

## **A SONG OF THE SATISFIED**

### **Psalm 131**

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These psalms, according to Ephesians 5, are given that we might have something to address one another with as a mark of being continually filled with the Spirit. I found that going through the psalms provides me some sort of prayer base—a prayer language—which helps me when I'm going through similar crises and feelings or emotions, to be able to have a way to approach the Lord. Psalm 131 reads, “My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD both now and forevermore” (Psalm 131:1–3, NIV).

We certainly recognize this psalm as a very short psalm. It's unlike us to have so short a scriptural passage. Psalm 131 is the third shortest psalm in the Psalter. Although it is a very quick psalm to read, it is perhaps one of the more difficult psalms to learn and perhaps takes the longest amount of time. It speaks of the theme of contentment, of inner satisfaction.

This small psalm reminds me of the merchant of the story of Jesus in the kingdom parables. The merchant who was in search of fine pearls and came across one pearl of great price. He sold all that he had to secure it. He had been in search of many things, but he finds one thing and he recognizes its substance. Therefore, he leaves the pursuit of everything else, that he might secure that one thing.

This small psalm is like that one pearl for the person who wrote it—and we're led to believe the psalm is ascribed to David as the author of the psalm. Here certainly is a person who had looked, in many avenues of life, for inner satisfaction. The person who wrote it is not the kind of

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individual who hadn't striven for something. He is not the kind of person who had had a mediocre existence and had never tried to be something. He had sought the pearls of life in wealth and honor in reputation, success, in worldly acclaim. But having tried the various avenues of life, which had been open to him as a mortal man to pursue in order to gain satisfaction, finally the psalmist had thrown his soul in repose upon God. He's come to realize that in a relationship with God, there is the one pearl, the magnificent treasure.

This psalm is therefore an Old Testament saint's affirmation of the New Testament truth stated by the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11, "I have learned in whatever state I am to be content." Contentment is something learned. It is not an automatic gift. We do not operate on what I might call "injection theology," where we want something and we go to the Holy Spirit and he puts out a hypodermic needle and all of a sudden injects us with it. It'd be nice if the problems of life and the needs of life could always be solved by getting a shot from God which would immediately give us what we asked for. But there are some things in life, including satisfaction, that are formed and shaped over long periods of time, over much growth and over testing and over searching. A personality that is really becoming the personality God wants. The writer of Psalm 131 is reflecting what was said in Philippians 4. "Contentment didn't come automatically. I learned it. It grew."

Therefore, this psalm is for all of us who have, at one time or another, been anxious in our spirit. There are times in my own experience I have been exceedingly anxious. Perhaps you're beyond the state of being anxious to the point of being nervous, maybe bordering on a nervous wreck. You may be the kind of person, like in this psalm, who has sought a goal and failed. And feel upset about it. Or maybe you've sought a goal and succeeded and still feel upset. This psalm could help you if you have difficulty in going to sleep or difficulty to stay asleep.

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This psalm is for you if the dark moments of life crowd out the light moments and the good moments. This psalm is for frustrated people. It's for persons who are unforgiven or unforgiving. There is such a thing as heresy in our emotional lives. A dissatisfaction, an imbalance in our emotional life is every bit as much heresy as a doctrine one might hold that is heretical. Often, we assume that spiritual truth is only in the realm of the intellectual affirmation of certain data. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He's risen from the dead, we believe that God is one, yet has revealed himself in three persons. There is not only heresy in terms of doctrinal truth. There can also be such a thing as heresy in our emotional life. It's a heresy that the Bible copes with by giving us gentle refrains, like Psalm 131, which reflect how to be satisfied. It's very clear, from reading the first two verses of this psalm, how dissatisfaction comes into our life. Then in the second verse, how satisfaction is secured.

#### **I. The source of dissatisfaction is really twofold.**

It's noted in verse 1. The first phrase of verse 1 reads, "O LORD, my heart is not lifted up." That statement is an indication that satisfaction has come. The opposite of the first part of verse 1 is "My heart is lifted up" which is the source of dissatisfaction. Or the opposite extreme is the person whose heart is so totally downcast. In other words, dissatisfaction arises in an individual's life when they have an exaggerated sense of self-importance or when they have an exaggerated sense of lack of personal worth. The psalmist says, "My heart is not lifted up." He's not saying my heart is cast down. He is indicating life is on an even keel. We recognize the alternatives here. My heart is lifted up—exaggerated self-importance. That would be representative of the kind of person talked about in transactional analysis who says "I'm ok, but you're not." On the other hand, the person who says "I'm not ok, but you are." The person who says "I'm a hero and really great. No one else has quite made it to where I am." Or the individual who says, "I'm a worm

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designed only to be stepped on.” The Lord wants us to keep a balance in our emotional lives, so we do not have an opinion higher of ourselves than we ought. But neither are we so cast down that we cannot cope with things in life.

