

The Taylor's were proud of their family tradition. Their ancestors had travelled to America with the Pilgrims on the Mayflower. Their ancestors included Congressmen, successful entrepreneurs, famous athletes and even some TV stars. They decided to research and write a family history, something for their children and grandchildren. They found a genealogist and writer to help them. But they ran into a problem – how to handle Great Uncle Jefferson Taylor who was executed in the electric chair.

The genealogist said that she could handle the story tactfully. When the book appeared the section about Uncle Jefferson read: *“Great Uncle Jefferson Taylor occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution, he was attached to his position by the strongest of ties, and his death came as a great shock.”*

So how was your Thanksgiving? Were you with some unforgettable relatives? Would you like to re-write your family history? While that's not possible, what you can do is **Rewrite Your Thanksgiving Story**.

Have you ever thought about this? The art of giving thanks is one thing that separates man from animals. To receive a gift and say, “Thank you,” is one of the noblest things a person can do. There's nothing small or trivial about it. To say “Thank you” is to acknowledge that we've been given something we did not earn and do not deserve.

Happy is the one who understands that all of life is a gift of God and that life itself is the ultimate gift. It's why the Bible says, *“In everything give thanks.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) When we can't do anything else, we can always be grateful. As someone has said, *“If you can't be thankful for what you have received, be thankful for what you have escaped.”*

Today as we tie up the Thanksgiving weekend we're taking a break from our series in 2 Thessalonians and looking back to the hymnal of the Jewish people, the book of Psalms. Please turn to Psalm 131 (p. 519).

Psalm 131 is a psalm of triumph, but God's triumph looks very different than the world's triumph. Instead of talking about power or wealth or fame, Psalm 131 is all about humility and contentment. It's known as a Psalm of Ascent yet it teaches us that the way up is actually down. Psalm 131 might seem like a step down, yet it's truly a step upward to God. As James 4:10 says: *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.”*

This is a psalm of David. There are four psalms of David in the Psalms of Ascent, and this is the third of the four. (Psalms 122, 124, 131, 133) David is a good example of someone who learned the truths of this psalm. When David was hunted like an animal by King Saul, he refused to take matters into his own hands. He trusted God to make him king when the time was right. He's an example of someone who learned the power of humility and contentment.

As you know, King David was a poet and a musician—“The Sweet Singer of Israel.” If you read through the Psalms, you'll notice nearly half were written by David. Psalm 131 is also one of the Pilgrim Psalms. That means it was part of a group of Psalms which were sung as the Hebrew pilgrims made their way up the mountains toward the city of Jerusalem for one of the annual festivals. Fifteen of these Psalms are grouped together—numbers 120-134. All except one are fairly short, exactly the kind of songs you'd expect a group of travelers to sing as they traveled along. The Pilgrim Psalms are like the choruses we sing in church from time to time. Their purpose is the same—to prepare the heart for worship.

Maybe you've never really noticed Psalm 131 before. It only has three verses. You could easily overlook it. But that would be a mistake because this little hymn by David is real jewel.

Charles Spurgeon (**picture**) said that this Psalm is *“one of the shortest to read, but one of the longest to learn.”* Each of these three verses reveal an important quality for us to consider this Thanksgiving season.

1. Practice humility. The Psalm begins with these words, *“O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high.”* Not many of us would begin a prayer this way. It sounds strange to us, as if perhaps David was bragging about his humility.

It's always dicey to talk about humility. How do you know when you're truly humble? Come to think of it, if you're truly humble, will you even know it? It's been said that humility is the virtue which, when you think you have it, you've lost it.

It's helpful to know that the word for “*proud*” is actually the Hebrew word for “*high*.” In the Old Testament, it was used for high trees and high mountains. It's used to describe King Saul who stood higher and taller than anyone else in Israel. It was used of God who was said to be “*on high*” and Whose thoughts are higher than the thoughts of human beings. We use the word in the same way when we say, “Get off your high horse.”

We live in a culture that puts little low value on humility. It goes back before Muhammad Ali (**picture**) in 1965 and his poem, *“I am the greatest.”*

They don't give trophies for humility. From the moment we enter the world we're urged to get ahead, climb the ladder, to look out for number one, win through intimidation, prove our success by the car we drive, the home we buy, the

clothes we wear, and the friends we have. Our culture is very status-conscious. While it may be true that the meek will inherit the earth, it doesn't seem to be happening around here.

We all feel the pinch. Maybe you've felt the gift giving pressure of Christmas. Some hate Christmas because giving gifts has become a game where your love is measured by how much you spend. It's a sad commentary on the way we live.

David describes humility in terms of how he looked at his own limitations. *"I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me."* The Living Bible simply says, *"I don't pretend to be a 'know it all'."* David is saying, "There are many things in the universe that are far beyond my meager ability to understand. I don't worry about those things and I don't try to figure them out."

