

I want to invite you to turn to Psalm 131, if you have a copy of the Scripture, and if not, it will be projected for you. We begin a series in the Psalms today that will take us through the summer months. Psalms, you may or may not be familiar, is a book of the Old Testament that is filled with the songs of the people of God. They are categorized in various ways. There's different ways to type Psalms, different ways to understand how they're presented. Some are Psalms of lament. Some are Psalms of praise. Some are messianic Psalms that point directly to Christ. Some are pointing to Christ as we see him in every page of Scripture.

The Psalms, however, speak directly to our human condition. They give a voice to our heart. The Psalms are written by real people with real and raw emotion. The Psalms are where you and I need to camp out when we have those exalted mountaintop experiences and when we find ourselves in the valley of discouragement and despair. The Psalms give insight into the troubles of this world. They show us where to place our trust in the midst of tribulation. They show us how to praise, for what to praise, and to whom praise should be given. The Psalms are fairly important. Through the Psalms we gain insight into how people who trust in God pray to God and call upon his name.

So today we're going to look at three verses. It's all contained in one Psalm, Psalm 131. It's a short Psalm. It's a Psalm of David. It's a *Song of Ascent*, probably recited as those who were going up to the temple to give sacrifice, they might say this Psalm. It's a very personal Psalm. It's a psalm of a reminder of the heart, the condition of our heart. It's a reminder of the God who oversees our heart as well. It's attributed to David, and David, as you know, King David in Israel was a man after God's own heart---that's a description given to David. God chose David, and David in turn chose to follow God. Often times, David was humbled, humbled from his arrogance and his independent posture. Psalm 131, we get to see a glimpse of that. We have the privilege today to look into this Psalm, to peel back the protective layers of the human heart and to actually hear a real person, who really lives on this planet, and how he sees life and life lived well. In turn---now, here's the warning for all of us who remain in the room---in turn, we get to see our own hearts. That's what the Psalms do. And my prayer, as I was led to Psalm 131 and knew that June 2 would be our appointment with this text, my prayer for myself and my prayer for you is that God would use this in a powerful way, in a particular way for each of us, so that we could see more of God as he reveals to us more of our hearts.

I want you, if you will, to set the stage, to picture the typical person who's heading into a new setting. It could be a recent high school graduate heading off to college. It could be a returning college student beginning a summer job. It could be someone in the workforce placed in a new working group. Maybe it's a family that moves into a new neighborhood. Or perhaps it's someone who volunteers for Vacation Bible School or Upward camp, and they find themselves in a team of people that they've not previously experienced. Picture these scenarios or any host of any others that you can fill in the blank on, where the temptation exists to have the opinion of others hold more of an influence on the way that we act and react than what those opinions should have. It's the danger of a life lived in the arena of comparison. A life lived in the arena of comparison. This horizontal relationship that each of us have, where we enter a room with new people sitting in a circle, and we start to evaluate where we are in the pecking order. Many of us, we're familiar with the arena of comparison. And depending on our perspective on this arena, we're either wildly successful or we're abysmal failures. Psalm 131 speaks to us in this. The arena of comparison is a life marked by the pressure to perform. And when performance doesn't match up to whatever standard has been raised---despair over failures and setbacks. It's a life---the arena of comparison life is a life that is obsessed with the next thing that we're supposed to achieve. And when achievement seems elusive, it's a life marked by anxiety. It's the jockeying for position from this horizontal viewpoint with one another, and that produces anxious thoughts. Will I measure up? Will I be acceptable? Can I even be loved? All retrospective thoughts seem clouded over with regret. Anybody? That's me! That's this heart. That's David's heart. That's why the Psalms are so wonderful, so real,

and so refreshing when given a chance to penetrate our lives. Don't you long for a life that's free from the busyness of competition with one another---that arena of comparison. It's not the way that our Heavenly Father designed for us to live out our days on this planet. It's not, because, on the authority of God's word, this is the way we're design to live. A life lived well.

So let's look at a life that's free from the race of self-imposed rightness or righteousness. God's word for us today. Psalm 131.

O LORD, my heart is not lifted up;
my eyes are not raised too high;
I 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.
O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore.

God's word for us.

In this three-verse Psalm I see three characteristics I'd like to bring out, three characteristics of *A Life Lived Well*. Characteristics that I'm trusting God for myself, but I'm trusting God for you, as well---that he'll point us to these characteristics, point us to Christ in them, and bring us further up, further in, and closer to him.

