

Psalm 131 • I have quieted my soul

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Psalm 131. I actually went over some of this stuff with my staff on Thursday, right before we started praying. So they're getting a little bit of a double dose on this one. But then again, that never hurts, does it? Psalm 131. This is one of the shortest Psalms, and yeah it's only 3 verses. And it goes like this,

"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; like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3 O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forevermore." (ESV)

Alright, very simple Psalm. But this is one of many psalms actually where David speaks about his soul. I want to remind you again. The soul is the center of your intellect and your emotions. Okay?

And in fact, in one of the Psalms, David doesn't just talk about his soul, he talks to his soul. Let me show you this on the screen. This is from Psalm 42, verses 5 and 6.

He says,

Psalm 42:5-6 (ESV)

*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him...*

*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him...*

I want you to notice how David starts. Keep this up for just a second, if you would, Jane. He begins by posing a question to his soul. He's talking to his emotions and his intellectual seat. And he says, why are you so depressed? That's what that means, by the way, to be cast down or downcast. Why are you so depressed?

Have you ever gotten depressed? Of course, we all have at some point in our lives. Some people have struggled with it, majorly. Have you ever thought about talking to your emotions, why are you down? See, we just consider it so much just, this is the way I am. This is me..., that we never...

David exhorts his soul. Look at the exhortation that he gives to his soul. He says, "*Hope in God;*" Isn't that great? This is like a locker room talk. He says, why are you depressed? Put your hope in God. That's what you're supposed to be doing. It's interesting, isn't it?

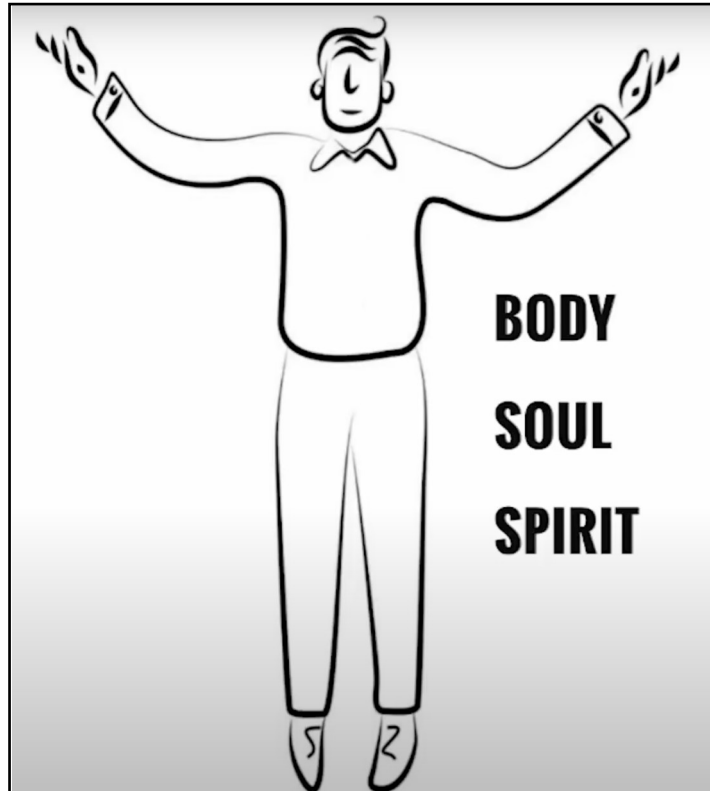
Again, David is talking to his soul as if his soul - listen to this - is a thing that can be tamed and controlled. I'm going to say that again. David talks to his soul as if his soul is a thing that can be tamed and controlled.

Now I want to come back to Psalm 131, where you have... Which you have in your Bible on your lap. And I want to read again, verse 2 because that's where we're going to focus. Look at verse 2, "*But I have calmed and quieted my soul,*" David says, "*like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.*" And you notice how David likens his soul to a child. And not just a child, "*but a weaned child with its mother;...*"

And by the way, the Hebrew word for weaned can also be translated "contented." And the picture that you're to get here is this child that is just sitting quietly next to his or her mother, contented. And as David comes before the Lord, he announces to God, I have "*quieted my soul.*" My soul is now like a child, contented, sitting next to its mother. Right?

Again, the unmistakable idea is that David believed that he could do this. He believed that his soul was something that could be quieted. David comes before the Lord saying this.

Now the next question we need to tackle is, why? It might seem obvious, but here's the question: Why did David feel that quieting his soul was important? And to get the answer to that question, we have to go back to our essential makeup. Let me put Mr. A man back on the screen.



