

From Protest to Peace

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[0 : 00] I'm very grateful to Dr. Don Coleman for the invitation to share this morning.

! And what a blessing. As I was thinking about it, what I would share. I thought about the Highland Park family and how involved many of us are in missions work around the world. I was thinking about just the the voice of the martyrs and the Highland Park kind of connections. Because this time last week I was in Nepal with a brother and I won't disclose his name for security reasons but with one of our family members here at Highland Park. And then I started thinking about Pat Berry and her work in our international accounting department. And I started thinking about Mershandria who's not with us this morning but she's begun working now as the executive assistant in the communications department. And of course Tom providing governance and oversight as a member of the board of directors. And just the way that the Lord's kind of knit the two families together. It's very exciting and I'm grateful for that. So it's wonderful to be able to share with you this morning. I was just just arrived early yesterday morning from Nepal. So I might be a little bit out of sorts. But that might be an advantage for you because if I get tired I'll just kind of wind things down. Because I know we normally go to 12 30. Is that right?

Okay I'll see if I can shorten it a little bit. But having just come back from Nepal I want to bring you greetings from your sisters and your brothers in Nepal. That's what I do when I talk with them. When I arrived we just arrived in Pokera last week and we'd only been on the ground literally about half an hour. And we arrived at the hotel ran into our colleagues there and and somehow there was a miscommunication because I learned that I was going to be preaching at a church at one o'clock. And so we had a couple hours I thought that's good. Maybe I could take a shower and freshen up after this you know 38 hour journey to get here. And and then I was in my room kind of settling in. In fact we didn't even have all the hotel rooms. There's just a few of us where we're staying in one room. And all of a sudden there's a knock on the door. And this guy comes in with a frantic look on his face. And he says, hey we need to go right now. The church is waiting right now. And I was I was like I thought it was at one o'clock. No no no 11 o'clock. Oh okay. So I said well at least let me go brush my teeth. And and we went over to church. And the first thing I told them was I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in the United States of America. Because that's one of the greatest parts of my job is bringing together the body of Christ. And being able to open all of our eyes up to the fact that we're not the only place that God is at work. In fact arguably he's at work in more remarkable ways in other parts of the world. Because we see just an explosive growth and revival happening in some parts of the world. So it is an honor to be able to say to you I bring you greetings from brothers and sisters in Nepal. Pretty soon we're gonna have a chance. I forgot to mention Anthony too. We're gonna have a chance to go over to Asia in just a couple weeks and we'll share that same message with those brothers and sisters there. You know it really is remarkable that we're all one family. If you think about it. One giant family with a lot of diversity. A lot of different backgrounds and experiences. All coming together to worship the same God. And he's big enough to accept that worship.

And that's what I want to remind us of today. That no matter where you're at. No matter what you're struggling with. God is big enough to handle it. To give you what you need. To accomplish his will.

[3 : 56] And if you think about it. Even right now as our pastor Don is sleeping in Asia. He's teaching the word of God. He's sharing principles to pastors. Who every week. As Tom so eloquently pointed out. Every week they're proclaiming the word of God. Isn't that remarkable to think about?

Every time zone around the world. Every country of the world. Has people who are gathering. To learn from this. The very word. Of God. And we all have familiar stories. In fact. One of the most famous stories in the Bible is the story of David and Goliath. People love talking about David and

Goliath.

You know the underdog wins. In that story. And really of course it's about God winning. But a few years ago there was a magazine that did this little collection of funny things that kids say. Have you ever noticed your kids say funny things? I mean I think with our five children there's been so many times we wish we had the video camera on when they said something crazy. And just hilarious. Well they wrote down a few of the misconceptions that kids have about the Bible. And so I thought I'd share those with you this morning as we start. One was that Noah's wife was called Joan of Arc. And another one was that Samson was a strong man who killed a bunch of people with an axe. And that axe was called the axe of the apostles. Moses went up on Mount Sinai to get the ten amendments. But unfortunately he died before he made it to Canada. And Solomon, one of David's sons, you know we're going to focus on David, but Solomon had 300 wives and 700 porcupines. But this is my favorite one because according to the kids, God says that a Christian should only have one wife. And that is called monotony.

Not really. Not really guys. Just say it. Not in my case at least. I could speak from personal testimony. 20 years of marriage and not monotonous at all. Lots of other things but not monotonous for sure. But the truth is David did write a psalm that shows this remarkable transformation. And I want to talk about it. Psalm 13. So if you have your Bible, turn over to Psalm 13 with me. And this is a journal of a man's transformation. I mean you see in these six verses, you see a man changed from the inside out.

