, hey Job, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Where were you when I designed every little thing to the smallest detail to how atoms were made and why they were made that way?

Who did determine, Job, where the waters would end and the land would start? Job, have you like me gone to the ends of the universe and seen every star and know them? Oh Job, surely you understand and have made provision for all the living creatures on the earth every single day like I do?

Do you guide weather events? Can you tame the big scary leviathan of the deep and command it like a puppy? Job, for a few chapters God goes on and on about Job with Job questioning him.

[20 : 39] Finally Job answers the Lord and he says, I know, God, that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. And then he hearkens back to God's first question to Job in verse 3.

It says, who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? That's God's indictment against Job. And Job says, yeah, that was me. Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand. Things too wonderful for me which I didn't know.

Hear and I will speak. I will question you and you make it known to me, God says to Job. And Job responds to that. I had heard of you by the hearing of my ear but now my eye sees you.

Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes. That is humility. When you see the majesty and the marvel of God and you realize it is not for us to know every single thing, every possible thing, we land in a good place.

Humility, it searches the deep things of God but it is satisfied knowing that God is sovereign over all the affairs of this world. And following the path of humility leads us to that one destination which is really one person and it doesn't matter who you are and what you are facing in this life.

[22 : 05] Humility leads us to the gentle arms of a sovereign God. God is two things at the same time. He's all powerful and he is loving.

He's almighty and he is gentle. He is kind. He is exalted above all things and yet he is near and close and caring to you and me.

The God who guides the affairs of his creation is also the God who draws near to his people in love and gentleness. Verse two of Psalm 131. But I have calmed and quieted my soul the psalmist says like a weaned child with its mother.

Like a weaned child is my soul within me. I've read this verse as many times and it's kind of an odd picture for me. But a child if you think about it a child who nurses with its mother what it does there it develops a bond of trust and love and connection.

But the child doesn't stay a nursing child all the time. It grows up. It matures beyond that nursing and it grows into a new level of maturity and relational connection with its mother where mom is no longer a refrigerator to eat from anymore.

[23 : 29] She's a person with a heart to draw near to. You know they say that in battle wounded soldiers cry for mom not dad more often than not.

That's what they're doing. Why? Why is that? In their greatest pain in their most fearful moment they want mom to be near because moms are safe.

Moms are nurturing. Moms are comforting. And that's who God is. And look I'm not trying to over feminize God. He is our father.

He's revealed himself as our father and he does that. He fathers us as fathers do the fathering things like encouragement and discipline and all that good stuff but also he is gentle.

He is nurturing. He is caring. He is doting like a mother is. The Christianity of the at least the part I really grew up in and became an adult in in the 90s and the early 2000s there was this big emphasis on God's masculine traits.

[24 : 37] Right? But it kind of really de-emphasized like the kind motherly parts of God. It ignored the fact that like man God made man and woman in his likeness not just man.

He said you know what we're going to make man in our image. We're going to create them in our likeness so he made them man and women. Good masculinity it testifies to God's nature but so does good femininity.

God our father Jesus the son and the holy spirit they are the perfection of the best of both genders. We know that true be true because he made them both.

So be thankful that God is sovereign and strong and also learn to enjoy him like a weaned child with its mother. He is the destination of the humble path.

He is the one that the humble heart desires and in his gentle arms your soul will experience calm and quiet. It will find rest there.

[25 : 42] You know one of the helpful practices when I think about like man how do we practice that? How do we live out this reality of tucking into God in his gentle sovereign arms?

I think one of the old disciplines that is so good for us is silence and stillness. Just practicing getting away with God somewhere where there is good quiet.

Maybe into creation somewhere maybe it is just your backyard if you have that kind of backyard. It is just sitting there not opening the word and studying the Bible not even praying out loud it is just coming and saying father I am your son bring me close to your heart.

Let me hear you let me know you and that is enough. As a Christian your faith needs to know and experience God's gentle care along with his sovereign strength because our hope will be set upon him and him alone.

Psalms 131 verse 3 lands this way O Israel hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. So as we close the humble path what it does it leads us to a place where our only hope is in God alone.

