

# The Life of Contentment

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[ 0 : 00 ] Psalm 131. A song of ascents of David. O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul.

Like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

Well, the great 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon says in Psalm 131 that it's one of the shortest to read but longest to learn.

It's one of the shortest to read but longest to learn. And that's a pretty big claim because there's 150 Psalms. It takes up a big chunk of the Bible and there's some weird stuff in the Psalms. Why would Spurgeon say that Psalm 131 is one of the longest for us to learn?

[ 1 : 11 ] I think it's because Psalm 131 is about contentment, finding satisfaction. And the world we live in struggles to find contentment.

It's almost impossible to find satisfaction. Psychologists have come up with a term which describes the cycle of discontentment we go through in life.

They call it the hedonistic treadmill. The hedonistic treadmill. Psychologist Frank McAndrew describes the hedonistic treadmill this way.

He says, Have you felt the feeling of being on this treadmill?

I know I have. And it starts when we're young, when we're children. When I was a kid I'd watch ads on the TV about toys and I would really want these toys.

[ 2 : 24 ] And I would nag my parents for these toys. And then maybe eventually on my birthday or Christmas my parents would generously buy me one of those toys. And I'd be super happy about it.

I'd play with it. And then in about two days I would start losing interest in it. But it would be at that point where I'd feel that disappointing feeling of that thing which I'd put so much hope in.

That thing that would bring me so much joy. So even as children we know the experience of being on this treadmill. And it continues on through life.

What are the things that you have put your hope in? But when you finally got it you felt that feeling of disappointment. Or maybe you felt that it wasn't actually as satisfying as you thought it was going to be.

Or you were fearful that you could lose it. Or it caused you to start worrying about how you could stuff it up. Was it that relationship? Was it that marriage?

[ 3 : 30 ] Was it that child? The house? The renovation? The job? The iPhone? The new toy? What did you do instead once it disappointed you?

What is the thing you don't have now but think will finally make you happy? We're all stuck on the treadmill. Many people recognise they're on the treadmill and try and get off.

They might turn to things like Buddhism and meditation to just remove all desires. Or they'll try the secular route of minimalist living. There's a craze right now of decluttering your life.

Marie Kondo. If it doesn't give you joy. If it doesn't give you joy get rid of it. We only need to live off what we actually need. And so get rid of everything you don't need. Create a tiny house and that will make you happy.

But the problem with these methods is they still keep you stuck on the treadmill. You're still believing that these things or this way of living is what you need to find peace and joy.

[ 4 : 38 ] But even then that still doesn't deliver. I have a friend in Melbourne who was living in a van and he told me all the amazing minimalist reasons why living in a van with his wife was really good.

And then he proceeded to complain about it for a long period of time. His wife is a nurse so she has to do her shifts and then go home and live in a van. It didn't work out for them.

Getting off the treadmill seems impossible. Which is why we need to begin to learn the lesson of Psalm 131 this morning. Now Psalm 131, David wrote it as a song of ascents.

And our best guess is that a song of ascents is a song that pilgrims would sing as they made their way to Jerusalem and the temple for a festival. And in this Psalm, David shows the pilgrims and us how he got off the treadmill and found true contentment.

Now in this Psalm, we're going to work from the outside in. In verse 1, we're going to see the fruit of contentment. Next in verse 2, we're going to see the method of contentment.

[ 5 : 47 ] And in verse 3, we're going to finish by seeing the source of contentment. So what does it look like when someone has got off the treadmill, finally got off the treadmill and found contentment?

In verse 1, we see the fruit of contentment is a lack of pride. And David denies pride in three areas. First, he denies pride in his heart when he says, Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up.

The New American Standard Bible translates this as, My heart is not proud. David doesn't have a big opinion of himself. This is pretty big coming from the great King David.

This would have been written later in his life. He had all the reasons to be proud and he's not.

Second, he denies pride in his eyes when he says, My eyes are not raised too high.

What does that mean? Tremper Longman helpfully says, This is equivalent to a person today saying that they do not look down their noses at people. And third, he denies pride in his actions and thoughts when he says, I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me.

[ 7 : 07 ] David's not out to accomplish things that are out of his control. He's not thinking about things that are out of his control. Now this is the fruit of contentment.

Why is lack of pride a fruit of contentment? What's the connection between those two things? I think it's because the goals we long for on the treadmill that we're running towards are often things that are out of our control.

Things too wonderful and marvellous. You know, we want that person to reciprocate our feelings for them. We want to have perfect children.

We want to have great health. We want to have financial security. And all of those things are out of our control. But when we think we have control over those goals, we feel proud.

We have achieved what is great and marvellous. And then we look down on others who don't have control over those things, who don't have it together like we do, who don't have the good children or the good financial security.

[ 8 : 15 ] And this just further fuels our pride. But the problem is we don't have control over these things. We have... It's a... Our sense of a control is just this temporary illusion and we sooner or rather find out that it's all a lie and we're just devastated when we realise that.

