

Text: Psalm 131:1-3

Title: The Secret to a Peaceful Life / translated by Eunji Choi

1. Inevitable Anxiety

What does the Chinese character for "peace" (安) mean? It signifies safety, peace and security.

This character represents the idea that when a woman (女) is inside a house (宀), it is a peaceful situation. I wonder what connection there is between women being at home and the idea of peace. I suppose it comes from the notion that one is most comfortable in a place where they belong, and there's no place more comforting than home. Conversely, when you add the character for "not" (不) to this character, it becomes "anxiety" (不安). Anxiety means unpeaceful, unstable, or anxious. Anxiety is perhaps the most common mental struggle faced by modern individuals. Everyone, from young children to the elderly, experiences anxiety to varying degrees. Ask the children present here. They each likely have their own reasons for feeling anxious. Some children might feel anxious about their parents returning home quickly. Reflecting on my own childhood, I remember feeling anxious about what would happen if the world ended. What about you? What causes you anxiety lately? Young people often experience anxiety over finding stable jobs, securing positions, meeting a partner, and raising children. For some, health may be the biggest source of anxiety, while for others, relationships can be a cause of unease. One poet said that adding anxiety to the earth makes us human, and removing it from humans makes them earth. The poet suggests that anxiety is part of human nature. Don't be too discouraged when you feel lost and anxious; feeling anxious is part of being human. If we can manage and control our anxiety, we can live our lives more happily.

2.

Philosopher Alain de Botton discusses various reasons for modern anxiety in his book titled "The Anxiety." Some causes he identifies include lack of love, uncertainty, meritocracy, and snobbery. What is the lack of love? De Botton suggests that from the moment we are born, we are destined to struggle without confidence in our own value. As a result, how others perceive us determines how we perceive ourselves. In other words, we do not define our own worth but leave it up to others' evaluations. Why does the ugly duckling become an ugly duck? Because everyone says they are ugly, they become ugly. Before checking their reflection in the water, they cannot assess themselves properly. If we focus too much on how others see us, life will inevitably become anxiety-ridden. We seek happiness not from being happy in our married lives but from others saying, "You married well." Children who grow up not receiving enough praise and love often become more desperate for others' evaluations. We must express love to our young children. It is said that a child needs at least ten hugs a day to feel valued. If ten seems too much, at least give them a ten-second hug once a day. This is a special remedy to prevent them from developing anxiety, so try it out. The love Alain de Botton speaks of is a broad concept encompassing the feeling of being respected. Modern individuals suffer from anxiety because they feel disrespected, regardless of their actions or results.

Uncertainty is an unavoidable aspect of human fate, so it requires no further explanation: life is inherently uncertain. Only those who accept this fate can attain some freedom from anxiety. What does meritocracy mean? It critiques a society that respects people based on their social status. In a meritocratic society, those with high status are respected. People seek to enter prestigious universities and secure good jobs to gain high social status. These days, young people say that the playing field they are stepping into is like a tilted playground; they claim that the term "dirt spoon and gold spoon" reflects reality. Social status seems predetermined by family background. In the comic "Misaeng," a character named Jang Geu-rae makes an immense effort to become a professional Go player but fails repeatedly. He comes to terms with this truth: "Did I really work hard? I didn't work hard enough, so I had to come into the world. Because I didn't work hard enough, I was abandoned." It is heartbreaking that young people have systemic issues to contend with even as they strive with all their might, and they end up blaming themselves for not trying hard enough. In a meritocratic society, there is a tendency to ignore those of lower status. People wish to connect with those above them socially, which prevents them from taking an interest in others who are not in their social circle.

Another reason for anxiety, according to de Botton, is snobbery. The English term "snob" originates from the Latin word "sine," meaning "without." "Sine nobilitate" translates to "without nobility." In the past, society was divided into nobles and non-nobles. De Botton describes snobbery as the tendency to judge an entire person based on merely one aspect. In such a society, it is easiest to judge individuals by their appearance, educational background, or salary. For someone who has a snobbish mindset, an actor like Jung Woo-sung may seem superior to me due to my thinning hair. During childhood, exceptional academic performance was often seen as a talisman for forgiveness of all faults. This too reflects a snobbish attitude. Society quickly evaluates someone as "good" if they are academically accomplished and alumni of a reputable university. The sickness of a snobbish society lies in its encouragement of competition and excessive greed, leading people to compare themselves to others, which amplifies their anxiety. Dr. Jonathan Haidt from New York University, who authored "The Anxious Generation," pointed out that the rates of depression and suicide among adolescents have significantly risen over the past decade, attributing this to heightened smartphone usage and social media like Instagram and Snapchat. Compared to others' seemingly glamorous lives, feeling miserable about one's situation can lead to depression, and in severe cases, even suicide. Comparison is like a cancer that festers in our lives. In a snobbish world where we evaluate people based on a limited perspective, we find ourselves unhappy and trembling with anxiety.

3.

As I mentioned earlier, we find liberation from anxiety and gain peace when we are where we are supposed to be. Augustine, a Christian theologian from the 4th century, confesses in his book "Confessions," "God, you created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find

rest in you.” The place where we belong is in the embrace of God. This confession states that we cannot enjoy peace until we are within God. In a similar vein, the psalmist confesses that just as a weaned child rests in its mother's arms, so too does my soul find peace in God. Where is the safest place for a nursing baby? Surely, it is in its mother's arms. Jesus said, "Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Just as a child finds peace in the embrace of its mother, so too do those who take on the attitude of a child find themselves within God's kingdom. Here, being a child refers not to physical age but to the mind. When discussing with Nicodemus about seeing the kingdom of God, Jesus' assertion of being born again was misunderstood by Nicodemus. "How can an old man be born again? Must I enter my mother's womb once more?" Jesus was referring to a renewal of mind and spirit—living with a childlike attitude. A child is gentle and adaptable. Because of that, they can fit in anywhere. They are pure. Our souls and minds must become pure and simple like children to embrace God. Today, let us explore how to become like children and find true peace in God's embrace, casting off our anxieties through Psalm 131.

