

Anxiety, God and Me (Psalm 131)

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Preacher: William HC

- [0 : 00] So now, I am going to read today's passage. I'm going to read Psalm 130 and 31.
- ! Psalm 130, a song of ascent. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?
- For with you, there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reference, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word, I put my hope.
- I wait for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning. More than watchmen wait for the morning. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption.
- He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. Psalm 131, a song of ascent of David. My heart is not proud, Lord.
- [1 : 13] My eyes are not haughty. I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me, but I have calmed and quieted myself. I'm like a weaned child with his mother.
- Like a weaned child, I am content. Israel, put your hope in the Lord, both now and forevermore. That is the word of the Lord.
- Thank you for reading that, Eva. And also thank you for just your courage and sharing your struggle.
- Can we agree? Yeah, we're so blessed by hearing that, so thank you. So do keep Psalm 131 open in your Bibles. If you don't have a Bible, there's a couple of Black Pew Bibles.
- You're welcome to help yourself. And let's continue listening and leaning into this topic that we've been exploring so far. Anxiety.
- [2 : 14] It's big in our lives, isn't it? When it's the main character of a Disney Pixar movie, you know that this is a big deal in our culture today, isn't it?
- We live at an anxious age. I don't have to convince you. It's full of many, many, many decisions that kind of pass through our day. We live amidst a barrage of real news and fake news, and it's so hard to tell them apart sometimes.
- Lots of expectations from hundreds of people in our lives, whether in person or people that you never see, but are on social media watching your every step.
- It's wonderful to celebrate being a dad, but even fathers have expectations on their shoulders that can cause anxiety. True story. And in an age where the question, who am I, you can get hundreds of very different answers.
- In an age where we worry and doubt even the most basic things about our life, no wonder when people ask you, how do you feel? What's a common response? I'm a bit anxious.
- [3 : 25] Yeah. I don't need to convince you that anxiety is a growing problem in our culture. And about nine years ago, the New Zealand Health Survey found that one in four adults experience anxiety and or depression, right, in the past two weeks.
- One in four, right? So you look around and one in four among us, perhaps. And actually, since the 2020 pandemic, they did the survey again, and actually that number is now one in three.

But then you might be sitting here thinking, well, look, if they'd surveyed me, I could tell all kinds of stories. Maybe you're the one in three that do experience anxiety on a regular basis.

Maybe for you it's been serious enough that you've had to seek help, meet a therapist, find a doctor, something else. Well, maybe you're here and you carry the weight of someone else's worries in your heart.

A couple of weeks ago, we heard about how Paul, right, the apostle Paul was carrying people, people everywhere in his heart as he poured out his affections for them in his letters. You know, I don't know, if he went to see his GP, maybe they would have said, you need some pills for your anxiety.

[4 : 47] I'm not sure. But praise God, we're not alone in this mental health struggle. And so, before we dive into this psalm, can we just take a moment?

Take a moment, maybe close your eyes with me, and try to think of a worry that you have right now. One word. I want you to imagine that that word, it's written on a stone or a pebble, and you're at the river.

I'm not sure what to do with this stone of worry. Whatever you've written on that stone, maybe something at work you're dreading to face.

Or maybe on this stone is a stressful problem. Try and visualize it. Maybe on the stone there's nothing written, you're just worried about what might be written on it next.

Keep that stone with you, and what we're about to do in this short talk is to drop it into the river, the river of life, God's living word.

[6 : 09] Let me pray before we dive into this. I'm going to use a prayer from a Christian. His name is Guan Un. He wrote this wonderful book, Anxiety and Me. You're welcome to borrow it from the library after me.

And we're going to use his prayer for us. Let's pray. Dear God, you are good. Your goodness is bigger than my anxiety.

And so I can be calm. I can trust you. And we can have hope. Amen. So for the rest of this time, I'm going to briefly unpack Psalm 131, which is a psalm that Guan and many other Christians have found helpful in anxious times.

You might have heard Eva read Psalm 131 and thought, I wonder how this will help with my anxiety. I mean, I don't even see the word there.

Well, one thing that helps is a short song. It's only three verses, right? If you're anxious, you can't hold too many thoughts in your head. I think three lines will do for us today. And yeah, sometimes three line worship songs can be very, very helpful, right?

