

Being Human - Lovingly made by God with creaturely limits

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[0 : 00] reading is from Genesis chapter 2 beginning at verse 4. It's on page 4 in the Church Bibles. This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but the streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden. From there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon.

It winds through the entire land of Havilah where there is gold. The gold of that land is good. Aromatic resin and onyx are also there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It winds through the entire land of Karsh. The name of the third river is the Tigris. It runs along the east side of the Asher. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. The second reading is from Psalm 121 on page 622 of the Church Bibles. Psalm 121.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber.

Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night.

[2 : 42] The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. This is the word of the Lord.

Catherine, thanks for reading that for us. And good morning, St. Silas. If we've not met before, my name's Martin Ayers. I'm the lead pastor here. And it's our regular diet as a church, week by week, to work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter. And we feel that's the best way to feed on God's word together. It means that God is setting the agenda for us and we're not missing out bits that we find more challenging. But from time to time, it's helpful to take a theme and to think, what does the Bible as a whole say about that theme? And that's what we've been doing the last few weeks as a church. And we've got a couple more weeks left in this series about the theme of being human. So let's pray and ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you have revealed to us who you are, that we might know you, and through knowing you, that we can come to know ourselves.

We ask that by your grace, you will speak to us now, that you will open our minds and hearts and be at work in us for what's pleasing to you. For we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So as we look at this together, in order to help you, you should find there was a sheet inside the notice sheet that's got some Bible readings on that we'll look at together, the ones we had read and a couple of others as well. And that will just help you navigate what we're doing as we explore this theme.

Our foundation stone in this series of being human in week one was, who am I? God says you are royalty. You were made in the image of God. In week two, we thought about our bodies, that God gave us our bodies. Our bodies are part of who we are. They were made good. Our bodies are fallen. They are mortal.

But our bodies will be glorified. And then last week, we thought about our desires, that the world wants to say you are defined by your desires. The Bible says you're not defined by your desires.

[5 : 08] At the same time, God's desire is to redirect our desires towards him, where he will satisfy them as we glimpse his glory and his goodness in the face of Jesus. And today we're thinking about our creaturely limits. Almost everything about this morning, that you hear this morning, you can find in a recent book, *You're Only Human* by Kelly Capic. It is a brilliant book. I've read it three times so far. And sometimes the most helpful thing that I can do here for you is I can read, I can digest, I can disseminate. So that's what you're getting today. And our first point is this, your creator God has wisely limited you. So rejoice in being a creature. Lots of people, Christians as well as non-Christians, go to bed at night and lie down and they feel a sense of inadequacy, even a sense of despair, because we think, am I enough? Have I done enough? Or we know that we've messed up.

Sometimes we feel guilty because we are convicted that we have grieved the Spirit of God in the way that we've lived, in what we've done, what we've thought, said, what we've failed to do.

And when we feel like that, as we go to bed at night, we need to remind ourselves of the gospel. Hopefully the message you hear here every week at St. Silas and we sing about, that as you go to bed at night, we keep short accounts with God, we turn back to God, away from the mess that we've made from our sin. And we remember Romans chapter 8 verse 1, there is now no condemnation for those who were in Christ. No condemnation. But sometimes we can feel false guilt because we think to ourselves, I should have done more today. Have we done enough? And even as Christians, we can think alongside that, when God looks at me, he must feel a bit disappointed, a bit frustrated. I mean, I know he was good enough to offer that anyone who comes to him through Jesus is saved, but does he kind of regret that when it comes to me? Does he begrudge that I took up that offer and went into his kingdom?

Now we start our response to those thoughts in Genesis chapter 2 in the account of God making humanity as he makes the first man. And it's on your sheets there. Let me read again verse 7.

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. So first, God gives life. He takes dust, he takes created stuff that he's made, and he thoughtfully, generously gives life. And then we learn in verse 8 that the Lord has planted a garden in Eden. And it's a really good garden.

