

Student Work

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From Frustration to Contentment

Ashley Huizinga
Dordt College

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From Frustration to Contentment

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Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 119:121-128](#)

[1 Kings 3:16-28](#)

[James 3:13-18](#)

When was the last time you complained?

Hmm, not complained, exactly. Perhaps “ranted” would be a better word. Recall the last time that you felt overwhelmed, unprepared, frustrated. The last time that you poured your heart out to someone close to you, or the last time that you found yourself at your wit’s end. In the face of these trials, what did you do? Did you complain to your neighbor, a best friend, a spouse? Did you write an angry blog post or Facebook status? Did you feel any better afterwards? Did anything change?

The psalmist of Psalm 119:121-128 is in something of the same situation. This particular section of Psalm 119 is a psalm of complaint, of impatience. But it is not a hollow complaint. It is not gossip; it is not merely murmuring (as when the Israelites “murmured” amongst themselves in Numbers 14:2 and Exodus 16:3). Rather, the song of the psalmist is complaint addressed to the Lord with fervor—admittedly, in frustration. How many times have you ever shouted at the Lord, cried out in your frustration at situations or circumstances you cannot change (or do not want to have to change)? Have you ever said—almost to yourself—*Lord, it is too much for me. Where are you? Why have you left me with this problem, in this situation?* Have you ever asked for—perhaps demanded—understanding as the psalmist does: “give me understanding, so that I may know your decrees” (vs.125)? How many times have you thought, “It is time for the Lord to act, for your law has been broken” (vs.126)? Now, think back. Did you grumble and groan and mutter? Or, did you approach the Lord in your frustration? Did you pour out your heart as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, begging a better circumstance that you know may not be in the Lord’s plan for you? That’s what the psalmist does here, at least in the first 6 verses.

But, in the next 2 verses, we read: “Truly I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold. Truly I direct my steps by all your precepts, I hate every false way” (vs.127-128). As in all the finest sonnets, these last few lines of the passage carry a conclusion—an ending understood and confessed by the psalmist. *Truly, I love your commandments... Truly, I direct my steps by all your precepts...* In other words, “Lord, do as you will in this area of my life. Direct my steps, and I will accept your guidance (whether it is what I want or not).”

Perhaps 1 Kings 3 seems a strange story to be tied to this Old Testament reading. Here we read of a woman who steals the child of her roommate and passes off the untimely death of her infant son as another mother’s mistake. How could this be connected to a psalm demanding the Lord’s intervention in a broken situation?

Truly, this story serves as an example, and the dots to be connected between this passage and Psalm 119:121-128 are not so far apart as you might think. In the story, the “lord” of Israel (that is, King Solomon) in his role as judge is presented with a challenge. His intervention is demanded. What, then, does Solomon do? Does he ask the women who looks more like the child than the other? Does he bring the dead child back to life so that each of the two women can be satisfied? Rather, he takes an unexpected route. Bring me a sword! Cut the child in half and present each mother with one-half of the body!

Lord, what could possibly be the meaning of this? What is the purpose in this course of action? Madness! But in this strange action, the secret truth is known. Much like the psalmist, the true mother gives the situation over to the “lord”

to decide (vs.26). *I may not have my son* (certainly what she would have considered the best course), *but as long as he is alive...* In desperation, she cries out, “Give the first woman the living child!” In other words: I may not win here, but I don’t need to win to be satisfied. In the end, “All Israel... perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice” (vs.28). Peace is made, a peace that passes all understanding. “And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace” (James 3:18).

Today, even in the midst of trials and tribulations, strive to make peace. Strive to bring—to be—contentment personified, as you surrender your circumstances to the Lord’s judgment.