

Psalm 131 (PM)

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[0 : 0 0] Well, you heard the psalm read. I think it's just, Psalm 131 is astonishingly beautiful, and I think it's a very challenging psalm, and it's the last in our series looking at the Psalms of Ascent. It's short, just a couple of verses, but if you take on what it says, I think it can change your life. So we're going to jump straight to verse 2 and then come back to verse 1, and that'll make sense shortly. We're going to jump straight to verse 2. These are the words of David, and he says, I have calmed and quieted my soul. In other translations, it simply says, I am content. I'm content. And contentment in the 21st century, I think, is a very rare thing. Rare, because it's just too easy to get caught up, swept up with our desires and jealousies for more, for more, for more. And there are many, many people in the world who are discontent with their loss in life, maybe related to finances, family, health, parents. My family went to a family camp at Piney Pacific three weeks ago for a week, and it was a brilliant time, but there was this toddler there at this camp.

There was this toddler, infamous toddler. And she was such a handful. Such a handful. If there was a kid playing with a toy, this toddler, if it was anywhere near this other kid, would just launch her body, launch her body at this kid, trying to snatch and grab this toy, just screaming and screaming, mine, mine, mine. What? What? What? And the mum, who was a really wonderful mother, would very calmly say, no, honey. No, honey. That's not your toy. This is your toy. A toddler would just rage and rage and rage. And sometimes, I think, I know I do, we act like toddlers. We are unhappy with what we've been given. We're frustrated because the kid beside us has something we want, and we feel like they've been dealt a better hand in life. And that attitude is not going to produce calm. It's not going to produce a calm and quiet spirit. It's going to steal your contempt. So, verse two, again.

I have calmed and quieted my soul. Imagine that. Just some, wouldn't that be amazing? If that was your baseline, just content. Now, before we get, before we talk about how David got there, we need to establish sort of a working definition of contentedness. So, we'll start with what David is not talking about. First, contentment here, he's not connecting it to circumstances.

Because, you know, sometimes we get glimpses of it, kind of like a faux contentment, and it's it's, you know, we have a great day at work, and our boss says something really nice to us. Maybe we have a date night that night booked at a great restaurant, and you're listening to some fantastic true crime, true crime podcast on your commute, but this is just me. And you feel really good, and you had a salad for lunch, so you don't feel bloated, feeling peaceful, you're feeling great. That's brilliant. But that is not the contentment David is talking about. The calmness in his heart that David is talking about here is not linked to our circumstances. David is not saying, you know, look, guys, I finally solved all my problems.

You notice he doesn't say that. He doesn't say, I'm in a really great place financially and relationally. I'm the king, so I've achieved a fairly significant career milestone, and I just feel really good about life. I mean, that's a good feeling. But it's not the contentment he is talking about in the psalm. Now, the Apostle Paul in the New Testament is helpful to us here. Let me read Philippians 4, 11 to 13 to you.

[4 : 1 9] I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. See, this is contentment, unlinked, untethered to our circumstances. And we don't want our inner peace connected to our circumstances anyway. It's too vulnerable an arrangement because our circumstances can change in a moment. So David here is not talking about circumstantial content.

What else is he not talking about? Well, he's also not talking about just being resigned to what you have, settling for what's in front of you. Sometimes I say to my kids, come on kids, look, there are

people in the world that don't have any toys. Be happy with Mr. Potato Head or whatever it is. Just be happy with what you have. Adjust your expectations.

That's, again, that's not what David's talking about because it's still linked to our circumstances. It's just sort of like a psychological trick. It's still contentment, unconnected to a relationship with God. And again, it's a fragile thing. This is not what David's talking about. And lastly, he's not just talking about a personality trait. I mean, some people are more evenly killed. Some people handle disorder better than others. And that's true. And that's wonderful. But again, it's not what David's talking about. It's not what the Bible talks about when it talks about peace in our hearts.

