

## Psalm 131 ▪ Contentment: The Rare Jewel

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A meditation on Psalm 131 is meant to move us to greater contentment

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Intro: In the year 1648, a Pastor named Jeremiah Burroughs published a book with an interesting title *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

It's an exposition of Phil. 4:11

### Philippians 4:11 ESV

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.

The title is interesting because it says contentment is in short supply; it's a precious commodity.

- Clearly contentment was a struggle in 1648—it was a struggle in the first century when Paul wrote Philippians.
- We can trace the struggle for contentment way further back—really to the Garden of Eden. A struggle with contentment is tied into Eve's fall into deception and Adam's fall into disobedience.

*In this sense the struggle to find contentment is built into our human nature. We are not born into this world content.*

› **At the heart of this Psalm is the commitment to contentment.**

Main Point: Unless we commit ourselves to learning contentment, we will never find it.

The battle for contentment has grown by leaps and bounds as our culture has become more affluent and on-demand.

Some of you remember back to the days of dial-up internet. It took 10 mins to log on. I was only able to stay on for an hour because grandma may be trying to call and she will get the busy signal.

Now we have insanely fast broadband where we can stream on demand. And grandma can call as often as she needs to.

- Point being: In a very affluent, on demand age, our fight for contentment will be even *more demanding*.

- Our world continues to advance more and more for our comfort and entertainment—not for our contentment.
- I felt that at the dawn of the new year a focus on contentment is really something my heart needs—and I trust your heart also.

This Psalm, written by David, gives us a fresh focus to help us commit (or recommit) our souls to contentment.

### Let go of pride (1a)

- Now when I hear the word contentment, my mind typically goes to possessions and material things—that certainly is the context of [Phil 4:11](#), and [Heb 13:5](#).
- Yet the battle for contentment is not fought outwardly, but inwardly.

*The battle for contentment begins when we deal with the pride of our heart.*

- We probably don't see pride lurking behind many of our sins and motivations, but it actually is.

I remember a few years back Pastor Rob illustrated pride like sand at the beach. It gets into everything. I've even had it in my sandwich.

- E.G. anxiety: you would not think a highly anxious person has a problem with pride, but look at how scripture links them together.

### 1 Peter 5:6–7 ESV

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

- V1 of [Psalm 131](#)—David denies that he is proud. It's does not seem like he is using hyperbole either.
- David describes this in a couple of ways:

“My heart is not lifted up” (arrogant)

- He goes on: “My eyes are not raised to high” another poetic way of describing an arrogant person
- A person with raised eyes would look down on others.
- Q: How did he do this?
- A: He focused on his heart.

The heart in the bible is not the organ, but the inner person—it's our drive, motivation, ambition, desire, longing.

- › To deal with pride, we must deal with our heart, and that can be messy business.
- › When was the last time you've asked the Lord to deal with the pride of your heart? Hindsight is 20/20—in 2020 did you focus specifically on how pride manifests itself in your heart?

The first step toward contentment is to ask God to search our heart for pride.

We will not make any headway in contentment if we hang onto pride.

- Pride whispers lies to our heart: "I deserve this. I've earned this. I'm entitled to this."
- Humility is just the opposite approach David took—even after being anointed to be King, he did not grasp at the throne, but waited on God.
- Humility:

### **2 Samuel 7:18 ESV**

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?"

A heart that thinks it earned and deserves anything other than hell will never be content.

### **Let go of selfish ambition (1b)**

- This next point is really an extension of the first.
- Alec Motyer describes the things "too great and marvelous" as over-ambitious and unrealistic projects.

When I was in High School I had the goal of wanting to be the strongest kid in the school...which I fell woefully short of.

One summer break I read this weightlifting book that said to pack on muscle you need to drink a gallon of milk a day.

About 6 weeks into that I landed in the ER with severe gastro-intestinal issues.

That may seem pretty juvenile, but our hearts are hardwired to have overly ambitious and unrealistic projects that just promote self.

