

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Adult Bible Fellowship
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by
William D. Barrick, Th.D.
Professor of OT, The Master's Seminary



Psalm 131 — Godly Contentment

1.0 Introducing Psalm 131

- In the Psalms of Ascents' five sets of three psalms, we find a theme of distress in the first, power in the second, and security in the third, Psalm 131 speaks of security (cp. Pss 122, 125, and 128), illustrating it with a weaned child's secure relationship to his mother.
- Their style and their theme of hope link Psalms 130 and 131 (see notes on Ps 130). We can fulfill Psalm 131's lesson for ourselves by living out Psalm 130.
- Theme of Psalm 131: *Troubled travelers humbly and contentedly hope in God.*
- As we approach this psalm, it behooves us to "understand rightly what Psalm 131 describes. *This composure is learned, and it is learned in relationship.* Such purposeful quiet is achieved, not spontaneous. It is conscious, alert, and chosen. It is a form of self-mastery by the grace of God: 'Surely I have composed and quieted my soul.' And it happens in living relationship with Someone Else. . . . Can you get to this quieted place, here and now, in your actual life? Yes. This psalm is from a man who leads you by the hand. The last sentence of the psalm stops talking with God and talks to you. Psalm 131 aims to become your words as a chosen and blessed child." — David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003), 77, emphasis his.
- "It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn." — C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vols. (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, n.d.), 3/2:136.

2.0 Reading Psalm 131 (NAU)

131:1 A Song of Ascents, of David.

O LORD, my heart is not proud,
nor my eyes haughty;

- Nor do I involve myself in great matters,
Or _____ in things too difficult for me.
- 131:2** Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;
 Like a weaned child rests against his mother,
My soul is like a weaned child within me.
- 131:3** **O Israel, hope in the LORD**
From this time forth and forever.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 131

3.1 Outline

Psalm Heading (v. 1a)

- I. The Psalmist's Personal Piety (vv. 1b–2)
- II. The Psalmist's Public Plea (v. 3)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “my heart is not proud”
 - Being proud, arrogant, loudly opinionated, or having an overly high opinion of oneself results in a lack of humility and a lack of real peace within oneself. If we are always defending our pride, we will have no rest or peace of mind.
 - Personal, fleshly ambition differs from godly aspiration. Our culture glorifies, rewards, and encourages selfish ambition. It is the real American idol.
 - Compare Proverbs 16:5; 21:4; James 4:6 (Prov 3:34).
- **v. 1** “Nor do I involve myself in great matters”
 - First, let's identify what this is *not*. This does not refer to being faint-hearted, spineless, mousy, or unwilling to take on great challenges. William Carey's axiom (“Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God”) still applies.
 - So, what does David mean? Each of us at one time or another either has or will come across someone who makes it their business to micro-manage everyone around them. He or she is the type of person who purposefully inserts himself or herself into every situation that might advance their personal agenda for being center stage and for getting up the social ladder in a job or an organization. They are the Diotrepheses of the world and even of the church (cp. 3 John 9–10).
 - Powlison (*Seeing with New Eyes*, 78) suggests that we each think deeply about this matter by considering the opposite of Psalm 131 — the so-called “anti-psalm”:
 - “Self,
my heart is proud (I'm absorbed in myself),
and my eyes are haughty (I look down on other people),
and I chase after things too great and too difficult for me.
So of course I'm noisy and restless inside; it comes naturally,

**like a hungry infant fussing on his mother’s lap,
like a hungry infant, I’m restless with my demands and worries.
I scatter my hopes onto anything and everybody all the time.”**

- Even if you say, “I don’t have issues with pride; my problem is a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence,” you really have a problem with pride. Fear of failure and rejection, self-pity, and an unhealthy low opinion of oneself express “*pride* failing, *pride* intimidated, and *pride* despairing” (Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 79).
- v. 2 “Surely”
 - Literally, “If not” — the usual means of commencing some sort of oath or vow. “Surely,” “Indeed,” and “Truly” are all possible ways to express David’s emphatic declaration.
- v. 2 “I have composed and quieted my soul”
 - We understand David’s model clearly. The question is: *How do I compose or quiet myself in the midst of all that I am facing in my life?*
 - ✓ Get a grip on yourself.
 - ✓ Identify the areas of your pride.
 - ✓ Silence your desires, opinions, agendas, irritabilities, anxieties, and fears.
 - ✓ Replace all those thing with Christ — focus on Him.
 - ✓ Look for strength from God to accomplish this — cast yourself on Him.
 - ✓ Have a psalm-generated conversation with yourself then go to the Lord with that conversation.
 - ✓ Live out Psalms 130 and 131.
 - This is godly contentment. Compare 2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:6; and Hebrews 13:5.
- v. 2 “a weaned child”
 - Weaning consists of breaking the child’s dependence upon his or her mother to satisfy his desires. The relationship blossoms into a love for mother for her own sake.
 - I must rest in God because I know Who He is and what He has done, not because I know what He can do *for me*.
 - Compare Isaiah 66:13.
- v. 3 “hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever”
 - See Psalm 130:7. Compare Psalms 113:2; 118:15; 121:8; and 125:2.

4.0 Singing Psalm 131

“Quiet, Lord, My Froward Heart”

(Tune: “Rock of Ages”)

1 Quiet, Lord, my froward heart,
Make me teachable and mild,
Upright, simple, free from art,
Make me as a weanèd child:
From distrust and envy free,
Pleased with all that pleases Thee.

2 What Thou shalt today provide,
Let me as a child receive;
What tomorrow may betide,
Calmly to Thy wisdom leave:
'Tis enough that Thou wilt care,
Why should I the burden bear?

3 As a little child relies
On a care beyond his own;
Knows he's neither strong nor wise,
Fears to stir a step alone:
Let me thus with Thee abide,
As my Father, Guard, and Guide.

4 Thus preserved from Satan's wiles,
Safe from dangers, free from fears;
May I live upon Thy smiles,
Till the promised hour appears;
When the sons of God shall prove
All their Father's boundless love.

— Words: John Newton (1779)

“Be Still, My Soul”

1 Be still, my soul! the Lord is on thy side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul! thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Thro' thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul! thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul! the waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

3 Be still, my soul! the hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul! when change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

— Words: Katharina von Schlegel,
translated by Jane L. Borthwick
Music: Jean Sibelius

5.0 Praying Psalm 131

- Deliver me from my pride, Father. [v. 1]
- Teach me to find contentment in You. [v. 2]
- Thank You, Lord, for the hope I have in You forever. [v. 3]

6.0 Applying Psalm 131

- “I will not noisily strut about demanding that I be treated as the center of my family or my neighborhood or my work, but seek to discover where I fit and do what I am good at.” — Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 149–50.
- Learn to desire God for Himself and not use Him to fulfill your desires.
- “When you set your hope in the right place, you become the right size.” — David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 88.

... get a clear picture of what Psalm 131 is *not*. It does not portray unruffled detachment or stoic indifference. It's not about having an easygoing personality or low expectations. It's not retreat from the troubles of life or retirement to a life of ease. It's not the quieting of inner noise that a glass of wine or a daily dose of Prozac produces. After all, Jesus and David were both kingdom-builders who expected — and achieved — huge things in the midst of commotion and trouble. They experienced pressure, joy, heartache, outrage, affection, and courage. So Psalm 131's inner quiet comes in the midst of actions, relationships, and problems.

— David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 76–77