Again, he's made up of body, soul, and spirit and David knows that. He knows that he's a three-part being. He knows that there's the physical part of his existence. He knows that he is a man with a soul, an emotional, and an intellectual self. And he also knows that he is a man with a spirit.

Now, ask yourself this question: If I want to have fellowship with God and hear Him speaking, which part of me needs to tune in to God? And if you guessed the spiritual part of me, you guessed correctly.

You remember when Jesus was sitting with the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman? He said to her, "*God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*" (John 4:24) In fact, He's looking for people to connect with Him on that level. To worship Him, but also to commune with Him. Because worship is communion. He's looking for people to commune with Him in spirit and in truth.

And that's frankly, where most Christians just tilt. And they say, listen with my spirit? I don't do anything with my spirit. I do all kinds of things with my physical body. I do a lot with my intellectual and emotional self. But tuning into God with my spirit? You're talking gibberish to me. Right?

When it comes to the spiritual side of who we are, most of us, frankly, are just lost. We have no idea how to begin to use our spiritual faculties. And yet, the

Bible would tell us that they're just as real as this physical part of you, the emotional, intellectual part of you. The spiritual side of you is no less real, just as dynamic.

And here's the other thing. When you came to Christ, it was made alive. When God breathed in you with His Holy Spirit, you were born again. You were born once when you came out of your mother. But you needed to be born again. You needed to be regenerated. You needed that spiritual side to be awakened, made alive.

And that happened when you came and bowed your knee at the cross and said, I need You, Jesus, to be my Savior. And I believe what You did for me on that cross was enough to save me from my sins. God placed His spirit in you and you were made alive, spiritually made alive.

And yet, interestingly enough, even though your spirit is now incredibly alive, we never tune into it. You know why? Because the physical and the emotional are taking up all of our time and all of our bandwidth. And there is just nothing we're hearing from the spirit, hardly.

I mean, once in a while when you're hearing the teaching of God's Word. Once in a while when you're hearing..., you're reading through your Bible, something will click and you're like, yeah! And it's like, wow, something got through to my spirit. But it's they seem to be just all too rare.

But activating our spiritual faculties or focusing in on our spiritual faculties is only part of the problem. The other part is equally frustrating. And that is, we can't tell the difference between our spirit and our soul. We can't tell the difference. Have you ever heard someone say to you, I pray about stuff, but I'm just never sure if it's the Lord speaking to me, or if it's just me talking to myself. I can't... I just don't know whether that idea just popped into my head, or whether that was the Holy Spirit speaking to me.

You ever heard someone say that? Maybe you've said it yourself. You know what they're basically admitting? You know what you're admitting when you say that? The spirit and the soul are almost indiscernible, as far as understanding their difference. And separating what is soul, which means in my brain and in my emotions, from that which comes spiritually from God, is incredibly difficult. Because our feelings and our thoughts so easily take over, while at the time appearing to be like God.

In fact, people can come out of a prayer time and say, well, that's it. God told me. And they'll start talking and it was nothing but their soul. Right? They had a communication with self and they called it God. That can happen. It happens, frankly, all the time. That's one of the reasons why God has given us His Word. Because the Word can actually help separate, help you to understand the difference between what is soul and what is spirit.

You guys remember how the writer of Hebrews tells us that? Let me put it on the screen for you. Hebrews chapter 4.

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, (look at this,) piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, (or if you want to give it a physical picture) of joints and marrow, (And it helps us to do what? to discern) the thoughts and the intentions of the heart.

See, that's what the Word of God can do to you and I. Or, for you and I. We might think that we're being led by the spirit and suddenly we find something in the Word that says, "No, it's actually not God that's leading you in that. That's just your soul." And that's soulish energy. That's not spiritual energy or spiritual communication from God. You with me?

We find it very hard to discern our own thoughts and intentions. And the Word helps us to do that. But someone might say, well now wait a minute. What about all those times I need to hear from God, and the answer isn't covered in the Scripture? Because there's a lot of specifics that aren't in the Word of God.

For example, God's Word tells you what kind of a person to look for if you're wanting to get married. But it doesn't tell you who to marry. The Word of God tells you that they need to be a believer. And, if you're a woman, there's things you need to look for in a man. If you're a man, there's qualities you need to look for in a woman. And a lot of those things are dialed into the Scripture.

And you can read that, and you can go, okay. But it's not going to say, this one. You're not going to find that in the Bible. Marry, this one. Right? For that you need the Holy Spirit living within to guide and direct your heart.

