

Finding Contentment

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] It would be great if you could turn in your Bibles back to Psalm 131, page 618. There's also an outline in your pew sheets, which you may find helpful.

So, Psalm 131, page 618. Well, one of my daughters turned 18 last Friday. I can't believe she's that old.

I can't believe I'm that old. I know it's all relative. But it caused Michelle and I to reflect on, you know, when she was born and what she was like and so on.

And when she was a baby, let me tell you that she cried incessantly. I know all babies cry, but this one was special. But we learned the secret to her contentment, which was to feed her and then let her lie on one of our chests.

Usually Michelle's a bit like this baby here on her mother's chest. Or actually, Michelle, when she did that and fell asleep, Michelle's face was a bit more like this mother.

[1 : 05] You know what the mother's doing there? She's thanking God that the baby's asleep, right? That's what Michelle did anyway. Well, today's psalm may be a short one, but it teaches us an important lesson on how to find contentment, how to be like that infant resting on her mother's chest.

And this is helpful for us to know as we head into a new year, because we don't know what lies ahead of us on our journey this year, do we? And like previous years, we may face things that simply don't make sense to us along the way.

Things where we ask, why did God allow this to happen? Or how long will I have to wait? Or what does this mean for me in life?

Whether it's things that don't make sense to us in life or even make sense to us in God's word. The title of the psalm this morning tells us that it's a song of ascents.

And as I said last week, these were psalms sung by Israel as they ascended or went up to the temple at Jerusalem for one of their three annual festivals.

[2 : 22] But we're also told it's of David. That is, King David wrote it. And so as Israel went up to the temple, not knowing what hills they'd have to climb or why things perhaps happened along the way, their king teaches them how to be content.

In other words, it's a psalm about finding contentment along the journey. And David starts by showing his contentment as an example. And first of all, he's humble before the Lord.

And so point one, verse one, he says, My heart is not proud, Lord. My eyes are not haughty. I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.

Now, this may sound like one of those Facebook humble brags, you know, where people put things on Facebook and basically say, look how humble I am, everyone, so that they might praise them.

That's not what David's doing here. He's simply expressing a state of being. He's showing Israel what his contentment looks like, where his heart is not proud, his eyes are not haughty or literally raised up in arrogance.

[3 : 41] But where he's content not to worry about things too wonderful for him to understand. In other words, it's a picture of his contentment. But as an example, it also teaches us how to find it.

You see, if we are not arrogant but humble, then we'll be content with our limits and trust God for the rest, won't we? Whereas arrogance not only leads us to think we are greater than others such that we put them down, it also leads us to think that we're greater than God, as though he owes us answers.

This would have been easy for David to do. After all, he was the king, the greatest position in his society. And so it would be easy for him to let his position go to his head like many leaders do today.

In fact, all our kids work part-time at Macca's, three different Macca's stores, because they couldn't work at the same store apparently. But anyway, but each of them have said that certain managers have let their positions go to their heads.

I mean, it's Macca's for crying out loud. It happens, doesn't it? Or like the king of Tyre in Ezekiel, whose position went to his head in his pride.

[4 : 56] He thought he is a God, when really, as God told him, he was a mere mortal, a man. And this arrogance keeps us from contentment, because it demands answers from God, as though we are God, as though he answers to us, as though we're entitled to them.

And then it leads to resentment, rather than contentment, when we don't get them. I remember when our kids were younger, one of them asked why they had to go to bed, and we said, it's for your good.

But instead of humbly accepting that and trusting us, they demanded more, rather arrogantly. They said, how can it be for my good when I don't want to? It's the logic of a child.

Now, we could have explained how the body needs sleep to function and to practice self-discipline, which they were severely lacking, but they're not entitled to those answers, are they?

We might sometimes give them, but we don't actually have to, because they are not the parent. But then their arrogance, they acted as though they were.

[6 : 00] They even said at one point, you can't tell me what to do, you go to bed instead. Didn't end well for them at that point. The point is, arrogance led them to rail against us instead of trusting us.

It led them to resentment rather than contentment. But not being arrogant, not lifting our eyes in arrogance, but being humble, helps us to remember we are mere mortals.

