

## Psalm 131

### *Be Calm*

**Main idea:** God does not desire that we make every issue a hill on which to die. Pick your battles, and even then, be calm.

Do you ever wish that you could live in a simpler time? Like, a time when there just seemed to be less to complain about, and people minded their own business, and you didn't have to keep up with all the latest crazy news and trends? Do you ever wish that you could live that way?

Did you know that you actually CAN live that way, even today?

This last week, my family declared a "less screens" week. Now, the kids did great with it, but Abby and I struggled and even snuck our screens more than a few times. But when we weren't sneaking our screens, we did things like work on a puzzle together, go on walks together around town, and read books together as a family.

One thing that's awesome about a media fast is that it puts things into perspective. You're reminded that what's most important in our lives isn't usually what's going on on the other side of the world, but what's going on in your home.<sup>1</sup> And your most important relationships aren't ones that you have with politicians or actors you see on TV, but the relationships you have with people face-to-face.<sup>2</sup>

Now, for some families, your face-to-face relationships may cause you a significant amount of stress and drama. And if that's the case, pray that God would give you peace with them.<sup>3</sup> And while there's nothing wrong with technology, and it's good to be informed about what's going on in the world, my point in all of this is simply that maybe the reason we often don't live the simple life is because we often actually invite the drama into our own lives.

So I hope our Scripture this morning encourages you to put things into perspective. I hope that it encourages you even in the midst of our crazy world to be calm.

Psalm 131:1.

A Song of Ascents. Of David. (Psalm 131:1a)

This is a song of ascents. In other words, it's a song that David wrote for his people, the Jews, to sing as they ascended the hill to worship God at the temple. This was a song they sang in order to prepare their hearts to worship.

How do you prepare for worship? Do you make it a priority in your life?<sup>4</sup> Do you stay up late playing video games on Saturday night, so that you have to drag yourself out of bed in the morning? Or do you go to bed at a reasonable hour, so that you'll get enough sleep, and be able to be awake and alert, and able to give God your full attention as we gather together?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 5:8

<sup>2</sup> 2 John 1:12

<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:18

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 85:8

And how do you prepare on Sunday morning even? Do you get up late and rush to get ready, and rush to get out the door and even then get here late, or do you give yourself time to worship even before you get here so that your heart is prepared to hear from God?<sup>6</sup>

If I'm honest, I often fail in this area. It's often a little chaotic in our home on Sunday mornings. I sometimes have last minute things to print or prepare for the morning, and Abby and I are often scrambling around, trying to quickly get the youngest two children in our home ready, so much that it's amazing to me that we're almost never late.

And I'm sure none of us ever argue with our spouse on the way to church, do we? We've been guilty of that. And I really should learn my lesson, because I usually lose those arguments. Sometimes we have to drive separate vehicles here because I have to get here a little earlier for one reason or another, so I come alone, and when I do, I still sometimes manage to get into an argument on the way. And, not only that, I still somehow manage to lose the argument.

Sometimes I drive to church grumpy, or defeated, or even ready to just turn around and go home.

But as we read this psalm this morning, we're challenged to make even our morning leading up to the gathering of the church a time to quiet our souls and prepare to worship God.

But that's also not the only time we, as Christians, ought to worship. We're to worship every day, in everything we do.<sup>7</sup> So as we read Psalm 131, seek to adopt this way of life in everything, so that you might worship every day.

Here's how it goes. Psalm 131.

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. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. (Psalms 131:1-3)

*Father, as Your children, help us to trust You with the things that are too great and marvelous for us. Quiet our souls and help us to hope in You. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

So this was a song that the Jews sang as they went to worship. It was part of how they prepared their hearts to worship.

It's interesting that part of their preparation for worship was to remind themselves that God does not desire that we make every issue a hill on which to die. As Christians, we can so often get so incredibly outraged about every issue that we disagree with our culture about, and then we might post or share a rant about it on Facebook. We usually justify it by calling it standing for the truth, but if we really wanted to stand for the truth, we'd be far more vocal about Jesus's love for them, because Jesus Himself is the Truth.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mark 1:3

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31

<sup>8</sup> John 14:6

In fact, if you never or rarely tell others about Jesus's relentless love for them, then it does people no good for you to tell them all the ways they're wrong. Usually when we get so outraged about others, it's less about them, and more about us. We care more about expressing and proving our points than having any real, loving dialogue that invites them to trust in Jesus. But if we believe, as the Bible says, that we're sinners saved by grace alone,<sup>9</sup> then we should know that only grace is going to change anyone.

