

Psalm 148 "Living in a Transcendent Frame"

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[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer for a moment. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you want your children to be near you, to be near your heart, to know that you love us and care for us, that you hear our prayers, that you desire us to be near you and have the same view of the world as you do so that we might be in harmony with you. Father, we give you thanks and praise that as your great heart for us. Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would come and move with gentle and deep penetrating power, Father, to so continue to make us more like Jesus and to be near you. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Saviour. Amen. Please be seated.

One of the reasons why people often are, don't, those who are outside the Christian faith don't want to become Christians or are nervous if they're starting to think about becoming a Christian, Christian, is that for a lot of people when they think of Christianity, see the Christian faith, they think that to become a Christian means that they will come into a smaller world, a narrower world, a cramped world, a diminished world. And they very naturally fear this, like who would like to actually enter into a more narrow, cramped, diminished world? And they fear this.

[2:45] And now, this psalm actually, in fact, it's really, this is just part of the whole providence of God. Those of you who are watching this online, just to let you know that we aren't a church, there's not 5,000 people out in the stands right here listening to the sermon, far from it. But sometimes we can accidentally be like a mega church. So in some mega churches, when they have a sermon, they're able to make a whole set to reflect what the sermon is. And by the providence of God, even though we're a tiny little church, we're like a mega church today because the set actually is a perfect counterpoint to the psalm that we're going to look at and this idea, this fear of being in a narrow world. Well, what am I talking about? Well, very simply, the play that's on here at the, we're meeting in a live theater, if you don't know that, if you're watching or listening online, the play that's on in this theater right now is called The Death of a Salesman.

And The Death of a Salesman is a famous play, I can't remember now, I think it might be from the 50s, but I can't remember when the date's from. But it's a, it's a play about despair. And no, it's not, this isn't a spoiler alert, I mean, the play is called The Death of a Salesman.

And so the play ends with the salesman committing suicide. And the play is about the fact that this man has completely devoted himself to the American way. He wants to become a complete American, he's given himself to trying to just live within this world, to make his way within this world, to make lots of money, to be a success, to sell well, and he's completely sold himself to be in this world.

And by the end of it, he kills himself. He comes to a point of despair that suicide is the only way forward for him. In contrast, the psalm that we're looking at today is a psalm that tries to help us to, to give up our small, narrow, this world only point of view, and to live in a big world, a big,

universe-spanning world, all open to us, that we are to, to dwell in and to rejoice with. And it tries to make us look at the world and see it as, as very, very, very big. So obviously there, there can be some Christians who, because they've forgotten the Bible or not known the Bible, do create a type of Christianity which is very, very narrow and very, very cramped and very, very fearful and very, very restrictive. The Bible keeps trying to blow that up. And Psalm 148 is a psalm to blow that up and to have us look and see how big the world is. And it's good to be in a big world and take your place, brother and sister, in this big world. So let's look at it. And it's going to be Psalm 148. Psalm 148, if you don't have a Bible of your own, should have mentioned this earlier, there's a couple of free Bibles there you can come and take. The words will be on the screen, but it's really good to have the Bible of your own, right? And look and see that, that what I'm saying. Now, the first thing here, and this, this actually continues to fit with the difference between Psalm 148 and the play that's going on in this place, The Death of a Salesman. And it's a bit of a geeky point. There's two geeky points in this sermon that I'm just going to share with you. I know most of you aren't geeky, nerdy types with the Bible. But for the three of us who are, this is where you really come into your thing, because the geeky point here is actually really important. So take your Bibles and look at the first three words of Psalm 148. This is the geeky point. What are the first three words of Psalm 148? Praise the Lord. In Hebrew, it's one word. And if you look at what are the last three words in Psalm 148? Praise the Lord. In Hebrew, it's hallelujah. Three words at the beginning, identical three words at the end. And here's the geeky point. It's called a frame.

[6:45] It's a framing device. It's to try to set before you the, there's a frame, and the frame helps you to understand what's in the middle. And what's in the middle will help you to understand the frame, and it all fits together. And why this is such a brilliant counterpoint to being on a stage with a plate called the death of a salesman is this. What the death of a salesman reveals is that the average Canadian and North American lives in what some scholars call the imminent frame. And that's a big sounding word. It just really means something like this. What is life to the average Canadian?