[8 : 11] There are trees, there's fruit on the trees to eat, and there are rivers, it's plentiful, there's gold, there's gold, it's paradise. And God takes the man he's made, and he places them, in verse 11, in the good garden that he's made. So God gives life, he gives good gifts to enjoy, and in verse 15, he gives purpose to the man. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. So we're given dignity by this account of creation, that we have been carefully, generously, wonderfully made, and given purpose. But we're also humbled here because we're reminded that we came from the dust. We're creatures limited by space and time, and our human nature is innately limited. And most of our time today is just going to be exploring and thinking about that simple truth, the doctrine of creation, if you like. And if I ask most of the

Christians at St. Silas, how is your doctrine of creation? I think most of us would sort of back ourselves on the doctrine of creation. Yeah, I'm doing pretty well on that doctrine of creation. God made everything he made me. But what that means for us is human finitude. Finitude is about our limits, our creatureliness, that there are things that we cannot do. Why do we need to think about that? Because all around us, the world has forgotten God, and one of the results of that is that we want to deny our limits and defy our limits. There was a season in our culture, sometime around the late noughties, when the best-selling books were about the power of positive thinking. When the secret we were all invited to get in on is that if you want something really badly, you just have to think about it, and it will become reality. Daydream your dreams, and they will come true. Picture yourself passing your next eye test with flying colors. Clean out your wardrobe to make space for the man of your dreams, and imagine hanging his ties up in there, and he will appear. The arc of history is bent towards success, and you've just got to line yourself up with that and call out your wishes to the universe. Now, since that time, when books like that were popular, we have had a global financial crisis, a global pandemic, and a cost-of-living crisis, war in Ukraine and the Middle East, and we are not fooled anymore. We tried to imagine away the lockdowns and COVID-19, and what we've realized is the universe, the world around us, seems immune to our positive thinking inside. So the big trend now is optimization. The new gurus for our lives, with chart-topping podcasts and best-selling books, are psychologists,

CEOs of big companies, and tech entrepreneurs, and they tell us, you can't control what's going on out in the world, what happens, what's done to you, but what you can do is learn to be the fittest, most productive version of yourself that you could ever be. Optimize your to-do list, clean your workspace, analyze your sleep patterns, improve your time management skills, get into good habits, defy your limits by doing everything smarter, better, achieve, achieve, achieve. And as Christians, we've got to respond to that. We want to affirm some of that in the sense that there is an appropriate way to be ambitious, to long to be the best version of yourself that you can be. And we see that kind of godly ambition, that healthy striving, in the Bible. So the Apostle Paul, in Philippians 3, it's on your sheets. He is writing about his own example in life, that he was someone who thought that by his own good merit, he could be right with God. And in Philippians 3, he says, I've now learned that I have to let go of all of that, count all of that as rubbish, that I might take hold of Christ and be found righteous in him. And then he says how he longs to know Christ better. And he says these words from verse 12 on the sheets, not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters,

I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. There's that healthy ambition towards the prize of being more like Christ and knowing Christ while we wait to anticipate spending eternity with Christ. But that person that we long to be is still a creature with limits. The writer of Psalm 121 sees great comfort in that if we just turn there in our sheets. It's a song that was written for pilgrims, Old Testament believers on the way up to Jerusalem for feasts and festivals. And that was not an easy journey. And it became like a parable for life knowing God, that we're all kind of on pilgrimage on our way to be with God forever. And they know they need help on the pilgrimage. So if you look at verse one, they ask that question, I lift up my eyes to the mountains, says the writer. Where does my help come from? And then the answer, verse two, my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

He is the one without limits, the uncreated creator, the everlasting God, and he will not faint and he won't grow weary. I can count on him. Verse three, he will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. And that assures him and us that we will be protected if we trust this God. Verse five, the Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. Verse seven, the Lord will keep you from all harm.

[14 : 46] He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore. And that description of our coming and going, it's the kind of the everydayness, the ordinariness, whatever we're going through in life, we have a God who is limitless and who watches over us.

We don't need to strive to be God. We can rejoice when we look to God for protection, when we remember that he is watching day and night. And in taking hold of this, we find great freedom.