[27 : 02] We don't place our hope in people we don't place our hope in power we don't place our hope in pleasure we don't place our hope in more knowledge we don't place our hope in wealth or health we place it in God alone.

The New City Catechism which we are teaching to our middle schoolers it begins by asking and answering this question what is our only hope in life and death? Well the answer is our only hope in life and death is that we belong body and soul in life and death to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

That is our only hope not that plus something it's our only hope. You know one day whether it is by passing through death into eternity or Jesus returning you and I are going to stand before God and we are going to stand before him in judgment.

What will be your hope then? It's all about where you put your hope now and this verse says put your hope in the Lord your God put your hope in the Lord your God you don't do it to get on his good side so he will throw some extra blessings your way your hope in God is in what he has done and what he has done that you could never do.

Jesus came walked this earth to fulfill the law of God and he did it and he kept it perfectly. He was blameless he was without sin he walked perfect obedience where you and I and no man could ever do that.

[28 : 40] he earned righteousness according to the law of God that no man could ever earn and then what he did is he went to the cross. Why did he have to do that? Well he had to go to the cross because the punishment of sin the wages of sin is death and so Jesus had to go in our place he had to take that punishment on himself take that penalty on himself for you and me because you know what we are law breakers the Bible says very clearly all have sinned not some have sinned all have sinned and have fallen short of God's glory they have fallen short of his moral standard.

We lie we covet we cheat we do terrible things we lust we envy we put our hope in many other things besides God we put a lot of things that are meant to be only God that places only God is meant to occupy and we put other things in there and we go about living seeking praise and power and pleasure and peace apart from God and in the process what we do is we build and create and develop new ideas and ways of living and we build these lives thinking like surely if I just do this

thing surely if I have this thing this relationship this amount of money these kind of possessions those kind of friends like then my life will be at peace but all the things we chase after all the things we build and we can create and develop they are all tainted with moral imperfections because we are the ones building them and because of that they fall short and because of that they will pass away so we would be wise not to put our hope in those things don't put your hope in any nation any politician any political party any form of government whether it is capitalism or socialism or communism or any ism that you can see and know and understand they all those things are relegated to pass away but God will not and his kingdom will not

God's redemption plan is culminating at the end of the age when Jesus returns bringing his kingdom to this earth and all the bad things all the evil all the futility of this world will disappear and he will rule and reign as Lord over all we will see him fully as he truly is and those who have their hope set on Jesus desire that we want that we walk the humble path toward that future promise to inherit eternal life with God as the band comes up and we look to respond in a moment followers of Jesus are going to take communion and this is a practice of the humble path that reminds us of who our hope is I want to say to you if you're here and you're not yet a follower of Jesus your response right now is to humble yourself today humble yourself the Bible invites you to come to Jesus confess that you are a sinner confess that he is the savior who died for your sin he is the king that you want to live in submission to and follow and obey the promise for you if you confess and repent that you will be saved and that's you there's going to be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray

I want to encourage you to pray that now if you're already a follower of Jesus we're going to come to the communion table in a moment but before we do that I want you to reflect on these questions what has the Holy Spirit been highlighting in your heart today how has he been calling you to respond where is your trust where is your hope how is he calling you back to the humble path so take time do some business with God maybe ask him some good questions and listen for some good answers but when you've done praying and you're ready to go to the table come and get the bread and the cup his body broken for you his blood shed for you take it back to your seat and take it when you're ready Father pray with me Father we come to you right now we thank you for your amazing grace we thank you Jesus that you came you came and you lived you lived among us you lived humbly you lived obedient you have surrendered we thank you that you came and you were exalted on a cross it's a humble place to be the cross was humiliation because you did that you were buried in the ground and then rose far beyond the cross into heaven seated on the throne where you are ruling and reigning in resurrection life forever and ever more and we're reminded of that we thank you for that so we pray that you would encourage us stir up hope in you stir up hope in our hearts towards you that we may live content in you grateful in you this time forth and forever more amen do you