

Taylor Hollingsworth

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! As we get closer to the city, we connect with many other travelers onto a single road like several small streams coming together into a single river.

Even though we're all coming from different places, our march toward the city reminds us of our common history. We were once slaves, but our God has delivered us.

We were once exiles, but our God has brought us home. And now we are headed toward the temple to remember where we came from and who our God is.

Step by step, we continue in this growing caravan. Then, the sound of singing. Striding shoulder to shoulder on the road to Jerusalem, we unite our voices in the familiar songs given to us by our ancestors.

[1 : 19] Songs that provoke us to search our hearts and our minds as we prepare to worship the God of all creation. Then, we come to this song. Composed as a prayerful meditation by King David, a man after God's own heart.

And with fellow pilgrims around us, the temple of the living God before us, and the melody of King David filling the air, we encounter these divinely inspired words. So would you look at Psalm 131 with me?

Psalm 131.

Hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. This song provided the pilgrim worshipers, and it provides for us this morning an opportunity for self-reflection.

What are we saying when we read this psalm? What's it trying to get to? Well, it'd be difficult for me to improve on the words of biblical counselor David Pallison. And in his insightful article on this particular psalm, he begins this way.

[2 : 49] Most of Psalm 131 is wholly eavesdropping. You have intimate access to the inner life of someone who has learned composure. And then he invites you to come along.

Psalm 131 is show and tell for how to become peaceful inside. This person is quiet on the inside because he has learned the only true and lasting composure.

He shares the details of what the peace that passes understanding is like. Amazingly, this man isn't noisy inside. He isn't busy, busy, busy.

Not obsessed. Not on edge. The to-do list and pressures to achieve don't consume him. Ambition doesn't churn inside. Failure and despair don't haunt him.

Anxiety isn't spinning him into a free fall. He isn't preoccupied with thinking up the next thing he wants to say. Regrets don't corrode his inner experience.

[3 : 48] Irritation and dissatisfaction don't devour him. He's not stumbling through the minefield of blind longings and fears. He's quiet. Are you quiet inside?

Is Psalm 131 your experience too? When your answer is no, it naturally invites these follow-up questions. What is the noise going on inside of you this morning?

Where does it come from? How do you get busy and preoccupied? And why? Do you lose your composure? When do you get worried, irritable, wearied, hopeless?

How can you regain composure? Or do you need to learn it for the first time? I believe that the Lord has brought us here together this morning to address the noisiness in our souls.

I've been meditating on these three verses for a few weeks now, and I think Spurgeon was spot on whenever he said, This psalm is one of the shortest psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn.

[4 : 55] That's because this psalm is designed to reveal the roots of our soul's restlessness and teach us the source of true contentment. So the main point for us this morning that I believe this psalm is trying to communicate is that true contentment grows through humble hope in God.

And we're going to look at three points, three verses, one for each verse. Verse one, the posture of true contentment. Verse two, the picture of true contentment.

And then verse three, the path to true contentment. So if you would just look on at verse one with me, the posture of true contentment. It says, Oh 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. So right away, the psalmist draws our attention to three things that are not going on, right?

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.

[6 : 03] All three of these statements are really three ways of denouncing the same issue. And the issue is pride. David is rejecting the source of discontentment, which is pride.

So you're probably familiar with the story of Alice in Wonderland. Throughout the whole story, Alice finds herself to be either way too big or way too small. And as a result, she's constantly disoriented.

We are just like Alice. When pride is operating in our hearts, we have a warped view of ourselves, others, and circumstances. David knows this, and that's why he's denouncing pride at the very beginning.

So the first part of this rejection of pride begins with himself, right? Throughout scripture, the word heart functions as a metaphor for the mind, will, and the emotions. It's the centerpiece of our being, and all of our beliefs and actions flow from it.

Out of the abundance of the heart, what? The mouth speaks, right? So what does it mean that his heart is not lifted up? Wouldn't it be a good thing for a heart to be uplifted?

[7 : 13] Well, in this case, the word refers to being lofty and exalted. So the image is a person who is self-obsessed, kind of like the story in Greek mythology of narcissists, who fell in love with himself after he saw his reflection in a stream, and after he realized that the centerpiece of his love would never materialize, he fell into despair and commits suicide.

So even though it's Greek mythology, there is biblical truth in there. The supreme love of self is suicide. It's pride that makes us disproportionately large, and it is radically disorienting.

So if David is showing us the posture of a heart that is not lifted up, what can we say about our hearts this morning? Is your heart lifted up too high?

How do you know? How do you know that? Well, you can know if your heart is lifted up by how bad it hurts when it's not.