It brings freedom. It brings freedom for those of us who are parents. I remember when we had, our three kids were under four, and there were some nights when children wouldn't settle, or someone would wake in the night having settled. And as I went in to see a child, it was my turn, I could feel in myself this sense of deep frustration, thinking all the things I've got to do tomorrow are now trashed. I am now not going to have the energy to do what I plan to do, to get through the to-do list. I can't meet my own expectations for what I plan to do, and I'm going to let down other people with their expectations of what they're expecting me to do with my day. But when you have a night like that as a parent, what freedom there is in knowing God already knew what your night was going to be like, and he made you knowing how much sleep you need. So evidently, his plans for his world and his purposes for his kingdom tomorrow will be accomplished, even though you're knackered.

A helpful question on nights like that is, what is God calling me to do right now? In this season in my life, what is God calling me to do? And that might be changing nappies at three in the morning, or lying on the floor awake next to a child because they've woken up because they had a nightmare.

And we do that, and we pray for the grace to do that godly, to be godly in that, to be patient and loving, even when that means that we won't achieve what we'd hoped to with the next day. The Lord knows that. He is the one without limits, and he has put us in this place and time. Here is freedom.

[17 : 15] Freedom, too, in our expectations for our children. Now, this won't be true in every community, in Glasgow, and it might not be true where you live, but for some of us this will be true, that when I look at our kids and the school, the kids around them at school, the achievement of children is an idol in our time. Many things are sacrificed on the altar of people's kids achieving.

In fact, often in family life in Glasgow today, lots of help that people could give to others is sacrificed on the altar of their own kids achieving. Parents spend their evenings and their weekends driving kids around Scotland for tennis competitions, orchestras, flying around Europe for gymnastics. And don't mishear me, there is a healthy way to take joy in your child doing well with the talents that they have. Growing in their skills, growing in confidence, that's healthy. But too often, the heart behind this is, my child needs this if they're not going to fall behind.

There's a fear driving it. What if my kid doesn't achieve? What if they lack confidence? What if they're weak? What if they feel weak? And it's an idol that doesn't deliver. Of course we're weak. And teenagers today are finding themselves feeling crushed by enormous pressure to achieve. And a sense of their acceptance from people around them is conditional on levels of achievement that those of us who were older didn't have set for us. And some of you will be here and you felt that expectation. Maybe you're here and you're young adults and you're students and you feel a burden of expectation on you that acceptance is conditional on achievement. Here is freedom in knowing that that is a false burden.

We can rejoice in being limited creatures and rest in the security of knowing there's a heavenly father who loves me in Christ and he made me with limits. We don't need to prove ourselves to God.

We can rest. If we've come to Jesus, we can rest in his acceptance. And for lots of us today, whether or not we've got kids, we feel under pressure to never stop. And when people ask, how are we doing? How do we answer that question? Often, I'm stretched. I'm under the cosh. I'm overwhelmed. These are words that describe our lives as though things are being done to us that we cannot control. What do we do these days when we stand in the queue at Asda or Morrison's or Lidl?

[20 : 11] What does everyone do when they're waiting in the queue? Well, you know, once you've got your stuff on the conveyor belt thing, we get our phones out, our smartphones, and we start doing things.

Why do we do that? Because we're addicted to the smartphone, yes. But is it also because those are the moments when all we've got to do is wait and we can't cope with the silence.

We can't cope anymore with the few minutes where we won't be productive, where we're suboptimal. So we turn to our phones because they are the socially acceptable drug that will help us through this moment of agony where we cannot achieve anything. Well, instead, let's rejoice in having creaturely limits. When you can't get everything done, that's God's good design. That's how he's made us.

And at its best, it drives us to depend on him and worship him and pray more. Don't confuse creaturely limitedness with sin. We don't need to ask for forgiveness from God for the times when, because we are limited, we couldn't do everything. Liberate yourself with the truth that you are a creature with limits. And that allows you as well to delight in the achievements of others. And when you're talking to a parent and you've got kids, delight in the achievements of their kids that your kids haven't managed. You know, next time you hear that a friend has managed to get a promotion at work and you find out that they've also passed their grade seven piano recently and they've been learning Spanish and they've started their own charity helping orphans in Tanzania and they're still finding time to bake all their own bread. Don't feel crushed by it anymore. Just praise God that he has enabled them to do that. And God has made you with limits that mean you can say, I could never do all of that. But I can be faithful in who God has made me to be and what he's calling me to do.

