

Psalm 131

Dr. David Shaw

Lord, my heart is not proud, and my eyes are not haughty, and I do not go after things too great and too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child on his mother, like a weaned child, my soul rests within me. Israel, hope in the Lord now and forever.

This is a person who is quiet on the inside. Most of us are not quiet on the inside because we are noisy on the outside; busy-busy-busy; obsessed; consumed; driven. Failure and despair are our masters and we are in a free fall of anxiety. Are you quiet inside or noisy inside?

Remember that this Psalm is written by David. It does not portray a blissful, unruffled detachment or meditative state of higher consciousness. Neither is it stoic indifference. It is not retreat from the troubles of life and the commotion of other people. It is not retirement to a life of ease and wealth, the quiet of having nothing to do and no worries. The quiet of Psalm 131 comes amidst action, relationships, and problems.

This psalm contains big things in a very tiny package, divided into three parts.

1. ***Lord, my heart is not proud, and my eyes are not haughty, and I do not go after things too great and too difficult for me (vs. 1)***

Faith delivers us from our biggest problem which is a proud self-will. To be able to say "I am not something, you must be able to identify the something you are not. A pool of water in the stillness of dawn is highly sensitive to vibration. In the same way, this quiet Psalm can make you highly sensitive to noise. It is an instrument with which to detect gusts, tremors, and waves in the soul. What makes us so noisy inside? Turn it around:

SELF:

-my heart is proud (I am absorbed in myself)

-my eyes are haughty (I look down on others)

-I chase after things too great and too difficult for me

Noise follows these things like trucks on the freeway. Do you remember Alice in Wonderland, how Alice was either too big or too small? Because she was never quite the right size, she was continually disoriented. We have that same problem. We imagine ourselves to be independent and autonomous – PROUD HEARTS. Another way of saying this is I WANT CONTROL. Pride

is not just about me – it is about you. HAUGHTY EYES asserts my superiority to you in some way. HAUGHTY EYES says “Compared to you, I am right.”

HAUGHTY EYES leads to the third problem mentioned in verse 1 which in the language of the Psalmist is I DO NOT GO AFTER THINGS TOO GREAT AND TOO DIFFICULT FOR ME. If other people are beneath us (HAUGHTY EYES) we are tempted to pursue impossibilities.

The person who is humble knows that our daily bread, abilities and opportunities, indeed everything is a gift from God that we don't control. When a person sets out to attain the impossible, the noise makers of despair or rage, anxiety or manipulation must eventually begin to take over for the quiet.

2. ***Surely I have composed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child on his mother, my soul rests within me (Psalm 131:2).***

Now we consider the process. This is not a “Half-way composed” or a “half-way weaned.” He once was noisy and now has learned quiet. In the first word in Psalm 131:2 (Surely), David comes close to taking an oath. He is bound and determined to have wrestled down his unruly soul. There is no technique or formula to make this happen. COMPOSE means literally TO LEVEL. Bulldoze the building site. David had gone about unplugging to noise machines in his life. It came with great effort.

In the 1700s Katarina von Schlegel wrote a hymn about wrestling to compose and quiet her soul. It is an extended personalization of Psalm 132:2, presumably written in the context of some great loss.

Be still my soul, The Lord is on Thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave it to God to order and provide
In every charge, He faithful will remain.
Be still my soul, Thy best, thy heavenly friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

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.

Be still, my soul, When dearest friends depart,
And all is darkened in the vale of tears,
Then shall thou better know His love, His heart,
Who comes to soothe thy sorrows and thy fears.
Be still my soul, that Jesus can repay,
from His own fullness all He takes away.

Be still, my soul, the hour is hastening on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
when disappoint, fear, and grief are gone,
sorrow forgot, loves purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul. When change and tears are past
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

MOST OF THE NOISE OF OUR SOULS IS TRYING TO CONTROL THE UNCONTROLLABLE.

David drives this home with a wonderful metaphor: *like a weaned child on his mother, like a weaned child, my soul rests within me.* Children not weaned want something. A Mother's milk means life, health, satisfaction, and joy. Once weaned, a child sits in his mother's laps perfectly content. Envision your own soul on your Mother's lap. You used to be noisy, squirmy, and demanding. Now you sit still. That is the picture of a quiet soul.

3. Israel, hope in the Lord, now and forever.

This last line gives us the reason. **First**, you are called by name. Israel is the name of God's people. Disciple is the most commonly used name to describe you. You are Beloved, a holy one, a saint of God, a son or daughter, and a called out one. **GOD CARES FOR YOU AND WANTS YOU TO REST. IT IS HIS WILL. YOU ARE HIS WILL.**

Second, you are called to **hope in His name.** Who is this One who topples all the ladders to nowhere and gives you something better? He is the true God. Psalm 131 is the condensed version that should be paired with other things such as Psalm 130, which gives details in verses 1-8 about the God with whom we have to do. **We are racehorses, not milkcows, called to bovine apathy but equine alertness and focus.**

Third, you are called to these hopes **now and forever.** Literally, David says FROM NOW UNTIL FOREVER. That pretty much covers it all. Our biggest problem is proud self-will. That is the noise machine inside you.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

1. Identify the ladders to nowhere that pride erects
 - Where do you raise up ladders of achievement?
 - Where do you set up ladders of acquisition and security?
 - What ladders of gratification have you set up?
 - What ladders of avoidance or escape do you have?

2. Jesus does not set up ladders that lead to nowhere
 - See where your ladders are leading
 - Are they leading you closer to the cross?
 - Are they leading you to quiet places

3. Live the mindset of Psalm 131

When you set your hope in the right place, you become just the right size

 - Pride cannot coexist next to Christ
 - Humility prevents you from looking down on others
 - Be still and know that HE IS GOD