One dang thing after another, and then you die. And if you ask it at Tim Hortons, they won't use the word dang. And that's what life is. One dang thing after another, and then you die. And within that imminent frame, because it's just one dang thing after another, that's pretty depressing. So what you need to do is you still need to find some pleasure, you need to find some joy, and you need to find things that you can give meaning to. But here's the problem with finding things that don't have any inherent meaning or value that you try to give them to. You give the thing meaning to. It's exactly like I have nine children. They're all old now. I have grandchildren too, because I'm ancient of days.

And I'm not. That's God, ancient of days. I'm just old. And, but you know, there was a time when our, you know, the kids, I don't know what they were, maybe, you know, there's some of the kids were like, you know, six, eight, you know, nine, 11, or something like that. And I think we were visiting somewhere. And the person had been to an early version of a dollar store and given out a couple of these little tiny, plasticky, junky things, you know, to each of them. And they were, they're just young kids. They were really excited to get them. But one of them was better than the other toys, at least to the kids. And they fought over it. Now, I know it's hard to believe that I'd have children that would fight with each other, but I just had normal human children and human children fight. And they fought over this one particular little junky plastic toy. So I eventually had to intervene and deal with it. Now, for all of you parents, half an hour later, how many of my children remembered the junky toy? Zero.

Where did that junky toy go a week after this incident? The garbage. You see, when something, in fact, has no inherent value, but you just try to put value on it, because you live in this imminent frame, and life is just one dang thing after another, you're not actually much better than the six-year-old, the eight-year-old, and the nine-year-old fighting over a piece of junky plastic. You might think it's really important for a moment, but you know it isn't. And that's the frame of this world. It's not satisfying. Life is just one dang thing after another. The things that he tried to put his meaning into come to nothing. And at the end, he knows he's going to die, but before that, he commits suicide. This frame here, remember the first three words of the psalm, praise the Lord. The last three words, praise the Lord. It's a, it's a, literally, it's called a framing device to frame the entire psalm. And you can see right here off the bat, the Bible is calling us not to live in the frame that the average Canadian lives in, which is the imminent frame that life is one dang thing after another, and

then you die, but a transcendent frame.

[10 : 18] There is a God that does exist. As we're going to see in a moment, he is worthy to be praised. If we don't recognize his worthiness, that's on us, not on God. We are to grow into recognizing his worthiness. And we live between birth and death in a world where there is a God that does exist, that frames all things, who is to be praised. That's the frame that we're going to be in, and that frame is going to help us to understand what goes on in the frame, with, like, in the net limits of the frame, and that also helps us to understand the frame. And that's what the rest of the psalm is. And, and so it goes, once again, it begins, praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise him in the heights. Now, before I go any further, here's, here's the second geeky thing, okay? I didn't lose you with the first geeky thing. So this geeky thing's important. It actually is really, really, really helpful. And that, that is this. There's a literary device. If, if I told you that I was looking for my church key, I don't know what it is, folks. The last couple of years, I have become an expert at losing my church key in my house. I think when we finally move, they'll eventually find 50 church keys in different places in my house, or there's house elves or something that steal just the church key, not the others. Anyway, so I'm looking for my church key, and I might tell you that I looked high and low.

And what does high and low mean? It's called a merism. I think I'm pronouncing it correctly. It means you look everywhere. I look high and low. You know, if you're looking for your, looking for something, I mean, we had some people on our street, they're, they have a neighbor whose dog keeps escaping. And the kids and all go out, and they look far and wide. It means you look everywhere, right? So there's a, a similar type of device that's all the way through the Bible, and it's called heaven and earth. And you, when you see heaven and earth, you're to understand it as being a way of saying high and low or far and wide. It means everywhere, everything. Heaven and earth is a, a poetic way, a memorable way of saying everything. And so what this psalm does, here's the geeky point. It takes that merism, and it, it pauses between heaven and it pauses between earth. So if you look at verse one, praise the Lord from the heavens, and you look at praise, at verse seven, praise the Lord from the earth. You have the heavens and the earth. It's a way of expressing the everything. And now what it's going to take is this big abstract idea, everything, which would go, we all snooze. And it does these concrete things to make him, you realize that he really means it. And, and what you can think of is you're, if you're the one praying this psalm, it's as if we all say, to get together, because we're the psalmists, who say, okay, everything above the planet, praise the Lord. And then in verse seven, everything on the planet, praise the Lord. And that's in a sense what's being acted, and it's trying to say everything, praise the Lord. So, so look how it, it works out then poetically. We'll read it from verse one to, to verse four. And it goes like this, praise the Lord, praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights, praise him all his angels, praise him all his hosts, praise him sun and moon, praise him all your shining stars, praise him you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens. Those first four verses. Everything above the planet, praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praising the Lord isn't just something limited to human beings, geeky types of nerdy Christians. And in a sense, the, the, the Christian faith is calling you into this big universe and big world where even the universe is praising, is praising the Lord.

