

Humility

“Humility is a strange thing. As a rule, once you discover you have it you lose it. Humility is like a rare flower – put it on display and it instantly wilts and loses its fragrance! Humility is one character trait that can never come out of the closet; it is not something to announce from the rooftop.”

I do not want to be misunderstood this morning. I am not announcing complete humility because I do not want to cause anyone to stumble. But as I thought about humility this week, two people came to mind for me. I then asked Helen--who exhibited humility for her in her life here at the Chelmsford church? So we came up with with four people off the top of our head: Kitty Dugre, Rachel Field and Bob and Betty Smith. Now, I don't want to cause these people to stumble this morning...

There's this humorous story about the guy who tried to write about his humility. It was hard for him to choose a title. "Humility and How I Attained It" didn't seem to fit; nor did "How I Became Humble." So as the story goes, he finally settled on this title: "Me and My Humility" – and then wrote twelve full-pages with pictures of himself!

C.S. Lewis wrote in his "Screwtape Letters," these words: that we can never be proud of our humility. So Kitty, Rachel, Bob and Betty--I'm not saying that your exhibit all the humility God's want you to have, but I am saying that you have been a good example for others and me about being humble.

Pride is like a telescope turned the wrong way. Pride magnifies the wrong things. Pride magnifies self and makes the heavens small. No wonder Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are the meek" (Mt 5:3,5). His parable of the Pharisee and tax collector perfectly illustrates the danger of pride and the blessing of humility (Lk 18:9-14).

Read Psalm 131 (do you know what I like about this Psalm? That it's by David and about David)

I like what Spurgeon says about this Psalm: "It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ."

I was speaking to one on my shepherds this week (Scott Renner) and I appreciated his words of wisdom. He said to me, in reference to speaking about the church here, that you can't be a Christian alone. I think he's right. Christian faith needs continuous maintenance. I have these posts down in the basement. Every so often I need to paint them green. I've noticed that if I don't, they begin to rust and turn black.

I planted a peach tree this year. I like to grow things. But growing things takes more than planting. If you didn't know better you'd think that after pruning my peach tree, I'd a killed it.

Psalm 131 is really a maintenance Psalm. Psalm 131 is like a pruning for the person of faith. It sort of cuts off the things that look good to people who don't really know any better. Eugene Peterson says that the pruning here cuts down the distance between our hearts and the roots we have in God.

The overgrown branches that are pruned in Psalm 131 are **uncontrolled ambition and infantile dependency**. I suppose another way to say this is "we're getting to big for our britches while at the same time we refuse to cut the apron strings.

I'm convinced that people of faith are in need of correction. I know this is hard to fathom, but it's true. My next statement actually gets better: We are in special need of expert correction! Which probably means that you're not the one to do the correcting! Which probably means, you may need to be corrected. I told you it got better.

Jesus told us about the importance of cutting and pruning. **He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. John 15:2 [NIV]**

Psalm 131 is one of those places where we get expert correction and where we can be pruned so that we will bear more fruit...and this is good news!!

So we begin the pruning: **V. 1, 2a My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul...**

Now here's where I've been camping out this week... I understand every word in this Psalm, but it is difficult to comprehend--not intellectually--but emotionally. Remember **what Spurgeon said: "It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn."**

I mean it's difficult to feel the truth of this Psalm. It would be easy for me to say that I really can't experience what this Psalm is talking about because of the culture that I live in. We live in a noisy, hectic culture. But the truth is, all cultures in one way or another throw stumbling blocks in front of us, who believe in God. The truth is, dreaming about another place or time to live out our Christian lives would be no easier than living it out now--and here. It is not easier to be a Chinese Christian, or a Spanish Christian, or a Russian Christian or a Brazilian Christian. The truth is it is not easier or harder to be an American Christian. The truth is, living a Christian life deals with the realities in that place or time we find ourselves.

But there are those times within our culture or times we find ourselves living in--that bring with it its own unique problems. When the culture we live in takes something that was always understood to be a temptation or a stumbling block--and our culture approves of this thing as an expected way of life--we can definitely stumble! The problem with temptation is that it is disguised--well. Many temptations come to us, especially those that our culture accepts as normal everyday life--looking like a monument with lights all around it to show its beauty as something to be revered. But the truth is, no matter how you dress it up, it is still a stumbling block for the Christian.

One example of this (and the main example I'll use today) in our culture is "ambition." The apostle Paul would call it "selfish ambition." Our culture honors ambition. Our culture encourages and rewards ambition with little or no qualification. Our culture is saturated with the idea that betterment is understood as expansion and acquisition and fame. Everyone wants to get more. Everyone wants to be on top... not matter what the top is. If you're on top of something, you are to be--at the very least--admired!