What is your emotional response? When we were kids, we used to drop rocks from as high as we could. You ever done that? Throw them up as high as you could just to see how big the splash would be?

[8 : 25] The size of your emotional splash is a good indicator of the height your heart is falling from. We may never say this outwardly, but we all have expectations of what is worth our while, don't we?

Right? But when that expectation goes unmet and our worthiness is challenged, there's no hiding from the emotional splash, is there? I was recently reminded of a story about my wife's grandfather that he shared with us.

One of the godliest men I've ever met. After coming to Christ, he desired to help get the good news of the gospel to places that had no access to it. He labored tirelessly through college and went on to complete a master's in theology and linguistics so that he could spend his life translating the Bible into the languages of some of the most remote people in the entire earth.

Eventually, after completing years of education, finishing jungle training camp, raising all the necessary financial and prayer support, and figuring out the logistics of traveling across the world with his wife, he found himself joining a very small translation team in an isolated village in the mountains of Papua New Guinea.

And one of the first assignments upon his arrival, we really need a latrine. Would you mind heading up the latrine digging team? A latrine?

[9 : 53] I spent all that time and money and education and energy to come here, and you're asking me to dig a latrine? I was willing to leave everything and travel to the other side of the world and live with the primitive, Stone Age people so that I could give them the words of life, and I'm digging a latrine?

And there, while shoveling the latrine ditch in the jungle mountains, this missionary felt the emotional splash of his heart falling from a high place.

How big is the splash whenever your contribution isn't noticed? How big is the splash when you feel slighted or criticized or underappreciated?

When asked to do something that is beneath you or not worth your time, that splash may be revealing a heart that is lifted up. In the first denunciation of pride, if that deals with his posture toward himself, the next denunciation of pride has to do with his posture toward others.

Look down at it with me. It says, His eyes are not raised too high. So the pride of the heart says, I'm great. But the pride of the eyes looks outward, and it says, I'm great compared to you.

[11 : 21] Right? We can be so consumed with constant comparison, can't we? So the question that starts to get asked is, how great am I in this area compared to this person?

David Powlison helped me so much understand the dangers of this more clearly with the analogy he calls ladders to nowhere. Essentially, we use that question, how great am I in this particular area compared to that person, to measure the perceived distance between ourselves and that other person.

So you plug in the content, whatever you want. How big is my bank account compared to this person? How smart am I compared to this person? How successful at work am I compared to this person?

How attractive am I compared to this person? How cool am I compared to this person? How many people need me compared to this person? On and on and on it goes.

Then once we've sized ourselves up in relation to that other person, we take that distance and we flip it vertically into a ladder so that we can see what rung we're standing on. Right?

[12 : 28] So we'll either find ourselves higher up on the ladder in relation to the other person or we find ourselves a little bit lower. The tricky thing about pride is that it's not one way.

Pride not only expresses itself in superiority, it also expresses itself in inferiority. You just think about it for a second. Have you ever noticed that even people who feel lousy about themselves are judgmental towards other people?

When you feel inferior to others, you don't admire and respect them or think charitably about them. Instead, you envy, you hate, you nitpick, you grumble, and you criticize.

Even self-belittling tendencies, low self-esteem, self-pity, self-hatred, timidity, fearfulness, fear of rejection, all of these basically express pride failing, pride intimidated, pride despairing.

When we find ourselves on a lower rung, isn't it true that we scramble to find another ladder to reposition ourselves? They may have a nice house, but have you seen how insane their kids are?

[13 : 42] That's not direct to anybody, okay? All right, everybody relax. Everybody just got real uneasy. She might be good looking, but it's too bad she doesn't have a personality to match. We frantically measure and put ladder and ladder and ladder, one after the other up.

Then we want to see, we want others to see how high we are in certain ladders, the ones that we've staked out a higher rung. So Pallison points out that all of these ladders, all these ladders we're frantically putting up are about 15 feet tall, and they're leaning on a wall that's about 50 feet tall.

They are ladders to absolutely nowhere. They accomplish nothing helpful. They promise steadiness and stability, but they come up short.

Instead of contentment, they compound the clutter in our souls. What ladders do you find yourself trying to climb up this morning? What ladders do you find yourself celebrating and busily fending off those who are trying to come up?

David would have us know that true contentment cannot exist where eyes are raised too high. Now let's turn our attention to the end of verse one.

[14 : 57] You can look at it with me. For the last denunciation of pride, I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. So he's demonstrating the posture of true contentment here in relation to himself in the heart, the relation to others with the eyes, and now in relation to his circumstances.