Now, some of you might say, well, George, here's, okay, George, whoa, time out. George, come on, George. This ancient cosmology, this is why I can't be a Christian. Waters above the heavens and the heavens, like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. First of all, it's poetic language. A lot of times when people complain about stuff, they want to replace this brilliant, beautiful, memorable, poetic language with the most boring, imaginable, nothing, I don't, don't mean to insult civil servants, the most boring, imaginable civil servants speak that nobody remembers. So that's the first thing. Okay, you can have your civil service speak and I'll have the waters above the heavens and we'll see which one remembers which, okay, but actually what it is, it's actually a brilliant feature of the Bible, is that the Bible uses simple ingrained understandings in the human psyche and observational language, which makes it cross-cultural and cross-temporal. You think about it for a second, it's just, it's a natural part of human consciousness that if you're going to have deliverance, it's going to come from on high, not all of a sudden burst up from underneath your feet. That's a very, very different type of beast that jumps up from the ground than one that comes from above to deliver. And then the rest of it's just observational language, everything above the planet. Now, what did they think in their head when they wrote it? I don't know, who cares? Doesn't matter what they think. Read C.S. Lewis's brilliant essay called Horrid Red Things, you can Google it,

absolutely brilliant. And it's just really a simple observational thing. Everything above the planet, praise the Lord. What's above the planet? Well, there's angels, there's the highest heavens, there's, there's, you know, clouds, you can call them clouds, you can call them the waters above the heavens, you know, and there's everything above the earth, the planet, praise the Lord. That's the command. It's just simple observational language.

[16:15] And then the other thing is you might say, okay, come on, George, how on earth can the stars praise the Lord? Well, I'm going to talk about that at the end of the sermon, because it's also, it's just as easy to believe stars doing it as creeping things and beasts, so I'll get to it later on. So then it says, you know, so if you live in the imminent frame of the average Canadian, you only do something, you only pray something if it helps you get through the night, right? I mean, that would be what a very typical secular Canadian would say. They say, hey, listen, George, I'm an open-minded guy, just don't push your way on me. And you know, if, if reading evening prayer gets you through the night, good on you. For me, it's bourbon, you know, and a good movie. That's what gets me through the night. But if that's what gets you through that, good enough. No, no, no, that's not what the Bible here is saying. The Bible is just, is saying something, because that's like an imminent frame point of view. There's just really why life is just one dang thing after another, and then you die. So whether it's a matter of having some alcohol, or whether it's spending some time doing online poker, or whether it's crossword puzzles, or whether it's praising, you know, whatever works for you. But no, no, no, that's an imminent frame. The Bible is also going to make it very, very flexible in a big world about being able to do different things. But the heavens declare the glory of God. There is a creator.

Well, we'll get to that in a moment. Here's why it's completely different. Look, look at what he does now. Here's the final geeky point. There was three geeky points. The frame, the merism, the heavens, and then the earth, another way of saying everything. And the final one is each half gives you an explanation about what's going on and what you should praise God for. And look at it. You'll see here in verses 5 and 6, and then you're going to see it again in verses 13 and 14. Let them praise the name of the Lord for... Now there's a reason, an explanation, what you should be praising him for. That's how the poem is structured. Let them praise the name of the Lord for... There's three things. He commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever. He gave a decree and it shall not pass away. These are the three things. Now the first thing is he created... In verse 5, he commanded and they were created. Another way to put it is, God just said the word and it was. He said stars and there were stars. He said earth and there was earth. He said sky and there was sky. He said light and there was light. He just says it and it is.