[7 : 25] And when we look closely at the psalm, right, we just get windows into how real people with real problems talk to God.

And that's so helpful for us as well. So here's just some couple of, just a couple of reasons why I think going to the psalms in particular can be really helpful.

And the Bible isn't like, going to the Bible isn't like going to your doctor, right? Different tools for different purposes. The Bible doesn't claim to cure all our problems, right? If your life feels like a broken gearbox, there's only so much you can fix on your own.

So if you do have a serious problem, do call a trustworthy mechanic for your soul, for your body. But I still want to suggest that for many of us, even these three verses from God's word in Psalm 131 can be super helpful as we navigate life in our anxious age.

I'm going to just explain a few quick thoughts about, just so we can understand the song was written thousands of years ago. Most of us don't live and breathe the world of ancient Hebrew poetry, right?

[8 : 36] Learning English poetry is hard enough. Firstly, stating the obvious, this is a psalm. A psalm is just a word for a song. And in this book, in the Bible, there are 150 songs.

These are, each of them, invitations to join the king's choir, as it were, to jump in into his big sing and to sing to the Lord with these human words, and yet they're divinely inspired by God.

That's why we don't treat Psalm 131 like, you know, the lyrics to your favorite rap artist or whatever. These are inspired words. We tune in. We listen carefully what it has to say for us.

This is a psalm. Secondly, another context issue. This is a song of a sense. Did you notice that little phrase, a song of a sense? A song of a sense says it there in Psalm 130.

If you look in your Bibles, 129, 128. Actually, there are lots of songs of a sense. This collection, 120 to 134, there are 14 songs introduced this way, a song of a sense.

[9 : 44] What does that mean? It just means that these 14 songs form part of a special collection in the book of Psalms. These were songs that God's people put on shuffle or repeat as they together would kind of come in from all their various towns and gather together and then walk to Jerusalem together to worship together.

Making their regular road trip from whatever town they came from, their hometown to, to worship together. And the key is that while they were singing these songs on this road trip, most of these songs of a sense, they are laments.

They pulse with pain. Right? I mean, did you hear and notice from Psalm 130, just one up? Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Imagine all kinds of people singing this cry. Right? Strumming their pain with their fingers on harps while singing this song of David. And of David is also what we want to notice here.

Psalm 131, it says a song of a sense of David. I was recently reading a biography from our previous prime minister, Jacinda. Gained a new sympathy for how hard it is to lead a country after reading her biography.

[11 : 06] Similarly, in the book of 1 and 2 Samuel, in our Bibles, that's kind of the biography of King David himself, who's named here. You go to his backstory there, and if you want next level anxiety, try running a country like the one he had to run.

Dealing all the national politics, international politics, I should say. All the while, your home life, your family life being very messed up. What might David, an anxious man after God's own heart, have put on his lo-fi, chill Spotify playlist?

I think Psalm 131. Psalm 131. Let's take another listen. Verse 1. My heart is not proud, O Lord. My eyes are not haughty.

I don't concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. First point, I think we can glean from this Psalm, is that in our anxiety, this Psalm says, you and I can move towards humble confession.

Move towards humble confession. All three points, H, C. Humble confession. You might be surprised that this is how the song starts, but let me explain.

[12 : 20] Actually, in the original language, all the nots that you see, right, not proud, not haughty, not concerned, they actually sit at the start of the phrase, right? They sit at the very front.

If we were to read it more literally, God's anxious people were singing in Psalm 131, not great is my heart, not raised are my eyes, not caught up are we with great matters too wonderful for us.

If life feels like you're tied up in knots, as it were, here there are three knots of a different kind. No, my heart's not great. No, my eyes aren't raised.

No, I'm not caught up in wonderful, great things. I don't have to be great. I don't have to keep looking up and chasing things. I don't have to be encouraged and, sorry, concerned by everything under the sun.

Why is this line verse one in the song? Because the order of what we sing is important, isn't it? And because we can't get to the quietness and hope of verse two, if we don't recognize the root cause of our anxiety that we need to be humble about, that we need to confess, the root cause of a lot of our anxieties and worries is that we don't have control.

