

July 14, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Humility and Hope

Psalm 131

1. Humility (verses 1-2)

2. Hope (verse 3)

The Bible says that King David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 15:14; Acts 13:22). David loved the LORD (Psalm 18:1). David took refuge in the LORD (Psalm 18:2). David called upon the LORD (Psalm 18:3). David prayed to the LORD (Psalm 5:3). David gave thanks to the LORD with all of his heart (Psalm 9:1). David told others of the wonders of the LORD (Psalm 9:1). David was glad in the LORD (Psalm 9:2). David sang praise to the LORD (Psalm 9:2). David blessed the LORD (Psalm 16:7). David found his greatest joy in the LORD (Psalm 4:7).

And because David was a man after God's own heart, he "found favor in God's sight" (Acts 7:46). God heard David's prayers (Psalm 18:6). God saved David from his enemies (Psalm 18:3).

Now, surely, you know enough about human nature to know that David was not perfect. He was a man of war (1 Chronicles 29:3). He was a man of bloodshed (1 Chronicles 29:3). He committed adultery (2 Samuel 11). He committed murder (2 Samuel 11). He tried to cover up his sin (2 Samuel 12).

And yet, David did repent. David confessed his sin to the LORD (Psalm 32:5). David pleaded for God's grace (Psalm 51:1). David pleaded for God's compassion (Psalm 51:1). And God forgave David's sin (Psalm 32:5).

It's right here that you get a glimpse of why David was a man after God's own heart. He submitted himself to the LORD in every way. He didn't always do what was right. But, he hated his sin and he loved His LORD. He longed for fellowship with Him. So, he confessed his sin and found the LORD to be a merciful, forgiving God.

As we come to our text today, we will see some characteristics of David's heart, which show why the LORD considered him a man after his own heart.

Fundamentally, David had a humble and content heart. He trusted in the LORD. He rested in the LORD. The call of our text is for us to do the same. It's the call to "Be still, my soul."

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 131. This is one of the Songs of Ascents. There are fifteen of these Psalms -- they begin with Psalm 120 and end in Psalm 134). It is one of the Psalms that Israel sang as they went up to worship the LORD in Jerusalem, according to Divine command three times each year. For the past 10 weeks, we have been looking at these Psalms. These are the Psalms that Israel sang as they went up to worship the LORD in Jerusalem, according to Divine command, three times each year (Deut. 16:16).

Just as we don't sing the songs in our hymnals straight through, so also have we not taken these Psalms straight through. Instead, we have taken them in logical order. We have taken them in thematic order. This is why we began with Psalm 122. Psalm 122 is THE Song of Ascents, which describes the worship in Jerusalem, as well as God's decree to go up to Jerusalem to worship there. Then, we looked at Psalm 120, in which the pilgrim was far from the LORD, just beginning his travel to Jerusalem. We looked at "The Family Psalms" (Psalm 127, 128) on Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day. We looked at a military Psalm (Psalm 124) on Memorial Day. We looked at "The Mountain Psalms" (Psalm 121, 125) in consecutive weeks. We looked at Psalms that brought blessings, of forgiveness and unity (Psalm 130, 133) in consecutive weeks. Last week and this week, we are dealing with "Humility" Psalms.

Last week, we looked at Psalm 123. The cry of Psalm 123 was to look to the LORD. Look to the LORD for mercy. Look to the LORD for grace. Look as a humble servant might look: not demanding anything, not deserving anything, just looking and waiting.

The message of Psalm 131 is much the same. David calls us to humility. David calls us to hope. These two words: humility and hope for the title of my message this morning: "Humility and Hope."

My prayer in preaching this message is that it would bring us all to a humility in the LORD and lead us all to a hope in the LORD. As I read Psalm 131 for you, listen for these two themes: Humility and Hope.

Psalm 131
A Song of Ascents, of David

O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;
Nor do I involve myself in great matters,
Or in things too difficult for me.
Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;

Like a weaned child rests against his mother,
My soul is like a weaned child within me.
O Israel, hope in the LORD
From this time forth and forever.

We see humility in the first two verses. We see hope in verse 3. Let's look at my first point:

1. Humility (verses 1-2)

David says, ...

Psalm 131:1
O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;

Now, that's not an easy thing to say. Often, those who make such a statement, demonstrate that they are indeed proud. They are proud of their humility.

I heard the story this week of the Sunday school teacher who received the award for being "The Most Humble Teacher." He was given a medal for this award. However, when he actually wore the award to church the next Sunday, the award was taken away from him.

Such is the difficulty of claiming to be humble. Such is the difficulty of writing a book on humility.