Makes it out of nothing. Creation ex nihilo. That's what this text is telling us. He speaks a word and it is. Now you just compare that to the ancient myths with, I don't know, odd animals and other things doing things to create the world or you compare it to the idea of a catastrophe of the ancient unity of our friends to the east and there's this ancient unity that gets destroyed and creation's like a terrible tragedy and out of that you get this entirely different sense of God says it and it is. He says it and it says beyond that you can ask me over coffee. This actually continues to open up the door to science.

But the next thing really shows why it is that science... It's interesting. This psalm, it helps to understand why when we walk in the bush on a beautiful day or if we're out on a trail somewhere, it almost feels as if the world... You have a sense of there's meaning and almost as if it wants to say something.

[20:09] And this is telling you you're on to something. That's a clue. But this psalm is also why science got invented. But science that does not end up just making all of reality into like plastic that you can just rape and pillage and do whatever you want with it.

But a science where there's real limits, where there's an integrity to the created order. Sorry, I'm getting a bit too weird. Look at the text. Let them praise the name of the Lord, verse 5. For he commanded and they were created. That's the first reason. You praise the Lord because he said a word and it existed. The second thing is he established them forever and ever. And this is important in two senses. The first thing is this, that if tomorrow we didn't know if the sun would rise, you can't have science. If we think that on another galaxy gravity doesn't exist, you can't have science. You need to have a continuity in the entire universe.

And by the way, this is completely radically different than the ancient world. And for those of you who are really into philosophy, the limits of skepticism, Hume said there's actually no reason inherently to believe that the sun will rise tomorrow other than custom.

[21 : 32] The Bible here says that God not only has created all things, he established them forever and ever. And it's because of that that you have a stable universe that the scientific and engineering types amongst us can go and do science and can go and do engineering. But it also opens up the whole door to miracles. Look again at this word in verse 6, he established them forever and ever.

The original language, it literally says that God caused them to stand. And the idea here is that not only did he establish the sun and the moon and the planets and gravity and all of that, but he also caused them to stand. And the image is this. So I often, when I'm in the office, our ministry space, I usually try to work on the ground floor and the others will be working on the upper floor. And if I was to yell up the stairs and say, come on downstairs, and they'd all come and they'd stand waiting for me to tell them what I called them down for. That's why they'd be downstairs standing. They've come down to here. Okay, George, what do you want? And that's the image here.

It's the image then that on one hand, God has created the entire universe so that it's established and all, but he hasn't said, oh, I'm going to lock myself out of the creation. All of creation has been maintained by me. You know, the engineers, the physicists, the astronomers, the scientists, you can all bet your life on it. Go ahead and study this thing, find out the laws. But if I want, they're all waiting to do my will. It gives you a picture of why it is that when Jesus is on the boat and there's the storms and the waves and he says, be still, Jesus is God, the son of God, the second person of the Trinity, and all the created order have been maintained by him and they're waiting for him to give a word of command and they do it.

And it gets more cool with the next one, believe it or not. Verse five, let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever and he gave a decree or a law or a rule and it shall not pass away. Why did science start to develop in human as a way of looking at the world and analyzing the world in a Christian context? The cumulative, you know, cleverness is equally distributed or not distributed amongst human beings. It doesn't matter if you're a caveman or a professor at Columbia or Harvard. It's equally distributed cleverness and inventiveness, but science of looking. What goes on? They read this and read this and read this and read this and read this and it's part of the liturgy and they're part of their prayers and it's part of their, it becomes part of their consciousness and one day they think, God has said that the universe is made according to laws.

Let's go find them. Let's go looking. And the whole idea of laws in the natural world, in an ordered world, in a stable world, develops.

[25 : 00] And it's so beautiful. The same text of the fact that the stars and the wind and as we're going to see the beasts are praising the Lord that makes you think that if you're out in a place and that you're far from the city and there's a type of a stillness which you just can't get in the city. And by the way, the Bible is not anti-city. It's just not the point of this analogy. And you almost have a sense as if there's something that has to be said or a message trying to be communicated to you. Why it is that people go to the bush and the mountains to commune with nature. And on one hand, it is a clue that only Psalm 148 answers. And the same Psalm that justifies that clue that there is something is the same clue that allows the engineers and the scientists to make the shoes and the rubber and the poles and the phone and the cameras that you use to enjoy nature.