Now there's a lot of believers that think that doesn't happen anymore. Which is really sad to think that God now suddenly has a muzzle and can't speak to people. Because I believe that He does. If He does speak, how do I know if it's God speaking, or if it's just me trying to convince myself because, man she's pretty! Or something like that.

Because see, my emotions enter into it. My thoughts enter into the decision making process. And I can convince myself, oh yeah, God wants me to marry her. I am sure. Right? How am I going to know?

Well this is where we come back to verse 2 of Psalm 131 that's in your Bible on your lap. This is where David says, "*...I have calmed and quieted my soul,*" you see. And this is very important you guys that you hear this. David understood that his own emotional voice was so strong that if he didn't take steps to quiet it, meaning to quiet his soul, there was no way he was going to be able to hear the voice of God.

And guys, David was a passionate man. Okay? Very passionate. And he did listen to his emotions and his intellect a few times. Got him into really serious trouble. He committed some major sins by listening to his heart and listening to his mind. And so David understood, if I don't tune this soul of mine down in volume and quiet it, I'm never going to be able to hear God's voice. Because you see my voice is just too loud and it drowns out the voice of God.

Unless, I actually take control of my soul like David did. And then I come before the Lord and then say, Lord, I'm ready to listen. You see, because I've quieted my soul. I've quieted it. And this is the insight that I think we've all but lost in our day and age.

Instead of coming to God and saying, I've quieted my soul, what do we say? I have exalted my soul. That's our message. I have exalted my soul. My feelings are the highest form of reality. I have taken my intellect and I have exalted it above Your Word, Oh God. And now I worship myself. And that's where we're at.

And that's why... And we wonder why we're not tuning into God. We're wondering why we haven't heard His voice. Good grief, you can't hear anything over the din of our own sound! The sound of our own voices. The sound of our own desires and our own understanding. All the while God says, don't lean upon your own understanding. And we go, but I'm going to anyway. Because that's what I've learned to do.

You see, the exaltation of soul has taken such a place of center stage, that we have an almost total inability to hear from God. And it's like an unruly child that won't be controlled. And that's the way I want you to think about your soul. It's like an unruly child.

Did you notice in that verse that David actually, used the picture of a child in the sense of saying, I have calmed and quieted my soul. Meaning I've told it to shush! I'm controlling this unruly child of my soul.

How rare it is today to find children who are well mannered and can sit quietly. I mean, it's practically unheard of. Sadly in the parenting department, we've pretty much lost control of our children. And like an unruly child, we've given in so much to our feelings and our thoughts, that we now find ourselves in the same sort of a situation with regard to our soul. Like our children, our soul has become unmanageable, uncontrollable. And it dominates our lives.

Have you ever tried to carry on a conversation with someone when they had a toddler at their feet that was uncontrollable? Have you ever tried to carry on a conversation? Just talk to that person. And this kid is just constantly talking. Constantly tugging on their sleeve trying to get their attention. Constantly making noise all the time demanding to be the center of attention. And then you're trying to have this conversation with this other adult. And this child just will not be quiet. Will not let go of your attention.

And our souls are just like that. They've become unruly. They've become loud and boisterous. And they're like, they're constantly saying, listen to me! Listen to me! You listen to what I'm telling you! You listen to how I'm telling you to feel! You listen to what I'm saying about how you think! And you ignore everything else!

And as Christians, we're trying to tune in to God. But our soul is behaving so badly, we can't get the thing just to be quiet for a minute. We have to realize at some point that our soul is like a child, in the sense that it can be taught to behave.

When Sue and I were new parents, we struggled frankly, with controlling our kids. Mostly because it didn't dawn on us to do it. Nobody really told us ahead of time anything about that sort of thing. Here we were a few years into parenting, had our first couple of kids. And they were good kids for the most part.

But there was one day when our oldest daughter, who's now 33. But she was about 3 years old then. And our next oldest son was about 1 years old, 1 and a half. And we had somebody over to the house. And we were having a conversation. Or at least we were trying to in the living room. And the kids were playing around us. And Sue and I were totally used to the mayhem by this time. And we're trying to have a conversation with this person. And we're talking. And I think we probably barely noticed that the kids were like out of control, especially, Aaron. He was just like any other boy. He had a lot of energy and lungs on him that could rival Tarzan.