So why do we often allow ourselves to get so worked up about things? Could it be because, at least at that moment, we've forgotten, as it says in verse 3, that our hope is in the Lord?

Do we trust that God is in control? And if so, why do we panic when we feel like we're not in control, as if we ever were? And why do we sometimes act like we need to make sure a certain political party doesn't gain control? And feel free to fill in the political party that you personally disagree with, because believe it or not, there are genuine Christians on both sides who say this about the other side.

And why do we get so upset over politics at all? Jesus and Paul lived in the midst of a far worse political situation than ours, and yet they didn't go on and on about how bad their political system or rulers were. Even under Nero, who would eventually authorize his execution, Paul wrote that we should pray for kings and all who are in authority.<sup>10</sup>

So instead, David wrote in verse 1, "O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high." And that sounds a little strange, doesn't it? We like the idea of having a heart lifted up. We like the idea of feeling good and being inspired. And we think it's good to raise our eyes, not always sulking around with our heads hung low, but able to hold our heads up high, because we're somebody!<sup>11</sup>

But the word translated "lifted up" might better be translated "proud" or "haughty."<sup>12</sup> David wrote, "My heart is not proud," or "haughty." But even then, in our culture, we often treat pride as a good thing. We say things like, "Be proud of who you are," and "Be proud of your accomplishments."

Now, you'd think that if anyone had the right to be proud with his head held high, it would be the king of a nation, right? But no, David writes, "my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high." Why is that? Could it be because that, even as the king of a nation, he recognized Someone even greater?

I think David was able to say that his heart wasn't proud or haughty because he knew that previously, his heart had been proud and haughty. We see this most clearly in Psalm 51. David wrote:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. (Psalms 51:1-4)

So David knew that it was only by the grace of God that his sinful heart was changed.

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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 2:8

<sup>10</sup> 1 Timothy 2:1-2

<sup>11</sup> Luke 18:9-14

<sup>12</sup> גבה: to soar, that is, be lofty; figuratively to be haughty: - exalt, be haughty, be (make) high (-er), lift up, mount up, be proud, raise up great height, upward.

You see, there's nothing wrong with taking pleasure in who you are what you've done as long as you look to God as the One who makes you who you are,<sup>13</sup> and see that He's the One who has prepared good works for you to do that you should walk in them.<sup>14</sup> So don't take credit for you, but worship God.

Everyone has heard the saying "Pride comes before a \_\_\_\_." Do you know why that is? Is it because prideful people fall more? Maybe, but I don't think so.<sup>15</sup> We're all sinners, so we all continue to fall.<sup>16</sup> But if pride means that we're always taking all the credit for all our successes, then that also means that we'll feel the full weight of responsibility for failures. But if we humble ourselves before God, then we'll say with Paul, "I don't even judge myself,"<sup>17</sup> not because he thinks he's perfect, but because he knows that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>18</sup> and that any good that Paul does is not his to claim, but Christ in him.<sup>19</sup>

I think that's at least part of why David also wrote in verse 1, "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me." But think about this: what was too great and too marvelous for the king of Israel? I mean, you'd think that the king had the right and even the obligation to take a look at everything going on in his nation so that he could rule well, right?

And surely, David had done great things. As a young shepherd, David protected his father's sheep by killing a bear with his bare hands.<sup>20</sup> He killed the giant Goliath with a sling and a stone.<sup>21</sup> And he wrote at least half of all the Psalms! I mean, that's pretty great and marvelous!

And yet, David didn't consider his life and accomplishments as being the greatest and most marvelous things. He recognized God's works as being far greater. He recognized that the most important things were out of his hands.

I think people often think that the opposite of pride is self-loathing. But the opposite of pride is actually confidence not in ourselves, but in God.<sup>22</sup> It's a reverence and respect for God's control. It's moving away from thinking everything is about us, how we look, how perfect we appear, and how right we are, and instead realizing that everything is about Jesus and how good He is.<sup>23</sup> He's the one who holds the world in His hands, and we can trust Him.

That ought to create in you a very specific attitude toward all of life. Verse 2.

But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. (Psalms 131:2)

Taking care of a baby these last couple of months, we've been reminded of just how much babies can cry when they're hungry. They let you know!

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<sup>13</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 2:10

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 16:18-19. The very next verse after "Pride comes before a fall" says that the proud "divide the spoils." So sometimes being proud leads to a windfall. But it's not one that we should pursue.

