



### Introduction

Today we continue our series looking at Psalm 23. We shall explore the phrase “*I shall not want,*” and how we might train our hearts and minds to live in contentment, no matter what situations we face in life.

The Book of Job in the Bible is one of the oldest stories in world literature. It details Job’s conversations with God and with his three friends, in the face of the tragedies that struck his family. Towards the end of the first chapter, Job utters these amazing words, demonstrating that submitting our own will to God’s is possible in any circumstance:

“*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.*” (Job. 1: 21) These words offer us perspective, but they also encourage us to praise God, not *for* all circumstances, but *in* all circumstances. That is a vital distinction. So, we do that now as we sing a song based on this verse, “*Blessed be your name.*”

### Song

Blessed be your name  
In the land that is plentiful,  
Where your streams of abundance flow,  
Blessed be your name.  
And blessed be your name  
When I’m found in the desert place,  
Though I walk through the wilderness,  
Blessed be your name

Every blessing you pour out  
I’ll turn back to praise.  
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,  
Still I will say:

***Blessed be the name of the Lord,  
Blessed be your name.  
Blessed be the name of the Lord,  
Blessed be your name.***

Blessed be your name  
When the sun’s shining down on me,

When the world’s ‘all as it should be,’  
Blessed be your name.  
And blessed be your name  
On the road marked with suffering,  
Though there’s pain in the offering,  
Blessed be your name.

Every blessing you pour out  
I’ll turn back to praise.  
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,  
Still I will say:

***Blessed be the name of the Lord...***

*You give and take away,  
You give and take away,  
My heart will choose to say,  
‘Lord, blessed be your name.’*

***Blessed be the name of the Lord...<sup>1</sup>***

### Reflection

Self-sufficiency or God-sufficiency?  
The videos can be viewed at [www.burleymethodist.org](http://www.burleymethodist.org)  
Alternatively, the written text is provided below

### Song

O God, you search me and you know me,  
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.  
When I walk or lie down you are before me:  
Ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.  
You discern my purpose from afar,  
And with love everlasting you besiege me:  
In every moment of life or death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,  
You have known its meaning through and through.

You are with me beyond my understanding:  
God of my present, my past and future, too.

Although your Spirit is upon me,  
Still I search for shelter from your light.  
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:  
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me,  
Gave me life within my mother’s womb.  
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:  
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new.<sup>2</sup>

### Prayers

<sup>1</sup> Matt and Beth Redman, 2002, Thankyou Music

<sup>2</sup> Bernadette Farrell, 1992, OCP Publications

For our prayers today I want to use the words of a familiar song of commitment and some prayers from the Methodist Covenant Service. I encourage you to join in saying them with me as your own prayer to God:

**As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.  
You alone are my heart's desire, and I long to worship you.  
You alone are my strength, my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield.  
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.**

**I want you more than gold or silver, only you can satisfy.  
You alone are the real joy-giver and the apple of my eye.  
You alone are my strength, my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield.  
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.**

**You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a king.  
I love you more than any other, so much more than anything.  
You alone are my strength, my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield.  
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.<sup>3</sup>**

**Eternal God, in your faithful and enduring love you call us to share in your gracious covenant in Jesus Christ. In obedience, we hear and accept your commands; in love we seek to do your perfect will; with joy we offer ourselves anew to you. We are no longer our own but yours.**

**I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace.**

**Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose.**

**Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven.<sup>4</sup>**

Lord, as people renewed in your love, may we be vessels of your presence, grace and love, bringing light into the dark places of this world, that we might share with others something of the contentment that comes from living life in the fulness of your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*

Our final hymn is another which speaks of the sufficiency of God in all circumstances of life, for those who put their trust in God. Be thou my vision, O lord of my heart.