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me. So if this is the posture of true contentment towards circumstances, that means the opposite of this posture leads to discontentment.

So if you want to see a recipe for a restless heart, try this one out. Occupy yourself with things too great and too marvelous for you. You ever try that? How'd that work out?

How is it working out? As I thought about this, I was reminded of the deep, theologically sound cinematic masterpiece, Bruce Almighty, starring Jim Carrey.

If you've never seen it, it's probably a great thing. But the premise is basically that Jim Carrey's character, Bruce, constantly complains about how bad of a job God is doing running the world, and more specifically, his life.

[16 : 07] At one point, he says, God is like a mean kid on an anthill burning ants with a magnifying glass. And I'm the ant. So God lets Bruce temporarily take over to see if he can do any better.

So Bruce uses the power to do what he thinks is best. So essentially, he indulges in things that he thinks makes his life easier and happier. All right?

So at one point, he pulls the moon a little closer to earth to impress his wife, and he tries to satisfy the entire world by simply saying yes to everyone's prayer requests. Well, it's good for a little bit, but it's not long before things just completely unravel.

Pulling the earth a little bit closer to earth in that romantic moment actually causes a tsunami and major devastation. And simply saying yes to every prayer request actually leads to extreme global chaos.

It becomes apparent that the intricacies of sustaining creation ought to be reserved for the creator. And though I was kidding about that movie being a masterpiece, it really does capture a profound biblical truth.

[17 : 18] As Pastor H.B. Charles put it, the difference between God and us is that God never thinks he's us. We want to involve ourselves with things that only God is able to handle.

Isn't that true? But Deuteronomy 29:29 shows us that the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of the law.

So there are things that are concealed and there are things that are revealed. Where does the impulse to take over for God come from for you?

What drives you to try to take the reins from the Lord? So I was looking back over my own life recently about this and I seem to be most deceived into thinking I should handle impossible circumstances when I don't believe God is strong enough or God is good enough to do it himself.

Either God is too weak or he is cruel because this should not be happening to me. Right?

[18 : 28] You plug in the blank, whatever circumstance that is for you. There are so many things in life that are extremely perplexing. That's true.

But we must remember that God is the sovereign king of the universe who spoke creation into existence with a word.

And we must remember that good is not an ideal that God measures up to, but God himself is the definition of goodness. There is no darkness in him at all.

So it must be true. Even though I can't see it or understand it in this moment, God is working all things together for good.

So if presumption swells up in our hearts and we dare attempt to take on the impossible, those things that are concealed, we will be restless, noisy, unsatisfied, and discontent.

[19 : 35] David did not allow himself to be preoccupied with what God was not pleased to give to him. Nor did he allow his mind to become fixated on the things God was not pleased to explain to him.

It has been well said that such preoccupations suffocate contentment. So I think we might be helped this morning if we lean in and listen to Spurgeon's wisdom this morning when he says, happily for us, I love this, our happiness does not depend upon our understanding the providence of God.

We are able to believe where we are not able to explain. And we are content to leave a thousand mysteries unsolved rather than tolerate a single doubt as to the wisdom and goodness of our Heavenly Father.

So we are not called to believe in the God. We are not called, we are called to believe, excuse me, we are not called upon to make sense of every situation. We are called to believe in the God that can make sense of it.

It is only when we refuse to occupy ourselves with things outside of our control that we begin to experience true contentment. So as we continue to the next verse, you can look at it with me, it's verse two.

[20 : 48] We are given a wonderful picture of true contentment. It says, but I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

David wants us to see a vivid illustration of what a satisfied soul looks like. And this verse may be a little jarring to us at first. It was to me at least at first glance for a couple reasons.

First, doesn't it seem a little bit arrogant to take credit for calming his soul? Shouldn't it read something like God quieted and calmed my soul? Now a little more Christian-y.

Also, what's the deal with a weaned child? Wouldn't it be more powerful to talk about an itty-bitty little infant that really needs his mama for everything? That's kind of what my mind went to. Well, I'm glad you asked those questions.

Yeah. So in order to understand the point he's making about his soul, it'll be most helpful to look at that analogy first. So was weaned child an accident?

[21 : 45] Should it actually be an infant or something like that? Well, the purpose of the analogy is to be a picture of contentment, right? The previous verse just showed us that the posture of true contentment denounces pride from every angle.

The result is restfulness, soul satisfaction, peace, silence. So the word weaned here is really important for us to understand the psalmist's intention.

Have you ever seen an unweaned child? If you haven't seen an unweaned child, you certainly have heard an unweaned child. So I'm the proud father of three kids, right?