Firstly, the psalmist advises that we ought to abandon pride. "Lord, I have given up my proud heart. I have turned from my arrogant ways" (1a). If we translate this verse from Hebrew literally, it would read, "Yahweh, I will not lift my heart high, nor look to lofty things." He speaks of not lifting one's heart and eyes to high places. The eyes are the windows to the heart, thus reiterating the same message regarding one's mindset. Pride conveys a sense of superiority and an attitude of arrogance, while arrogance means looking down on others. Both pride and arrogance are diseases of the heart. There is no greater ailment than this. Those with pride believe they are better than others, seeking to dominate and triumph over them. It is a competitive attitude. Before winning battles with others, we must first conquer our internal struggles—that is fundamental. Alain de Botton once said, "Behind arrogance hides fear. Only those tormented by deep inferiority complex strive to make others feel they are not worthy of being aligned with them." An arrogant person may deliberately belittle others to mask their own internal anxiety and fear. Whether it's displaying expensive possessions or flaunting educational and social accolades, those who try to overshadow others are often hiding feelings of inferiority. Because they cannot affirm their own worth, they seek to outshine others through different means.

The second key to the psalmist's teaching is to abandon excessive greed. "I do not pursue great things, nor attempt marvelous things beyond me" (1b). Letting go of excessive greed signifies living a simplified life. Simplifying our lives through letting go empowers us to enjoy the essence of our existence. Simplicity signifies the ability to draw a line and say "no" when necessary. Living simply while cutting out greed becomes a shortcut to peace.

4.

What state does the weaned child mentioned in Psalm 131 refer to? A child only relinquishes its mother's breast when it has been fully fed. After nourishing, it falls asleep. The state of being a weaned child is the most satisfying in the world. Imagine a nursing baby: a baby doesn't just

suckle; it connects with its mother through eye contact. The baby reconfirms the overflowing love from its mother as it feeds. The baby finds satisfaction not solely from milk; having acknowledged their mother's abundant love, they want for nothing more. Hence, nursing mothers should avoid distractions while feeding, such as watching TV or multitasking. A weaned child, being full, does not cultivate a desire to be filled more. The child is satisfied with their life. We, too, can adopt the mindset of such a child. Our souls simply need to rely on the Lord "from now until forever." Letting ourselves rest in the Lord means that only those cradled in His arms can maintain this simple attitude of life, capable of drawing lines against excessive greed. Only those who are loved can practice this. Those who receive God's love and respect can free themselves from disproportionate desires. They can escape the urge to prove their worth through possessions or status, and they can liberate themselves from pride and arrogance over wanting to rise above others. Those who are loved and respected do not thirst for validation from others. Many people seek happiness in the minds of others. Even when living fulfilling lives, a single passing comment can erase their happiness. Many prioritize being perceived as happy over actual happiness. Instead of seeking happiness within others' judgments, enjoy the happiness that exists within you. Above all, embrace the genuine tranquility found in God's embrace. Those who trust in and lean on God will experience a peace that cannot be given by the world.

5.

Alain de Botton claims that the opposite of a snob is a "mother." If a snob evaluates a person based on just one aspect, a mother accepts us as we are. A baby, the moment it is born, does two things: eat and relieve itself. However, a mother puts everything in order that the child has scattered and receives the child unconditionally. Of course, a mother's attitude may change with the child's growth. Upon entering school, a child becomes evaluated based on grades and begins to seek praise about being better than neighborhood kids. They transition from a world of unconditional love into a world of performance. Still, there is no greater form of unconditional love than a mother's. We endure our lives through the love we've received from a mother. In military training camps, drill instructors often make recruits sing the song "When I Miss My Mom." Even the toughest soldiers cannot help but shed tears. Everyone sings and cries, longing for the true comfort of their mother's embrace. What I truly miss is the warmth of a mother's embrace. A mother is that kind of being. A mother's love gives us the strength to endure in a materialistic world. Even when everyone in the world turns their back on me, my mother is the one who accepts me just as I am. We can only find true peace in the love of God, our true Mother.

A study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology in 2015 examined 90 college students by taking them to a eucalyptus forest. Half of the participants gazed at high eucalyptus trees, while the other half looked at distant buildings. After a minute, they conducted a survey. During this process, the experimenter accidentally dropped a pen. The intention of the experiment was not the survey content but to observe how much help they

would provide to the person who dropped the pen. The result showed that "those who had experienced looking up at tall trees were significantly more helpful and kind to others." What is the implication of this research? Those who have experienced something magnificent and awe-inspiring become less obsessive about their own importance and demonstrate a more generous attitude. As we noted earlier, an obsession with one's own importance is a significant aspect of anxiety. People who have experienced greatness are able to relinquish their self-obsession and live in peace. Each Sunday, as we worship the high and mighty God and set our gaze upon Him, we can liberate ourselves from our own self-obsession. Worship is the simplest means to embrace God and enjoy the true peace He offers. I bless you all in the name of the Lord to experience true peace and rest through the love of God, even in this materialistic society that provokes anxiety, and may you become those who hold and embrace others with that love.