[13 : 39] We're helpless about something. Actually, this is an issue that right from our very first parents we have all had to deal with. The sin that every human being has been plagued with the most is our desire to be in control of everything in our lives.

Have a moment to think about how you might be maybe kind of self-medicating your worries right now in a sense. Are you sedating yourself with food of your choice whenever you like?

Is your way of dealing with struggles letting loose with a special someone? Is the way that you're dealing with your stress distracting yourself in movies and films and whatever's on Netflix that you've picked?

Sometimes in a world full of so many things we can't control, we then double down on what we can control, what little things we can control. And so we might become angry, hurt and bitter then if someone tries to take control even of those parts of our life.

Might even start to tell people, my anxiety is what defines me. Don't dare mess with it. And verse 1 says, if you've kind of snuck down that hole, spiraled down that hole, it reminds us to start with humble confession.

[14 : 59] No, Lord, you're God and I'm not. No, Lord, I'm not going to raise my eyebrows at you. No, Lord, I'm not going to keep going around in circles, worrying about things beyond me.

Again, listen to Guan Yun speak, just quoting from his book. He says this, I quote, one of the constant nagging questions that anxiety asks is this, how can I do all of this myself?

The answer the world gives is that you can do it all by yourself. But the gospel gives a different answer that says you can't do it, but that's okay because you're not supposed to do it all by yourself.

Brothers and sisters, we don't have to be our own savior. We don't have to be someone else's savior, trying to put out fires, trying to be helpful all the time, minding everyone's business.

All this business can actually, sorry, all this busyness in those areas can maybe betray the fact that I'm not trusting the Lord who is the one in control of everything, right? Here I am, trying to lift a stone hundreds of times heavier than me on my own strength when the God of the universe is right next to me offering to take my heavy load.

[16 : 23] Now that willingness from God is what the Bible calls grace. The God who knows every hair of your head, who knitted you in your mother's womb, as our memory verse says, who sees all your sharp edges, your unkind thoughts, your worries, all those thought bubbles that no one else sees, God knows, and he still willingly offers to take your load upon himself.

That's the gospel, that's good news. How freeing in our anxiety, firstly, to move towards humble confession.

Next, HC, how freeing then that, in verse 2, singing these lyrics would move us towards hushed contentment. Hushed contentment, right?

Have a look. I have stilled, verse 2 says, I have stilled and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother. Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

Notice twice, it says, his heart is like a weaned child with its mother. Who here knows what a weaned child means? If you're a mom or dad, you can skip this one, just trying to see if anyone else knows.

[17 : 39] Weaned child, maybe. A weaned child is a picture, a perfect picture of quiet satisfaction.

A child is weaned when they no longer have to rely on their mother's milk anymore. Their relationship with their mother has progressed beyond feed me, feed me, feed me. There's no more frenzied scratching and biting and grizzling when they're hungry.

No more counting down the minutes from the parent side to the other end needs wiping. A weaned child is a young child who can just rest on mom's lap, who can just sit together content.

Shh. It's okay. What's your picture of calm and stillness? Maybe it's the moment the sun sets and you get to see it.

perhaps for you it's the quiet pause after that first sip of the monk. Whatever your picture of calm, verse 2 here says it's worth centering upon and it's worth pursuing through giving up our control of everything to the Lord.

[19 : 01] Right? From verse 1 to verse 2, you see, because once we've given up our need to control everything, we give it up to the Lord who takes our load, His Holy Spirit can give us peace, joy, patience, gentleness, all the fruits of the Spirit that we heard from Pastor Peter last week.

Fruits of a hushed contentment, of a soul that knows he or she is like a child in the arms of their parent. And maybe it's hard to picture this right now for you.

I don't know all your stories. But maybe your earthly family doesn't quite seem like the situation here. Instead of weaned child, it could be warring family members.

Maybe you're here and you can't even imagine this kind of calm at home. And look, if that's really hurting you, if that's a real struggle, if there's someone's life or heart in danger, please do reach out to someone.

Reach out to someone here in this family even, if that would help you. yet Psalm 131 verse 2 says that when we're safe in the Lord's arms, we can be like a weaned child.

[20 : 17] We can have this hushed contentment. And besides, to have faith like a child, to kind of have this posture, isn't that what our Lord Jesus commended?