We have an almost five-year-old. We have an almost three-year-old which made the sprint down earlier and a one-year-old who's not able to sprint but will be soon. So we've been down this road a few times.

So let me briefly paint a picture of an unweaned child from my memory that recurred over the course of hundreds of nights, okay? Flying through strange black tunnels and extremely disoriented, all of a sudden, I snap awake.

[22 : 56] I'm in my bed. A dull light is glowing. It's a lamp. But what is that piercing sound? In a haze, I scan the room for a swooping pterodactyl. I fearfully raise my hands to protect my face before the talons reach for my flesh and while bracing for the attack, I open my eyes one last time to see the world and my wife is there and she hands me the baby.

Right? Can you hold him for a sec while I go get some eye drops? Unable to speak for joy that I have not been carried off, I reach out my hands for the source of the screaming and for that moment it's just me and him.

Now, for you guys out there who've been in this position, you know that what that baby wants, you ain't got. Right? The noise goes up and the ravenous rooting begins.

Any orb-like flesh is fair game. On a number of occasions, I've had to pull these creatures away from my kneecaps because they get to such a point of frustration, they will strike at anything.

Right? So with an unweaned child, in that moment, you are witnessing the eruptive pain of self-seeking.

[24 : 12] If mom doesn't deliver right now, he'll thrash about. Right? His emotions range over the whole spectrum of noisy, negative emotion. It's amazing. If you look at that face and what he's doing, Pallison points out that you are witnessing the childish versions of things that destroy adults.

Depression, anxiety, anger, jealousy, discontent, confusion.

Are not those the very things that we just said pride can generate? You see, an unweaned child cries until he gets something from his mother, her milk.

But a weaned child is so different. The weaned child is satisfied with the mother herself. The commentator, Derek Kidner, helps us by saying that in contrast to the unweaned child, a weaned child no longer frets for what it used to find indispensable.

The soul that is like a weaned child experiences freedom from the nagging of self-seeking and the bondage of delusive threats and fears.

[25 : 26] Oh, that's so good. Freedom from the nagging of self-seeking and the bondage of delusive threats and fears.

Eugene Peterson said it like this, Christian faith is not neurotic dependency but childlike trust. We do not cling to God desperately out of fear and panic of insecurity.

We come to him freely in faith and love. So our Lord gave us the picture of a child as a model for Christian faith. Not because of the child's helplessness but because of the child's willingness to be led, to be taught, and to be blessed.

This freedom from self and satisfaction with God is the contentment that David is after and it's the contentment that we're after this morning. But please take note that there is a process to becoming weaned.

It is a process that can be very, very uncomfortable. We can certainly agree with H.B. Charles when he said that we are tormented by the thought that what means so much to us will be taken away.

[26 : 42] From our perspective, the loss of things is filled with pain. From God's perspective, the loss of things is filled with purpose. This does not mean that God is unloving or uncaring but the mother knows what the child does not.

This must happen for you to grow. Be encouraged this morning that true contentment grows. That's why David can say, I have calmed and quieted my soul.

You can't calm what was never turbulent. And you can't quiet that which was never loud. So if you felt that true contentment is some unreachable, ideal way out there, be encouraged that change and transformation and growth are possible for us this morning.

How? By telling your restless soul, shh. That's what this text is saying. Look at it.

It says, I calmed and quieted my soul. Is it arrogant that David is taking credit for the action here? Well, look at it. David is not digging within himself for some kind of inner peace.

[27 : 56] In fact, it's the inside that's full of turmoil here. He's reminding his restless soul of an external reality. Don't worry. I'm taken care of.

The same reality is guiding Paul's words when he says, 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 every circumstance.

I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. To quiet your soul means to silence the noise to your desires, your fears, opinions, anxieties, agendas, irritabilities.

In this way, contentment is not dependent on yourself or your shifting circumstances, but on the one who cares for you. The practice of silencing the soul with this truth was the inspiration for the beloved hymn, Be Still My Soul by Katerina von Schlegel.

In it, she artfully captures the pain of weaning and learning to trust God in the midst of mystery because of his power and goodness. Look at these lyrics with me.

[29 : 20] I'm just going to read them. You don't want to hear me sing them. Be still, my soul. The Lord is on thy side. Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.

Leave to thy God to order and provide. In every change, he, faithful, will remain. Be still, my soul. Thy best, thy heavenly friend, through thorny ways, leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul. Thy God doth undertake to guide the future as he has the past. Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake.

All now mysterious shall be brought bright at last. Be still, my soul. The waves and winds still know his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

Be still, my soul. When dearest friends depart and all is darkened in the veil of tears, then shalt thou better know his love, his heart, who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears.