The truth is, there's nothing new about this temptation. This temptation is the oldest sin in the book. It's the sin that caused Adam to be thrown out of the garden. It is the sin that got Satan thrown out of heaven. The truth is it's the sin that caused the confusion at Babel. So the sin of ambition is not a new

thing. What's new about it is how much it is admired and approved by our culture.

In reference to this Psalm, Eugene Peterson says: "I will not try to run my own life or the lives of others; that is God's business, I will not pretend to invent the meaning of the universe; I will accept what God has shown its meaning to be; I will not strut about demanding that I be treated as the center of my family or my neighborhood or my work, [or my church] but seek to discover where I fit and do what I am good at."

This is a good picture of not being prideful and arrogant. I suppose the problem of finally convincing ourselves about the sin of pride--is then to think too little of ourselves. It's easy to conclude in a lesson like this that we are to be the doormat Christian. But this is not so. God doesn't want us to be weak and timid like little babies who are scared and confused.

Christian faith is not some kind of neurotic dependency on God... Oh Lord, do this for me and do that for me, and Lord, take this pain away, and that hardship away from me. Oh Lord it's about me, me, me...woe is me!!!

Christian faith is about a childlike trust in God. It is about whom we trust with our destinies. Christian faith is not naïve, or like an innocent infant who's only identity is to be comforted by someone. Christian faith is about discovering the identity given us by God--which is best enjoyed and lived in voluntary trust. Our identity in God is not to desperately cling onto God in fear and panic of insecurity. Christian faith/trust is voluntary because of love.

Jesus said in Mark 10:14-16 that our faith is to be like that of a child, not because the child is helpless, but because of the child's willingness to be led by God--to be taught by God--and to be blessed by God.

This is an awesome Psalm! It is relational and completely attractive **2Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me. [NASB]**

Check it out... The Christian is not like a child that needs weaning. Do you know what that sounds like? The Christian is like a weaned child. And you know what a weaned child sounds like----- The Christian is content, comforted. The weaned child rests in the arms of her mother because she desires her mother for herself and not as a means of fulfilling her own wishes. This is a great metaphor of what a person of faith is like. The Christian can come and simply rest in the arms of God.

For many who have traveled on the road of faith--They can relate to the transition from an infantile faith that grabs at God out of complete desperation to this mature faith that comes to and responds to God out of love--just **like a weaned child rests against his mother.**

I realize that for many, me included--come to God out of complete desperation--and the good news is that God does not refuse to meet our needs. Even as a crying screaming baby, God still meets my needs. This does not mean that God wants us to neurotically be dependant upon him. What God wants is for us to trust him. So God is motivated to wean us. This time of weaning is a tough time. Those of you who have been Christians for some time know what I'm talking about. This time of weaning can often be noisy and be filled with misunderstanding. We can find ourselves saying things

like: I no longer feel like I did when I was first a Christian. Does that mean I am no longer a Christian? Has God abandoned me? Have I done something terribly wrong?

I think the right answer is “neither.” The good news is God hasn’t abandoned you and you haven’t done anything wrong. The truth is you’ve been weaned. The apron stings have been cut. The good news is you’re free to come to God on your own. And this is good.

Notice how the Psalm ends: **v.3 O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.** David is saying choose to be with God, choose to be in his presence, choose to live the way he wants you to, and respond to God and respond to his love.

Here’s what’s reflective of our lives: Our lives have had problems and terrifying emergencies. Many of us have lost jobs, or lost health, or dealt with rebellious children, or experienced the loss of loved ones. And many of us have taken matters into our own hands and have become masters of our own situation saying to God thank you but get out! Our tendency has been to go to the experts of our culture to know what to do and how to cope.

But there comes a day when we stand up and realize that there’s another way--the way of Christian humility. We come to the day that we know we need pruning. There comes that day that we are like the weaned child--that we come to God in a maturing trust knowing that he’ll take care of us.

This is a small Psalm, but it is essential to our walk of faith. It is essential because every Christian encounters problems of growth and maturity and has difficulties in development.

The good news this morning is that Psalm 131 nurtures the Christian. Psalm 131 has a quality of calm confidence and quiet strength that knows the difference between arrogance/pride and a desire to be faithful. Psalm 131 knows the difference between infantile dependency and childlike trust. Psalm 131 sings! It sings **I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me. (Psalm 131:2- NASB)**

As you leave this place today, may you **hope in the LORD, from this time forth and forever.**

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