

# Psalm 131

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

- [ 0 : 00 ] So we're looking at the Psalm of David, Psalm 131. It's an astonishingly beautiful psalm, and it is a very challenging one for us as well.
- Now, as a reminder, this is the last psalm we're looking at in the Psalms of Ascent. It's the shortest one, three verses, but if you take on what it says, it can change your life.
- So I'm going to jump to verse 2 and then come back to verse 1, but we're going to spend a little bit of time looking at verse 2. King David says, I have calmed and quieted my soul.
- In other translations, it simply says I am content, and contentment, as you know, in the 21st century, is a very rare thing. Rare because it is just too easy to get swept up in our desires for more, for more, for more, for better.
- And many, many people today are really discontent with their lot in life, maybe related to finances or family, health, appearance. They're just discontented.
- [ 1 : 17 ] My family and I, we went to Pioneer Pacific Family Camp a couple of weeks ago, and it was great. There was this toddler at family camp who was a handful.
- And if there was a kid playing with a toy and this toddler was nearby, this kid would literally, she would just launch herself, launch her body at the toy this other person was playing with, screaming, screaming for it, mine, mine, want, want.
- And the mum, who was a lovely mother, would calmly say, no, honey, no. That's not your toy. You have this toy. And the toddler would just be raging.
- And I think sometimes in our hearts we act like toddlers, right? We're unhappy with what we've been given.
- We're frustrated because the kid beside us has something that we want. We feel like they have been dealt a better hand in life. And that attitude is not going to produce the calm and the quiet spirit in us.
- [ 2 : 19 ] That kind of attitude steals our content. Verse 2 again. I have calmed and quieted my soul.
- What a state to be in. Wouldn't that be amazing? Wouldn't it be amazing to just be content?
- Now, before we talk about how David got there, how he got this contented heart, let's establish a working definition of contentedness.
- So we'll start by talking about what David is not talking about. Does that make sense? It's via negativa. We're going to start by saying, here's not what he's saying. So first, contentment here is not connected to circumstances.
- Sometimes, you know, every now and then we'll have a really great day. Just a brilliant day. Your boss says really nice things to you. And maybe you've got a date night booked that night.
- [ 3 : 26 ] You're listening to a really excellent true crime podcast on your commute. I'm basically describing my life here. And you feel really good. You didn't eat too much for lunch, so you're not kind of feeling bloated.

And you just feel peaceful. You're just feeling really good. That's a great feeling. I hope you have lots of those. But this is not the contentment David is talking about.

The calmness David talks about here is not linked to circumstances. David is not saying, you know, I finally resolved all my problems. I'm in a good place financially, relationally.

I'm the king. So I've achieved a fairly significant career milestone. And as a result, I just feel great. That's a good feeling.

But it's not the contentment he's talking about. Paul, the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, is helpful to us here. We read it earlier. I'll read it to you again. Philippians 4. This contentment that Paul talks about, the contentment that David talks about, it's unlinked to circumstances.

[ 4 : 47 ] And we don't want to link our inner peace to circumstances anyway. It's too fragile an arrangement. Because our circumstances can change in a moment. So David here is not talking about circumstantial contentment.

So just a reminder, we're talking about what he's not talking about. The next thing David is not talking about, he's not talking about to just being resigned to what you have. Settling for what's in front of you.

Like we say to our children sometimes, hey, look, I've said this to my kids. You know, look, there are some kids in the world who have no toys. Just be happy with what you've got. Adjust your expectations and then you'll be peaceful.

No. You see, the problem is it's still contentment linked to circumstances. It's a psychological trick. It can be helpful. But it's unconnected to a vibrant relationship with your heavenly father.

And again, it's too fragile. Again, it's not what David is talking about. Lastly, we might mistakenly think that contentment he's talking about is simply a personality trait.

[ 5 : 46 ] David had it, but other people didn't. Some people are just more even keeled. Some people can naturally handle more disorder in their life than others. That's a gift. It may be true for you, but it's not what David is talking about.

It's not what the Bible talks about when it talks about inner peace. So those are the negative definitions. Just one more thing before we get to the working definition of contentment.

I want to point out something about the first part of verse 2. I'll read it again. I have calmed and quieted my soul. Now, it's much clearer in the original language, but what David is saying 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. Determined battle against, like, keeping his desires in check so that he can know peace and calm in his heart.

And this contentment, he says he's worked for it. So it's not that his circumstances change to make his life more peaceful.

[ 7 : 04 ] No, David says, I have done the hard work of becoming a person with a calm and quiet soul. And that process, he says, that process is the process kind of like weaning a child.

Now, we've been talking about what contentment is not and that it's hard work. Let's talk about what it is. And from David, we don't get a dictionary definition.

We get a really lovely picture. It's a domestic scene. A picture of quiet, a picture of contentment. Let me remind you, this is verse 2, the second half.

But I've calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Right, what does that mean? So think about the difference between an unweaned child and a weaned child. An unweaned child is always fretting and crying until it gets what it wants.

[ 8 : 10 ] Right, and what does it want? It wants mother's milk. And only then does it settle down and be quiet. But a weaned child, and this is important, a weaned child is just happy being in the presence of its mother.

Mom is no longer just the milk machine, right? Mom is no longer just the thing it uses to get what it wants. You see what it's saying here?

David is saying contentment is learning to love God for himself. Not just for what you can get from God. Or not what you think God owes you.

And this is spiritual maturity. It looks like being able to say, I don't ultimately care. I don't ultimately care if my life goes exactly the way I want it or not.

As long as I have him. As long as I have my Father in heaven. So this is David's picture of contentment. It's beautiful.

