

Psalm 131 Study Guide

Opening

- Begin by relaxing and clearing your mind of any distractions. Close your eyes, and take three deep breathes with the exhale being slightly longer than inhale. After the third breath, opening your eyes and begin reading Psalm 131 aloud.
- Read the Psalm out loud three times using the three different translations provided for you. Give yourself at least one minute of silent reflection in between reading the psalm aloud. In the moments of silence in between each reading, circle a word or phrase that speaks to you or jumps out at you or that you focused on as he was reading.
- After the third reading and moment of silence, close with this prayer or a prayer of your own:

“God of our hearts, we know that we do not see clearly with our eyes, nor do we hear clearly with our ears. What we feel with our skin may not guide us as well as we would have hoped, and that which we smell or taste may bring us pleasure or disgust. But you are in, around, and through us in miraculous ways that offer us a chance to know your endless love for us. Help us to experience your love and share it with all creation.

Amen.”

Psalm 131 (NRSV)

Song of Quiet Trust

A Song of Ascents.

Psalm of David.

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 marvelous for me.

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.

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

Psalm 131 (NKJV)

Simple Trust in the Lord

A Song of Ascents.

Psalm of David.

Lord, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.

Neither do I concern myself with great matters,
Nor with things too profound for me.

2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3 O Israel, hope in the Lord
From this time forth and forever.

Psalm 131 (CEB)

A pilgrimage song.

Psalm of David.

1 Lord, my heart isn't proud;
my eyes aren't conceited.

I don't get involved with things too great or wonderful for me.

2 No. But I have calmed and quieted myself
like a weaned child on its mother;
I'm like the weaned child that is with me.

3 Israel, wait for the Lord—
from now until forever from now!

Unpacking Psalm 131

- Psalm 131 is attributed to David, and his authorship is not disputed.
- Psalm 131 is a "Song of Ascent." It was probably either a song sung by pilgrims making a journey to the Temple for a festival. Or it might have been sung by Priests as they walked up the Temple Mount.
- Maybe lost to our contemporary ears, the phrase in v.1 "my heart is not lifted up" is not a statement of despair but instead of phrase expressing humility. It speaks to having a humble spirit, not being haughty or arrogant.
 - The prideful or entitled who do not lean or trust in God will not receive the blessing of God (see Proverbs 6: 16-17)
- v.2 describes orienting the heart in a posture of worship of God.
- "The weaned child" = an older than an infant, a toddler or what we might consider preschool aged. This child has some autonomy, has been exposed to the world some, and is no longer 100% on its mother for food and protection.

- The Prophet Isaiah says in a poem from his prophecy that God's love and steadfastness is like that of both a nursing child and the weaned child that both "play near the home of venomous serpents" but will remain safe by God's grace.
- The Psalm ends with a plea to the people to remain in this spirit of humility and trust. It shifts from a personal point of view to a communal point of view.
 - The poet's use of worship and openness to God is an elixir to one's anxiety and worry and the poet uses it as a prescription for the nation.

Questions for Reflection

1. Psalm 131 lauds the necessity of quieting the mind and calming the spirit as a spiritual discipline. What is the relationship between quiet and calm and trusting in God been in your experience? How do you quiet and calm yourself? And how vital or not are quiet and calm for a faith walk and spiritual journey?
2. Psalm 131 is sometimes referred to as a "Song of Innocence." William Blake called the psalm this. What does it mean to have a "spirit of innocence" and do we find the "innocent" to be examples of what it means to trust in God?
3. Psalm 131 is so short it could easily be a mantra. Have you ever used a mantra as part of your faith exploration? If so, which one's have you employed and appreciated the most?

Closing

For your closing prayer, hear an interpretation of Psalm 131 by singer-songwriter, Sarah Sparks. She uses the Psalm as the chorus of this heartfelt song about the chatter and worry that can consume our spirits.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEj1h-5LQsg>