

February 23, 2025

Psalm 131

“Protect your peace.” If you google that phrase, you’ll find endless results for articles titled, “Protect your peace,” with 5, 7, 9, 12, even 17 steps on how to be less anxious, less agitated, less stressed, more calm, more healthy, more mindful, more at peace. One of the most popular articles lists these steps: *1. Set boundaries with people, 2. Practice mindfulness, 3. Exercise, 4. Limit Exposure to Negativity (turn off the news), 5. Prioritize self-care, 6. Seek support.* I don’t hate this advice. Some of us should probably watch less news. Exercise is generally a good thing. But what do you notice about this advice? It’s focused on *me*. What do *I* need? What’s good for *me*? Isn’t self-centeredness one of the things that strains our relationships and makes work life impossible? Isn’t it obsession with what *I* need that causes so much friction in our marriages, friendships, and families? I’m not saying advice like this is useless, but I don’t think it’s a coincidence that we modern Americans are more sheltered, more comfortable, more self-focused, more safe than the vast majority of the world, and we are also statistically some of the most depressed, anxious, stressed, unpeaceful people in the world. The Scriptures offer an alternate route to inner peace. God offers a way where you can, even while things are falling apart around you, even while you are in severe pain, can say, “I am at peace. I am okay, even though things are not.” This is what this Psalm is about. The inner peace of a Christian, and what we can do, or rather, what God does within us, to make us at peace. The theme is **“Protect your Peace.” 1. Let Go Of Your Pride. 2. Find Contentment in the Lap of God.**

**1. Let Go of Your Pride.** The Psalm is attributed to King David, who led as Israel’s king around 1000 years before Jesus walked the earth, and he wants you to know that the thing keeping you from peace is this: Pride. We sometimes assume prideful people, who think they are really important and don’t care about others, are absolutely at peace- because they don’t care about anyone else but themselves! But the opposite is actually true. There’s a morning show on 103.7 called “Alley and DZ,” and they have a segment called, “Am I The Jerk,” where people call in and tell them of a conflict or situation in their lives, and they ask, “Am I the jerk for doing this or feeling this way?” Alley and DZ react and take calls and debate on whether this person is a “jerk.” It’s profoundly entertaining. Last week, a woman called in and said this: “At my family’s Thanksgiving, my husband’s brother and his girlfriend of twenty years came, and this girlfriend came with her own tupperware and helped herself to leftovers after the meal. Am I the jerk for being upset about this?” And the general consensus was this, “yes, that’s a little presumptuous. But it was three months ago! Get over it! You’re a jerk for being this angry about it after all this time.” Did you catch it? Why was this woman so offended? Pride. Sure, that was a little rude, but the only reason that would bother you so much is because you think you and your family’s meal are so important that no one may dare help themselves to your precious leftovers and not give you the respect that you think you deserve. The more prideful you are, the more important you think you are, the more respect and honor and praise and attention you think you deserve, the more offended, angry, petty, bitter, resentful, and jealous you become. A prideful heart robs you

of your peace. Not just a prideful heart, but “haughty eyes.” Hebrew talks about pride both in the heart and in the eyes. We do too- we often talk about “looking down on people.” Haughty eyes are eyes that look down on people as if they are better than others, and again, if you do that, you will be constantly angry, bitter, resentful, and hateful toward “those” people, whoever those people are that aren’t as good as you. We all struggle with this. Religious people often look down on those who are not, and then get angry that God seems to be so good to those people who sleep in on Sunday! We see it in politics, we look down on people who vote differently and we resent them because *they’re* what’s wrong with this country! The Pharisees did this, looking down on people they considered unworthy of God’s forgiveness, and they hated Jesus for eating with “sinners.” Eventually became so agitated they put the Son of God to death. But do you see how this happens? Looking down on others with pride, as if you’re better than them, robs you of the peace God wants you to have.