[6 : 29] I mean a change from protest to peace. And we're going to see this morning that when we trust in God, we can find true peace. In fact, that's the only place that we can find it. When we begin to minimize our focus on ourselves and to maximize our focus on him. When we begin to look to him for all of our solutions, for all of our hope, that's when we find true peace. Now I wanted to ask you this morning, have you ever been pursued? And you don't have to raise your hand if you've ever been pursued. But you know that if you're being chased, you have this feeling of just being overwhelmed, of being stressed out. And we're not happy when we're the object of a pursuit of some kind. In fact, our usual response, our typical response is to protest. And so what I called the talk this morning was from protest to peace. Because in life we get pursued by different trials, don't we? Or different people, circumstances. I've been on both ends of a pursuit. I won't tell you about the other end. But when I was in college, I used to catch shoplifters. And so I was often the one running down the street chasing someone who had stolen something from the department store. And I know Tom's been in many of these kind of pursuits. It's very interesting how your focus changes when you're pursuing something.

Because it's sort of a tunnel vision. Your eye is on the prize. There's no distraction. You're just focused. In fact, I remember one story. This guy came in. His name was Brian. And he came in. And by the way, if you're ever going to shoplift, let me give you a tip. Don't look up at the camera right when you walk in the store. Because all those guys like me who are sitting in the camera room watching the cameras notice that. And so this guy came in the store and he looked right up at the camera. And we're like, this guy's up to no good. So we kind of strategically positioned ourselves to watch him. And sure enough, he stole a couple pairs of jeans. He did what we call a grab and run. He just grabbed him and ran. And so I began to chase him through the parking lot. And I remember it was just getting, it was dusk. And I was literally like dodging cars and just locked on on this man trying to apprehend him. And things were falling off. I remember my radio falling off. But I didn't care. I just kept going. You know, finally I caught up to him and grabbed him. And I had him on the ground. I was sitting on top of him. And then I realized that my handcuffs had fallen off as well in the pursuit. And thankfully someone else showed up that had some handcuffs and we were able to apprehend him. But I thought about that pursuit. How do you think Brian felt when he was being pursued? I mean, was he just kind of lollygagging along? No, no. He was as focused on getting away as I was focused on catching up to him. And he just, he wasn't able to think clearly. In fact, he didn't know the area that we were in as well as I knew it. And so he found himself kind of trapped in a corner. And it's just easy for that to happen. When we're being pursued, we're just not all there. And I know that right now in this place, there may be circumstances that are so overwhelming, you can't even think straight. In fact, even during this message, you might be so distracted by that that you can't even listen. I mean, I've been there before where I'm in church and I'm just in a constant state of anxiety. I can't even begin to focus on the message or the Word of God. You know, you feel that difficulty breathing sometimes, the tightness in your chest, just the overwhelming sense of

anxiety. It happens. Where do we turn? Where do we turn when that happens? I've been working with trauma for some time, and I could tell you more about that if you're interested. But before I came to the Voice of the Martyrs, I was on the faculty at the Air Force Chaplain Corps College teaching chaplains crisis and trauma, how to cope with trauma. And one of the things that that we talked about was the way that we get tunnel vision in the midst of trauma.

And when something horrible happens, you know, people are in shock. You show up and people aren't able to really focus on what really matters. They're focused on their immediate crisis that's right in front of them. Trauma is a part of life. And it may be even more true in other countries where it's tough to be a Christian. Think about that, the trauma that a believer feels when they're being pursued. They're being chased down, and they can't even really pause to reflect or to catch their breath.

[11:00] Instead, there's that constant pressure, that sort of burden that we carry when we're being pursued. Just earlier this year, before we look at Psalm 13, I wanted to share a little bit about Nigeria.

Kimberly and I were over there earlier this year, and we met with victims of all kinds. We met with widows who live in the same village where their husband's killer lives. And so their husband was a pastor, was killed by Boko Haram or some extreme Muslim group, and they live in the village. They see them, the people that killed their husband.

I mean, imagine that kind of just pressure and struggle and turmoil. I interviewed amputation victims who are learning to forgive even though they have lost a limb due to this kind of violence. And in many of these encounters, you know, this theme of forgiveness surfaces. And that's miraculous. That's all you can say about it. It's miraculous that somebody can forgive.

I met with three girls that had been kidnapped by Boko Haram, and Kimberly interviewed them, and they were forced to marry Muslim men at knife point. Literally forced to marry Muslim men. And one of them complained about it and said, we're only, we're too young, these two sisters. One was 16 and one was 19.

And the Muslim man pointed to an eight-year-old girl and said, she's married. So, how do you respond to that kind of pursuit, that kind of trauma? Are we going to protest? Are we going to say, God, why me? Why is this happening? When we look to God, miraculous things start to happen. And in this one story, I met with a guy who was a victim of a radical amputation of his leg. He was working in a kerosene market. Very interesting story. His mother owned a kiosk that sold kerosene.