So those are the negative definitions. Just one more thing before we get to what he is actually talking about. And this is important. I want to read verse 2 again slowly to you again. Here we go. I have calmed and quieted my soul. I have done that. It's much clearer in the original language. But what David is saying is, I got contentment the old-fashioned way. I learnt it. I learnt it. David is saying he has been involved in a long battle, a determined battle to keep his desires and his jealousies in check so he can know calm and peace in his heart. His contentment, he has worked for it.

[6 : 47] It's not that his circumstances suddenly change to make him quite peaceful. No. He's saying, I have done the hard work of becoming a person with a calm and quiet soul. And that process, for him, he says it was like weaning a child. Now, we've been talking about what contentment is not.

Let's talk about what it is. And what David does is he does not give us a dictionary definition here. What he gives us is a picture, like a domestic picture. And it's a really beautiful picture of contentment. Let me read the whole of verse 2. I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me. Okay, what does that mean? Right. Think about the difference between an unweaned child versus a weaned child. An unweaned child is always fretting and crying until it gets what it wants. What does it want? It wants its mother's milk. And then it will settle down. But a weaned child is just happy being with its mom. Mom is no longer just the milk machine. Mom is no longer just this thing it sort of uses to get what it wants. See what David is saying here? David is saying contentment is learning to love God for himself. Not just what he can give me and not just for what you think God owes you in life. Just happy to have God. And this is what spiritual maturity looks like. It looks like being able to say, I don't ultimately care if my life goes exactly the way I want it or not. As long as I have the Father. This is David's picture of contentment. It's a beautiful picture. Now, that's all the middle section. Verse 2. Let's go to verse 1. Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great or marvelous for me. Right. So, let's agree for a moment. Let's agree.

[9 : 10] We all want verse 2. A quiet and calm spirit. We all want that. We want to be like this weaned child, content just with God no matter what life throws at us. That's what we want.

We agree. Excellent. But in order to get to verse 2, we have to go through verse 1. To get verse 2, we have to go through verse 1. And that's hard. Let's look at it closer.

David says, Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high. David is saying, here's something I had to give up in my life. I had to give up pride. That's what it's talking about. It's talking about pride. So, what is pride? Pride says, it all depends on me. A prideful heart says, I'm the center of the universe. Things revolve around me. Pride says, I know best.

Pride has a low view of God. It has a high view of self. And it's the sin that causes most other sins. And here's the thing about pride. It is tricky to recognize though. Because like so many other sins in our culture, it's a sin that presents as a virtue. It's a sin that presents as a virtue. For example, pride becomes, I am totally committed to my personal happiness.

above all else. Which in our culture is celebrated. It's called authenticity. But perhaps, perhaps it's just a polished up version of self-centeredness. And tragically, it's a way of living that doesn't actually ever deliver on the promise of joy anyway. So, it's tricky. David says, I've had to work through pride. I've had to set aside these ideas in my heart. I've had to set aside the idea that I always know best. I've had to set aside the idea that I make meaning for myself. That I am the final authority. And this is a journey towards spiritual maturity that we all must go through. We need to set aside our vision for personal flourishing and submit it to God's sacred order and His divine plan for our life.

[11 : 22] And when we do that, we might start to experience contentment. But it's hard. This is hard stuff.

It's comforting to know that Christ had to continually make these decisions in the garden, in Gethsemane, when He said to the Father, if this cup can be taken from me, let's do that. But not my will yours. He set aside His desire for the Father's will. And let's move on. I want to get to the second part of verse 1, which I think is brilliant. David says, I do not occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me. I don't occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me. Now, we may have a few problems with this, but just hear me out on this one. This is the other thing David had to work through to find contentment in his life. Now, what he's saying here is not, don't ask questions of God because the Psalms are full of questions. But he is saying there are just some things in life that you are going to go through or that you will witness or that you will see. And you're going to see some things or witness some things or experience some things that you have to be God to understand why they're happening. He's not saying don't wrestle with mysteries. But at some point, at some point, we have to arrive at Deuteronomy 29, 29, which says, the secret things belong to the Lord our God. But the things that He has revealed are for us and for our children.

