

David: Living Deliberately for God No Coasting Allowed Psalm 31

This morning Psalm 31 confronts all of us with a serious question—"Am I seeking the Lord deliberately with all my heart—or just coasting along spiritually"?

Many weeks ago when we began this look at David's life we read God's epitaph for David's life. In nine words God summarizes all that David was on earth.

David ... served God's purpose in his own generation (Acts 13.36, NIV).

As we open to Psalm 31 we find David's personal resolve that marked out why God thought so highly of him.

In You, O LORD, I put my trust (Psalm 31.1a, NKJV)

This Psalm opens with a carefully crafted order of words. Note the Lord comes before David.

David points to the Lord before he speaks of himself. God is the deliberate focus of this opening verse, this Psalm—and David's life.

Psalm 31 is David's reflective song about the dangers and painful consequences of coasting through our spiritual lives.

David crashed when he wasn't careful. David crashed because he had disengaged from following the Lord with his whole heart. David crashed because he was just coasting along in his walk with the Lord.

One of the greatest dangers for a mature believer is to begin coasting spiritually.

Coasting is when we slack up on seeking the Lord with all our heart.

We begin to feed our souls on yesterday's blessings, last week's devotions, and last month's ministry.

Coasting is when we stop engaging our whole mind in worship.

David had carefully lived for the Lord most of his life. He had seen the Hand of God so clearly as a lad facing Goliath. David had felt the Presence of God as a young man fleeing from King Saul. David had felt the blessings of God as a man through all the years of leading the armies of Israel as king.

But somewhere along the way David disengaged his heart.

His heart was no longer fixed on the Lord, but surrounded by so many blessings, he could just coast. He went through all the motions, said all the same words, but wasn't careful to guard his heart.

In those unguarded moments coasting through life, he crashed.

Then everything in his spiritual life halted abruptly and stayed in neutral for that year following his grievous sin against God involving Bathsheba.

After his repentance and restoration—David had changed.

He had learned in the spiritual woodshed of God's chastening, that sin paid a heavy wage of consequences. His life would never be the same. David realized you can't live on yesterday's manna or last month's spiritual disciplines. He couldn't just coast!

David was different not because he had lost something; he was changed because now David lived with an acute awareness that God's forgiveness had given him a second chance. That caused him to live life so much more deliberately than ever before.

BEWARE OF COASTING

The constant danger in our spiritual life is to disengage our engine (our hearts) and just start coasting through our days spiritually; passing up worship, neglecting spiritual disciplines, and slowly drifting away from ministry.

Stop and ask yourself this morning—am I just coasting today? Or, am I seeking God with all my heart?

David in Psalm 31 examines for us how to live life deliberately--how to intentionally live each day in such a way that we live as much as possible of our life for the glory and purpose of the Lord our God.

With David in Psalm 31, this morning we will examine how to live life deliberately--how to avoid coasting and the costly consequences of an unguarded heart.

Scholars are divided as to who wrote this Psalm because it reflects such a kaleidoscope of settings. Most seem to think it was probably David reflecting back across the seasons of his life.

That is where I see this Psalm.

Psalm 31 is a Psalm written—

- after the events of I Samuel 11-12 (David's sin and repentance),
- after the year of painful chastisement recorded in Psalm 32,
- after the magnificent prayer of repentance and return of Psalm 51, and also
- after the painful dash to the wilderness by David--away from his rebel son Absalom, recorded in Psalm 3.

Psalm 31 is a reflective Psalm that David wrote to capture his choice to return and deliberately live his life one day at a time; building upon the lessons he has learned in both triumphs and failures. This Psalm is quoted directly by Jesus, Jonah and Jeremiah.¹

In Psalm 31 David looks back over his life and tries to find when he stopped seeking the Lord with his whole heart. He reflects upon God's Hand in his life in the past. Then he resolved to once again make intentional choices, careful steps and measured responses to each event he faced.

We saw this so clearly in Psalm 3 in David's initial response to Absalom's rebellion. He wept and worshipped, fled and cried to God for help. All that he did was done very carefully.

As we have noted with each of David's Psalms, they are the personal diary of the man God notes is after His heart. David's Psalms are about the experiences of *the man God emphasizes* by writing more about him than anyone else who ever lived.

David learned a strong lesson from his failures and sins and all of that convinced him that he must spend the rest of his days living deliberately for God.

Turn with me to Psalm 31 as we stand and read David's song about how to again whole heartedly live each day of our life for God.