[12:54] And so, as he was working in the market, one day, a Muslim man came by, and his mother had always told him, be nice to everyone. Muslims, Christians, it doesn't matter. Be nice, be loving to everyone.

That's what Jesus tells us to do. And so, he was just doing what his mother said, and this Muslim man came in. In this area, they carry things on their head, and they're called hawkers. They were hawking their wares. And so, they came in, and this man had a box, and he set the box down on the ground. He said, boy, watch this box for me. And so, Israel said, okay, I'll watch it. And he said, I'll be back. And as the man walked away, minutes later, the box exploded, and Israel lost his leg above the knee.

You know what Israel said, though? It was interesting, because I asked him about this. I said, well, what's God doing in your life after this? I mean, you're getting this new prosthetic limb, but I know that's been so painful and so hard to work with. And this is what he said. He said, actually, based on Christianity, I can forgive them. He said, it is only because Christ died for everybody. That's the only reason. Just because of Christ, I can forgive.

Isn't that incredible? It's miraculous. So, when we think about our own struggles, where do we go in that time of brokenness? You know, Psalm 34 18 reminds us that God is near to the brokenhearted. He saves those who are crushed in spirit. It's often in this place of darkness, this dark night of the soul. Some theologians have called it this cul-de-sac of pain when you walk in, and you can't seem to get out of it. That's where God meets us. And in this story, in Psalm 13, this is where David is. David is in that place of pain. I can't even imagine what it would have felt like to be in that spot. I mean, David's obviously being pursued as he writes the story here, and we're not sure exactly what was happening, the timing. It's always hard to nail down the exact time, but probably being pursued by Saul at the time. He may have been hiding in the cave of Adullam while the Philistines were teamed up to capture or kill him. Day after day, he's finding himself in this desperate situation. He's tired.

[15 : 15] You know, he's been sleeping on the ground in a cave, probably. He's sore. He's weak. He's emotionally exhausted. I mean, how would you feel if your former boss, the man that he had played the harp for, that he tried to bring solace to, was trying to kill you because he was threatened? And so he's just crying out to God. So look over there at Psalm 13, and what we're going to see, as I mentioned, just in these six verses, is just a transformation where David goes from this time of incredible turmoil to a time of peace. And I want us to see what God is saying to us in our turmoil today.

And I want us to see how he can turn us towards him into a place of peace. Let's look at first at David's protest. David's protest in verses one and two. Listen to this protest. How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? David appears to be at the end of his rope. He's been pursued. He's tired. He's weak. He's experiencing feelings of loneliness and despair. He's depressed. Can you identify with this? I mean, does any of this kind of resonate with you, I think we've all have those moments when we're like, how long, Lord? I don't know how much more I can take. It seems like he's questioning God's presence, even. I mean, have you ever felt like God has forsaken you? Like he's hidden his face from you? If you can answer yes to that, then maybe you can kind of sense where he's at. He's questioning God. His perspective is thwarted. As I said, when we're being pursued, we don't have the right perspective. We think we're alone, but we're really not. We think God has turned his face, but maybe he hasn't. We're looking inward instead of upward, and that's where God wants our focus to be. It's on him looking to heaven, not on everything around us, and certainly not inside ourselves. We're looking upward. That's the path to peace, and instead of trusting God's complete sovereignty and love, David is trying to analyze the situation. He's trying to rack his brain to determine what he should do. You know, have you ever been in a situation where you don't see any way out of it?

And what do we do? We usually, we begin to fret. We cry. We stress ourselves out. We try to solve whatever issue we have, when all we need to do, as the reading that Jonathan selected said in Philippians, is to turn those petitions over to God and to trust in him.

[18 : 40] And in that transaction, there's a resolution that follows. The resolution is, God says, you give me your struggle, give me your anxiety, give me your request, and what will he give? And I'll give you peace that no one else can touch, a peace that passes all human understanding.

