



Psalm 131 - Song of Quiet Trust

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

Introduction

This psalm of confidence in the Lord models the ideal frame of soul before God, a calmed and quieted soul. Commentators suggest two possible occasions for its composition. The first may be when Saul hunted David, and David was often accused of ambition for the throne of Israel. The second may be David in response to his wife Michal when she accused him of being vulgar and undignified when he danced in the procession of bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. Whatever the occasion was, this short psalm is a beautiful denial of pride, arrogance, and selfish ambition. Charles Spurgeon observed, "It is one of the shortest Psalms to read, but one of the longest to learn. It speaks of a young child, but it contains the experience of a man in Christ."

Psalm 131:1-2 - I Have Quieted My Soul.

The opening section describes the humility that befits the faithful person: his heart is not lifted up and his eyes are not raised too high, both of which are expressions for arrogance and pride; nor does he occupy himself with things too great and too marvellous for him, i.e. with matters beyond human powers to comprehend: <<*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children for ever, to observe all the words of this law*>> (Deuteronomy 29:29).

This person has calmed and quieted his soul, like a weaned child with its mother: just as a weaned child is content simply having his mother's presence, so the faithful worshipper is content with God's presence, even when there are many things he would like God to explain, such as how one's own little story relates to the big story; refer to the introduction to Psalm 111.

¹ O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvellous for me.

Psalm 131:1

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up. When the heart is lifted up the person is proud; the same expression translated <<*the pride of his heart*>> in 2 Chronicles 32:26 and <<*your heart is proud*>> in Ezekiel 28:2. Similarly, when the eyes are raised too high, they are <<*haughty eyes*>> as in Psalm 18:27, Proverbs 6:17 and 21:4. David learned to reject pride. David came before the Lord in conscious humility. He understood the principle later explained in the NT: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble; refer to Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6, and 1 Peter 5:5.

My eyes are not raised too high. David learned to reject arrogance. Under the influence of pride, people can become arrogant and look down on other people. Although he had accomplished great things and had a great destiny in front of him, David tried not go around thinking himself better than others.

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. David learned to reject selfish ambition and he chose not to pursue things too profound for him. He did not set his focus on promotion or position above what God had appointed in the present season. Jesus taught his followers to accept a lower place: <<*When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted*>> (Luke 14:8-11), and to wait patiently for God to lift one up in his wisdom and timing.

There are godly aspirations: <<*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus*>> (Philippians 3:12-14), and then there are **selfish ambitions:** <<*For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be*

quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder>> (2 Corinthians 12:20), <<*Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*>> (Galatians 5:19-21), <<*These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defence of the gospel*>> (Philippians 1:16), and: <<*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves*>> (Philippians 2:3). One way to determine between them is to look for a focus on God (related to godly aspirations), or a focus on self, i.e. selfish ambition.

Spurgeon commented, “Frequently, too, we exercise ourselves in great matters by having a high ambition to do something very wonderful in the church. This is why so very little is done. The great destroyer of good works is the ambition to do great works.” And, “The young man who is quite content to begin with preaching in a little room in a village to a dozen is the man who will win souls. The other brother, who does not mean preaching till he can preach to five thousand, never will do anything, he never can.” And again, “Fill your sphere, brother, and be content with it. If God shall move you to another, be glad to be moved; if he move you to a smaller, be as willing to go to a less prominent place as to one that is more so. Have no will about it.”

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. These can also apply to some intellectual or mental pursuits that may become expressions of pride. In pride, people can demand to know aspects of God’s will or mind that he has not and never will reveal. This was Job’s sin, of which he repented: <<*And the Lord said to Job: ‘Shall a fault-finder contend with the Almighty? Anyone who argues with God must respond.’ Then Job answered the Lord: ‘See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but will proceed no further’*>> (Job 40:1-5), and: <<*Then Job answered the Lord: ‘I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. “Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?” Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. “Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.” I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes’*>> (Job 42:1-6). David understood the principle of Deuteronomy 29:29, quoted above in the section introduction.

² But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

Psalm 131:2

But I have calmed and quieted my soul. Instead of proud pursuits, David determined to find satisfaction and serenity of soul, content with God and his works. Those who feel constantly driven to do and achieve more in their own relationship with God should learn some of what David had learned in his. David phrased this with an emphasis on what he did. Of course it was ultimately the work of God within him, but it was vitally connected to his own will and choices. God did not do this for him; God used the operation of David's choice. Christians too must choose to calm and quiet their soul.

Like a weaned child with its mother. A child not yet weaned embraces the mother with the thought of food and immediate satisfaction. A weaned child embraces the mother out of a desire for love, closeness, and companionship. Such was David's humble desire to draw near to God. God is beyond what is normally thought of as gender; he is neither male nor female. Yet overwhelmingly, God is represented to humankind as their Father. This is one of the few passages where God is represented in some way as a mother; others include: <<***Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you***>> (Isaiah 49:15), and: <<***As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem***>> (Isaiah 66:13).

My soul is like the weaned child that is with me. The phrase is repeated for emphasis. The process of weaning may seem strange and terrible to the child, but it is necessary for the child's development. The weaned child comes to realise that the denial of some of the mother's gifts does not mean denial of the mother's presence, and comes to love the mother herself instead of the gift received from her. People regard the process of weaning as natural, but the child likely regards it as a battle. What David wrote of here was contentment with God that did not come naturally, but through victory over what comes naturally and the habits associated with previous experience. Spurgeon noted, "He is no longer angry with his mother, but buries his head in that very bosom after which he pined so grievously: he is weaned on his mother rather than from her."

When God allows things or circumstances in life that wean a person from things they used to rely on, they should never despise it. Again Spurgeon commented, "Blessed are those afflictions which subdue our affections, which wean us from self-sufficiency, which educate us into Christian manliness, which teach us to love God not merely when he comforts us, but even when he tries us."

Psalm 131:3 - O Israel, Hope in the Lord!

With such a disposition of trust and contentment, Israel may hope in the Lord at all times.

³ O Israel, hope in the Lord
from this time on and for evermore.

Psalm 131:3

O Israel, hope in the Lord. God's people could only learn and live the lesson David sang of in this short psalm if they set their hope in the Lord, and in nothing else. Nothing or no one else gives the same assurance. Spurgeon added, "See how lovingly a man who is weaned from self thinks of others! David thinks of his people, and loses himself in his care for Israel."

There is the testimony of David's experience that he wanted the people of God in general to enjoy. Adam Clarke commented, "Act all as I have done; trust in him who is the God of justice and compassion; and, after you have suffered awhile, he will make bare his arm and deliver you." Derek Kidner also wrote on this, "The last verse rouses us from contemplating David to following his example and that of his greater Son: not through introspection but through being weaned from insubstantial ambitions to the only solid fare that can be ours. 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work' (John 4:34)."

From this time on and for evermore. The decision to place one's hope in the Lord must have a beginning point, and that point should be now, i.e. from this time. From there, it should go forth and forever, never ending. Spurgeon added, "Weaning takes the child out of a temporary condition into a state in which he will continue for the rest of his life: to rise above the world is to enter upon a heavenly existence which can never end." It will endure forever, but does have a beginning. Again Spurgeon offered a final thought, "If there is any unconverted person here who cannot understand all this, I pray the Lord to make him a child first, and then make him a weaned child." Jesus held a similar view: <<***Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven***>> (Matthew 18:3-4), and: <<***But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it'***>> (Mark 10:14-15).