Pray

WITH ALL MY HEART

There is a short chorus we sing from time to time that sums up David's longing in Psalm 31.

"With All My Heart"

With all my heart I want to love You Lord,
and live my life each day to know You more.
All that is in me is Yours completely;
I'll serve You only, with all my heart.

¹ 31.13 terror Jeremiah uses this phrase *magormisbib* 6x (6.25; 20.3-4, 10; 46.5; 49.29; Lam. 2.22). Also Jonah quotes 31.6 in Jonah 2.6. David opens Psalm 71 with the same words. But most significantly, Jesus used Psalm 31.5 as His last words on earth in Luke 23.46.

After his crash, David was so careful. He guarded his heart, and he harnessed his moments. He was deliberate about his spiritual life, he wasn't coasting. He had a new focus for his life, and it was:

Live deliberately for God—No Coasting Allowed!

The dictionary defines that word for us.

De·lib·er·ate·ly *adv.* With careful consideration, or deliberation; circumspectly; warily; not hastily or rashly; slowly; as, a purpose *deliberately* formed; as words and actions said or done on purpose. A life not hurried.

Is that where you are with God today? Or are you coasting?

A Short Definition: intentional

Some Antonyms: A person who does not act deliberately acts--by chance, indeterminately, unintentionally, unmethodically, unsystematically, unwittingly.

In Psalm 3 we saw how David learned to face abuse and danger, and even go to sleep in the face of both—peacefully. That was the first lesson Absalom's rebellion taught him by God's grace.

Today we come to the next lesson God had for him. David learns in this time of consequence was that he must live deliberately. No spiritual coasting through life.

- No more of this boredom stuff like the night he padded out of bed in his slippers and peeked over the rooftops looking for something to interest him.
- No more unplanned situations he walks into defenselessly.
- No more unguarded moments where in an instant of passion he caused a lifetime of heart aches.
- No more! David says, I am renewing my walk with the Lord.

Living deliberately for God means I am going to deliberately plan to neglect anything that hinders my walk as Romans 6 commands.

Living deliberately for God means choices to live—

- *by careful consideration* as I count the cost as Jesus said in Luke 14.28;
- *circumspectly* as Paul said in Ephesians 5.15;
- *warily* of the devil my prowling adversary as Peter said in I Peter 5.8;
- *not hastily or rashly* as James warned in James 1.19.

So living life intentionally, on purpose, deliberately for God is the theme of Psalm 31, as we see David draw inspired lessons from three eras of his life.

Look down at them in your Bible, and trace them with me. Note that the first 22 verses are David talking to God about running, not running, and again running.

1. Psalm 31:1-8 reflects lessons David learned in his **running from Saul years**.
2. Psalm 31:9-11 reflects lessons David learned in his **not running from Bathsheba year**.
3. Psalm 31:12-22 reflects lessons David learned in his **running from Absalom years**.

Now, let's walk through this Psalm section by section and see the ways that David learned from his troubles; lessons that helped him walk the rest of his days intentionally for the Lord.

First David explains to us the lessons he learned from all those years of running for his life from Saul. Look at Psalm 31:1-8 with me.

Psalm 31.1-4 In You, O Lord, I put my trust; Let me never be ashamed; Deliver me in Your righteousness. v. 2 Bow down Your ear to me, Deliver me speedily; Be my rock of refuge, A fortress of defense to save me. v.3 For You are my rock and my fortress; Therefore, for Your name's sake, Lead me and guide me. v. 4 Pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, For You are my strength. (NKJV)

David seems to start this Psalm by reflecting upon all his years on the run from King Saul, fleeing from one cave to another, from one wilderness fort to another.

That is where David found that God and God alone can be the place where we safely rest. In verse one David says I put my trust (chacah [2620] v. 'to seek refuge; to trust') Then he uses four different nouns to describe how he found the Lord as his place of safety. This security David finds in God is seen in the usage of

- o **Rock/Strength** (NKJV 31.2,4 **maowz** [4581] 'fortress, stronghold, strong');
- o **Refuge** (NKJV 31.2 **tsuwr** [6697] 'cliff, rock wall');
- o **Fortress of Defense/Fortress** (NKJV 31.2-3 **matsuwd** [4686] 'fortress' also word for Masada in Israel today, for any of you that have gone to the Land of the Book and seen that majestic refuge).
- o **Rock** <different Hebrew word> (NKJV 31.3 **sehlah** [5553] 'rock, stronghold' as in Psalm 18).