Humility in this context simply means that you're not on top of the world, you don't have all the answers, you know your limits. That last one is a hard one for some—the idea that you have limits. It's sort of a trendy, New Age-type idea to talk about unlimited potential and the untapped resources within. The truth is that our potential is very limited and the only untapped resources are the ones we discover when we come to the end and admit that we are limited but God is not.

Pride is the main obstacle between you and God. It's what caused Satan's fall. Pride caused Adam and Eve to listen to Satan in the Garden. Do you want to practice humility? It starts with your heart. Do not be proud in your heart.

When Dr. John Hannah (**picture**), professor of historical theology at Dallas Seminary was asked advice by a young man on what he should do with his life. The young man explained that he felt he had so many possibilities open to him that he couldn't decide which way to go.

Dr. Hannah replied, "That's the curse of having too many options. The man who thinks there are 15 things he could do with his life will probably do none of them very well. But the man who has only one option throws himself into it because that's the only choice he has." Dr. Hannah went on to say that for most of his life his options had been limited and it was why he's a happy man. I think David would agree. Happy is the one who knows his/her limits and within those limits does the very best he/she can.

2. Learn simplicity. Verse 2 brings before us a second quality that's very useful if we want to hang on to Thanksgiving. It's the quality of simplicity. *"But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me."*

The picture is one a mother can fully understand. A child is born and for a long time he looks to his mother's breast as the source of his nourishment. Breakfast, lunch and supper all come from the same place.

When he's hungry, he cries and Mom knows exactly what to do. Her milk satisfies him and back to sleep he goes. But the day comes when he has to learn how to take a bottle. It's not a happy day. He cries, big tears roll down his cheeks. His arms reach out but his mother pushes them away. He fights, he pouts, he screams, all to no avail.

What's happened to Mom? She who used to be his friend has now become his enemy. And Mom will often cry too because from now on things will be different. She will feed him but never again in the same way.

When the bottle is over, when the tears have stopped, when he learns to eat with his brothers and sisters, then the child comes, lays his head on his mother's breast, not in order to be fed, but just because he loves her. He comes because he wants to be near her.

We all know that unless a mother weans her child, he'll never grow up. He'll be a baby all of his life. Though it may seem hard, though the child misunderstands, if a mother truly loves her child, she will not stop until the job is fully done. When the job is finally done, the child no longer begs for that which it once found indispensable. Once he could not live without his mother's milk; now he no longer needs it.

To be weaned is to have something removed from your life which you thought you couldn't live without. David is saying, *"I've come to the place where the things I thought I had to have, I don't need anymore. Now my soul is quiet and content."*

Most of us live by the opposite principle. We determine our level of contentment on the basis of how many of our needs are met. Unfortunately, it's impossible to reach a place where all our needs are constantly met. By that standard, it's nearly impossible to ever be content. If contentment is measured by how much you possess, who can ever say, "I have enough."

Maybe you've heard of the billionaire who was asked when he was going to stop working. "When I make enough money," was his reply. "How much money is enough?" He answered, "Just one more dollar."

That's the way most evaluate contentment. In our hearts we think, "I would be happy if only I had a new car or a new job or new clothes or a new husband or a new wife." Since life is hardly ever that simple, we stay frustrated when we ought to be happy.

No wonder Thanksgiving whizzes by. No wonder Christmas can be a nightmare. No wonder we're never satisfied. Instead of being *weaned* from the world, we're *wedded* to it. Or maybe I should say, *welded* to it. Our soul is anything but quiet, our countenance anything but peaceful.

Jesus said, "*Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 18:3) What was He talking about? It's that faith is childlike in its simplicity.

Children learning to play baseball are often afraid of the ball when it's their turn at bat. Their instinct is to duck or step out of the path of the ball. Their perception of the situation is that the ball is going to hit them. They have to trust their coach when he tells them the ball isn't going to hit them. They have to let go of their own assessment of the situation and trust, having the wisdom to stand where the coach tells them too so they can swing the bat properly and hit the ball. Like a child has to trust the coach and avoid a natural reaction to what's going on, we have to trust God with every situation in our lives and ask Him the proper way to respond.

It's what Jesus was talking about when he said, "*Unless you become like a little child.*" It's a faith that's childlike in its simplicity.

There's something our children and grandchildren can teach us about being grateful. They can teach us what it means to have a simple and uncomplicated trust in God.

How does God go about weaning us from our dependence on the things of the world? I ran across a three-part answer from a Bible commentator writing over a century ago. *First*, God makes the things of the world bitter to us. *Second*, God removes one by one the things on which we depend. *Third*, God gives us something better. In the end, we find that we no longer need the things we used to think that we couldn't do without. And our walk with the Lord is stronger than ever before.

At the end of a bloody battle during the Civil War, someone found the following prayer folded in the pocket of dead Confederate soldier:

*I asked God for strength, that I might achieve;
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things;
I was given infirmity, then I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy;
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men;
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life;
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among men, most richly blessed.*

It's a great advance in spiritual understanding to be able to say, "*I got nothing I asked for, but everything I hoped for.*" It's what simplicity is all about.