But when we've found true contentment like David has, we don't need to worry about things that are out of our control. We don't need to look down on others to make ourselves feel good about ourselves.

When we have true contentment, it disarms our desires which lead to pride. How amazing would it be to not be proud, to not look down on others, to not worry about things out of our control?

How amazing would this church be if we were characterised by that corporately? How do we achieve that? How do we achieve this? Well, we gain this contentment which leads to a lack of pride.

In verse 2, David shows us the method. He says, But I have calmed and quieted my soul. The soul of someone who is not content is like a raging sea tossing to and fro.

[ 9 : 34 ] But the person who has found contentment, their soul is like a calm and quiet and still lake. And David achieves this calmness of soul by being weaned.

He says, Like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. Now, there are various ways we could read into this imagery of weaning, and I'm not an expert on weaning. But commentators are also divided on how you translate the word, translated wean here. See, it could be the child is at the age where they've been weaned off breast milk, and now they've moved on to solid food.

And we could sort of read into that imagery a bit. Or it could just mean that the child's been nursed and is content to just sit with its mother. But either way we take it, the child is content to just sit and be in the presence of its mother.

It doesn't want what the mother can give it. It's just happy and satisfied being with mum. David's method of contentment, achieving quiet and calmness of soul, is finding rest and satisfaction in something greater than the things of this world.

[10:59] See, we can't just not be proud. We can't just force ourselves to not be proud. We can't just quiet and calm our own soul. We need a greater affection. We need a greater force to do this.

We need something that can actually provide us with lasting contentment and get us off the treadmill. Otherwise, we then just shift from one treadmill goal to the other.

Over the last few years, there's been a lot of talk about the great resignation. Maybe you've heard about the great resignation. In the face of the COVID crisis, people have come to realise that their job wasn't the path to contentment.

And so they've been resigning from their jobs and wanting to focus on what they think is more important. Their families, travel, health. And there's some aspects of that which are really good, but really they're just swapping one treadmill for another.

Families, travel, health, can't provide lasting true contentment, no matter how good they are. So what has the power to give us rest and satisfaction greater than the things of this world?

[12:08] In verse 3, we see the source of contentment. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. In verses 1 and 2, we've been listening to David talk to God, but now he calls to God's people and reveals the source of his contentment is the Lord.

Yahweh, the great I am. Through hoping in the Lord, David was able to find contentment and quiet and calm his soul. And now he calls Israel to join him in finding contentment by hoping in God.

What does it mean to hope in the Lord? Well, the biblical definition of hope is not wishful thinking. I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow so I can finally put my clothes on the line.

It's not wishful thinking. It's confident expectation in God to fulfill his promises. He's fulfilled his promises in the past. He's going to fulfill his promises in the future. And Psalm 131 was purposely placed after Psalm 130 so that we could learn what hope we have.

Look at Psalm 130 verses 7 and 8. It says, O Israel, hope in the Lord. It's the exact same words. For with the Lord there is steadfast love and with him is plentiful redemption and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

[13:43] Steadfast love, forgiveness, redemption, relationship with God is at the heart of their hope in God. See, our problem is we are running on the treadmill trying to find contentment in everything but God and we think we can reach it by just trying harder.

But David is showing us that only God is the source of contentment. And even though we've been running hard away from him, he actually comes to us and does everything that we need.

And the clearest picture of this hope is seen in the Lord Jesus. He is the reason we have, we can hope in the Lord now and forevermore.

In sending Jesus, God's one and only son, we see the ultimate expression of his steadfast love. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see the ultimate and only means of redemption from sins. In Jesus, we see the source of true contentment coming to us. True contentment is found by hoping in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[14:54] Now, as we hope in Jesus, as you hope in Jesus, he will calm and quiet your soul as you have assurance that he's dealt with your biggest problem.

And knowing that minimizes and relativizes all the other problems we might face. As you hope in the Lord, you won't want to occupy yourselves with things too great and marvelous.

Instead, you can see every circumstance as him inviting you to find contentment in him. As you hope in the Lord Jesus, you won't want to be proud or look down on others, knowing that he did not look down his nose at you, but instead counted himself nothing so that you might be saved.

As you hope in the Lord Jesus, you won't try to find ultimate satisfaction in the things of this world, but instead you can receive them as a gift, which lets you truly appreciate them for the things they are.

Gifts from God which lead us to worshiping him. A wife isn't a bad thing, a child isn't a bad thing, a house isn't a bad thing, but they're gifts from God. They're not the ultimate thing. When you find yourselves downcast and in toil within you, you can preach to yourself saying, hope in Jesus, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

[16:22] Why would you want to be on the treadmill? It's so tiring when you can be like a calm child with its mother. The Lord Jesus, the source of contentment, calls you to find hope in him now

and forevermore.

Let's pray. Lord, we praise you for all you are and all you've done for us. Thank you for offering us true contentment in yourself.

Lord, help us hope in Jesus, the source of true contentment. As we go about our weeks and we're tempted to find hope in the things of this world, help us remember Christ.

In his name, amen.