I love being a Christian. I love being a Christian. Only in Christianity is this held together like this. It's absolutely spectacular. But there's more. There's more. And you see that in the second part, right? So the second part is the heavens, everything above the earth. And now verse seven, it's as if he says, okay, everything above the earth, praise the Lord. Now everything on earth, everything on this planet, praise the Lord. And I really mean it. And look what happens. Verses seven to 12. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word, mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds, kings of the earth and all peoples, that's people groups, princes and all rulers of the earth, that would be leaders of business and of culture and of education and civil servants, young men and maidens together, old men and children, everything. Whatever is in the deepest part of the ocean, whatever is in the deepest crevice, praise the Lord. The wild animals, your pet dog, your pet canary, praise the Lord. Your kids, the prime minister, the prime minister of Nepal, the ayatollah, praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. And then it's all peoples and it really means

it. And then it gives you the three reasons. And it's going to begin at verse 13. And now what you need to understand now is it's not as if, okay, the stars have one reason, but we have completely different reasons. No, what you need to do is the whole psalm, remember because it's heaven and earth, it's everything. So this explanation, what's going on in the first explanation helps you to understand it's in harmony with this next bit. And this next bit helps you to understand the first bit better.

It's, it's, you have to understand it as if it's a harmony, as if it's a duo, as if they're singing back and forward to each other to communicate, you know, one particular truth. It's a harmony. It fits.

It, you can interplay. You can think about this to think about this. And then as you think about this, it makes you think about the other one more. And that makes you think about this one. And that's the way you understand it. And there's three reasons given to praise the Lord for this next bit. And look at, they're very, very, some of them are very surprising. So it's assuming, by the way, that human beings were created and hence had a design. That's assumed. It also shows a bit of a hint of the fall, the fact that this, but we'll get to that in a sec. Let them praise the name of the Lord. Verse 13, for his name alone is exalted. His name alone is exalted. And, and what this means is that his name, he is worthy of being praised. There's like real worth. It's not just invented worth. So when I went to Zimbabwe, I was back in March to help teach local pastors.

I went looking to see if I could get Zimbabwe currency. And what I discovered is you can get Zimbabwe currency. You can't get any Zimbabwe currency in Canada unless you happen to meet somebody who was in Zimbabwe, got some currency and would give it to you. And that even when you go to Zimbabwe, they basically don't want you to pay for anything in Zimbabwe currency because they inherently view their own currency as worthless. I paid for everything. I paid for every single thing with a U.S. dollar. I could have said, here's a thousand. I can't remember what the currency is for Zimbabwe. I could give you a thousand or ten thousand of these. Ten thousand of the Zimbabwe currency were two one dollar bills. They wouldn't even think about it. They'd pick the two one dollar bills from the U.S. because they have real worth. The other stuff doesn't.

[30 : 20] And so what this is saying is that God has real worth, not just subjective worth. It has real worth. It has worth that one of the problems with planes flying into Zimbabwe is that the government wants to pay in Zimbabwe currency and the planes only want to be paid in U.S. dollars. And it causes a bit of a problem in terms of planes going there and refueling and everything like that. They only want to get paid in something that has real worth, that's recognized as worthy. And that's the same idea. When saying exalted, God really is truly of worth. And then the second thing is, so that's the first reason.

Why do you praise him? Well, he actually is worth it. He's exalted. The second one is, his majesty is above earth and heaven. Now this is, again, a transcendent idea. And earth and heaven, you see the mirrors above everything, above bugs, above the deeps, above stars, above angels and archangels and thrones and dominions and powers, the entire angelic hierarchy above them all is his majesty. And majesty has these other ideas to it in the original language, and we should have it as well.

It can also be understood as splendor. It can also be understood as beauty. It can also be understood as glory, but it's not just splendor and glory and beauty. It has a weight to it.

It's like those of you who like a weighted blanket. You're feeling maybe a little bit stressed at the end of the day. You want to sit and watch TV with a weighted blanket, and feeling the full weight of the blanket is very comforting. And this beauty and splendor and majesty has a weight to it. And there's times you sense that you can just, you know, on this side of the grave, even on this planet, you can see things of real beauty, or you can hear something of spectacular beauty. And just for a moment, you almost want to sag, but not sag in a bad way because it's despairing because you've gotten defeated, but just sort of almost, just go like this, because it's so beautiful. So beautiful. It's the sag of woe, not defeat. That's why God should be worshipped and praised. And now here's the third thing which is really surprising. Verse 14, he has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him, and then the final frame, praise the Lord. So what's going on here with this imagery? Now, by the way, this imagery, you see it show up in the New Testament. If you read the book of Luke later, and

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, burst into a prophetic praise. And in it, he mentions this phrase of God raising up a horn for his people. It's a phrase that's in lots of different Psalms, and it's here. And the idea, horn is an idea of strength. So what it is, is that God has done something for his

people. He's done something to raise up strength. He's brought down some strength, a strength that will raise up. And the strength is completely and utterly centered on a person.

