

WHEN FAITH GROWS UP
Psalm 131

Good things come in small packages. **Psalm 131** is one of the shortest psalms. But it is just as meaningful as the longest psalm. It is a short ladder that leads to great heights. But the way up is not easy. This psalm is a quick read but a long lesson to learn. JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE labeled it, “An easy psalm with a hard lesson.”

The superscription above 1 reads: “A SONG OF ASCENTS. OF DAVID.” This is one of the hymns worshipers would sing as they journeyed up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish holy days. As they traveled to the place of worship, they would sing this psalm to force themselves to consider whether they were growing up as they were going up. This is an important point of self-examination. Personal edification is a wonderful benefit of corporate worship. But what a shame it is to spend so much time in the place of worship without experiencing real and obvious growth in your faith. **1 Peter 2:1-3** says, “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” **Psalm 131** reminds us there are some things that must be put away if your faith is to grow up.

Psalm 131 is a psalm of David. **CHARLES SPURGEON** commented: “It is both by David and of David: he is the author and the subject of it, and many incidents of his life may be employed to illustrate it.” We do not know the occasion of this psalm. But this does not hinder our ability to understand this psalm. It only makes the point of this psalm all the more unavoidable. You still have a lot of growing up to do. In **Matthew 18:3**, Jesus says, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” God demands childlike faith. God despises childish faith. Once you are born again into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ, God has one plan for your life. The Father wants his children to grow up. **Romans 8:29** says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” It is the will of God to have the Spirit of God to use the word of God to make the children of God look like the Son of God. How does faith grow up? **Psalm 131** teaches that faith grows up when you learn childlike trust in God. This psalm teaches three marks of a grown-up faith.

I. GROWN UP FAITH DENOUNCES PRIDE.

W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE wrote of verse 1: “In the Hebrew there are only twelve words in the verse; but what words!” Verse 1 begins by identifying the audience David addresses: The Lord. This verse would have a totally different feel if David was talking to other people; or worse, to himself. This is because humility is an elusive virtue. The moment you know you have it you have lost it. But David is not guilty of false humility that is only a platform to exalt self before others. This is a public statement that comes from a private conversation. David is not on stage playing to the crowd. He is in his closet praying to the Lord. The Lord leaked these secret utterances to teach us that grown-up faith denounces pride.

When commended for his humility, **CARL F. HENRY** responded, “How can I be proud when standing next to the cross?” Indeed, humility should not be viewed as some exceptional virtue. It is Christianity 101. A proud Christian is a contradiction in terms. If one is proud, he is not a Christian. If he is a Christian, he is not proud. Yet there is a sense in which humility characterizes mature faith. It has been said that humility is not thinking negatively about yourself. It is about not thinking about yourself at all. It is a holy sense of self-forgetfulness. Unfortunately,

Christians can be just as proud as those whose lives revolve around self. It is an ongoing battle with remaining sin we must fight until our faith becomes sight. But the more faith grows up, the more we will denounce pride. JOHN STOTT wrote: “At every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is our greatest enemy and humility is our greatest friend.” To denounce the enemy of pride you must befriend humility in your attitude and your aspirations.

A. HUMBLE YOUR ATTITUDE.

A PROUD ATTITUDE IS ROOTED IN THE HEART. Verse 1 says, “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.” The heart is a metaphor for personhood. It is the attributes of human nature that make us persons – the mind, will, and emotions. **Proverbs 4:23** says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” All that you are and say and do and think and feel flows from what is in your heart. So it is no surprise that David begins this denunciation of pride with a statement about the condition of his heart: “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.”