[ 9 : 18 ] Let's go to verse 1 now. So, let's agree.

We all want verse 2, right? We want verse 2. We want a calm soul. We want a quieted soul. We want to be content in whatever the Lord has for us.

We want that. We want to be like this weaned child. We want to be content just to have God no matter what life throws at us. We want it. We agree. We want it. But in order to get to verse 2, you have to go through verse 1.

And that's hard. That's difficult. Let's look closer at it here. David says, Oh Lord, my heart is not lifted up. My eyes are not raised too high.

David is saying, I had to give up pride to get content. Now, what is pride? Pride says, It all depends on me. A prideful heart says, I'm the center of the universe.

[ 10 : 31 ] Everything revolves 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 most other sins arise from.

But pride, folks, is tricky to recognize. It is tricky to recognize in others. It's tricky to recognize in ourselves. Because like so many other sins in our culture, it is a sin that presents as a virtue.

It's a sin that presents as a virtue. For example, Pride becomes a commitment to my personal happiness above all things.

Pride becomes a commitment to my personal happiness above all things, all others. And in our culture, that's called authenticity. And it's celebrated.

But perhaps it's just a polished up version of self-centeredness. And tragically, it doesn't even deliver on the promise of joy.

[ 11 : 34 ] So pride is a tricky thing. And David says, I worked through pride. I've had to set aside the idea that I always know best. The belief that says, I will make meaning for myself.

That I'm the final authority. And this is a journey we all must go through to become spiritually mature. We need to set aside our vision for personal flourishing and submit it to God's sacred order for things.

His divine plan. And we have to do that to experience contentment. And that is hard. It's hard work. I find it comforting to know that Christ, Christ knows this.

In the garden, he said to his father, if this cup can be taken from me, let's do that. But not my will, but yours. Christ set aside his desire in that moment for the father's will.

Now let's move on, because I want to get to the second part of verse one, which is just brilliant. David says, I do not occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me.

[ 12 : 44 ] This is the other thing David says he had to work through to find contentment. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

So we put aside pride. But what does the second half of verse one mean? Well, David is not saying don't ask questions of the Lord, because the Psalms are full of questions.

What he's saying is this, there are just some things in life, some things that happen, that you have to be God to understand why they're happening.

He's not saying don't wrestle with mysteries. Don't think about this stuff. Don't ignore it. He's saying, but at some point, we have to land on Deuteronomy 29, 29, which says, the secret things belong to the Lord, our God.

The secret things belong to the Lord, our God, but for the things that he has revealed, are for us and for our children. There are some things above our pay grade. Look, you have, most of you probably have like a key fob, you know, like a key fob to open your car door.

[ 13 : 58 ] You go outside after this, and you're going to push the button, and your doors all unlock, right? Incredible. That's incredible. Most of you have no idea how that works, right?

You have no idea how that works. But I think we think we could wrap our heads around what God is doing in our life all the time. See, contentment is found when we reach the place that says, even when I cannot understand, I trust.

And I know some of you are going through extremely difficult things right now. And this is hard. But, this is kind of like, weaning, isn't it?

Because there's so many, crazy things happen in our life. We don't understand them. We have to remind ourselves that, all of these things that come into our life, do not haphazardly, enter our life.

But they're part of our life, through the wisdom of God. And this is not an easy truth. But God has secrets. And we don't understand why everything happens.

[ 15 : 18 ] So we hold up that truth. And right beside it, we hold up another truth. Romans 8, 28. We know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

So, summary here of this little section. And David is saying, I am not going to fret over questions, that I know, I will not get an answer to.

Rather, I am trusting that the Lord knows what he is doing, even, even for the most difficult things in your life. Do you know, even evil things in your life, even dark, evil things in your life, the Lord is so wise, he can sweep those into his plan for you, for our community, and for the world.

And believing this, is one of the keys to finding contentment in your soul. Again, difficult truths. Spurgeon, the great preacher Spurgeon, Spurgeon said of Psalm 131, that it's one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.

So, let me finish up here. And rather than finishing up with some really clunky summary, which I am prone to do, I want to read a short poem written by Amy Carmichael.

[ 16 : 45 ] You don't know who she is. She was a Protestant Irish missionary in India, in the late 1800s. She was there for 55 years, never furloughed back to the UK. She set up a mission to rescue children from Hindu temples.

A lot of kids were sold into these temples. They were unwanted, perhaps. They were sold into the temples, and then those kids were then forced into prostitution to make money for the temples.

So Amy would go into these temples and rescue these kids and raise them in this mission that she started. And over her life, she rescued over a thousand children. She was often very sick herself, faced lots of hardship.

The last 20 years of her life, she was bedridden due to disease, but used that time to write and encourage other Christians. Amy had a treasure greater than anything the world could offer her.

She had Jesus. And so she could live this life of radical contrast. Now, this attitude did not come naturally to her or easily to her.

[ 17 : 56 ] And we know this through her poetry. So to finish, I want to read a short poem of hers, a poem which seems to be a reflection on Psalm 131.

I'm going to read it twice, actually. Here's what she wrote. And shall I pray, you change your will, my Father, until it be according unto mine?

But no, Lord, no, that shall never be. Rather, I ask you, blend my human will with thine. I pray, 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.

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

[ 18 : 59 ] At last, at last, even as a weaned child. I want to read it again for you. And I wonder if you could just take a posture of prayer in your hearts, and this could be a prayer for you as we finish.

And shall I pray, you change your will, my Father, until it be according unto mine?

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

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

[ 20 : 13 ] At last, at last, even as a weaned child. Amen.