Again, located ...in the heart, James warns us:

### **James 3:14–15 ESV**

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

Paul tells the church in Phillipi the same lesson: let go of selfish ambition.

### **Philippians 2:3 ESV**

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Apply: Do you see how selfish ambition are at odds with humility?

Just as with asking the Lord to check our hearts for pride, we also need a selfish-ambition check.

- Yet it's interesting that David claims he is free from pride and selfish ambition. Is that a stretch?

A couple of thoughts:

1. Yes, when David penned this, he was sincere. But....he also had moments where he had slipped.

Ps 143:2 "No one living is righteous before you."

2. The Psalm foreshadows another King from the tribe of Judah. A King who would come in *humble perfection*.

› While this Psalm may describe David's heart partially, it shows us Jesus's heart perfectly.

- We see the humble heart of Jesus woven in the Gospels

### **Matthew 11:29 CSB**

Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

### **Matthew 21:5 ESV**

"Say to the daughter of Zion,

'Behold, your king is coming to you,

humble, and mounted on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

This humble entry is what led the Savior to the Cross

### **Philippians 2:8 ESV**

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Apply: The Lord Jesus Christ is the only human who ever walked on this earth and let go of pride and selfish ambition his *entire life*.

Think about that. There have been seasons I've had a humble mindset. You may be growing in letting go of control.

But having our entire life marked out?

- › We may be partially humble, but he is perfectly humble.

Apply: That means we never trust in our own humility.

We can only trust a Savior who has perfect humility to save us from our sinful pride and control.

- › Pride and control are sins. So is living in discontentment. This is not about setting a better New Year's Resolution—it's about dealing with our sin.

Letting go of pride and self, happen only by coming to Jesus.

Jesus came to free you from the burden of sin—the burden of pride and selfish ambition is massively heavy.

Jesus says: Let it go. Look to me and let it go.

Finally, the psalm teaches us to:

### **Live with God in childlike humility (2-3)**

- V2 describes not a desire, prayer, or even praise. It simply states a condition, a fact. In a picture: David feels content.

Anyone who has spent time with a nursing infant knows they are constantly fussy, cranky, restless, sleepless.

David affirms that he's not there anymore.

The picture is childlike trust; it's the same picture Jesus gave to his disciples when they asked about spiritual greatness.

### **Matthew 18:1–4 ESV**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Becoming like a child.

—Aspect of dependency.

—Also, simplicity of faith.

I overheard my kids talking a few days back about what happens if we all got into a car crash. One of my younger ones said, “if we all get in a car crash then we all get to go to heaven.”

There was a beauty in the childlike expression.

A few years back I met a young man, who had visited the church I pastored, for coffee. I asked about his family. He told me his dad lived in Washington. Then I asked, “how about your mom?” and he said with a sweet smile, she’s in heaven.”

Someone could probably write a dissertation on a biblical theology of childlike trust, but they probably would not get much closer than my child and the young man.

*A childlike trust is having our heart set in heaven. When our hearts are set in heaven, we have discovered the rare jewel.*

Back to the Psalm--

- “I have” —those are vital words to getting this right. King David knew this was “on him” — he had to let go, he had to wrestle and resolve.
- › **None of us will slip into contentment. Like all of spiritual life, it requires a lot of discipline and most of all God’s enabling grace.**
- Finally, v3. David calls all Israel to hope in the Lord. The Psalm ends with a call of hope.

This also shows us what is at stake with contentment.

If David was not content, if he did not find the rare jewel, how could he call others to hope?

*Only a soul that is content in Christ can truly call others to hope in Christ.*

*The rare jewel is not just about us, it also tied to us passing on the gospel treasure.*

*Soul contentment is bound up with gospel mission.*

Conclusion:

Spurgeon said of this Psalm--

“It is one of the shortest to read, but one of the longest to learn.”

Humility and contentment don't come easy. But they do come for those who are committed to letting go and learning from the Spirit of Christ.

May the Lord, by His good Spirit, lead us on that level ground.