I like what someone said about a rocking chair one time. They said a rocking chair is like worry. It'll keep you busy, but it just won't get you anywhere. You'd just be rocking back and forth, and I know you've done that in your head before. I have, where you're just rocking back and forth, thinking about this. It's funny, because a lot of times it's things in the past that you did or didn't do, and you can't do anything about it. I mean, there's no going back and putting those words back in your mouth or whatever it is, but we worry about it. A lot of times it's about the future, and we're not present. Just because we feel forgotten does not mean that we are forgotten, and that's the gift that faith gives us. And David's phrases here reflect how desperate he is. I mean, you can just sense it when you read the text. And we would all admit that life is filled with this kind of pain and protest, and the question is, when we're protesting our situation, where do we turn? Some people turn to a bottle. Some people turn to sex. Some people turn to other vices that can get you in a lot of trouble, whatever it is. But the point is that we try to self-medicate. We try to sort of make ourselves feel better, and it really just compounds the problem, doesn't it? David doesn't numb himself here. Instead, he admits that there's a struggle, and he did know where to turn. In fact, I think that's very profound, is that in these two verses, what you see is he refers to the Lord several times. He's saying,

Lord, in you, I mean, how long will you forget me? How long will you hide your face? You know, how long will my enemy triumph over me? Lord, I know you're there, but I just, I don't know what's going on. It just doesn't seem like you're there. I believe that, but I don't feel it.

I love how Chuck Smidala talked about one time. He said that God can see around the corners, and it just reminds me of a mouse in a maze. You know, they do these laboratory experiments, and you put the mouse in the maze, and you put some cheese over here, and the mouse is trying to get over there, and the guy who's running the experiment, he can see everything going on.

There's no question how to get there, but the poor mouse, they're bumping into walls and going backwards the same way they just came from, and that's what I feel like sometimes. I'm like in the

maze, like, God, could you just show me the way here? Could you just make it, make the walls flat so I can just go straight to the cheese? And that's not the way he works. He wants us to communicate with him, to trust him, and honestly wants us to be spirit-led enough that he shows us the next step.

[21 : 50] He's not going to show you the whole playbook. He'll show you the next play, and then the next one, and it's amazing when that happens. Let me ask you this. Is there someone today, the Lord might lay in your heart, who you know is in this spot of a protest? Maybe they called you last night and said, you're not going to believe what's going on in my life. It's been really hard. What can we do? How can we meet them there and help shift their eyes towards heaven? I think that if we're sensitive to this, God will use us. I really believe that. If we're sensitive and say, Lord, I really want to be an instrument in your hands, in my community, in the people you put in my life, how can I enter into that point and to be able to share a word from you? I'll never forget just practical, talking about practical help. When Kimberly and I were finishing up seminary, I had no idea how we were going to pay. We'd had Brittany. I was working.

Kimberly was working. She had Brittany, and she decided to stop working, which was great, but that led to a lot of less income to work with, and we just didn't know how we were going to make it through the end of seminary. And we just couldn't pay anymore. And it was interesting because I've been there, and I'll never forget just that feeling of just, Lord God, I believe you called us here, but there's just no way.

The numbers aren't adding up. We can't do it. And you know what? It was so cool. We started keeping a journal of ways God provided. And it was almost like when we stopped trying, then he started delivering.

You know? I mean, it was amazing. We'd have people just randomly give us money. I remember one time I picked up. One of my jobs at seminary was picking up chapel speakers and hosting them. And in fact, I got to do that with Tom Eliff. I know a lot of you know Tom Eliff. That was really cool. He took me out to McDonald's, and he said, you can always say, at the time he was the president of the SBC, he said, you can always say the president of the SBC took you out to breakfast at McDonald's. So that was fun.

So I'm going to say that now. But there was another guy I picked up, and it was funny because he's getting out of the car, and I hadn't mentioned a thing the entire time we'd been together. And he just said, you know, the Lord just told me to give you some money. And he just gave me money. You know, and it was just perfect. Just God delivering. But there was one Sunday night we came back from church and walk into our apartment, or walk up the stairs to our apartment there on the seminary campus, and it was literally flowing with bags of diapers and food and all kinds of things. We still, to this day, have no idea how that happened. It was just an anonymous gift. Someone just provided.

[24 : 33] God spoke to them. They listened, and they just provided. And we felt like we were alone, but we weren't alone. God knew. You know what's great about that story is it's all God, because we were being so careful not to talk about it, because we just, you know, you don't want to be like, hey, you know, we don't have any money. Can you give us some diapers? I mean, you don't want to have to say that. And so we were just keeping it quiet, and God provided in incredible ways. You know, another way we serve, we talked about practical service, but we serve spiritually, don't we? Maybe the burden you're going to bear isn't going to cost you a penny. It's just going to cost you an hour, because you're going to go to that friend, and you're going to say, hey, I hear some of what David's talking about here coming out of your lips. You're wondering, how long is this going to go on? And you're feeling afraid and overwhelmed, and let me tell you what God has shown me through these times.