[33 : 45] And the idea of him doing, bringing strength in the form of a person that will raise up is an image of salvation. There's only one person in history that that describes.

Jesus. God, the Son of God, come amongst us. God's strength to save. That's why you see the early apostles, they could preach the whole gospel just from reading the Psalms and the prophets and the law.

They could see it all the way through. All these times, it's said, of God sending us a horn for his people. This person, a strength that comes from God into human beings to raise them up and deliver them. This is an image of God's promises. And by the way, you see the other thing which is just so beautiful about it. There's this beautiful harmony between all of the hearts, parts. There's this harmony of there is a God who's created all things by his very word. And this same God is the God who establishes things and guarantees that the sun will rise tomorrow and the day after that and the day after that. And the same God who has done this with decrees that we can learn from science is the same God who is completely and utterly worthy of being praised. And he is the same God who saves.

You don't have to have in Eastern religions and the Eastern world a cosmic tragedy and some other source of a savior that points the way to salvation. You don't have to have one God who creates and another God who destroys and another God who saves. There's this beautiful picture of there's just this beautiful harmony of creation and sustaining and majesty and glory and splendor. And God does it all.

And God is the same one. Only he can come and save his people who need saving. And how is it described to be saved? Look at it again. It's so beautiful. We're described as his people, his saints. Praise for all his saints. You know another way to describe that, to translate the word saints in the Old Testament?

[35 : 54] His beloved ones. His beloved ones. His beloved ones. For the people of Israel who are near to him. And this near to him means he's near to be heard. He's near in your times of sadness. He's near in your difficult times, in your times of success. He's near you. And there's another sense of it here as well. And you get to understand it if you remember the story of the prodigal son in the New Testament. A story that Jesus tells. And he tells the story of there's two sons.

And one son goes. He wants the father dead. Wants his inheritance. In other words, dad, hurry up and die. And I'm tired of waiting for you to die. So give me your money now. And he goes off and he wastes all of the money.

He has the other son, the elder brother, who's apparently the good guy who just hangs around the dad all the time and works hard. And then finally, the younger son, the prodigal, he comes and he realizes that his life's a wreck.

And he'd be better off as a slave for his father than what's going on. And he doesn't expect anything more than that. And then you discover the heart of the father. And the heart of the father is that ever since his son left, he was looking and hoping that his younger son would return because he loved his son. And the son does return. Before the son even gets there, the father rushes to him.

Before he does his little speech and the father just ignores it. And in a sense, I mean, he receives it because he's glad to have his son back, gives them the robe and all of that. And here's the thing about the story. One of the many things about the story. The elder son is angry that the father has welcomed the younger son back. You see, the older son was physically close to the father.

[37 : 49] But the older son's heart was far from the father. You can go to church all your life and have a heart that's far from God.

You're not near him and you have not, you don't have his heart near you and his heart isn't near you. That's what near to him means. It means we're near to the father's heart, what he loves.

We sense that he loves us and we want to love what he loves. We don't want to be like the elder brother, just close in ritual. We want to be close to him, near to him.

And know that our God is near to us. Praise the Lord. It's really interesting. You go back and read the book of Romans, read chapter 8. And there's a part here where now you can understand why Paul in Romans chapter 8 said, all creation is groaning in longing for the redemption of the human race.

Why is one of the reasons that the stars should praise the Lord? Because God redeemed a people to be his beloved who are near to him. That's one of the reasons why the stars and the wind and the

wild animals should praise the Lord.

[39:04] Just in closing, a couple of things about praising God. So first of all, if you're here and you haven't given your heart to Christ, that's where you have to begin.

He wants you to be near him. He came to save you. Like, this is your opportunity. If you feel a tug on you, if you think, you know what, I wish Christianity were true. I mean, Christianity is so neat to talk about the universe that way.