It helps us to accept our limits and trust God for the rest. That's David here. He doesn't concern, verse 1 himself, with great matters, matters above his pay grade, things too wonderful for him to know.

Instead, he humbly accepts his limits. It's like that well-known verse from Deuteronomy 29, easy reference to remember, 29, 29. The secret things belong to the Lord our God.

But the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of his law. God has revealed everything we need to know to follow him, but there are simply some things that we just won't know.

[7 : 16] Will Trump win the next election? Who knows? Well, God does. How can Jesus be 100% God and 100% man at the same time?

We don't understand, but God does. How can this possibly be for my good when it doesn't make sense to me? Well, it does to God.

I mean, if we knew everything, then who would we be? God, yeah. But we're not, are we? And so David humbly accepts his limits and trusts God for the rest.

And by doing so, he can calm and quiet his soul and find contentment in life. And so more briefly, point two, verse two, he says, But I have calmed and quieted myself, or literally my soul.

I am like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child, I am content. Here is the flip side to David's picture of contentment.

[8 : 21] Verse one, he's humble before the Lord, which means verse two, he's able to calm and quiet himself and be content like a weaned infant. Now, a weaned infant is one, as you know, who is fully fed.

I'm sure you've seen babies who cry because they're hungry, whether it's grandchildren or great-grandchildren, nieces or nephews. Now, what's the word they use these days when you're so hungry that you're angry?

Is it hangry? Is that the word? I think that's the word they use these days. But after a child has been weaned or fed, they're no longer hangry, but they're like this.

Ah, content. It's amazing what food can do, isn't it? Even for us adults, actually. Well, by humbly accepting his limits and trusting God for the rest, David has been able to calm and quiet his soul and find peace, contentment in life, like a well-fed infant.

And now having his example, given his example, he now tells Israel to do the same in different words. He tells them to hope in the Lord.

[9 : 30] Point three, verse three. He says, Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore. And so last week, Israel was to hope in the Lord for forgiveness.

That was the last verse of last week's psalm. This week, Israel is to hope in the Lord for contentment. And like last week, to hope in the Lord means to trust in the Lord, to depend on him, to rest in him like an infant does its mother.

And to hope in the Lord includes actually being humble before the Lord, like verse one. After all, if we hope in God, it means we humbly acknowledge we're not God and need his help.

I mean, that's the practice of hoping in him. We can't solve it ourselves. So there's an element of humility here. In other words, to hope in the Lord means to humbly trust in the Lord that we might find contentment in life.

After all, that's the example David has given his people in verses one and two. And so as Israel journeyed up to Jerusalem without knowing what lay ahead or perhaps understanding why things have happened along the way, they are to hope in the Lord.

[10:48] To humbly trust in him that they might find contentment in life. Indeed, Israel is to hope in the Lord both now and forevermore.

But it's not easy to do, is it? Rather, it's easy to worry when we don't know what will happen on our journey.

It's easy to be angry when we don't know why God has allowed that to happen. And it's easy to deny or misapply when we don't get parts of God's word.

It's not always easy to hope in the Lord, to humbly trust in him, is it? And even when we do, it's not easy to do it fully.

I don't know if you've ever had this experience, but I certainly have, where I've prayed about things. And I feel like I've left most of that thing with God. But there's often these niggling questions that keep dancing around in the back of my mind.

[11:51] What if? Or why did? Or when will? Have you ever found that? You've handed over to God in prayer, but then these questions keep popping back into your mind.

It's not easy to leave it fully with God, is it? To hope in him completely that we might not worry, but find contentment in life. In fact, the great 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon said of this psalm, it is one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.

And that's the thing with finding contentment. It's something that needs to be learned over time. It doesn't happen just like that. In fact, we heard that from our second reading, didn't we?

Where Paul himself says that he has learned to be content. To learn something takes time and practice, as it did for Paul.

Practice that keep putting our hope in the Lord. Keep humbly trusting in him. Keep depending and resting in him. Telling ourselves to keep doing it over and over again.

[13:02] But the good news for us is that we have more help to do this than Israel had. For starters, we have a greater example to inspire us.

Rather than King David, who did not actually always find contentment, we have King Jesus, who did. You see, even Jesus, while on earth at least, did not know everything.