So David uses every word in the Hebrew language he could find for rocks, mountain top fortresses, and strongholds to sing of God's great security that was available. These graphic pictures symbolizing the comfort and help found by David in the Lord, come from his years of running from King Saul. In those years Saul's vast superiority in both numbers and strength were blunted by David's ability to hide in and out of the many caves, canyons, and rocks of the wilderness.

As he looks back he draws from that time of intense fear and shares his hope that rests firmly in the Lord. He is intentionally going to walk forward through this time of testing

and consequence—not running from the problems.

Remember how David is so clear even in the word order. The “in You, O Lord” precedes the “I put my trust”. God is first, He is the source, the target and the point of all David is doing from now on.

When David stepped out once all on his own, he fell deep into sin with Bathsheba. No more, he is putting the Lord first. As we read this section, have you ever come to this deliberate moment in your life?

- Have you said in your heart and at the center of your will—Lord You are first?
- Have you said in your heart and at the center of your will—Lord You come ahead of me, my plans, my desires, my way?
- If not, as I read David’s words again, why not surrender to Him right now?

Even more specifically it seems that David was reflecting upon one of the darker days of those years. David had asked God if he should rescue the fellow Jews of Keilah a town in Judah, from attack by their enemies. David delivers them but as I Samuel 23.1-13 records, after rescuing them, they betray David to Saul and would have given him over to Saul’s murderous intentions.

David may have wanted to make the city of Keilah his safe fortress against Saul, but it turned out to be a false hope and a worthless refuge.

God wanted David to learn that as those natural outcroppings gave David a safe haven all those years--so the supernatural Presence of the Lord, who was always there and always able to protect, **was the real Rock, Refuge, and Fortress.**

David refers to the Lord in this way often in the Psalms (Psalm 18-19; 28; 61-62; and 71).

David fills the Psalm with statements to the Lord that **“You are...”**, afterward applying those in his time of need by saying to himself by faith—**“...then be...”**.

Why not try that in your life?

Carefully go through the Word and declare what God is as revealed by His Word.

Then in faith declare deliberately—

- God you are a Rock, then be my Rock.
- God you are Strength, then be my Strength.
- God you are a Refuge, then be my Refuge.
- God you are a Fortress of Defense, then be my Fortress of Defense.

And then each time you’re in the Word, stop when you find a truth about God. Repeat the truth back to God in the “You are” form. Pause and by faith say, “Then be...”

This is how we can derive the greatest comfort and strength from God's Word. We open to the Lord in His Word and let Him declare that He is something. Then we believe Him enough to declare "You are...then be to me"... and apply what He is to our lives!

Drop down to the next verse. Here is another treasure. See if you recognize v. 5.

Psalm 31.5 "Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth. (NKJV)

After three and one half years of public ministry, after six long hours of horrific suffering on the cross—Jesus lifts His head one last time, pulls Himself up on the spikes to let out His final words in Luke 23:46.

David's words in Psalm 31:5 became also Christ's final words; these words found their way into the hearts and lips of many great saints of the past. Those who stood at their bedside as they died tell us that the following saints used these same words as their last words on earth like Christ's:

1. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee" [#79 TBC Hymnal] died quoting this verse;
2. John Hus (1369-1415) who was burnt at the stake in Constance by the RCC for believing in justification by faith alone and preaching it. At the end of the ceremony condemning Hus to death by fire the presiding bishop uttered this chilling condemnation, "And now we commit thy soul to the devil". To which John Hus calmly was heard to say by those who loved him and stood by him to the end, "I commit my spirit into Thy Hands, Lord Jesus Christ; unto Thee I commend my spirit, which Thou hast redeemed!"
3. Martin Luther (1483-1546) who wrote, "Blessed are those who die not only **for the Lord** as martyrs; not only **in the Lord** as all believers; but likewise **with the Lord**, as breathing forth their lives in these words: 'Into Thy Hands I commend my spirit.' (J. J. Stewart Perowne, in loc.) and so on his death bed in February 18th 1546 that great reformer confidently left this world faintly uttering those words of triumph!

If you haven't yet thought about your last words, maybe you should. Since we never know when we will draw our last breath, why not plan to say something like David, and Jesus, and many other great saints, and breath out the final moments of your life on earth by saying—Into Thy Hand I Commit my spirit!

(Psalm 31.6-8 NKJV) I have hated those who regard useless idols; But I trust in the LORD. ⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, For You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities, ⁸And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a wide place.