C. J. Mahaney wrote a book entitled, "Humility." Mark Dever endorsed the book with these words: "C. J. Mahaney is not humble. At least, that's what he'll tell you. And that's one reason he's so well qualified to write this book."

David's claim is the opposite. He claims that he is humble.

Psalm 131:1
O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;
Nor do I involve myself in great matters,
Or in things too difficult for me.

He claims that his heart is a humble heart. He claims that his eyes are lowly eyes. He claims that his work is simple, God-dependent work.

Notice that this is a prayer. David's intent isn't to broadcast to the world how humble he was. Nor was he trying to prove a point to anyone. Rather, he was praying to the LORD. He was praying to the one who knows everyone's heart. Surely God knew of how true this statement was. And it was true.

We see this in David's life. It was the LORD who put David in power. David never sought his position as king over Israel. When Samuel came to the house of Jesse to anoint the next king, you don't find David jumping up and down, seeking to be chosen. It was his brothers who were first tested. After going through seven of Jesse's sons, Samuel inquired if there were more children. Jesse said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep" (1 Sam. 16:11). After David was fetched from the field, Samuel "took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers" (1 Sam. 16:13).

But, David didn't immediately seek to take the throne from Saul. He waited, and waited, and waited. During that time, he served Saul faithfully, even though Saul tried to kill him with a spear on numerous occasions (2 Sam. 18:11; 19:10). On two different occasions, Saul and his men went out to kill David in the wilderness (2 Sam. 24, 26). On both of these occasions, David had opportunity to put Saul to death, but refused both times. Instead, he trusted that the LORD would strike Saul down (1 Sam. 26:10). He said, "The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed" (1 Sam. 26:11).

Eventually, the LORD did strike him down. And David became king, some 10 to 15 years after he was anointed by Samuel to be king. David's patient wait demonstrated his humility. He wasn't going to exalt himself. Rather, David waited for the LORD to exalt him. As James 4:10 says, "Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." And to the humble, it doesn't matter how long it will take.

It's possible that David wrote these words during these early years in a time of waiting, in a time when all didn't quite seem right. He had been anointed king, but hadn't seen that come to pass. He had humbled himself, but hadn't known the exalting work of God in his life. But, he expresses his trust in the LORD to do what is right.

But, I do believe that these words fit his later years as well. Perhaps David wrote these words in a time of reflection or in a time when he was summing up his life. He had made some mistakes. He had sinned. He had seen his own pride rear its ugly head. But, life's circumstances had humbled him. And now, David rests completely in God's grace toward him.

I know that this true of my life. Now, I don't think that I'm the poster child for humility. I see great pride in my heart. Yet, there have been circumstances in my life that have humbled me. The older I get, the more and more I see the many things that I simply can't do on my own.

When you are young, you are ambitious. You think that you can conquer the world! Yet, as you age, you see your own frailty and your own weaknesses and your own sin and limitations. It has a way of humbling you.

Nothing else has been used of the LORD to humble me than the planting of this church. The first church Yvonne and I were involved in planting boomed! We grew very quickly. I assumed that Rock Valley Bible Church would boom in the same way. All that I had to do was teach the Bible with clarity, passion, in accordance with the truth, and all would go well. People would follow my great preaching and my great leadership abilities.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I have seen up front how difficult leadership is. I have seen up front how my pride has crushed others. I have seen up front how limited are my gifts. Sure, we have grown, but our growth has been much slower than I anticipated.

I do believe that I'm a different man today that I was 10 years ago, when we are in the early years of this church. I know now that any work that God does through me in this church is all because of His grace. I so want David's words here in Psalm 131 to be my heart. I want these words to be our heart as a church.

Psalm 131:1

O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;
Nor do I involve myself in great matters,
Or in things too difficult for me.

And as God has done His work in my life, he has helped draw me closer to these things. I have a long way to go, but David, seemingly, has arrived.

I believe that David arrived only because of God's continued working in his life to bring him to a point of humility. As his life was reaching its final days, his heart was increasingly conformed to trust in the LORD for all things.

David's rule and reign were not without his proud moments. Nor is it that he only attempted the easy, simple work. There were times in his life when he was proud. But every time, David's heart eventually turned soft. And the turning soft is the sign of humility. And, it very well may be that David's circumstances brought him to a place of humility. Or, may I say it this way, God used David's pride and the pain it caused as an opportunity to learn humility.

Do you remember when David wanted to build a house for God? He came to Nathan the prophet and said, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains" (2 Sam. 7:2). David's intent was to build a house for the LORD.