When we have to give an account before the judgment seat of Christ, which we'll all have to do, he is not going to criticize us that there were things that we couldn't do because of our limits.

[22 : 27] Things that our mortal bodies were not able to do. That we had to sleep. What does God want me and you to do? He wants us to be faithful. He wants us to live our lives in obedient trust. To trust his promise of Jesus' return. To strive to crucify our sin so that we might be the creatures that he made us to be.

living our lives poured out in love for him and love for our neighbor within the limits that he has set for us. That's our first point. Your creator God has wisely limited you. So rejoice in being a creature.

And our second point this morning is also good news. It's a good news day. Your redeeming God God has thoughtfully loved you. So rejoice in his genuine delight. When we ask ourselves, if we are people who wonder from time to time, am I enough? Have I done enough? It can raise the question, what does God really think of me? And what Kelly Capic describes in his book is that when you when you ask a Christian, do you believe that God loves you? Almost without exception and without hesitation, they will say yes. It's fundamental. I mean, every Christian should be able to, this is absolute basics. Do you believe God loves you? Yes. But then ask them, do you believe that God likes you? Well, then people struggle. They look at the floor. For when we hear the word love, in the Christian world, it is tied up for us with ideas of obligation and commitment. But when we think about whether God likes us, that is a word that's less about obligation and more about inclination and preference and genuine enjoyment. If our understanding of the good news of the Christian faith, the gospel, is that Jesus Christ died so that God would love you and me, then our understanding of the gospel has become skewed. And this is a very basic human need to be liked for who we are.

Lots of teenagers would think to themselves, do my parents love me? Yes, but they kind of have to love me. What a difference it makes to think, to know, to believe, you know, my parents actually like me. They would actually choose to spend time with me. Some of you might be first year at university in a new environment and wondering, does anyone here actually like me? That's often what we'll think in a new place, a new environment. What a difference it would make to know that you are liked as well as loved by God. Well, Jesus assures us that there is nothing begrudging about God saving us, about God the Father sending Jesus on his rescue mission. However much someone else might have made us believe that we have failed in life or that we're unworthy, it might even be ourselves, God the Father is wholeheartedly committed to us because he deliberately lovingly made us and is inclined towards us. Listen to these words from John 6. Jesus says, all those the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away for I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all those he has given me but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day. Every Christian story is a rescue story rooted in the fierce love of God the Father for us. He's delighting us as the people he thoughtfully made so that he chose us and he sent

Jesus on a rescue mission for us. In Ephesians chapter 1 the Apostle Paul praises God the Father for all that he's given us in Jesus and for the gift of the Holy Spirit and he says that he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. It was a free choice by him because of his love for us, his delight in us and we will experience the delight of the Father for eternity. So that's promised in Zephaniah chapter 3. It's on the sheets there verse 17. The Lord your God is with you, the mighty warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you. In his love he will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing. When do we sing over something? When we like it. We are inclined towards it.

[27 : 36] Sometimes we present the gospel, including me, we present the Christian faith in a way that leaves us unsure of this. Our gospel presentation says something like this. I'm an idiot. I've made a complete mess of everything but God is so loving in spite of that he sent Jesus to come and pay for my mess and now when God looks at me he doesn't see me anymore. I'm clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

So he sees Jesus and it means he looks on me and he smiles. He's pleased because Jesus is wonderful and that's who he sees when he looks at me. And I think that all of that is basically true. It's kind of essentially true. Wonderfully true in fact. It's just that it's incomplete and it can leave us thinking I've been welcomed by God to his heavenly banquet but only because I tagged along with someone he actually likes. Really I'm like you know if one of my kids brings around a friend to our house on a play date and I've let them in my house and I have them around but I find them a bit irritating but I'll let them be there because they're with my kid. Does God look at us like that? You know I'm covered with Christ's blood so God can't see my sin. Maybe he doesn't really want to look at me at all.