### **Hymn**

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Be all else but nought to me, save that thou art;  
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;  
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;  
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;

Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:  
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:  
Be thou mine inheritance now and always;  
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart:  
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won;  
Great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.<sup>5</sup>

### **Blessing**

And now may the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; may the Lord look on you with kindness and give you peace. Amen.

<sup>3</sup> Martin J Nystrom, 1983 Restoration Music Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> Methodist Worship Book, 1999, TMCP, P. 288-289,

<sup>5</sup> Irish 8<sup>th</sup> century translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne, versified by Eleanor Henriette Hull, adapted by Martin V Clarke. Adaptation, 2011, OUP.

## Reflection: Self-sufficiency or God-sufficiency?

Rev Tim Perkins

Where streams of abundance flow and when I'm found in the desert place, when the world's all as it should be and when the road is marked with suffering – blessed be the name of the Lord!

Our experience of life does not change the character of God. God is always loving towards us and always present with us, even when we don't realise it, can't see it or won't acknowledge it.

The singer-songwriter Mary Black expresses a similar sentiment to Job with these lyrics from the song *"The thorn upon the rose,"* *"Win or lose it's just the same. Tears of joy and tears of pain. They're hand in hand, they come as one. You'll never see the moon without the promise of the sun. For all the bruises, for all the blows, I'd rather feel the thorn than to never see the rose."*<sup>6</sup>

Beauty and goodness go hand in hand in this life with pain and sorrow. Sometimes, God acts to bring about transformation and renewal in this life. Sometimes God's transformation and renewal are brought about through the letting go of our physical bodies and our spirits being clothed in immortality in the glorious life of the Kingdom of God. We don't know why that is the case but we know that it has always been so.

From Job onwards, God's faithful followers have been no more immune from the ups and downs of life on earth than anyone else. So, what do we do with that? Do we just give up on God when life turns sour? Or is there another way? I think there is. Bear with me as I try to unpack it a little.

The key, I think, is to be able to live the life we are given here on earth in the light of the eternal kind of life that we are given through faith in Jesus Christ. To live through all our doubts and sorrows with the certain hope of a bright future in the Kingdom of God. To live this life trusting that God is good and gracious, and that God lives this life with us. To live this life knowing that we are people in whom Jesus Christ dwells and grows. And if we are able to do that then we can be completely assured that we are living in the glorious kingdom of God already and that that kingdom can never be shaken, no matter what we face on a day to day basis. In a word, it is to live a life of contentment – to know that if we have God in our lives, that is enough.

But that's easier said than done because we are all people who in some way have been battered, bruised or broken by the world that we live in. Our characters, our very DNA are marked by that brokenness. Death and new life are woven into the very fabric of our world and of human existence. And that has a massive impact upon us. We all know it deep down, when or if we stop to think about it. And one of its effects upon us is the temptation to selfishness and greed. We have to make the most of our life and it is easy to try and do so in such a way that as we climb up the ladder of human influence we tread on the heads of others. Our need for more, impacts those around us, even the world itself. When we do not know that God is sufficient for us, we have to be self-sufficient and it is very hard to be content when you have to look after number one.

This was brought home to me when my two boys were much younger and one of their favourite films to watch was *Finding Nemo*. It is a fabulous film. There are all sorts of different themes I could explore from it, from being lost and found, to exerting one's own will and needing to live one's own life. There are massive parallels with the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son in Luke 15. But for my purpose today, the scene that sticks in my mind is the image of a flock of seagulls chasing after Nemo, seeing him as a tasty little snack, and screeching, "Mine! Mine! Mine!" before flying beak-first into the sail of a yacht!

Selfishness and greed are the antithesis of contentment. They are the result of a life lived in fear that we will not have enough or be enough. When we are self-sufficient, we can never get enough. Another of Jesus' parables, that of the farmer who must keep building bigger barns, reminds us of this. But what use is the biggest barn in the world if all you do is hoard it for your own safety?