[30 : 26] Be still, my soul. Thy Jesus can repay from his fullness all he takes away. So we've seen the posture of true contentment and the picture of true contentment.

Now we turn our attention to verse 3 to see the path to true contentment. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

In the end, the psalmist pivots from a private confession of dependence on God to invite others to do the same. What we're seeing here is the fruit of contentment springing up from the soil of humility.

When the weeds of pride are ripped out, there is a surplus of satisfaction that must be shared. Tim Keller in his excellent little book called *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* articulates the type of humility we see here.

The things we would remember from meeting a truly gospel humble person is how much they seem to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself.

[31 : 44] It is thinking of myself less. Gospel humility is not needing to think about myself. Not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to such thoughts as I'm in this room with these people.

Does that make me look good? Do I want to be here? True gospel humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself.

The freedom of self-forgetfulness, the blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings. Is that the kind of rest that you have this morning? Are you free to think about yourself less and enjoy being a channel of blessing to others?

What is the path to that? Well, this that I just described can be ours because David addresses it to us. Galatians 2.16 clearly associates Christian believers with the title the Israel of God.

So when David says, oh, Israel, he's speaking across the span of thousands of years and thousands of miles directly to us this morning in order to invite us to the changeless path to true contentment beginning with this word, hope.

[33 : 03] In a general sense, hope is a desire for something good to happen in the future. David is urging us to hope in order that we may experience true contentment.

But our hope is only as durable as that in which our hope is placed. If I hope an umbrella is enough to sustain me in flight when I jump off of a cliff, my hope is flimsy.

If I hope to catch a speeding bullet in my teeth, my hope is shot. Right? Where our hope is placed makes all the difference.

If you want to know true contentment, do not look to yourself. It says, hope in the Lord. When the psalmist says, hope in the Lord, this is not just a generic title for God.

It is the proper name for the God of the Bible, Yahweh. And this book continues from the pages of the Psalms where we are right now in the middle. And it goes on with the unfolding story of God's plan to save people like you and me from the devastating consequences of our self-reliance.

[34 : 17] 1 Peter 1.13 says, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So, which is it? Should we fix our hope in the Lord or in Jesus Christ? Well, this is the exact same question the disciples wrestled with while on a boat ride with Jesus.

Y'all remember the story, a fierce storm comes out of nowhere and the wind whips so violently that the waves begin to crash onto the boat. The storm on the outside was certainly a reflection of the storm going on within the disciples' hearts.

Jesus was sleeping peacefully and the wind finally, the disciples cried out to Jesus what many of us tend to think when we are shaken. Do you even care?

Do you even care that we're perishing? At this, Jesus sits up and rebukes the wind saying, shh, be still.

[35 : 25] Sound familiar? Amazingly, the winds obey and there's peace. The storm outside was stilled and disciples leave us with this question.

Who is it that even the wind and the sea obey him? He goes by the title Emmanuel, God with us.

The one who has the authority over the wind and the sea is the one who created it and sustains it. The one that David looked forward to is Jesus Christ, the Lord.

This is the place of unshakable hope for us this morning. So if your life has been devastated by the cancer of self-reliance, if your heart has repeatedly fallen from high places of self-glorification, if your eyes have led you to frantically put up ladder after ladder after ladder to nowhere, if you're at a stalemate trying to manage the impossibilities of life, if your soul is bound by the nagging of self-seeking, we have good news for you this morning.

Jesus lived the life we could not live in perfect humility and dependence upon God. Jesus died the death that we should have died when we rejected God as our rightful king and chose to live in self-reliance.

[36 : 49] Jesus took upon himself the full weight of God's just judgment against our rebellion. Jesus rose from death and is now at the right hand of God. Jesus offers his clean record to all who hope in him.

So this morning, we can lay our pride down at the feet of Jesus, embrace humility, and walk along the path of true contentment from now and forever more.

So in the words of David Pallison, Psalm 131 overthrows the powers that be in order to establish the reign of him who is. When you set your hope in the right place, you become just the right size.

No pride, no looking down from on high, no hot pursuit of pipe dreams. The soul storms meet their master and he says, be quiet.

Shh, peace, be still. Let's pray. Lord, this morning we confess our pride.

[38 : 04] We've been preoccupied with ourselves. We've judged others. We've attempted to run our lives and solve the impossibilities of life apart from you.

But we want what this psalm has for us. Would you teach us humility so that we can see ourselves rightly in relation to ourselves, others, and you?

We thank you this morning that our contentment can be found in Jesus. So help us to live with true contentment in every circumstance because of Christ.

Let our souls be quieted with the reality that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

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