In the youth camp experience, one of the things I began to discover in a fresh way is that many of the younger people feel they are just not acceptable to God—one thing committed wrong and one is out. There has been such an atmosphere of judgment and failure and fear of God that has affected so many individuals, that it’s hard to recognize that God really does want to put us on an even keel. We know we are accepted in the Beloved. All sound psychological insights stem from biblical truth. This principle of not having exaggerated importance and not having an exaggerated sense of lack of worth is something soundly supported throughout the Bible.

No doubt the palmist, in his earlier life, had the kind desire to be preeminent, the desire to be number one. He has those ambitions, but now there has come a time in his life he has to settle the score and accept where he is and account for his self-worth. What he’s saying in that first refrain—“My heart is not lifted up”—is, “I’ve come to grips with myself and recognize who I am.”

He’s also saying something very significant in the later part of verse 1, “My eyes are not raised too high. I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.” Again, he is avoiding extremes. If we stated from the negative, the complete opposite point of view than what the psalmist is saying, before he had come to this position, he could have said, “My eyes are raised too high and I have occupied myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.”

He’s setting his mind upon unattainable goals. Things he could never reach in life.

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But had he stated it another way, which would have been an imbalance also, he might have said, “My eyes are completely on the ground. I never look up. I don’t occupy myself with anything at all. I would as soon go out of life dull—spiritually, intellectually, and in every other way.”

Instead, once more in this phrase he’s affecting an even balance in his life—goals unattainable or no goals at all. Both of these are extremes, which the psalmist in his spiritual maturity is keeping away from.

On the secular level of life, we see the danger of setting up the kinds of things in life which can’t be attained. We tend to have sort of a postponed happiness that presumes to think that if we can only have more, we can be happy. We have sort of an inflated view of life. Inflation psychology—“One more thing and that will do it!” There is biblical rest in just saying where you are—“Thank the Lord I’m here in this moment in time.”

Often, this can become a habit within the church. To live with such ambition and desire for the Lord’s work, that it’s very easy to not appreciate the very moment we’re in. We become so goal-oriented and future-oriented that we can’t really enjoy where we’re at.

If this is true on the secular level of life, it’s very much true of the spiritual level. Sometimes we come to a position of spiritual dissatisfaction and unrest because we’re not relaxed concerning where we’re at spiritually. Perhaps we have spiritual goals that high and unachievable. Perhaps you want to become like some other Christian and you’re far away from that in your life and you become very discouraged and cast down. Your eyes are toward the ground instead of on an even keel. There is a danger in setting goals in the spiritual life which for the moment are totally unattainable and which can only lead to depression, because you’re not there. There’s danger, on the other hand, of having no spiritual goals at all, so one simply drifts along and never seeks more from the Lord.

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If you're going to make spiritual progress, set your eyes on an even keel and begin putting realistic goals in your path to develop spiritually. When we see another person really growing in the Lord, what's the temptation? Often, instead of being built up by the other person's spiritual growth, we become frustrated because we are not yet there. As a result, we feel like we don't want to grow at all. Often we fail to see that the person who has grown spiritually has had a tremendous wintertime and struggle in their soul and they haven't come to that position overnight. Neither shall we.

There's a balance in Scripture between striving and rest. Between activity and being content. Between hope for the morrow and peace for today.

In Philippians 4:11, Paul says, "I have learned to be content." But also in another prison letter—2 Timothy—he uses three occupational goals. He says that no soldier in service gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to satisfy him who enlisted him. The athlete competes. The farmer does hard work. It's not a question of simply sitting back at ease. But it is being content in what you're doing. The Lord does not want us to be striving for anything that drives out that inner peace and satisfaction. It's ok to be reaching, but it's a must that where we're at right now, we're enjoying our life in the Lord.

The psalm of satisfaction. Sometimes we're victims of spiritual inflation. We drive ourselves in an incessant manner for more and more and more, while getting less and less and less.

The psalmist has come to terms with himself and he has recognized that the key of life is not having a goal which is too high nor a goal which is too low. But the key is discovering himself and what the Lord has for him, and being content with his unique calling in life.