Do you guys remember what the Lord Jesus said about children? Let the little children come to me. right? It's their kind of faith, that childlike trust, that the Lord accepts and commends.

And don't forget our Lord Jesus walked this earth 2,000 years ago singing psalms like these. Don't forget that like every observant Jewish family from a young age, he too would have made that trek to Jerusalem.

In fact, there was one time he made that trek to Jerusalem with his family, and then his family got busy and then lost him. Do you remember that story?

And then remember that picture of calm? That 12-year-old Jesus sat in his father's house, and then all the while his parents were all anxious about losing him?

[21 : 21] What? I thought you were watching the Messiah. No, you were meant to be babysitting him this time. sometimes we need to put our worries in perspective.

Actually, as Billy, Billy's actually a trained counselor for Victim Support used to be, he's often said to me, there's always someone who's got it worse than you. True story.

Put your worry stone next to Jesus, the Rock of Ages. Jesus had his fair share of worries too, right? Do you remember his life story?

right from birth. He was actually born in less than ideal conditions, wasn't he? He was rushed off to Egypt as a refugee family, escaping his death.

Grew up in a backwater village. Someone once asked, can anything good come out of Nazareth? He of all people, Jesus, knows all our struggles and weaknesses.

[22 : 21] He knows our worries, and he calmed the storms, he rebuked the anxious, he comforted the weeping. And yet no one was more anxious than Jesus the night before Good Friday.

Surrounded by olive trees in the garden of Gethsemane, tears, and in his anxiety and anguish, do you remember he cried out in his worries, right?

Father, take this cup of wrath and judgment from me. He cried with blood and sweat, and yet he too moved from verse 1 to verse 2. He had to go, you're God and I'm not.

Father, yet not my will, but your will be done. And as Jesus, David's greater king, then gets to verse 2 of the psalm, he then marches on to the cross.

One of the most striking things when you see the last hours of Jesus' life is how much of a picture of hushed contentment he was, was he not?

[23 : 25] People throwing insults at him, people treating him like dirt, all as mockers. They couldn't actually get a word out of him unless he chose it.

So settled was our Lord Jesus, silent as a lamb. He quieted his anxious heart for us. As he bled and died for our sins, for your sins, for my sins.

Every cry of control that you've cried out, Jesus nailed to the cross. Every thought of sin and action of shame, Jesus has forgiven.

Praise the Lord. What a savior. Do you believe this? If so, would you cast your cares upon him? He is the rock of ages where we put our little rocks of worries next to.

Would you give your anxieties to him with childlike faith? Jesus is our gentle and lowly savior. He longs to take your heavy burden and give you his light one in return.

[24 : 40] Anxious brother, worried sister, this is the invitation from Psalm 131. Move towards humble confession. Move towards hushed contentment.

Finally, verse 3 says, move towards hopeful community. Move towards hopeful community. What does it say? Let's say this one together because it's a together verse.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forever. forever. Friends, this is not just stating the obvious for God's promised people. Put your hope in the Lord, yes, but your hope, it's speaking to more than one person, isn't it?

It's a whole group of people because Israel isn't just one rugby player, he's a body of believers, God's people. And so as you and I give up our need to control, as we individually seek refuge in the arms of our loving dad, the psalm then invites us to move towards a hopeful community of brothers and sisters who hope in the Lord together.

That's what God wants for us. That, by the way, hope in the Lord together, that's a wonderful picture of what church should be like, right?

[26 : 06] PCBC is not really a building on 207 Te Arako Drive. PCBC is not primarily a bunch of families or friends who enjoy the same kinds of jokes and share the same hobbies or games together.

No, the Bible says God's people, church, to people of all walks of life, young and old, who hope in the Lord together.

Who hope in the Lord, not our bank balance, who hope in the Lord, not our job title or CV, who hope in the Lord, not our relationship status, not how wonderful we look in the mirror or in the eyes of strangers or family.

We who hope in the Lord Jesus, we are the community of faith. And this psalm reminds us to go to this community, right? To go to God's people, to go to this lighthouse, this outpost with all our troubles and worries.

churches, not because the church is a picture-perfect museum, far from it, because I joined the church and now it's no longer picture-perfect, because you joined it, it's no longer a picture-perfect museum.