Prideful walking. That’s the Hebrew word for, “concerning myself,” literally, it says, “I have not walked into,” or “meddled” into great things. When you are prideful, you assume that you know exactly how your and others’ lives are supposed to go, how the country is supposed to be run, how the world political scene is supposed to play out, how the world’s problems are supposed to be solved, and when things don’t go the way you *know* they should, you get anxious and angry and lose your peace. Let me be clear. We should care how our lives play out. We should care about our country, our leaders, and the suffering in the world. We should pray for all these things. We should also have enough humility to admit that all these things are above our pay grade. The only reason we worry is because we’re so prideful to think that we know how much money is supposed to be in our bank account, how successful our children should be, how our life is supposed to turn out, how our country is run, how the world’s leaders are supposed to rule. We don’t know anything. Pray about it. Let God be in control. You have enough to be occupied by your calling as a spouse, parent, sibling, friend, and Christian. David says he hasn’t meddled in great things, nor things “too wonderful for him.” The final thing that robs you of your peace is meddling in things that are beyond you, trying to understand the things about God that are beyond understanding. How can God be one, and yet Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? How can Jesus be truly divine, truly God who has existed before time began, and yet also a human being? When you read the Scriptures, you will quickly find that there are some things that are beyond your understanding. There are teachings that we can communicate, apply, believe, and celebrate, but not fully comprehend. We must bow before the Word of God and hear what God tells us because he is so great that we could never comprehend him without him revealing himself to us in the Word. Why wouldn’t you do that? Why would anyone say, “Well, God is a God of love, therefore, he must accept this.” Why would anyone say, “I know what the Bible says, but...” Pride. I say this with humility, because I struggle with this too, but isn’t it prideful to assume that the all powerful, infinite, all-knowing creator of the universe must make sense to your finite human brain and your definition of love and logic in order to be worthy of worship? As a child, I couldn’t possibly comprehend how my parents could be both loving and also not allow me to

watch Scarface. Well, the intellectual difference between me and my parents was 30 years of life experience. How much greater is the intellectual difference between God and us? Your pride is robbing you of your peace. Let it go. How?

**2. Find Contentment in the Lap of God.** How can pride be conquered and inner peace found? David tells us. He quieted and stilled his soul by relating to God as a weaned child relates to his mother. This is a powerful picture. You see, most of the time, the Scriptures are constantly telling us to grow up, and rightfully so. When Christians are forgetting what's really important in life and putting their preferences and pride before the good of others or before the Gospel, we see the Biblical writers say, "you need to mature. Grow up." When Christians sometimes forget that we are supposed to dedicate our heart, soul, and *mind* to God, and have mindset of, "Jesus loves me, this I know, and that's all I care to know," the Scriptures tell them that they should grow in the knowledge of the Scriptures and wrestle with the complex doctrines that God gives us for our joy. We should honor God with our minds and wrestle with the teaching in the Scriptures like predestination, Jesus' real presence in the Lord's Supper, Baptism, and other teachings. But when it comes to how we view God, our dependence on him, our trust in him, our need for him, our confidence in him, we should be like a 2 or 3 year old with his or her mother.

This is a powerful picture with powerful implications: Firstly, unweaned children still relying on their mother's milk tend to be impatient and demanding and become violently angry when they can't find the breast within a few seconds. They are so easily frustrated, so easily angered, often difficult to console. But when a child grows a little bit and they no longer need milk, they still come up and want to sit on mom's lap. Why? Not because they want milk, but because they want mom. They are satisfied with just being on mom's lap. In the same way, our peace comes from being satisfied simply by God, for who he is and what he's done. Secondly, weaned children are still absolutely dependent on their mother for everything, and shamelessly ask without trying to earn a thing. I once saw a Roman Catholic devotion on Matthew 18 where he talks about how children are so wonderful, peaceful, happy, playful, excited about new things, obedient, and kind-hearted, and we should all be like that if we want to enter Jesus' kingdom. I remember thinking, "Only a Priest who's never had to raise children would ever say this." What Jesus is saying is that children are completely dependent, and will ask you for what they want and not try to earn it. They can't. That's how God wants us to be with him. With everything. You see, God doesn't love us, accept us, bless us, protect us because of anything we offer him. We don't earn a thing from him. We can't. Yet, Jesus Christ, while we were still sinners, happily offered his life for us, for all our pride, for all our rebellion, so that we enemies of God could be accepted as his perfect children. Because of what Jesus has done for you, because he took your punishment, you are God's chosen child and can go confidently, shamelessly to him and ask for the love, kindness, and mercy you don't deserve, and know God will give it to you and trust like a child that he knows what he's doing.

A final word. Our culture, as we saw before, when it protects its peace, tends to draw away from people. But look at what Jesus and Paul say. The peace that a Christian has actually propels you outside of yourself to love and serve your neighbor. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, his free forgiveness and acceptance actually free you from needing to take yourself so seriously. God himself is enamored with you. No one else needs to be. God thinks you're a big deal. Who cares if no one else does? That frees you to live a life where you are not the central focus, but others. The fact that Jesus has freely paid for your forgiveness with his blood frees you to forgive those who sin against you! God's love toward you while you were his enemy frees you to love those who you consider enemies. God's justice at the end of time frees you from having to take revenge on those who hurt you. So let go of your pride. Be content with your spot on the lap of the creator of the universe, who has given you a peace that no one can take away. Protect your peace. Amen.