**II. In verse 2, the psalmist goes on to indicate the real source of how he's arrived at this goal.**

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He has calmed and quieted his soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast. What is the source of satisfaction? It's not simply getting a hold of himself, as he did in verse 1. But the real deep satisfaction is in finding a personal relationship with the Lord and knowing Him. The psalmist has evidently come to an apex in his life. He says, "When it comes down to it, I've discovered that the source of satisfaction is simplicity—a relationship with the Lord like I had with my mother when I was a child; the small child finding that consolation in being close to his mother." The Lord is delighted if, like a child, we grow in knowledge and we have a profound appreciation for His truth and His Word. But all the while, He's not simply asking for our profundity of knowledge or accomplishments. He's saying, "There are times when I just want to love you, and I want you to feel and sense that love." There's security there. A mother can be holding a child and the worse storm can be breaking outside the house—it's immaterial to the child.

I find the times in my personal relationship with the Lord being rekindled and restored coming in real meditation and prayer. This puts to rest all the anxiety and the nervousness and the sleeplessness. Those times frequently come through the psalms or some of the hymns we sing. Life begins to change in its perspective. The psalmist has discovered that quietness before the Lord. Jesus took the little children in his arms and they were satisfied. John, the disciple, leaned upon Jesus' breast—he could get that close to the Lord and feel the warmth of his embrace. We may not do it physically, but spiritually the Lord has that place for us in Him.

The source of satisfaction is not in having something more. The source of satisfaction is in being enfolded in the presence of the Lord—being brought up close to him. That's why this psalmist, in this delightful small psalm, can then pass his experience on in verse 3.

**III. "Here is how I came to satisfaction."**

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“For hours and days and years of my life I struggled with how to be satisfied. I looked at things greater than myself. I found that I had to get on an even keel in life. I found also that satisfaction can never be attained except in a personal relationship with the Lord.” He says these things in simplistic statements. He’s found the treasure of life in a quiet and succinct way. Now that he’s found it, he wants to pass it on. He says, “O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever more” (Psalm 131:3).

How unusual a phrase! In the first two verses, he’s been talking about himself. Now all of a sudden he intends to let his experience be prototype of what the experience of the nation should be. If he has found satisfaction this way, then this must be how the Lord works. Does the nation have idealistic goals of ruling the world and struggling to be greater and greater? He says to Israel, “Step aside from a trust in that. Recognize communion and relatedness to the Lord.” He’s saying to the church, “If you want satisfaction, here’s how to have it.” Let the whole body of Christ know that the way to this gentle kind of a peace is laying aside unrealistic attitudes, having communion with the Lord and passing on that information. “Israel, hope in the Lord. From this time forth and for evermore.” A continuing pattern of the way the Lord gives satisfaction. Rest, trust, obey.

### **Closing Prayer**

“I have calmed and quieted my soul” may sound like such strange music to some within our body today. Because all that’s been heard is the turbulence of life and the tremendous problems and struggles that are all around. Yet we’re taught that, in You, there is a safe harbor. There is a quiet place, a resting place. Surely, it would be Your will for every one of us within this church body today to be at peace with You and with others, to really be whole. Surely, You want our emotional lives to be fixed on You so that there is ease with which we live. So that today is a day

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of calmness and joy. Teach us not to postpone our happiness. Teach us not to wait for a day when we're further satisfied. But teach us, just for today, what it is to rest, to be at home, and to be satisfied. Help us to acknowledge our limitations. Help us to lay aside those goals and those dreams which are only idleness, which could never be attained. Then, Lord, put those dreams and visions within us which You intend, by Your Spirit, for us to accomplish. And help us in our individual life to be discerning, to distinguish between that which is only for the self and the ego and that which is really from You. Lift the burden here today as well. Those who feel no sense of personal worth, who feel they have nothing to give to Your kingdom. Who feel that their experience with You is so washed up and so fragile and so broken that the pieces cannot be put together and restored again. Keep our eyes on the level. Let us neither look up or look down, but to look even out. To recognize that You lift the fallen and You restore the soul. Holy Spirit, by Your Word, and now through intercession and prayer, minister contentment and joy. Even now let the troubled heart find that resting place in Your own heart. Enclose that individual with Your gentle arms and speak words of love and tenderness. We praise You and thank You that You're here, ministering now. How keenly we feel it and how thankful that we've had the privilege of being in Your presence this day. Grant peace to Your people. In Your name. Amen.