Well those verses we've just looked at show us that Jesus didn't come and die for us to generate God's love for us. Rather he was sent by God because God loves us with this fierce love and his love there incorporates delight, inclination, preference, desire. He made you and he doesn't make mistakes. We've fallen short of the glory of God every one of us with fallen desires that turned us from him and broken bodies but he counts us worth salvaging and we see the two sides of that wonderfully in one verse Galatians 2 20. It's on the sheets there where the Apostle Paul describes in very personal language being saved. This is true for every Christian and let's notice as we read it there's an I that had to go and a me that God loves and likes and I and a me. So verse 20 he says I have been crucified with

Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Now I think there are three parts to this verse if you just look at it carefully. In the first part the Apostle Paul describes the I that had to die for him to receive new life in Christ. It was the self-centered I, the ego that Jesus died for.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live. That had to go, my self-centeredness. It died on the cross with him. The second part of the verse is about the new life that we live in Christ, the spirit-filled life knowing God. Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God. There's that new life in relationship with God that's been restored.

[31 : 03] But then crucially for our time today look at the third part of the verse where Paul references the me that has always been there since God made me. The me whom God loved, whom God liked. The me he wouldn't give up and came for. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. If you've seen The Repair Shop, the TV series, it's a popular show where people bring in things that need restored. Broken things, things you wouldn't be surprised to find at the dump.

But the thing is, all these things, they've got some value to the owner. There's a story about them, a memory, an attachment, a love that means that they can't bear to give them up. Instead, they'll come to the repair shop and they'll pay for someone to diligently, carefully, skillfully restore these things to their former glory. And that is your story and my story as a Christian, that God saw us broken. He saw what we'd become as we rejected him and he was attached to us. His affection was stirred by us so that Jesus looked for us and saved us. And now he is at work by his Spirit restoring the glory he'd always planned for us until he spends eternity rejoicing over us with singing. So our first point this morning was about being wisely created with limits. Our second point is about being lovingly made with the Father's affection on us. And we can live this out with a life fearing the Lord. To fear the Lord is a Bible phrase that doesn't mean being scared of God so that we hide from him. It's about being in awe of God and being aware of God so that we respond to him in his world with trembling gratitude continually.

So that's our third point briefly. Your faithful God is near you, so rejoice in his watchful concern. We see the idea of fearing the Lord in the book of Proverbs, among other places, which is a book all about living the good life in the world God's made. And in Proverbs 14, 27, we read, the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. We want life, overflowing life? Fear the Lord.

Now the message of the secular world, of secularism, is God is absent from ordinary everyday life. The secularist says to the Christian, you can have your God as long as you keep him private. You can meet with other people who believe in your God and you might even believe he's there when you meet.

But out here in the world, he is weightless. He is irrelevant. He is absent. The Bible reveals to us rather that God is sustaining the world all the time. And he is, everything that's happening around us all the time and in our lives is according to his powerful goodwill. So fear of the Lord is about remembering that the Lord is near and that we're creatures and the Creator God is always at work and in control and resting in that, trusting him and being faithful. And the next idea is to rest in the faithfulness of the Lord. In Psalm 4 verse 8, King David, hard-pressed, says, in peace I will lie down and sleep. For you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety. So when we go to bed at night, rather than feeling, oh, have I done enough? Is there more I need to do? We can remember God's promises and rest. Remember, blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

[35 : 02] Remember, God has said, never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. And rest. Remember resting that the day is finished for you. The day is done. Lay it at the feet of God. Tell yourself, you don't need to do anything else today. Whatever targets you've missed, you are secure in the love of the Father and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

it. Let's pray together. The Lord is near. Almighty Creator God and loving Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your limitless power and love. And we praise you for your wisdom in making us with human limits, that we might depend on you.

Help us to know the freedom in being human of not needing to do more than we can do. And we ask that your grace will set us free to live faithfully to what you have called us to, a life of love for you and our neighbor within the limits you have given to us.

Amen.