Now, certainly, there were some good intentions there. Solomon, on the day that the temple was dedicated, commended David, his father, for having such a thought, quoting the LORD, who said, "you did well that it was in your heart" (1 Kings 8:18). And yet, it was very presumptuous. God had never approached David, expressing a problem that the ark dwells within curtains. God has never approached David, explaining the need for a permanent structure to house the ark. It was all David's idea. I believe that there was pride in David's heart.

But, God said, "No." He then reminded David of all that He had done for him: "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone" (2 Samuel 7:8-9). God told David of the great things that He would do for the LORD. "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). But, he wasn't going to build a house for the LORD. "Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?" (2 Samuel 7:5).

To these things, David responded in much the same spirit as Psalm 131. He responded in humility and in submission.

2 Samuel 7:18, 20, 29

Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? ... What more can David say to You?
For You know Your servant, O Lord GOD! ... For You, O Lord GOD, have spoken; and with Your blessing may the house of
Your servant be blessed forever.

Such are the words of a man learning humility. Do you remember when David sinned with Bathsheba? These were times filled with pride.

In his pride, he thought that he could have any woman that he wanted. In his pride, he thought that he could command the murder of a faithful soldier and get away with it. In his pride, he kept silent about his sins (2 Sam. 11).

And yet, the LORD was faithful to show him the error of his way. God brought Nathan, the prophet to show him his sin (2 Sam. 12). And David humbled himself and confessed his sin to the LORD, and pleaded that the LORD would forgive him. He prayed, ...

2 Samuel 51:1-3

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.

2 Samuel 51:7-10

Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

David responded with humility. And when His son, Absalom, took over the throne by deceit, David quietly left the city, walking out barefoot with his head covered (2 Sam. 15:30). And on his way out, a wicked man named Shimei, who threw stones at David and cursed him saying, "Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow!" (2 Sam. 16:7). When David's faithful companion Abishai heard this, he was irate. He said to David, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head" (2 Sam. 16:9).

But David said, "Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him. Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day." (2 Sam. 16:11,12).

David's sin had crushed him. The mere throwing stones and cursing words were unable to crush him any lower. David trusted in the LORD to deal appropriately in everything surrounding the coup of Absalom and the cursing of Shimei. Eventually the LORD did restore his throne.

"Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:10).

But, that wasn't the end of David's prideful days. Do you remember what David did near the end of his reign? He said to Joab the commander of the army, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people" (2 Sam. 24:2). Initially, Joab resisted -- He knew that it was wrong. But David's forceful insistence won the day, and the people were numbered.

Soon afterward, "David's heart troubled him" (2 Samuel 24:10). So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly" (2 Samuel 24:10).

Again, we see David's humility on display. Though he sinned, he repented and sought the grace of the LORD.

Is this not what humility is? It's not perfection. It's owning up to your sin and shortcomings. It's not lifting yourself up above others. We know that pride comes before the fall. The fall often comes before humility. Life's circumstances often humble us.

Such was king David. You look over his life and you see his reign as that of a humble leader. Peter exhorted the elders of the church, "[not to lord] it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). In great measure, this was the pattern of David's life.

But, David's life was only a hint of the greater David, the Lord, Jesus Christ -- the perfectly humble one. When Jesus spoke about His own life, he said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). If you knew the full majesty of Jesus, you would realize what a humble statement this was. Paul explains in Philippians 2:5-8, ...

Philippians 2:5-8

... Christ Jesus, ... existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus went from the Godhead to humanity. He went from glory to shame. He went from comfort to agony. He went from receiving worship to receiving insults. He went from ruling to being trampled upon. He went from royalty to servanthood.

This is a fruit of humility. It allows other to think less highly of you than you actually are. Jesus was the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity. He had enjoyed glory with the Father. And yet, He was willing to let others despise Him and mock Him and crucify Him, knowing that someday God would set the tables straight. "Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you" (James 4:10).

Indeed, this is exactly what happened in the life of Jesus. But, notice, Jesus was never exalted here in this life. He was exalted in heaven. Continuing on in Philippians 2, we read, ...

Philippians 2:9-11

[Because Jesus willingly humbled Himself] ... God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Forever, Jesus will be worshiped as the slain lamb, who, "purchased for God with [His] blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9). Humility brought Jesus low. Humility endured the shame of the world.

Pride is the opposite. Pride wants others to think highly of you. It wants others to think highly of you now. It wants the glory of the world.

Such a perspective will lead to ruin. This is what Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling."

This is the promise of God. 1 Peter 5:5 says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." All who are proud will face the resistance of God. "The LORD will tear down the house of the proud" (Proverbs 15:25).