The uplifted heart is an idiom for pride. To us, a heart that is up is happiness and a heart that is down is sadness. In scripture, a heart that is lifted up is a symbol of pride. It means to have a high opinion of oneself. **2 Chronicles 26** records the story of Uzziah, a successful king who was marvelously helped by God, until he became strong. Then he grew proud. Literally, his heart was lifted up. It resulted in his destruction. Uzziah’s pride moved him to presumptuously do what God had not authorized him to do. In the very act of his rebellion, God struck him with leprosy. And Uzziah was banished from the nation he built. This is the fate of all whose heart is lifted up. God will put you in your place. But it does not have to be that way. David says, “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.”

A PROUD ATTITUDE IS REVEALED IN THE EYES. In verse 1b, David confesses: “my eyes are not raised too high.” This second denial is wedded to the first. David testifies to the posture of his heart. Then he testifies to the focus of his eyes. Both go together. The same pride that hardens the heart also blurs the vision. Sinful pride in the heart becomes supercilious glances of the eyes. David denies them both: “O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised to high.”

Psalms 121:1a says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills.” As the worshiper travelled up to Jerusalem, there were dangers, toils, and snares in the hills ahead. Yet the pilgrim was confident, because he did not look to the hills. He looks beyond the hills to his sovereign source of divine help. This is not what David means in our text when he speaks of eyes being raised. This is another expression of pride. The uplifted heart exalts self above God. The raised eyes exalt self above others. **Proverbs 6:17** calls “haughty eyes” an abomination to God. God hates the proud look. It is the first vice listed among the things God hates. It is also the first and quickest sin God judges. To denounce pride, you must humble your attitude.

B. HUMBLE YOUR AMBITIONS.

David’s first two denials address the sin of pride. His third denial addresses the sin of presumption: “I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.” Some things are great. Some things are marvelous. Some things are great and marvelous. Some things

are so great and marvelous they overwhelm us. David did not occupy himself with things too great and marvelous for him.

David did not play God. He accepted that God is God and he was not. The difference between God and us is that God never thinks he is us. David knew what he was and was not, and he adjusted his ambitions accordingly. **Job 42:3** says, “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.” Job was picked out by God to be picked on by Satan. In a matter of days, all Job had left was his life and his faith. His faith was strong but immature. Job therefore subpoenaed God to vindicate Job from wrongdoing. When God showed up for the deposition, Job quickly discovered that God demands answers, not gives them. As a result, Job confessed he had been talking without knowing what he was talking about. He treaded into matters too wonderful for him. This is what happens when faith grows up.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” There are files God marks “Top Secret.” There are rooms over which God hangs a sign that says “Private.” There are conversations God says are none of your business. Grown-up faith does not occupy itself with things that are too great and too marvelous. Grown up faith trusts that God has everything under control, even when we do not understand.

I WOULD NOT HAVE THE RESTLESS WILL THAT HURRIES TO AND FRO,
SEEKING FOR SOME GREAT THING TO DO OR SECRET THING TO KNOW;
I WOULD BE TREATED AS A CHILD, AND GUIDED WHERE I GO.

II. GROWN UP FAITH EMBRACES CONTENTMENT.

In verse 1, David makes three great denials: “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 marvelous for me.” In verse 2, David makes one great affirmation: “But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.” Verse 1 is a confession of humility. Verse 2 is a testimony of contentment. To be humble is to have a proper perspective of yourself. To be content is to have a proper perspective of your circumstances. John Bunyan said it well: “If we have not quiet in our minds, outward comfort will do no more for us than a golden slipper on a gouty foot.” Immature faith is marked by an unhealthy preoccupation with the circumstances of life. But when faith grows up it embraces contentment. How does one learn to embrace contentment?

A. LEARN HOW TO RELATE TO YOURSELF.

In verse 2a, David says, “I have calmed and quieted my soul.” There was a time when his soul was restless. This is the condition of every person who does not live with confidence in the Lord. The soul is neither calm nor quiet. This can be true of believers and unbelievers. How can

the soul be calm and quiet if it does not know its Creator to whom it must give account? How can the soul be calm and quiet when it betrays its redeemer for the desires of the eyes, the desires of the flesh, or pride in possessions? The soul cannot be calm or quiet without God. David acknowledges this was the condition of his soul. His circumstances may have been peaceful. But his soul was restless. Then his soul became calm and quiet. How did this change take place? Verse 2 says, "I have calmed and quieted my soul."