There are some things that God has revealed to us with great clarity. And there are some things hidden from us. There are secrets. We must let God have the secrets. There are some things which are above our pay grade.

[13:18] We just don't, we're not going to be able to get our heads around them. I mean, think about your key fob, right? Like, you know, you've got a key fob to open your door in your car. Press a button and the door's all unlocked.

That's incredible, I reckon. I reckon that's incredible. You guys, we have no idea how it works, right? But we think we can wrap our heads around what God is doing in the world.

And we think we can put Him, you know, judge God what He's up to. Why did you let this happen? Why did you let this happen? Contentment is found when we've reached the place where we can say, even when I cannot understand, I still trust.

And again, this is hard. This is weaning. This is the process of weaning. And there are some crazy difficult things going to come into your life. And I know some of you, certainly a number of people in our congregation who are going through some extremely difficult things.

We must, as Christians, we must train our brains. We must remember that these things that come into our life do not come haphazardly into your life.

[14:30] But they come in the Father's wisdom. This is not an easy truth to hear. God has His secrets. We don't understand everything. So we hold that truth up.

We also hold another truth up. Romans 8, 28, which says, We know that God, that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called, according to God's purposes. So, in summary here, David says here, I'm not going to fret over questions that I know I will not get an answer to.

Rather, I'm going to trust that God knows what He's doing. Even the most difficult things in your life. Folks, even the evil things that happen to you in your life. God is God enough to sweep those things into His plan for you and the community.

See, believing this is one of the keys to experiencing contentment. Again, difficult truths. Spurgeon said of Psalm 131, he said, It's one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.

[15:49] Let me finish up here. And rather than finish up with a really clunky summary, which I'm prone to do, I want to read a short poem written by Amy Carmichael.

Amy Carmichael was a Protestant Irish missionary to India in the late 1800s. She was there for 55 years. Never furloughed back to the UK. Just an astonishing woman.

And she set up a mission there to rescue children from Hindu temples. The situation was this. People who didn't want their kids or didn't know what to do with their kids would basically just give them to these Hindu temples and then these children were forced into child prostitution to make money for the temples.

So she would go in there, rescue the kids, and she rescued over 1,000 kids during her life. She was often very sick herself, faced lots of hardship.

In fact, the last 20 years of her life, she was basically bedridden. It was a disease. But she spent that time writing, writing to encourage other Christians. She had a treasure greater than anything the world could offer her.

[17:01] She had Jesus. So she could live this life of astonishing, radical contrast. But this didn't come to her naturally or easily.

And we know that through the poetry that she wrote. So to finish, I want to read one of her poems. Which, I think, is a reflection on Psalm 131.

She wrote this. And I'm going to read it twice for us. She wrote this. And shall I pray you change your will, my Father, until it be according unto mine?

But no, Lord, no. That never shall be. Rather, I ask you, blend my human will with thine. I pray you hush the hurrying, eager longing.

I pray you soothe the pangs of keen desire. See in my quiet places, wishes thronging. Forbid them, Lord, purge, though it be with fire.

[18:01] And work in me to will and do your pleasure. Let all within me peaceful, reconciled, rest all content in my beloved's leisure.

At last, at last, even as a weaned child. Now, I want to read that again to you. But perhaps you can take a posture of prayer in your heart.

And this could be a prayer you pray to Jesus. And shall I pray, you change your will, my Father, until it be according unto mine?

But no, Lord, no. That never shall be. Rather, I ask you, blend my human will with thine. I pray you, hush the hurrying, eager longing.

I pray you, soothe the pangs of keen desire. See in my quiet places wishes thronging. Forbid them, Lord, purge, though it be with fire.

[19:07] And work in me to will and do your pleasure. Let all within me peaceful, reconciled, rest all content in my beloved's leisure.

At last, at last, even as a weaned child. Amen.