

Psalm 145
“Can't take my eyes off of you”

Overhead: title

I really don't want to be fussy and pedantic. It's just that some things almost leap out of the page or screen, or shop frontage, at me. I just can't help but notice things like

Overhead: bad apostrophes (2)

The other day I was checking through e-mails, and one of the headlines struck me

Overhead: alumni

You might not even be sure of that word, *alumni*. It's just a university and college kind of word for “someone who previously went to this university or college”. The problem here is ...

... that *alumni*, with the *i* ending, is plural. If they're going to use a pretentious and fancy word like that, I would say, they need to get it right and use the singular, *alumnus*, if they are using the singular article *an*.

I'm sorry, I just see these things. I prefer to say I'm

Overhead: precise, not petty or pedantic

And if that blooper in this week's e-mail actually – I confess – made me actually do a mini-growl, I guess I also have to confess that today's

Overhead: title,

which I've had on screen every time I check the church calendar for the last couple of months, makes me feel marginally uncomfortable, too. It just doesn't sound like good English to me, somehow. It's the “off of”. Surely the “of” is superfluous? Couldn't you leave it out and have something that conveys exactly the same meaning?

Overhead: amended title

Because we could say, in maybe a slightly threatening way

Overhead: I'll be keeping my eye on you

so surely when Dixon's steely gaze has done its stuff, wouldn't he simply be taking his eye *off* you? So why oh why, you could ask, have I chosen that title that grates? If you go back far enough, you can probably work out why – and hear the tune that goes with it.

Overhead: 1967 Frankie Valli

Actually, the original song *doesn't* have that extra “of” in it. But checking through the Net shows not just numerous recordings of this song by loads of other people, but quite a few of them *have* inserted the “of”. So my memory is *not* playing tricks on me, after

all. I guess it's just that the correct English is a bit fuzzy on that point, and the *music*, with two notes for the word "off", have just prompted people to include that extra syllable.

And of course I've come to this particular song because, with

Overhead: Valentine's Day

coming up this week, the words of that song are, well ...

Overhead: just too good to be true

*You're just too good to be true
I can't take my eyes off you
You'd be like heaven to touch
I wanna hold you so much
At long last love has arrived
And I thank God I'm alive
You're just too good to be true
Can't take my eyes off you*

Interesting how *God* can safely get a mention in a song from 50 years ago, isn't it? I'm not sure they write them quite like that nowadays.

But I did think that, as well as just being a rather heart-warming expression of human love ... isn't that a way of looking at Christian discipleship, too? I've just been reflecting on that a little this week. It's just a very simple and natural way that dependence and trust would manifest itself.

So take that psalm that we read together earlier on. It's introduction describes it just perfectly, doesn't it?

A Song of Praise. Of David.

(Psalms 145:1)

And it really does

Overhead: do what it says on the tin

***I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.***

(Psalms 145:1-2)

It's not just that David feels like this, but, I think this implies, there is something distinctly *praiseworthy* about this God that David praises.

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

(Psalms 145:3)

So David will not just tell his Lord the feelings of his heart, but they will overflow to others around him. It's something appropriate in the church and in the family:

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

(Psalms 145:4)

And maybe you could say, *Hold on, David ... Mum, Dad ... all this obviously excites you, but I'm not sure I get it! What is it about this God that inspires this kind of praise?* And it's not long until David tells us the answer. There is not just a spontaneous expression of the heart, because he just happens to be wired this way. Just consider what this God is like! Isn't this wonderful, and worthy of our worship?

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

(Psalms 145:8-9)

The obvious *sensible* and appropriate response:

All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you!

(Psalms 145:10)

This is a God who works at the biggest, world-sized scale:

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

(Psalms 145:13)

But he works on the individual scale too:

The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

(Psalms 145:14)

Response ... if you have any sense ...

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

(Psalms 145:15)

There you are, back at our

Overhead: title

You might know that we had the grandkids around this week. Actually, we had our daughter Jo and son-in-law Adam and their two boys, the whole family. It just strikes me that you have in young children such a good illustration of that last verse we put up:

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

(Psalms 145:15)

First of all, at the baby stage. You know that kind of look.

Overhead: feeding baby

But you get the slightly older baby, when they've got better control of their head muscles ... and

Overhead: watching parent

... all around the room. If Mum or Dad disappear out of the door, then the baby starts to cry. I wonder if that's why young kids always seem to like

Overhead: playing boo

with that continual reassurance that *Yes, I'm here!*

And even when they're older, a bit more like the older of Jo's two boys, getting a bit nervous about

Overhead: starting "big school"

It's safe, of course, if Mum or Dad are still somewhere in sight. A smile from across the room, or

Overhead: from the touchline

that's what they still feel they need, to feel secure. Isn't that exactly the kind of thing that this Bible verse points us toward?