Did you realize that? For example, Jesus himself said in Mark's Gospel, that about the time or day of his return, no one knows, not even the angels, nor the Son, nor him.

Only the Father. But did he rail against his Father and demand an answer? No, of course not. He humbly trusted his Father and was content.

Or perhaps the best known example was in the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing that his journey would lead him to the cross shortly. He asked if there was any other way.

[14:07] Do you remember? And yet he humbly accepted his limits by saying, not my will. And then humbly trusted his Father.

But your will be done. And so then was content to continue to the cross. Here is a greater example to inspire us that, like Christ, we might fully trust God and find contentment too.

What's more, we have greater strength to help us. And we heard this also from those famous words in our second reading, where Paul says, nope, it's not there.

It's a different verse. He says, I can do all things through him who gives me strength. Do you remember that from our second reading? All things refers to the things God has called Paul to do, like serving Christ.

And we're to serve him with contentment at no matter the circumstance. And we have access to Christ's strength to help us do just that. And third, we have a greater reason to encourage us to fully trust God.

[15 : 20] For if God gave his only son for our good, then we really can trust that he works for our good in all things. You know that famous verse?

In all things, God works for the good of those who love him. It's sometimes hard to believe that verse, when we can't see the good or understand it at the time.

But if God has given his only son for our good, we can trust that he really is working for our good, even if it doesn't make sense to us at the time. This is the big one for me, I think, and I think it's the big one that scripture points us to.

It's a bit like some friends of ours back in an old church who couldn't have children for years. They had quite a number of miscarriages, and they just didn't know why.

It didn't make sense to them, both in terms of biology, you know, they were both healthy, and there were seemingly no issues of fertility. And in terms of theology, they sought to be godly and prayed and just didn't understand why God wasn't answering their prayers the way they wanted.

[16 : 30] It didn't make sense to them. But then they said to Michelle and me, well, if God doesn't give us kids, then he doesn't give us kids. We just keep remembering that he gave his kid for us.

You see, they looked back and remembered God's goodness to them in Christ, and that helped them to trust him fully and find contentment in life.

And so when things don't make sense to you along your journey in life, then I think firstly, pray for humility to accept our limits. Kind of like that prayer of serenity, you know, that prayer of serenity, which says, God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

I think we can change that prayer to, God grant me the humility to accept the things I cannot understand, the help to understand the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The wisdom to know that there are some things that belong to God and not to us. And so firstly, pray for humility to accept our limits.

[17 : 44] And secondly, hope fully in the Lord, humbly trusting him, depending on resting in him, remembering that he does work for our good.

It's been really encouraging recently to see people from our church do that. In fact, just last week, I was chatting to two guys from our church, one who is unemployed and looking for work.

I was asking how it was going and if there's anything we could do and so on. And he said, I'm still looking for work and I've got a few emails. Things were a bit quiet at this time in January. And then he said, but I'm trusting God to provide.

And he just had this big smile on his face, this smile of contentment. In fact, he was at the shops and he was still happy to go and spend money on groceries, not frivolous things, but he wasn't so worried that he was eating baked beans all the time.

Or another guy again, just last week, has to move from Melbourne to another state, which means selling his house, uprooting his life and leaving his friends and family. He knows it's the right thing to do, but it's not easy for him.

[18 : 55] For he doesn't know what lies ahead and if it'll all work out. And yet he too said to me, I'm trusting in God's grace. It will be okay.

Humbly trusting in the Lord, hoping in the Lord and then finding contentment. It'll be okay. Well, finding contentment for my daughter when she was an infant meant feeding her and letting her lie on our chest.

But for us, when we don't know what lies ahead on our journey or why things happen along the way, we are to hope in the Lord to find contentment, to humbly trust in God, looking to Christ's example to inspire us, praying for Christ's strength to help us, remembering Christ's death and God's goodness to encourage us.

That we might not just humbly accept our limits, but fully trust in our God. Let's pray. We'll do both.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, when things in life don't make sense to us, help us, we pray, to humbly accept our limits, but also to humbly trust in you and your goodness towards us.

Help us to do this when we can't see it, when we don't understand. Help us to keep handing things over to you fully that we might find contentment in life.

[20 : 38] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.