In 1 Timothy 6: 6 – 10, St Paul writes these words to his young protégé: *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*

For money, we could add reputation, status, influence, power. The more you have, the more you want, but David wrote that when *"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."* Another of my favourite films is the comedy *"Cool Runnings"* about the first ever Jamaican bob-sleigh team and their journey to competing in the Calgary Olympic Games. Their coach is a disgraced former member of the American bob-sleigh team who was thrown out of the sport for cheating. When one of his young Jamaican athletes is having a crisis of confidence and asks his coach, *"How will I know if I'm enough?"* he replies in a moment of deep reflection, *"If you're not enough without a medal, you won't be enough with one!"* Finding a place of contentment is the only way to have a balanced perspective upon life – to be able to stand back from the hustle and bustle, the pressures and pains, and to be able to say *"with God, I have all I need. With God, I am all I need to be."*

Jesus' teaching about the flowers of the field and the birds of the air in Matthew 6 is where he deals with the challenge between self-sufficiency and God-sufficiency. In it, he teaches that to be reliant upon God, to put our trust in him, is the path towards a life without fear and anxiety.

St Paul, like so many of the great heroes of our faith, knew all about challenging times in life. In Philippians 4: 11 – 13, he writes these words: *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need,*

<sup>6</sup> Mary Black, from the album *Babes in the Wood*, Dara Records, 1991.

*and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.”* And what is that secret? He goes on to tell us: *“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”* It is his way of saying, *“The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.”*

I am fascinated that Paul starts those words by saying, “I have learned to be content.” It suggests that contentment is not something that just falls into our laps. Neither is it something that will happen if we just will it hard enough. Contentment must be learned. Now, if I want to learn patience, then the best way to do that is to be in situations that are going to face me with the possibility of impatience! Likewise, if I want to learn contentment, I cannot do so by constantly being in an easy place. I must be prepared to face tough times. But as I face those tough times I do so in the recognition and knowledge that I do not face them alone. I face them with all the spiritual resources of my Shepherd at my back. I face them knowing that Christ gives me strength to overcome all things if I leant to listen to him, to submit to him and to follow him wherever he leads. That is the content of our training programme as disciples of Jesus – listen to him and do what he says. Don’t just read about it, act upon it. Put it into practise. When you face the thorns of life, turn to Jesus, turn to God’s word, discover what it has to say to you, and then act upon it! It may well not be easy, because usually it involves Jesus asking us to let go of something we hold dear. But really it is simply a choice. Do I trust that God knows better than I do, or not? And if the answer is “Yes,” then put that trust into action and follow where your Shepherd leads you.

Before we sing again, I want to finish by sharing with you a poem written by Gerard Kelly, from his book, “Spoken Worship.” It is titled, “Dedication.” It contains echoes of the great story of the Prophet Daniel who learned what it meant to trust God in the face of life-threatening challenges. And “Dedication” is really just another word for turning trust into action.

*“Out of your sweetness, may strength come forth.*

*In weakness, may a brave heart grow.*

*In your dependence, may faith take root.*

*From wide-eyed wonder, may wisdom flow.*

*May the lions you face meet a warrior.*

*May you dance on the high fields of praise.*

*May rejoicing run like a river through the valley of your days.*

*May you stand in your inheritance and live as a child of the king.*

*May your ears be tuned to angels in the wind-whispered glory they sing.*

*May you carry a furnace fire of hope when the world falls dark around you.*

*May you find in your heart forgiveness when others, unthinking, hurt you.*

*May you know as deep as DNA in the marrow of your soul, you are known, you are loved, you are valued.*

*Though you fear it, you are never alone.*

*May you walk in the cool of the evening in the garden your maker has given.*

*May you bring to trembling, fragile earth the certain touch of heaven.*

*May your eyes never lose the wonder of the miracle of your birth.*

*From your heart, come love. From your life, come truth. From your sweetness, may strength come forth.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Gerard Kelly, Spoken Worship, Zondervan, 2007, P. 106