Humility, on the other hand, will receive the blessing of God. Humble people will receive the grace of God. Humility is the path to the kingdom of God. What does God call us to do? He calls us to repent. He calls us to confess our sins. He calls us to call upon the Lord, in admission that we can't do it ourselves.

And to those people, God will have favor. Isaiah 66:2 says, "To this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my word." God will look with favor to the humble; those who are broken in their spirit because of their sin; those who take His word and read it and tremble at the truths it holds.

This is the message of verse 2.

Psalm 131:2
Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;
Like a weaned child rests against his mother,
My soul is like a weaned child within me.

Here, David pictures himself as one who has found his quiet contentment in the LORD. He has stilled his soul. He has shut his mouth. He has placed himself in the care of God. And David is good with that.

Steve Lawson says it this way, "He is not giving God the solution to his problems but is waiting for him to speak." [\[1\]](#) The hymn-writer says it this way, ...

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change, He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

This is what David's heart is at this moment. He is like a weaned child. That is, like a young child, resting upon his mother. He is safe. He is secure. He is satisfied. He doesn't need his mother's milk, but, he relishes in his mother's care. This is where David's humble heart has led him -- to trust in the LORD's working.

I love how David Powlison describes David at this moment.

This person is quiet on the inside because he has learned the only true and lasting composure. He shared the details of what the peace that passes understanding is like (Phil. 4:7).

Amazingly, this man isn't noisy inside. He isn't busy-busy-busy. Not obsessed. Not on edge. The to-do list and pressures to achieve don't consume him. Ambition doesn't churn inside. Failure and despair don't haunt him. Anxiety isn't spinning him into free fall. He isn't preoccupied with thinking up the next thing he wants to say. Regrets don't corrode his inner experience. Irritation and dissatisfaction don't devour him. He's not stumbling through the mine field of blind longings and fears.

He's quiet. [\[2\]](#)

Does today find you like a child in God's lap? Are you humbly trusting in the LORD for all things in your life? Or, are you running ragged? Maybe your life feels more like the anti-Psalm of Psalm 131 that David Powlison wrote, ...

Self,
My heart is proud
and my eyes are haughty
and I chase after things too great and too difficult for me.

So of course I'm noisy and restless inside; it comes naturally,
like a hungry infant fussing on his mother's lap,
like a hungry infant, I'm restless with my demands and worries.

I scatter my hopes onto anything and everybody all the time. [\[3\]](#)

God calls us to a quiet rest in him, which is the fruit of humility in our lives. And maybe, just maybe, all the frantic hustle and bustle of our lives has its root in our own pride. We want to do everything. We want the approval of others. We want to be seen as those who achieve.

Do you know what? We just can't do everything. We have some limits. God calls us to rest in Him. God calls us to be like contented children, resting in their mother's arms.

Do you remember when Jesus was asked, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1). Do you remember what Jesus did?

Matthew 18:2-4

And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:2-4)

This is the same message of Psalm 131. David said to the LORD, "Lord, I have reached a point where I'm not seeking after my own glory. I'm not trying to over-extend myself to do what I can't really do anyway. I'm like a little child resting upon his mother. I'm resting in you. My soul is resting in you; and I'm content."

And in verse 3, he calls us all to join him. He writes, ...

Psalm 131:3

O Israel, hope in the LORD

From this time forth and forever.

This leads us to my second point (and I will be quick). We have seen Humility in verses 1 and 2. And now we see, ...

2. Hope (verse 3)

"Hope in the LORD."

And this isn't some one-time cure, which was true in David's day, but not in ours. He called Israel to "Hope in the LORD, from this time forth and forever."

What was true in David's day was true in the days of Jeremiah and was true in the days of Nehemiah and was true in the days of Jesus and was true in the days of Augustine and was true in the days of the Reformation and was true in the 1700's and in the 1800's and in the 1900's and is still true today. In all of our sin and our struggles and our failures and our pride and our worry we are called to hope in the LORD.

This was the message of Psalm 130: Hope in the LORD. "O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption" (Psalm 130:7). Do you want a quiet and humble soul? Then hope in the LORD. Trust in Him. Be humble. Hope.

Psalm 62:5-8

My soul, wait in silence for God only,

For my hope is from Him.

He only is my rock and my salvation,

My stronghold; I shall not be shaken.

On God my salvation and my glory rest;

The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God.

Trust in Him at all times, O people;

Pour out your heart before Him;

God is a refuge for us. Selah.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on July 14, 2013 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Holman Old Testament Commentary, volume 12, p. 301

[2] David Powlison, The Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume 18, Number 3, Spring 2000, "Peace, be still": Learning Psalm 131 by Heart," p. 2

[3] *Ibid.* pp. 3-4