It was interesting to think about this face-to-face engagement. It reminds me of Acts 16, when Paul and Silas were released from prison, and all the other believers were watching and wondering who was going to get arrested next, and what was going on. And it was neat, in verse 40 of Acts 16, this is what you read. Paul and Silas, they went out of the prison, they visited Lydia, and when they saw the brothers, they encouraged them. What a gift. They came out, and they said, let me encourage you. Let me tell you what God's doing. We're going to be all right. To be able to share that gift of encouragement. What a blessing. Well, David needed a guy like that right then, didn't he? He needed an encourager. He's crying out, how long, oh Lord, will you forget me forever? He was so desperate. So where did he turn? Look at verses 3 and 4, and we're going to see David's plea.

We've seen his protest. Now look at his plea in Psalm 13, 3 and 4. He says, look on me and answer, oh Lord, my God.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death. My enemy will say, I have overcome him, and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

He was so anxious. He didn't have anywhere to turn, but to God, which of course was the best place he could have turned. Have you ever felt that way where physiologically you're just so stressed out?

I've been in this spot where it's almost like this fight or flight response. You're feeling this response to some kind of trauma, and do you ever have a deep heart cry, Lord, help me?

[27 : 06] I don't know how verbal you are. I'm a verbal person, so you know, I instinctively kind of just verbalize things, and I've been there so many times. I'm like, Lord, help me. I don't know what's going on here. I don't know what to do, but that's an instinctive response. What I think is interesting about this is that we learn a lot about our character about that response, you know, from that response.

When you look at somebody who instinctively turns to God, that's a good sign. It shows that they have that relationship to God. They know there's something bigger than them that's orchestrating someone who's in their lives, and so that's what David did. It's interesting to note that he has this respect and this awe for God. I mean, he's truly a man after God's own heart. His first response is, my God. And that isn't something that just happens naturally. I mean, he was in this incredibly low spot in his life, but he had cultivated this relationship with God so that when things went badly, as they were at this point, he was able to pray in faith and to look to the source of all hope and all peace. And it's also interesting to note that if David says, if I'm killed, my enemies will rejoice and Jehovah's name will be hurt. It's very interesting. It's not even about him at some level. I mean, he's definitely overwhelmed. He's definitely struggling and he's hurting. But when he reaches out to God, what he appeals to is God's glory, which again shows why he was a man after God's own heart. I mean, I think there's a point of spiritual maturity that we can grow to where it's not even about us anymore. It's about God's glory. And so you say, you begin to think in your prayers, Lord, what, from my perspective, I think what would glorify you most is this, and you pray for that.

Now, of course, you always caveat it. Lord, I don't know. Your will be done, because I could be wrong. But it seems to me this would be the thing that would glorify you the most. You might say something like, if I see a healing in this situation and I've prayed for it, Lord, I will be sure to tell that story.

And again, this isn't like a bargaining with God, like, God, you do this for me, I'll do this for you. It's not like that at all. It's a deep sense of the glory of God and a desire to see that manifest in whatever form it needs to be. The real maturity, of course, comes when you say, Lord, Lord, maybe my death is what will bring you the glory. Maybe my poverty is what will bring you the glory. It's easy when we talk about positive ways to glorify God, but what about in the negative ways?

[29 : 57] There are people who are able to do that, be able to grow to that point where they say, God, no matter what, I want you to be glorified by my life, by my death, by my riches, by my poverty, by my satisfaction, or by my want. I want you to receive the glory. Look what happens in verse 5.

David's peace. David's protested, he's made a plea, and now we see his peace. But I trust in your unfailing love. My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me. Isn't that interesting? What a contrast between the opening part of the psalm and this ending. You're going to sing? You're going to rejoice, David? But you were so overwhelmed. But in that process of coming to God, he's changed. And scripture is so clear on this, that if we turn our worries over to God in prayer, he will lead us to his peace. And then in Philippians 4, it goes on in the end to say that he will not only give us peace, which passes all human understanding, but that he will guard our hearts and our minds through Christ Jesus. So we have a peace that's like rock solid. It's defended by Christ. So the message is really simple for us, isn't it?

That when we're in that spot, we need to take it to the Lord in prayer. That's pretty much the whole point of this message. When you're feeling like protesting, why don't we try instead to pray?

Is that easy to do? No way. It is very difficult. In fact, David, I think, showed us how at the beginning his perspective was all mixed up. But the result, when we bring our anxiety, when we bring our concerns, when we bring our worries to God, the result is peace. You know, David was able to do this because he had eternal perspective. And I cannot overstate the value of eternal perspective.

I mean, eternal perspective means being able to kind of see the big picture and to be able to step back and to see as much as we can from God's perspective. And I'll tell you how eternal perspective is fostered. It's very simple. It's through reading the Word of God and through prayer. Those are the two most important ways we foster eternal perspective. As we begin to read God's Word and we begin to pray and to ask for understanding about God's view on things. It also helps to fellowship among brothers and sisters and to kind of sharpen one another to share those stories. But that eternal perspective enables David to see that God never is going to abandon his people. And David had a promise from God at this point. Do you remember this? David had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king.