So the first characteristic, I would suggest, respectfully, about a life lived well, is *A Humble Recognition*. The psalmist has a humble recognition. He says, "Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high." What he's saying there is, I've got it. I've got my place, I realize. One of the things he realizes is the Creator/creature distinction. That's very clear. I know my place now. I do not occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me. The characteristic of a life lived well is to come to a humble recognition that God rules over all his creation with a loving and wise sovereignty. God is in charge. It springs forth---this humble recognition springs forth from the heart that has come to believe the truth of who God is. The truth that's summarized in our confession of faith. You're familiar, perhaps, with Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter five, verse one. "God, the great Creator of all things upholds, directs, disposes, governs all creatures, actions, and things from the greatest even to the least. He exercises this most wise and holy providence according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and unchangeable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy." That's a God who is lovingly, wisely, sovereignly in charge of all that he's made. And the humble recognition of the psalmist is a recognition of that God.

David is using Hebrew poetry. These are songs. They were songs to be sung, to be recited aloud. The Hebrew poetry employed in the first part of verse---he uses comparison and a doubling up: My heart is not haughty, my eyes are not lifted up. I'm not proud before you, O Lord. I've not encountered things that are too lofty for me. He's saying, O Lord, I'm not proud. I recognize who you are, who I am. David, by implication, is pointing out two pernicious enemies---I think your outline says 'punks'---two pernicious enemies that would seek to destroy humility or sap us of humility: pride and presumption. We constantly battle pride and presumption in this present age. David was no stranger to those things. But David the psalmist says, O Lord, I am not proud. My heart is not lifted up before you. My eyes are not raised too high.

I was immediately reminded of the parable---maybe you are, as well---in Luke 18, when Jesus tells the story of the two men who went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, who Jesus describes in the parable of Luke 18---the Pharisee stood where he could be seen, and in a

voice prayed aloud, 'Lord, I thank you that I am not like other men.' And he lists a host of adulterers, and you know, these bad people that he was not like. By way of comparison, he also points out the tax collector who's there in the midst. The Pharisee praying aloud, thanking God, employing the prayer of comparison, whereby according to the standard that he was using thought he was coming out on top. After comparing himself favorably with the despicable types, he also listed some noteworthy accomplishments: I tithe and I fast. I do the things I'm supposed to do. But the tax collector, Jesus says, stood afar off, and he beat his chest, his heart was not lifted up. He covered his eyes and he would not look up, because his eyes were not lifted up. And he cried, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.' Jesus records in Luke 18 that there's only one of those two men who went to his house justified before a holy God---the tax collector, because he recognized that God alone is holy. And he recognized that he, the tax collector, was a sinner in need of mercy. Jesus says, that's the prayer that God blesses.

Then he concludes that parable---in Luke 18:14 Jesus made this sobering reminder for all of us to hear, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." Although there are many races, many ethnicities, many types of people that walk this planet, there are only two types of hearts. You've heard this before. There's the proud of heart and there's the humble of heart. That's the distinction that draws across all of humanity. The proud of heart do not acknowledge God as Creator and sustainer of life. But by contrast, the humble of heart recognize God not only as Creator and Sustainer, but as the one---because he is the Creator and the Sustainer---who has the right to demand and require how we are to live our lives. The humble of heart recognize that they've broken God's commands, that they're justly deserving of punishment, because they are not righteous, no not one. The humble of heart see Jesus as the one whom God has given as a substitution for sinners. The humble of heart surrender and submit to God on God's terms. The proud of heart are obsessed with self. Whether it manifests in looking down on others and trying to find a favorable comparison, or looking down on self because of unfavorable comparisons, it's all about self. That's the definition of pride. Pride is about me. Me, myself, and I: the pride-filled, unholy Trinity. That's us.

God reveals himself to us in many ways, through creation and through the special revelation of God's word, and he communicates to us, 'There is only one God.' We are left without excuse. A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to consider the wonder of God as I stood on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean down in North Carolina. And as the waves repeatedly rolled across my feet, I penned these words. I thought, well, we're in Hebrew poetry. These are songs, so I might try my hand at a poem.

I stood on the edge of the sea, and contemplated me.
I shielded my eyes because I could not compete
with the brilliance of the sun.
I silenced my voice because I could not compete
with the roar of the waves bombarding the shore.
I realized my size because I could not compete
with the vast expanse of ocean before me.
I stood on the edge of the sea, and contemplated you.
I considered the one who brought the sun to be
and then by grace gave me eyes to see.
I considered the one who speaks words of life
and conquers my heart so that I might hear.
I considered the one who creates and sustains
and supplies and commands
and needs nothing from me to enable his plan.
I stood on the edge of the sea and contemplated life.

The psalmist says that he is actively repenting of pride. It's a constant battle. He goes on to say that not only pride, but presumption---his life is a life free from presumption. "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." I don't pursue things that are out of the realm of possibility for me. If you stop and think about life for a moment, that's just about everything. It's our daily bread. It's the opinion of others. It's our health. It's the length of our days on this planet. It's the idea---said here in the second part of verse one---of letting God be God. I don't occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me. I don't fret and worry about what I can't control. That's what the psalmist is saying. I'm not presumptuous before you, O Lord. I'm not consumed, as well, with making a name for myself. I'm not obsessed with being the one to whom others heap accolades upon. This is the life of the psalmist as he says, 'I'm not that.'