Next, David expresses his trust in the Lord by affirming four truths² that he held to in time of trouble:

1. David trusted in the fact that **God was well aware of all his trouble** (31.7a *"I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, For You have considered my trouble"*). God was aware and close by in every bit of his agony.
2. David trusted in the fact that **God responded to his anguishing soul** (31.7b *"You have known my soul in adversities"*). When God sees something we are struggling with it is not merely that He just notices it, He also responds and comes to help us in our time of need.
3. David trusted in the fact that **God did not hand him over to his enemies** (31.8a *"⁸And have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy"*). God will keep us from falling and is very near to us in time of need. He promises that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.
4. David trusted in the fact that **God set his feet in a wide place** (31.8b *"You have set my feet in a wide place"*). Since God is faithful, always had been—David knew that all he needed to do was trust in Him! The memory of a past deliverance can bear the fruit of a present confidence.

Next David explains to us the lessons he learned from those not running from Bathsheba year. Look at Psalm 31:9-11 with me.

(Psalm 31.9-11, NKJV) Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble; My eye wastes away with grief, Yes, my soul and my body! 10 For my life is spent with grief, And my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away. 11 I am a reproach among all my enemies, But especially among my neighbors, And am repulsive to my acquaintances; Those who see me outside flee from me.

David moans in these verses that it was just not worth it—the moment of stolen pleasure was repaid with months of unbearable tortures. Look at how many different ways David describes all that he went through: trouble, wasting with grief, years of sighing, strength fails, bones waste away, reproach, repulsive, fled from.

None of these woes are recorded in either II Samuel or I Chronicles where David's biography is written by God. It is only here in the Psalms, his personal diary. David was very aware of sin's high cost. He wanted to avoid any more headlong plunges into sin-- and so should we!

Next David explains to us the lessons he learned from those running from Absalom years. Look at Psalm 31:12-22 with me.

(Psalm 31.12-14, NKJV) I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel. 13 For I hear the slander of many; Fear is on every

² James Boice, Psalms, vol. 1, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, p. 271.

side; While they take counsel together against me, They scheme to take away my life. 14 But as for me, I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."

The fearsome times of being chased and hunted to the death is described by David using a curious word in Hebrew. He says in Psalm 31.13 'fear is on every side' which is the translation of the Hebrew words **magor mishaviv**. Jeremiah uses this same phrase 6 times to describe those final days as Judah was besieged and destroyed by the relentless Babylonian armies (6.25; 20.3-4, 10; 46.5; 49.29; Lam. 2.22).

(Psalm 31.15-18, NKJV) My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, And from those who persecute me. ¹⁶ Make Your face shine upon Your servant; Save me for Your mercies' sake. ¹⁷ Do not let me be ashamed, O LORD, for I have called upon You; Let the wicked be ashamed; Let them be silent in the grave. ¹⁸ Let the lying lips be put to silence, Which speak insolent things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.

31.15 "My times are in your hands".

David was confident that every part of his life was held by God. This morning each of us, where ever we are on the path of life should affirm this same truth with David.

- This means that the **times of our youth** are in God's hands—when others make decisions for us. He guides, He directs, He protects, and He works all things together for His good.
- This means that the **times of our career** are in God's hands—every choice, every victory, every defeat, all our accomplishments, all our possessions, all our troubles and triumphs. He is guiding them, and if we will just let Him, He fashions all of our life for His glory.
- This means that the **times of our decline** are in God's hands—when our days run out, when our starting of new projects ceases, even then God holds those days and wants to bless them with His presence and power. He cares for us and wants to make those final years the best of all (Psalm 92). Remember that God is never surprised; nothing gets past the boundaries of His good, acceptable and perfect will (Romans 12.2). We just need to see that in all things God works for our good (Romans 8.28) and wants us to be contents in all things He allows to come our way (Philippians 4.11).

(Psalm 31.19-22, NKJV) Oh, how great is Your goodness, Which You have laid up for those who fear You, Which You have prepared for those who trust in You In the presence of the sons of men! 20 You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence From the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion From the strife of tongues. 21 Blessed be the Lord, For He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city! 22 For I said in my haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications When I cried out to You.

31.19-20 The goodness of God.