[32 : 52] And here's the funny thing. Little did David know that when he was anointed to be king, he was really being anointed, as Gene Edwards talks about in The Tale of Three Kings, he was being anointed into a school of brokenness for the next 10 years.

As soon as Samuel poured that oil on his head, David had entered into 10 years of trauma. Isn't that incredible? But David believed the promise because he had a big enough perspective.

I was just chatting with someone yesterday who's 71 years old, and they said, you know what, I wish this person who quit would have had a longer perspective.

I said, yeah, that's true. In our culture, we don't have that long, eternal perspective. We have the, well, this has been a really hard month, so I'm out of here, you know. We don't have that stick-to-itiveness, that perseverance, when things aren't going the way that we want. Well, David had an eternal perspective, and so he literally is led at the end, I believe, to kind of erupt in praise, to really, to begin to, to, to have a peace in his heart that was so evident that he just couldn't help but praise God because of it.

He couldn't help but just explode and say, I'm going to sing. I don't know about you guys, but when I sing, it's usually because I'm in a good mood. You know, I'm singing because I'm filled with joy. You know, what a reversal. It's almost like David was in the cellar of despair, and God kind of takes him step by step out of that to where he's coming out in the sunlight, and he's singing and glorifying God. He's, he's gone from being isolated to really coming into the presence of God with joy.

[34 : 38] What a change in perspective, and a lot of it had to do with, if you look at his plea to change, he started all about himself, and then he started looking at God. That, that's really the, the pivotal point in the text. He started by recognizing the salvation of the Lord, but then he expands it at the end of verse 6.

He says, because he has dealt bountifully with me. God has been good to me. He began to realize how blessed he was. There's, if you're interested in studying about gratitude, there's been a whole bunch of research lately on, uh, just do a Google search on, on studies on gratitude, and you'll find incredible research on the way being grateful changes everything.

If you're grateful, which is so funny because that's what the Bible's been saying for years, but now it's like science is coming along and saying, people who have an attitude of gratitude just live remarkably better lives because they're filled with the peace, because they're not looking at what they don't have, they're looking at what they have.

And, and it doesn't take long if you start writing down a list of what you have for your perspective to be transformed. God has blessed us. God has dealt bountifully with us.

So it's time for us to leave the warped perspective behind, to, to just forget all that negativity, and to really focus on what God has blessed us with, even about our country. It's so easy to be negative.

[36 : 02] I'm, I'm the chief of negativity about the way our country is operating right now, uh, and where we're headed. But, you know, if you take a step back, there's so much to be grateful for. And that's where I want to focus instead of all the negativity of things I can't really control anyway. I used to have a buddy in seminary. His name was Jim Harbert. And this guy, every time I'd see him, I'd say, hey, Jim, what's going on? How you doing? He said, better than I deserve. And, uh, and then I started hearing Dave Ramsey say that on the radio, better than I deserve. You know, that at first it's like, well, what does that mean? It doesn't mean that, that they're, they're kind of putting themselves down necessarily.

It's just an honest admission of gratitude. God has been good to me. I'm doing better than I deserve. It's a way of proclaiming the goodness of God and how blessed we've been. We are joint heirs with Christ. Let me remind you this morning. We are recipients of an abundant life. We've been given a blessed hope of eternity and an eternity of intimacy and beauty and adventure like we can't even begin to imagine. And we get to do it together. That's something I'm excited about. One

of the things I shared in Nepal just recently was I said to my brothers and sisters there, I said, I can't wait until the day when there's no more language barrier or cultural barrier and we can just hang out in heaven and we can talk about what God's doing in our lives and what he did in our lives. I think it's going to be pretty cool because this week we were honored to be able to do a lot of Bible distributions, which is so exciting. I mean, you have this lady come up there who's so wrinkled. Oh my goodness, you know, living in Nepal is hard. And when you've lived there 70, 80 years, you're definitely minority, number one, to live that long. But number two, this, this one lady I'm thinking of had like tribal earrings in her nose and, and, and tattoos on her face and just incredibly wrinkled. She came up there and it was my privilege to be able to give her a Bible. And that's awesome. I mean, it doesn't get better than that. By the way, that's something we should be grateful for, that we have Bibles, many of them. But this lady just filled with joy. And you know what's neat about it? We, we couldn't say a word to each other really. And even with the translator, it wasn't really clear. But, but one day