In **Philippians 4:11-12**, Paul says, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." In a real sense, this is what David means when he says, "I have calmed and quieted my soul." He learned to be content. His circumstances did not teach him contentment. He did not learn it from other people. He does not even say the Lord taught him. He says, "I have calmed and quieted my soul." David was a self-taught man when it came to contentment. He had calmed and quieted his soul. At some point, David grabbed his soul by the collar and said, "Be quiet. Sit down. Stop acting out!" This is holy self-control. To grow up in your faith you must teach your soul to behave. **1 Corinthians 13:11** says, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." This is the key to spiritual growth. You must give up childish ways.

- You must give up childish ways.
- You must give up childish speech.
- You must give up childish relationships.
- You must give up childish habits.
- You must give up childish pursuits.
- You must give up childish attitudes.

As a little boy played with an expensive vase he should not have been touching, his hand became stuck. When he told his parents, his father determined to free his hands without ruining the vase. His father said, "When I count to three, I want you to open your hand real wide and I will pull it out." The boy objected, "Dad, if I open my hand, I will drop my pennies." You cannot ask God to set you free if you are holding on to the things that have you bound.

B. LEARN HOW TO RELATE TO THE LORD.

Verse 2 moves from declaration to description: "But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me." The weaning of a child is the process of removing the child from dependence on its mother's breast for milk to find sustenance through other foods. The weaning of Hebrew children would take place at the age of 3 or 4. It was not an easy process. The mother's breast is all the child has known and it possesses all the child wants and thinks it needs. So the child responds to the weaning process with resistance, struggle, and petulance. The child does not want to have its mother's breast taken away. But it does not know what is best. The wise mother continues the process despite the child's cold stares, loud screams, and violent struggles.

This is a glimpse of THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD. In scripture, God is consistently depicted as a father. The Lord Jesus Christ instructs his disciples to address God as our Father in heaven. Yet there are places in scripture where we see that God's care for us is maternal as well as paternal.

Isaiah 49:15-16 says, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.” God is like a mother who never forgets her children. You are always on God’s mind as he accomplishes his work in the world. Yet anyone who has been raised by a good mother knows sometimes she withholds what you want and forces you to take what is best. So it is with God.

It is an unpleasant but necessary part of our spiritual growth. One of the important stages of faith development is the weaning us off of what is good that we may experience what is best. This is key to the development of contentment. To become content in God you must accept the loss of what is important to you. We hate losing things. The more important the thing is, the more devastating the loss. We so hate losing things that it robs us of the enjoyment of things while we have them. We are tormented by the thought that what means so much to us will be taken away. From our perspective, the loss of things is filled with pain. From God’s perspective, the loss of things is filled with purpose. This does not mean God is unloving or uncaring. The weaning process hurts the mother more than it does the child. But the mother knows what the child does not. This must happen for you to grow. WARREN WIERSBE writes: “If children are to grow up and not just grow old, they must be able to function apart from mother. This means weaning, going to school, choosing a vocation, and probably marrying and starting a new home. They must learn that there is a difference between cutting the apron strings and cutting the heartstrings and that these separations do not rob them of mother’s love.”