[27 : 18] We bring all our sins and struggles, don't we? Church is not a museum, church is more like a hospital, where together by faith, we draw near to each other, we bear each other's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ.

God's people, hope in the Lord together, together by faith we remind each other, I'm not God. Are you God? No. Am I God? No. But let's do life together.

Let's trust in Jesus with all our worries. My heart palpitations over PCBC English kind of began at the start of the year.

there was a lot of changes going on in behind the scenes. And I'll be frank, I couldn't handle it on my own strength. I'd be hearing, I'd be talking, I'd be praying, and there were some days I'd wake up and my heart was already pounding.

The troubles haven't just magically disappeared. We have lots of challenges in our own lives. But I too needed to remember this psalm and how it moves.

[28 : 33] To go from verse 1 to verse 2 to verse 3 together. And if you're like one of those uncertain disciples, maybe they had heart palpitations or they had anxieties the night before Jesus died, right?

Can you imagine them sitting with the Lord at the Lord's Supper? Lord, we don't know the way. Remember this, Jesus, He loved His disciples so much to promise them something.

I'm going to give you the Holy Spirit. Just you wait. The time will come. I'm going to give you, you trust me, the advocate, the encourager.

He's going to dwell in the heart of every child of God, including each of you who believe in me. He's going to invite you, he's going to help you enjoy more of God's love, joy, peace, patience, as you keep in step with Him.

As you join His quest to bring the peace of Christ to your life, to the lives of others. And look, on every quest, as disciples, you're going to need a good inventory.

[29 : 39] Who plays games where you go questing? Let's be honest. Yeah. You need to go and get good kit, right? You can't just go out unarmed, that sort of thing.

So for your mental health kit, can I suggest three C's that you can equip? First thing you can equip when you go questing, cut.

Cut things for the Lord. Anxiety happens because we are living in a world full of distractions. Cut out any noise that's going to make you feel more anxious.

It might be cutting screen time. It might be cutting Father's Day ads in this past week for me. It might be cutting news feeds that just tell you nothing and give you brain rot.

Cut for the Lord. A second thing, cook. If you don't like cooking, craft, climb, create in the Lord. We live in God's wonderful creation.

[30 : 40] This is our Father's world. And you don't need scientists to tell you that it's good for your mental health to go out and see some sunshine or to do some sport, that sort of thing. It's just enjoying and appreciating God's beauty and creation, isn't it?

I don't know. It's cherry blossom season. Maybe this week, go find one, go enjoy, and sit there with all your worries, moving from verse 1, verse 2, verse 3 of the psalm.

Maybe that environment's what you and I need. And then you can cut, you can cook. Also, calm with the Lord, right? With all the stuff around, we must fill the void that we create by taking stuff out.

Fill it with the calm of God's word. Philippians 4.8 puts it so clearly for us, right? Don't get anxious about everything, but in prayer and supplication, make your request known to God, and the God of peace will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

How could you be using God's word this way? Filling the void, papering over the worries, strengthening your hope in the Lord together.

[32 : 02] There was a really frightening moment. Family and I were about to join a team traveling to a place we'll call Central Asia. And the week leading up to it was full of battles, visa issues, lack of sleep, and I still remember our team leader having taught us Philippians 4.8 in a song, just saying, let's sing this song.

Don't worry about anything, right? And so on. And then instead, pray about everything. Tell God your needs, and don't forget to thank him for his answers.

As we sang that, as we filled the void, as we filled our crazy busy week, our stresses with God's word, God brought peace, God brought calm.

He worked through our anxieties, and maybe he can with you. Let's return to that pebble that you've got. Do you see it any differently?

Maybe close your eyes if you need to, to imagine that worry right now. Many of us, maybe, we've written church over it.

[33 : 21] Maybe it's something else we've written down on there. A family member, a work colleague, a subject at school.

God invites us to humbly confess what we think about that pebble, to move to hush contentment with what God is doing with it, and to come together, hopeful together, in a community, and we drop that pebble into the deeper well of Jesus.

let's repeat that prayer again, and then respond in song. Dear God, you are good.

Your goodness is bigger than my anxiety, and so I can be calm. I can trust in you, and we here at PCBC can have hope.

Amen. Amen.