I'm going to be pretty excited to be able to sit down with her and say, hey, tell me what happened after you got that Bible. Hopefully she can read that, that we try to make sure that people that get Bibles can read. But even if she can't, maybe someone could read it to her. And so I said, one day I can imagine just sitting down and saying, what did God do in your life after you started really understanding his word and started growing spiritually? It's pretty exciting. I remember as we're thinking about eternal perspective, not long ago, one of our brothers who's here this morning, and I said I wouldn't mention his name, but probably about a year or two ago, we were in Delhi, India. I don't know if you remember this meeting or not. I know you remember the meeting. I don't know if you remember this saying. But we were meeting with the leaders of about 400 missionaries in Delhi. And, and I remember this one guy, and we're talking to him, and I'll never forget his response, because he said that, that he and his wife travel all the time in India. He said they travel like Indians. They go to some remote village. They sleep with the Indians. They, they just do, he was one of those guys who does cultural assessment. And he just going out there, ethnography, just trying to understand what's going on in the, in the culture so that they can reach the culture. So they eat Indian food.

They use Indian facilities, if you can call them that. And, and this is what he said. It's very interesting. He said, we will waste our lives to serve these people. Did you catch that? He said they're going to waste their lives. I mean, what would he mean by that? I think what he meant was that from an earthly perspective, it seems like a waste. Because this guy's super sharp. He could be doing a lot of other stuff. Doing a lot of different kinds of ministry in the U.S. But he's chosen, he and his wife, to waste, quote-unquote, their lives. Because they have an eternal perspective. In our economy, it doesn't make sense. But in that economy, it makes perfect sense. Because this life is not what it's about, is it? It's not about the here and now. It's about the then and there. And I believe that we're all being called to shift from looking inward to looking upward. And that's a message that, that we need to hear again and again and again. Because every week we're getting distracted. People are trying to pull us to, to look inward or to, to look on the earthly plane. And in this story, we're reminded we need to learn to look upward. Really to minimize ourselves and to maximize God. We had a good discussion in Sunday school. Doyleen was talking about worship and, and just how we, we don't have a big enough view of God. We really don't. I like what Paul said. He said the universal response when someone met an angel or a heavenly being was flat on their face in worship. That was, that's where we go. So it's easy for us to just forget that. And forget that, that, you know, God's big. He's got it. He knows what's going on. He knows why he's called us here and to do this thing. We've got to maximize him, minimize ourselves. You know, we want answers. We want to say, well, why can't I know right now why God is doing this in my life? I can know any other answer I want. I can just Google it. So let me try that.

Just Google. Why God are you doing this in my life? It's not going to work because we can't see the end game, but he can. I love the story of Joseph. You remember Joseph? Joseph, the whole story is so tough. You know, he, as a kid, he was distrusted, disliked by his brothers. He sounded like a little bit of a punk to me. I'm just saying, as a kid. He was talking about dreams to his brothers, and I'm sure he took a little delight in telling them that they were all going to bow before him one day. And even though it was true, he was still kind of rude about it. And so what'd they do? They decided they had enough, and they took him out and sold him into slavery. You probably remember the story. At the end of the day, what does it say? Genesis 50, 20. This is one of my favorite verses in the whole Bible because it's all about eternal perspective. Joseph looks at his brothers with

supreme confidence. He says, don't be afraid of me. Am I in the place of God? So what's he doing there? He's saying, it's not about me. It's about God. And by the way, you intended to harm me, but God meant it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Because Joseph would have never ended up where he was without all those trials and all that wondering and all that waiting. But God had put him in a spot. It's a remarkable response. It's one thing to be filled with faith when everything's rosy.

[43 : 08] But when you've endured prison, when you've endured shame and reproach, when your family has rejected you, when you've been wrongfully accused, and those are all things that happened to Joseph, and then you can look someone in the eye and say, God meant it for good.

And he brought me to this place to do his will. That's remarkable. David was a model of that too. He experienced all the pain, all the uncertainty. But what did he do?

He turned to God. We've got to learn to trust that our king will deliver what he promised. I want to read a section. I'm just going to read two sections of scripture as we wrap it up tonight, or today. Because Ephesians, or I'm sorry, Isaiah 61 is one of them. This is good news. This is good news. I just love reading the word of God when it's so clear. Because there's no, there's no question that our king is the king of the universe. And Isaiah 61, I'll begin in verse 3. I want to read a little bit of good news for those who are pursued and those who are protesting because they are oppressed. Isaiah 61, Man, that's an encouraging word. There's nothing like a great oak firmly planted.

[45 : 06] Will you join me in believing that our God is at work right here, right now, in ways that we can't even begin to understand or imagine? I love to think about the fact that God is so big that he's literally, like in this room right now, I don't even know how to begin to put a number on the levels and ways that he's at work. It's got to be in the thousands, really.