David says, “But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.” Note that David speaks of this process as complete. The proof that the weaning process is complete is that the child is “with its mother.” The boy no longer climbs onto his mother’s lap because he wants her breast. He now climbs onto his mother’s lap because he wants her presence. This is God’s will for your faith development. God wants you to grow up so that you no longer come to him for what you can get out of him. He wants you to come to him because you want him. **A little girl could not go to sleep without sitting in her mother’s arms and listening to her read her a story. But the mother wanted out of this bed-down ritual. So she recorded herself reading a series of books. When it was time for bed, she tucked her daughter in and put on the taped readings. This worked for a couple of nights. But her daughter again insisted her mother read to her. “What’s the matter?” her mother asked. “Just push play and listen to me read your favorite stories.” “I know,” the girl answered, “but the tape recorder cannot hold me as it reads.”** This is the attitude of grown-up faith. It is content in whatever circumstances it finds itself. It only wants to be in the arms of the Lord. It sings:

**I AM THINE, O LORD, I HAVE HEARD THY VOICE
AND IT TOLD THY LOVE TO ME;
BUT I LONG TO RISE IN THE ARMS OF FAITH
AND BE CLOSER DRAWN TO THEE**

III. GROWN UP FAITH PRACTICES HOPE.

This brief psalm ends with an abrupt transition. Verses 1-2 are words of personal testimony in which David declares he has stopped believing in himself and has learned to put his confidence in the Lord. In verse 3 the psalmist shifts from testimony to exhortation. In verses 1-2, David is speaking to himself. In verse 3, David speaks to the congregation and calls the people

of Israel to live with the same confidence in God he has learned: “O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.”

Psalm 130 and **Psalm 131** end on the same note. Yet the melodies are different. In **Psalm 130:7**, the psalm exhorts Israel to hope in the Lord. But the context is different. **Psalm 130** begins with a personal testimony of deliverance from the guilt of sin and its consequences. It closes with an exhortation to Israel to hope in the Lord that they too may experience divine redemption. **Psalm 131** does not exhort Israel to hope in the Lord to experience deliverance from sin. It exhorts Israel to hope in the Lord to experience true satisfaction in life. The psalmist has experienced this satisfaction because he learned to stop trusting in himself (v. 1) and to put all of his trust in the Lord (v. 2). Now he bids Israel to share his experience of satisfaction by living with the great expectation that the Lord will take care of you today and tomorrow.

A. EXPECT THE LORD TO TAKE CARE OF YOU TODAY.

In the Christian vocabulary, hope is not wishful thinking. It is joyful anticipation of what the Lord will do based on his changeless promises. **Romans 5:3-5** says, “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” This is Christian hope. Whatever we may face today, God has everything under control. **Hebrews 13:8** says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” Jesus is not only the God of biblical history and future prophecy. Jesus is the God of the present situation.

- **Jesus can forgive your sins today.**
- **Jesus can change your ways today.**
- **Jesus can heal your body today.**
- **Jesus can meet your needs today.**
- **Jesus can fix your family today.**

**MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS, THAN JESUS’ BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
I DARE NOT TRUST THE SWEETEST FRAME, BUT WHOLLY LEAN ON JESUS’ NAME**

**ON CHRIST THE SOLID ROCK I STAND,
ALL OTHER GROUND IS SINKING SAND**

B. EXPECT THE LORD TO TAKE CARE OF YOU TOMORROW.

Verse 3 says, “O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.” We can hope in the Lord whatever happens today. We can also hope in the Lord forevermore. **1 Corinthians 15:19** says, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people to be pitied.” Thank God we do not need to be pitied. We are not miserable people. We are not without hope. As sure as God raised Jesus from the dead, we can trust that God will take care of us whatever tomorrow may bring. W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE comments: “The past warrants such confidence; the present demands it; and the future will justify it.”

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT TOMORROW, I JUST LIVE FROM DAY TO DAY
I DON'T BORROW FROM ITS SUNSHINE, FOR ITS SKIES MAY TURN TO GRAY
I DON'T WORRY OVER THE FUTURE, FOR I KNOW THAT JESUS SAID
AND TODAY I'LL WALK BESIDE HIM, FOR HE KNOWS WHAT LIES AHEAD

MANY THINGS ABOUT TOMORROW I DON'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND
BUT I KNOW WHO HOLDS TOMORROW, AND I KNOW WHO HOLDS MY HAND