The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

(Psalms 145:15)

Trust that is truly justified, trust in the God who, remember ...

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

(Psalms 145:8-9)

But we're dealing here with the fairly literal, aren't we, even if David has written poetry for us. You can imagine a baby or a child looking, literally, to their parent, to feel secure. And so you get the picture elsewhere in Scripture, too. Not just security, but joy, I think, are implied here in another of David's poems:

Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

(Psalms 34:5)

There's maybe an allusion there to Moses encounter with God, back earlier in the OT, after which his face *literally* shone:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, ... Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

(Exodus 34:29)

But you don't see Christians going around nowadays looking like refugees from the old

Overhead: Ready-Brek adverts

That kind of facial radiance isn't literal ... but neither is "looking to him", either. That's got to be a metaphor, too. But if we are trying to work out exactly what this means we should seek to do, in practice, there are those clues in the picture itself - "looking to", like the baby or young child's gaze following their parent's presence around the room.

But I wonder if we haven't got another clue from the following verse, too. So what is "looking to him" at least similar to, what does it involve – even if it's not the whole story? First the general:

Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

(Psalms 34:5)

And now the personal experience: vocalising that directed attention:

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.

(Psalms 34:6)

So "looking to" God, I think it's fair to say, that would involve *speaking to* him – praying. Not just feeling, but converting that feeling of trust into words based on that trust.

And finally, that other passage we read a few minutes back, over into the NT, where you've got something very much along the same lines. The writer of that letter to the Hebrews calls upon his readers to

... looking to Jesus, ...

(Hebrews 12:2)

.... and I think the context around those three words will explain what it will mean in practice for us. You might remember that the previous chapter is jam-packed full of examples of faith from the OT. These are people who bear witness to the faith-worthiness, if I can put it that way, of God.

But now we see God more fully revealed to us, in the life and person and work of Jesus Christ. So ... just as those "saints of old" *looked to God*, and were not ashamed ...

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, ...

(Hebrews 12:1)

Not, I think, that *they* are watching us *now*, but that as they *then* gave their testimony as witnesses to the faith-worthiness of God, we are called to do the same, but in the NT context, explicitly factoring this further revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We must show that we belong to that same family of faith by ourselves living by faith ...

... the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

(Galatians 2:20)

So Hebrews tells us to ...

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ...

(Hebrews 12:1)

What will give us the encouragement to keep going when things are tough? What will give us the direction to follow when the road is dark?

... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, ...

(Hebrews 12:1-2)

And who is that? Plenty of descriptions that could have been used – that have already in this book – but here it's one who *himself* has successfully run an endurance race of his own:

... looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Hebrews 12:2)

And just *how*, in practical terms, are we called to “look to him”? Next verse:

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, ...

(Hebrews 12:3)

Consider ... deliberately call to mind ... the fact that *he* went through what *you* are going through. Be stirred and encouraged by his example. Then *follow* that example – which you have not yet been called to *fully* and finally emulate:

... so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

(Hebrews 12:3-4)

Implication there: *he* resisted *to the point of shedding his blood*. If the OT states what God is like – and I'll put it up on screen for us one more time:

The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

(Psalms 145:8-9)

... then the NT shows us just how far God was willing to go to prove himself gracious and merciful, and overflowing with covenant-love. We have that comment from the apostle John, as Jesus faced the cross:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

(John 13:1)

Folks, *look to* this Jesus, who went to lay down his life *for you*. Not as just some principle of noble suffering, but, the Bible tells us, *for sins*. For *our* sins. All of that self-centredness in our lives that demands that we will please and live for ourselves, instead of pleasing and living for God, all of that has separated us from God. We have lived in the foul stench of that rebellion so long that its spiritually gut-churning odour has permeated deep into our pores. We cannot scrub it out, or sweat it out. The words of a simple song tell us the only cleansing solution:

*What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus*

I don't know if I've totally persuaded you to rethink that Frankie Valli song with a Christian twist:

Overhead: title

But maybe the preceding line, the one that should properly be the title:

Overhead: you're just too good to be true

Well, maybe that's where you're at with this Christian good news. It sounds good, yes, but ... *really*? All of this for free? Those stories from two millennia ago still being of eternal relevance to me, today?

Well, maybe so. I hear you. I can understand that attitude. But if there is the slightest chance that it *is* true, doesn't something *this* good at least bear checking out properly?

Because millions down the centuries *have* been convinced, and *have* moved on from "too good to be true", to

Overhead: title (capital Y)