So, I mean, let me explain that, what I mean by that just a bit. So what I mean is that, that you being here today is not an accident. Me being here today is not an accident. I mean, Pastor Don called me a couple weeks ago, said, hey, I'm going to be on the road. Can you, can you share Sunday, July 20th? And yeah, be honored to do that.

God's at work. So then I'm sitting in Nepal last week, thinking, Lord, what should I share? What are some things? And I just started thinking about the family, and then I started thinking about those of you here who are a part of another family that works with this family. And, and I mean, it's just, it's so many levels. Right now, you may have in your mind a thought about someone who's just driving you crazy right now. Anybody got one of those? And God may be saying, listen, don't worry about that. You can't fix that. You can't change them. Bring it to me in prayer, and I'll give you, I'll trade you. I'll trade your anxiety for my peace. That's a pretty good deal. I'll take some of that.

That's what he says. But it just cracks me up because all of us know this, but we don't do it in the midst of the struggle. We don't turn to him like we need to. He's working at thousands of levels, and we may believe we can see it. Like, there may be a time we get a glimpse. In fact, I remember when we were doing a career transition out of the Air Force, it was so funny because I remember saying, oh, I can see how the Lord worked in that to make that happen, and then to prepare us for this, and to open this door. And it was like, you could see it. And then I just thought, Kimberly and I talked about it a lot at the time. Wow, we don't even know. That's just like one little teeny piece, maybe, of what he's doing. There's so much more because there were a lot of other people involved, and God was working in their life too. And we didn't even know at what level.

I mean, it's just incredible to think about. So at the end of the day, it's very simple. Will we trust him? And will we obey him? I heard in Sunday school that Brother Mike McBride used to say that worship leads to obedience. Well, that's what this is about. When you worship, then you can be led into obedience. To be able to say, I'll obey you, God. I trust you. So David cries out to God in despair. He's honest about the struggle. But in the end, what does he say? I will trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice, and I will sing. Should we sing about the Lord's deliverance? Oh yeah, when you think about singing, it's an emotionally related kind of thing. It's a song of joy. Just a few days ago in Nepal, I watched these poor physically, although not poor spiritually, these very poor Nepalese believers singing with joy and exuberance. I know that our brothers saw some of that too.

[48 : 33] A song of joy. You know why? They know that their deliverance is not fully experienced on earth. They have no question about that. When you're in a country with less than two percent Christians, you're definitely a minority, and it's tough to be a Christian. And so they don't look at their life on this earth and say, well, I hope to find satisfaction and comfort and peace here. No, they look forward to the day when they will sing in freedom, and they look to God for their deliverance.

And in those moments of worship, even though they might come into the church building or the house or the little hut in protest and in anxiety, that while they're there, through that worship, through that experience of the word and of singing, their hearts are turned towards God. They're shifted from protest to peace. That's what happens with us. Well, I'm going to read one more text of scripture, and then we'll close this morning. Exodus 15. This is a joy-filled song. And this week, as I was thinking about this message, I came across this reading in my devotions, and I thought, well, this is very fitting, very appropriate. It's the song of Moses and Miriam after the Lord destroyed the Egyptians who were chasing them across the Red Sea. Exodus 15, and we'll begin reading in verse 15. Listen to the joy that comes and the hope that we have in our God, because the same God that delivered them will deliver us. Maybe not on this earth, but eternally. And that's what our faith is about.

Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver, he is hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him. He is my father's God, and I will exalt him.

The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army, he is hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them.

They sank to the depths like a stone. Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down those who opposed you.

You unleashed your burning anger. It consumed them like stubble. By the blast of your nostrils, the waters piled up. The surging waters stood up like a wall. The deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. And the enemy boasted, I will pursue. I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils, and I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword, and my hand will destroy them. But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you? Majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders.

[51 : 42] You stretch out your right hand, and the earth swallows your enemies. In your unfailing love, you will lead the people that you have redeemed. In your strength, you will guide them to your holy dwelling. The nations will hear and tremble. Anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified. The leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling. The people of Canaan will melt away. Terror and dread will fall on them by the power of your arm. And they will be still as a stone until your people pass by, Lord. Until the people that you brought pass by. You will bring them in, and you will plant them on the mountain of your inheritance. The place, Lord, that you made for your dwelling. The sanctuary, Lord, your hands established. The Lord reigns forever and ever.

Where is our hope this morning? Are you relying on yourself, or are you relying on God? That's the heart of the gospel. Where is our faith? The object of faith has always been Jesus Christ. Those who were waiting for the Messiah look to the Messiah's coming. Those who are with him look to him as they begin to understand that he was a man sent from God. And then we look back. The object of the faith is always him. And it's in his finished work that we have hope.