George Gallup once found in his studies that “highly religiously motivated” people had a much higher quality of life, had fewer divorces, had less strife with others, and had more involvement helping others. But all those factors only give a tiny reading of what the goodness God gives brings to the lives of His children. Most of what God does is unseen by outsiders. His constant comfort in time of need is unknown to them. So is the indescribable rapture we find in those times we connect with God in worship and praise. Those outside Christ never know the assuring strength of His Presence we feel in the darkest of times and places. They never have felt the strength of seeing immediate and other times long awaited answers to prayer—when we are struck with the fact that God heard us and has responded. But all of this, great as it may seem is nothing compared to what is coming! As David said early on in life in Psalm 23.5-6, what we have now is wonderful, but what is coming is best. Alexander MacLaren (1826-1910) a Baptist pastor in Scotland once wrote these words as he preached on these very verses a century ago:

Here we see, sometimes, the messengers coming with the one cluster of grapes on the pole. There we shall live in the vineyard. Here we drink from the river as it flows; there we shall be at the fountain-head. Here we are in the vestibule of the King’s house, there we shall be in the throne room, and each chamber as we pass through it is richer and fairer than the one preceding. Heaven’s least goodness is more than earth’s greatest blessedness. All that life to come, all its conditions and everything about it, are so strange to us, so incapable of being bodied forth or conceived by us, and the thought of Eternity is, it seems to me, so overwhelmingly awful that I do not wonder at even good people finding little stimulus, or much that cheers, in the thought of passing thither. But if we do not know anything more—and we know very little more—let us be sure of this, that when God begins to compare His adjectives He does not stop till He gets to the superlative degree and that *good* begets *better*, and the better of earth ensures the *best* of Heaven. And so out of our poor little experience here, we may gather grounds of confidence that will carry our thoughts peacefully even into the great darkness, and may say, ‘What Thou didst work is much, what Thou hast laid up is more.’ And the contrast will continue for ever and ever; for all through that strange Eternity that which is wrought will be less than that which is laid up, and we shall never get to the end of God, nor to the end of His goodness.³

And then note that the last two verses are different; they are not addressed to the Lord but to all others. In verses 23-24 he is exhorting all who will listen. Up to Psalm 31:23 all 22 previous verses are spoken to the Lord—now David talks to us.

(Psalm 31.23-24, NKJV) Oh, love the LORD, all you His saints! For the LORD preserves the faithful, And fully repays the proud person.²⁴ Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart, All you who hope in the LORD.

³ <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/maclaren/psalms.ii.xxi.html>

- He says *love the Lord like I do* "Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints!" (31.23a). The Lord knows our deepest desires and responds to them.
- He says *trust the Lord like I do* "For the Lord preserves the faithful" (31.23b). God always looks at our hearts.
- He says *fear the Lord like I do* because He "fully repays the proud person" (31.23c). Don't mess with the Lord; He has built into this universe the inescapable laws of the consequence engine.
- He says *wait for the Lord like I am* "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart" (31.24a). Fear not is the most repeated negative prohibition in God's Word and God means it. Fear is the Devil's playground. Fear disables us, debilitates us, and robs us of joy and peace. Ask for and receive God's heart strengthening treatments. As much as you would seek the cardiologist for blockages, seek the Great Physician for strength.
- He says *hope in the Lord like I will* "All you who hope in the Lord" (31.24b). Here David uses that great Hebrew word *yachal* which denotes 'trusting hope'. This is the hope that Job, David, Ezra and Jeremiah all clung to, trusting God through the darkest days, longest nights, and most uncertain times. May I remind you of their trusting hope once again?

(Job 13.15 KJV) Though he slay me, ***yet will I trust in him***: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

(Psalm 42.5, 11; 43.5 KJV) Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? ***hope thou in God***: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? ***hope thou in God***: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? ***hope in God***: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God.

(Psalm 71.14 KJV) But ***I will hope continually***, and will yet praise thee more and more.

(Psalm 119.43, 49, 74, 81, 114, 147 KJV) And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for ***I have hoped*** in thy judgments. ⁴⁹ZAIN. Remember the word unto thy servant, ***upon which thou hast caused me to hope***. ⁷⁴They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because ***I have hoped in thy word***. ⁸¹CAPH. My soul fainteth for thy salvation: ***but I hope in thy word***. ¹¹⁴Thou *art* my hiding place and my shield: ***I hope in thy word***. ¹⁴⁷I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: ***I hoped in thy word***.

(Lamentations 3.21, 24 KJV) This I recall to my mind, ***therefore have I hope***. ²²*It is of* the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. ²³*They are* new every morning: great

is thy faithfulness. ²⁴The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; ***therefore will I hope in him.*** ²⁵The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him.