I'm using the word presumption here to carry the idea of attempting to accomplish something or setting the goal to accomplish something in order to gain glory. That's what the psalmist is saying: I don't do that. I'm not trying to rob God of glory. Now, that's not to say that David did not achieve great things. We know he did. He achieved great things. He was the greatest human king Israel had ever known. The accomplishments on the battlefield were well-renowned; they actually did receive the accolades of others. But this verse is saying that a life lived well doesn't become obsessed with accomplishing things, with the success of accomplishment as an end in itself. David accomplished huge things, and frequently those huge things were accomplished in the midst of trial and humiliating heartache. Accomplishment that we achieve is always and ever will be a gift of God's grace. Any accomplishment we achieve is always and ever will be a gift of God's grace. We must not lose sight of that ever. That's what God's word is calling us to. My achievements, my accomplishments---they're all of grace. My wisdom, my knowledge, my peace, and any humility that ekes from my system---it's a gift of God's grace. That's a picture of a life that is successfully combating pride and presumption.

David then goes on to say something even more amazing. Can you stand it? Verse two. He says that he is content with his life. He's settled. He is at peace. This is the second characteristic of a life lived well---it's the presence of *A Peaceful Resignation*. "But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me." What's contained here is the idea of a quieted soul, a still soul, a soul at peace, a soul that sings "It is well." It's the word that's used in the Septuagint by Jesus stilling the storm: 'Peace, be still' and the wind and the waves obey. And a stillness fell over the sea.

And David says, listen, this is what it's like to be at peace with a holy God. I don't know if you've ever been around a nursing infant before...anybody? But the picture here is so powerful. You place an infant who is hungry on the lap of its mother and what you see is your soul. The squirming, the fussing, the fidgeting, the fighting, the crying. You know, our kids, man, sometimes they would get so hungry that they'd do that pterodactyl cry. [aaah-aaargh!] The tongue comes shooting out, and it pierces....and I don't think dad's ears are capable of that frequency. Moms are equipped for it. Thank God for moms. But that's the picture. David says, listen, when I want and when I don't get and when I'm not satisfied and when I'm not content and when this life and I'm rolling around and all of that it is---I'm like the child on the mother's lap who was not weaned, who can't be satisfied, who needs that and must have that and will do whatever is necessary to get that. Not so with David. He says, listen, I have a quieted soul. It's a picture of getting to rest in God. The disquieted soul is a picture of when we are not getting the things that we believe will bring us life and hope and peace.

There's nothing wrong with desiring respect from others or financial security or good health or family harmony or to see relational strain brought to justice or any other of those great, good, godly things. We want those types of things. We want a lot of things. The problem with us is when we obsessively want a lot of things, those things we think will bring us satisfaction. And we fuss and we squirm and we fight. We want God to accomplish our wants or we're not satisfied. We naturally replace God himself with the blessings of God. That's the nature of sin. Do you want good health more than you want God? Do you want a happy marriage more than you want God? Do you want financial security more than you want God? You see how the

Scriptures probe our hearts when we think about that. David's saying, I have calmed my soul. We've got to look at this, because is he able to achieve this? David says that in the midst of all of life's ups and downs and twists and turns his soul is at peace. His soul is like the picture of that weaned child. David says, in essence, that he has learned that God is sovereign and loving, and when he gets things or he doesn't get things, he knows what it means to be content in times of plenty and in times of want. We hear that echoed by the apostle Paul, don't we? And man, do I long for that. I want to know what it means to be content and abounding in abasement. God help me, help us all.

But don't walk away from this sermon or this building or this campus thinking that you can actually calm your own soul in and of your own strength or some means or method. That, too, is a gift of God's grace. It's accomplished by the means of God's grace that he's given to us. The promises of God applied by the powerful presence of God's Holy Spirit is what calms our souls. We believe, Lord; help us in our unbelief. I believe, God, that you have rescued me from sin. I believe that you have conquered death and hell on my behalf. I believe that you rose victorious from the grave. I believe that when I die I will go to be with you again in that place that you prepared. But help me in my unbelief. Help me to live this life with all this noise and all these competing promises of life.