It's what fantasy, it's what poetry talks about, but it's also how scientists and mathematicians talk about. And these things aren't in fighting but in unity. And it's also to make me one with him.

Like, there's no time now better than to just pause here and just call out to Jesus and say, Jesus, you've come to save me. I want you to be my savior. Please take me and never let me go.

There's no better time than right now to do that. But a couple of other things. One of the problems we have with praising the Lord is that we emotionalize it. And what we need to do is then when we say, Okay, George, the Bible says I have to praise the Lord.

[40:16] Okay, I don't feel like praising the Lord. So what can I do to start to feel like praising the Lord? That's a false. The Bible is not saying manipulate your feelings to feel a type of praise feeling.

That's not what the Bible is saying. It's telling you to do something. So what you need to do is think about praising the Lord a little bit like you think about brushing your teeth. Now, I don't know about you.

I don't expect mystical experiences or ecstasy when I brush my teeth. Maybe you do. I'd love to hear why. Look, if, in fact, you had an ecstatic experience while brushing your teeth, you might be almost too embarrassed to tell anybody.

You might not even want to tell your best friend, You know, I had the weirdest thing happen. I was brushing my teeth, and I had an ecstatic experience. Like, you just brushed your teeth. So just praise the Lord. And maybe you'll get an ecstatic experience.

Maybe you'll have some emotions that go with it. But don't wait for that. Just praise the Lord. The second thing is, if the Bible says to be praised the Lord, and you say, you know, and you don't want to and you can't, then here's an idea.

[41:24] Be honest with God. I mean, he already knows that you don't want to, or you can't, or your heart's too heavy. Tell him.

Just tell him. And here's the other thing. I mean, the Bible allows us to be sad and all of that. And, you know, I think in heaven we'll find out it's a little bit like the widow's mite.

You know, the two women had virtually no money, and she gave them, and Jesus said she gave more money than the rich guys. Because some of us have just, you know, we're, you know, at a certain age, we're just really healthy and all of that, and so it's easy to do it.

But, you know, it might very well be that in heaven you'll find at that time when you'll say, you know, Father, I can't praise you. I know you're my Father in heaven. I know you're almighty, and I know you're loved, but, you know, I'm still mourning the death of my brother, or I'm mourning the death of my sister or my mom, or it's the anniversary of this.

I just, I know you're God, and I know you're great, and I know I should be able to praise you, but I just can't. That might be the greatest praise you do all in years, because it came out of a time of sadness and heaviness.

[42:32] It's easier to deal with life if you praise the Lord. It won't make your life better, but if you're reminded that there is a great God and a big God, it is way easier to deal with those hard things in life when you're praising the Lord.

Use means. Come to church. It might be that you come to, you know, sometimes you're too sad to come to church, but it might be that you really just desperately need to come to church, and you might just be that person standing there in the middle of the congregation or off on the edge, and the congregation's praises can wash over you.

Allow your brothers and sisters in Christ and the church to help you. And use some other means. We're going to do a mean right now in closing.

It's going to be on the screen, hopefully. Have that clear? So what we're going to do right now, before I give the closing prayer, there's this ancient thing from the Book of Common Prayer called the Benedicti Omnia Opera.

It's a canticle. And if you use the old Book of Common Prayer, Morning and Evening Prayer, one of the things that the Morning Prayer does is it's really brilliant. The early Reformers, right in the

[44:01] And so what they did is they had a systematic way of reading the Bible, and after you'd done some prayers and read some Psalms, you'd read a Bible passage, they'd have something that you'd say together.

And one of the things that monks were doing for 1,000 years beforehand is they took Psalm 148 and they made it bigger so that they could actually be as part of every day they would pray Psalm 148.

And as you'll hear in a moment, it's actually just an expansion of Psalm 148. And we're going to say it together and then I'm going to give our closing prayer. So let's stand. And it's the Benedictine Omnia Opera.

[illegible][illegible]

Ananias Azarias and Misael bless you the Lord and together glory be to the father and to the son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end amen Ananias Azarias and Misael are the Latin versions of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego let's pray father we ask that you instill within us a desire to praise instill within us and grow within us habits of praise make us to be a people of praise help us father when the world is beating us up and drawing us down that we would lift our eyes from these things we know that we have to deal with them it's not escapism but father lift our eyes that we might spend time every day praising you for who you

[illegible]