<sup>16</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:3

<sup>18</sup> Romans 8:1

<sup>19</sup> Galatians 2:20

<sup>20</sup> 1 Samuel 17:34-36

<sup>21</sup> 1 Samuel 17:49

<sup>22</sup> Proverbs 14:26

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 6:25-27

While the Bible consistently refers to God as our Father, there are a few times when God is compared to a mother,<sup>24</sup> like in this verse. What is a weaned child like with its mother? Quite simply, he's content. A weaned child is no longer crying for his mother's milk, because he's been satisfied in that regard. And we all know that even toddlers can throw major fits, so I don't think the Scripture is saying that a toddler is always quiet, but at least in terms of this one thing, a weaned child is content. One commentary put it like this: "the weaned child is no longer interested in merely gratifying himself, but is able quietly to rest at his mother's breast and thus, he can appreciate his mother not for what she can give him, but for who she is."

Are you calmed? Have you been satisfied by God? Or is your soul always in turmoil? Is your life plagued by drama wherever you go, or have you learned to always be content?<sup>25</sup>

You see, a relationship with God ought to produce not only a childlike faith in you, but also a childlike spirit. Or at least the good parts of a childlike spirit: like dependence, and humility.

We ought to already know this, but it's actually arrogant to constantly act like we have all the answers about everything. You can say that humility is a trait you practice, but I guarantee you that if you're constantly telling everyone how wrong they are, they don't see you as humble, but arrogant.

Now, the Bible does have all the answers about everything, and I'm confident that the more we study it, the more we can know God's answers about everything, but I'm extremely skeptical of the Christian who appears to be confident that they are right about everything. I mean, if that's what they really think, why study the Bible anymore? They've obviously already arrived at a complete and perfect understanding of God's word, right? No. We need to constantly be in God's word until the day we die, because we should know that we don't know it all, and that we probably believe some things that are contrary to what God would have us believe. So we should always be humble toward God and others.

I have some very strong political views, but if we took a poll in here about them, I don't think most of you would score very high if you tried to guess my opinion on all the major issues such as healthcare, gun control, immigration, and taxes. And that's intentional, because I don't want anyone to disregard the gospel because they've heard me say something political they disagree with.

There are definitely certain issues that we should be vocal about, like the rights of the unborn, and caring for orphans, and seeking justice and mercy for the outcast. But if I make even any of these issues, which are extremely important, seem more important than receiving and extending the grace of God toward even those who disagree with me about these issues, I've made Christianity more about being right than about being loving.

And, while I'm on the subject, let me talk a minute about fact-checking the things you share on facebook. So many lies are shared all the time! And when unbelievers read what you share, we come across as people who don't care about truth, and only care about our agenda.

But say you fact check an article, and it checks out. But the tone is angry, and alarmist, and accusatory, and unloving. This is 99% of everything that's written online, because these kinds of articles get people worked up

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<sup>24</sup> Deuteronomy 32:18, Isaiah 49:15, Isaiah 66:13

<sup>25</sup> Philippians 4:11-13

so that they share them. I beg you, stop sharing them! The Bible says we'll be known for our love, not for our angry rants, or for our sharing of angry rants.

Instead, if you care about an issue, do something. Give something. Pray. If all you do is post about it on Facebook or argue about it with your family, there's an imbalance. Are you pro-life? I definitely hope so. But don't just post about it on Facebook. Give your money or time to a crisis pregnancy center. Sponsor a child through Compassion International. Help moms who chose life for their unplanned, unideal pregnancies. I'm not saying posting about it is wrong, I'm saying it's not enough and that sometimes we feel like we've done our part by arguing over it on a facebook post rather than actually doing something.

Consider 1 Peter 3:15.

**Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15b)**

You see, even the most important truth, the gospel, ought to be shared with gentleness and respect.

The old cliché is true. People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And once they know how much you care, how much God loves them and how far Jesus went to demonstrate God's love,<sup>26</sup> so that they might believe and be saved from their sins, then they will begin to want to obey God from the heart.<sup>27</sup>

Verse 3.

O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. (Psalms 131:3)

You know, we often talk about putting our hope in God for eternity, but David here reminds us to put our hope in the Lord now: from this time forth. So what does that look like?

Well, I can tell you what it doesn't look like. It doesn't look like always being worried about the next election. And it certainly doesn't look like constantly telling half of our population that they're the problem.

Hoping in the Lord means trusting God, and knowing He has a plan. It means worshiping God by serving God, and serving others. It's a simple life, and it's a calm life, even when everything around you is chaos.

Do you have that kind of hope? You can. Place your hope in Jesus, and Jesus can quiet your soul.

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<sup>26</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>27</sup> Romans 6:17