We don't see how this life lived well is accomplished in either the first or the second verse. Thanks be to God for the third verse, because therein the psalmist David gives us insight into how the life lived well is arrived at. Because we want this kind of life. We don't want the opposite. The opposite is such a mess. Think of the opposite: Lord, I'm proud and I'm haughty and I got it all together. And I'm a mess and I fuss and I'm upset and I can't be settled with anything. That's quite the opposite, right? Who wants that? Anybody? Please, say No. And so he says the key to a life lived well is that Israel would "hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore." David turns his attention from describing the settled humility that he is experiencing, to describing for others the source of the contentment that he has known---active hope in the covenant making, covenant keeping God. That's why he calls out to Yahweh. O LORD, capital L O R D. And then in verse three, "Israel, hope in the LORD." Hope in the one who knows your inner workings, hope in the one who knows your upbringing and all the different ways you're wired, hope in the one who knows what you think will satisfy the longing of your frustrated and fussy heart. Hope in him, because he has settled all of that.

The only one who can bring us to a genuine place of humility without diminishing our dignity is the one who makes us in his image and then describes us in terms that are filled with truth and grace. It's quite the astonishing encounter with God's word to hear that you are not righteous, no not one. It's stark. It hurts. It's...wait, wait, wait...there's got to be some vestige of something good, right? No. None. But truth and grace. God is pleased to crush his son on behalf of sinners, to give him as a ransom, to give him as a substitute for sinners. David says, trust in that God. Trust in him when, David? "Now and forevermore." In the midst of all the stuff of this life, in the midst of all the noise and confusion, in the midst of competing things that say they will satisfy your soul. In the midst of that trust in the one alone who can satisfy. Trust in him now. Trust in him forevermore. That's the call. Easy, right? Not at all. Not at all. In fact, it's impossible. It's impossible in your own strength. In my strength this is not possible. David was not naturally this man. Does that surprise you? He was the greatest king in Israel. He's one of God's heroes. But he was not capable of this. He couldn't live it and neither can we.

Pride and presumption are behind every action and reaction that we have. Comparisons are constantly looping through our brains as we interact with the world. We raise up a standard of our own design and hope that we can meet that standard. We want to be righteous some way, somehow. I read this week in preparation for this message of a woman---listen---who described very few peers in her life, but rather many of what she called 'pedestal people.' The pedestal people are those whom she looked up to---in her opinion, who could do no wrong. So she made a comparison with the pedestal people and then she had 'pit people.'

People who she was able to find something that she could look down upon in order to feel better about herself. Of course, if pedestal people did something that was seen as a failure, they immediately passed go, did not collect two hundred dollars, and went straight to pit people. But as she came to realize that the standard that alone mattered was the standard that God had raised---his perfect righteousness---and the way in which Christ has kept that standard perfectly, his sacrificial life and death, she was then able to appropriate by faith, to receive by faith that record, so that the pedestal people and the pit people became peers. See, that's where the ground is level---at the foot of the cross. It's level for you and for me. That's who we are, all of us. There is one God, and then there's us.

The life lived well is not easy at all, but it is very possible, because the one who is greater than David has lived it. Jesus Christ was the one who was willing to be humiliated for the sake of his people. He didn't consider equality with God something to grasp or to hold tightly to. He did not lift up his eyes, he did not have a haughty heart. He was the one who was willing to do nothing on his own, but only that which the Father willed. He did not occupy himself with things too high or too lofty. He was the one who rebuked the disciples who were trying to block the little children to come to visit with him. He was not consumed with things too marvelous for him. He was the one who turned his loving and forgiving attention to a tainted and scorned woman at the home of Simon the Pharisee, when no one else in that dinner party greeted Jesus, and she greeted him by anointing his feet with her tears, and he turned to her. He was not consumed with things too great and too lofty. He was the one, that even in the midst of soul-agonizing torment on the night that he was betrayed, wrapped the towel around his waist and washed the disciples' feet. And shortly after that event he was in the garden, where he showed clearly he was not consumed with his own agenda, where he said, 'Nevertheless, Father, not my will, but your will be done.' Your will, Father, to claim this people for yourself. I will go. I will rescue them. I will do it for you.

And on the cross where he died for you, beloved, he showed that contentment, the peace of a settled heart at the point of death, where he provided you and me security and forgiveness. At the point of death he cried, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' That's contentment. In the very last breath he was at peace with God. He is the one who rose victorious from the grave three days later. He gives you and me an imperishable hope, kept in heaven.

A life well lived is only possible resting in the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, and he makes his appeal to you through me, of all people, this morning. "Come unto to me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart." Words of Jesus. You will find rest for your soul, rest for your weariness. My yoke is easy, my burden light. Come, Israel, put your hope in the Lord now and forevermore.

Let's pray together. God, help us please. We ask you for mercy, Lord, mercy to meet us. Lord, please push back the pernicious enemies of pride and presumption in our hearts. God, give us contentment and peace before you. Give us the faith that demonstrates itself by following you, by worshiping you, now and forever. God, hear our prayer. In the name of Jesus, we ask. Amen.