3. Live in hope. There's one more principle to be added to humility and simplicity. It is the principle of **living in hope**. Verse 3, "*O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.*"

The word "hope" in Hebrew means first to wait, then to wait expectantly. The concept is close to our English word "confidence." An expanded definition would be "to wait on something because you know the thing you are waiting for will happen because the person you are waiting on is trustworthy."

David says, "You have a choice to make. Either you choose to live like everyone else or you choose to wait on the Lord." Once a child is weaned, the apron strings have been cut. The child comes to rest on his mother's lap not because he wants something but because he wants to be near his Mom.

In the same way, God weans us from our dependence on the things of this world so that we will not be bribed into trusting Him. What credit is it if you trust God because you have a mate, a house, a job, a happy home, a secure future, and good health? What will you do when you lose your mate, your job, your home, your family, your security, your reputation, your connections, and your health? When life tumbles in, what then?

That's what it means to put your hope in God. It's choosing to put your confidence in God alone. It's believing He has answers to questions you can barely understand. It's coming to the place where you don't measure your spirituality by your prosperity. It's finding rest in your soul because you discover that the things you used to crave aren't as important anymore.

Several years ago a lady named Lois Kaufman wrote a letter after the death of her husband and her two subsequent tumor operations. The letter was written to Jesus.

Dear Jesus,

I've written a lot of "Thank You's" lately, but this is my first one to You. Until now I didn't appreciate your gifts to me these past several months.

Thank you for taking Don home to be with You. Now I'll never be concerned with what the future holds for him. His days are guaranteed. Thank You for giving him such a wonderful Christmas. Thank You for making his birthday last Sunday his best ever.

Thank You for putting me in the hospital three weeks after he died and showing me the way You could use his death in my life. I wasn't always sure how to approach others with the Gospel. But now You have given me so many openings, I can hardly handle them all.

Thank You for my most recent surgery and for the lessons it taught me. Especially for showing me how much I needed You. Thanks for letting me see what it is like to face surgery and suffering without You as I watched the difference in the lives of my roommates.

Thank You for the lessons Becky and Lori (her daughters) have learned from this. I could never have taught them the way You did. That's because of the great Teacher you are. I can't wait to see what You give them on their heavenly report cards.

You know, Jesus, I wouldn't have planned my life this way. In fact, I would have planned it just the opposite. I would have sought to avoid death's knock. I would have ducked out on the surgeries and tried to pretend that Christians were kept well by you all the time. But I would have missed out on so much.

The kids are sorry they couldn't be with their daddy on Father's Day, but we were glad he could be with both his earthly and Heavenly Father this year.

Oh, I could go on with this letter, but I could never cover everything I have to thank You for. So I'll send more, but for now please accept this as a beginning.

Gratefully yours,

Lois

When you hear something like that, you can only conclude one of two things: Either that woman has lost her mind or she's chosen to put her confidence in God alone. It's the same choice that we all face.

Conclusion: There's a lot to ponder in these three verses. Now you know why Spurgeon said this Psalm is one of the shortest to read, but one of the longest to learn. **Humility, Simplicity, Hope.** We need those three qualities every day of the year, not only just at Thanksgiving.

It's traditional in Thanksgiving sermons to ask people to make a list of their blessings. I'm going to ask you to make a list this week but not the traditional one. When we make a list of our blessings, we normally begin and end with our material blessings. That's okay but there's so much more.

So, in the spirit of Psalm 131, I'm going to ask you to sit down sometime this coming week and make a list—a very personal, private list—of the things from which you've been weaned during the past year. Make a list of the things which through suffering and hardship God has taken away from you in the past twelve months. And now your faith is stronger and deeper. Now your walk with God means more than it ever did before.

I want you to list those things you used to think you couldn't live without but now you know you can. It could be a dream you had for your life that consumed all your energy but God has taken it from you and you've found, "Yes, I can live without that." It may be a relationship, an idea, something you owned, a personal possession, a promotion or a new job you just had to have, or a new account you set all your hopes on.

It may be a person on whom you'd built your life, and now that person is gone from your life. It was difficult to let go, but you did, and now you're stronger. It may be something you fought for, strived for, lived for, worked for, and when you got it, you found it wasn't as important as you thought.

On your list may be things which are good and proper in themselves. Most of the things on your list won't be bad or evil or sinful. It's anything that has happened in your life in the last year about which you can say, "God has shown me that I don't have to have that in order to be happy."

As the old song says, *“Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.”* The surprise isn’t just in the material blessings of the last year. It’s also in the times of pain and suffering which seemed to be for no good purpose but turned out to be blessings in disguise. That too is the goodness and grace of God.

As believers, we ought to be the most thankful people on the face of the earth. May our days be marked with humility, simplicity, and hope.

Let’s choose to be thankful not only for the things we have but also for the things we no longer have to have. And may we, as the people of God, hope in the Lord both now and forevermore.