And finally, our guest turned to me at one particular point in the conversation. And he said to me, you need to get ahold of that kid. And that was all he had to say. And I remember being brought up short a little bit by it. Cause you don't really like people telling you what to do. And my pride got in the way there for a second.

But as I got to thinking about what he said, I thought, you know what? He's absolutely right. I need to get ahold of that kid! And that was really the statement, the one statement, that prompted Sue and I to start getting serious about parenting.

Here we've been parents for like 3 years. And we'd never really worked on that element of control to the children. And they were just going, blah!!! They were just whacked out crazy whenever they wanted to. And we were just like, kids will be kids. And suddenly it's like, you know what? We do need to get a hold of these kids!

We determined, as parents, that we needed to help our kids learn to control themselves. To control their attitudes, to control their emotions, to control their responses, to control when they come and talk to us.

We started training them, if mom and I are having a conversation with one another or with another adult, you come and wait patiently. You don't come in the room and interrupt. You don't come and grab us on the pants or shirt or whatever (Pastor Paul imitates a child tugging parents clothes attempting to get attention) and go, mommy, mom mommy, mom! Mom! Mom! Mom. Mom? Mom! Right? Like the majority of kids do.

But it dawned on us somewhere along the line, if we didn't ever train these kids, they're going to do what they want to do. Right? They're going to do what's most expedient for them. If they can't find their toy, or they want a drink of

water, that's the most important thing in the world to them right there at that moment.

And so it doesn't matter if we're having a life and death conversation with one another, they want a drink of water! And they're going to get my attention, at whatever cost. Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad, dad, daaadd! And pretty soon I'm going to go, what? And focus completely on them because they've drawn me away from whatever else was going on.

Anybody who has set out to teach their children to behave knows that it doesn't happen overnight, at all. But Sue and I had to come to that place of understanding that by teaching our kids to respect and honor us as their parents, we were actually preparing them to respond to God the same way later on. And we knew we had to start somewhere.

And I believe it's the same thing with controlling and training our soul to sit quietly, while you are spending time listening to your Heavenly Father. It needs to start somewhere. And it will not happen overnight. But you need to. And I don't care how old you are, you're not too old to get started doing this.

I think it begins by recognizing first of all, that it's an issue. I hope I've convinced you today that it's an issue. Because if I have, then the first step is already done. But next we need to confess it to God. And I think we fall short sometimes by refusing. Not refusing, but neglecting to confess areas of our shortfall.

We recognize them but we don't bring it to God and say, you know Lord... this is me. And we need to do that. Lord, this is me. You know what? I am a man whose soul is just unruly and unmanageable. And when I sit down to talk with You, my mind is wandering. Does that ever happen to you during prayer?

You're praying, and all of a sudden you're thinking about something else. You're thinking, oh man, I've got to get the car in for an oil change. Wow, I bet I'm probably over my oil. Well, I hope I haven't done any, hurt the engine. And at the same time, somebody else in the room is praying up a storm. Man, I'm hungry. I could really use something to eat. I'm getting thirsty too! Wow!
(Pastor Paul takes a drink to emphasize the thought)

Body makes its demands. Right? The mind keeps running. And we give in to it. It's like an unruly child. We confess it to God. We bring it to Him and say, Lord, this is me. This is this unruly, soulish person inside of me that wants, and often does, just take control. Even when I'm sitting and talking to You.

And the next thing we need to do, is we need to go to God in prayer and purpose to do what David did. And that is to quiet our soul in His presence. And you might say, well, what does that look like? Well, it looks a lot like parenting. For those of you that parented, just think back. If it's been a while for those of you that are parenting, it really looks just like when you are dealing with your own kids.

Do you remember what David said in Psalm 42? Let me put this back up on the screen for you. Remember what he said?

Psalm 42:5-6 (ESV)

Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I will again praise him...

Why are you downcast, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I will again praise him...

David talked to his soul like he would talk to a child. Why are you so bummed out? Why are you so depressed? Hey listen, put your hope in God, now! See it's like, you're not going to get your way, you're saying to your soul. I'm not going to let you have your way. I am going to control you. In other words, stop acting this way! Don't you say that to your kids sometimes? Stop acting that way. That's not appropriate. It's not good!

The point of all this is that God wants to speak to His children in a very personal and intimate way. But if you're listening to His voice with your physical ears; or you're trying to feel His presence; or you're trying to apprehend His presence with your mind? I'm here to tell you, you're in for a disappointment.

I'm not saying that the only way we can approach God is with our emotions completely under control. Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. There are many biblical examples of people coming to God who were in great distress and even in fear.

And God wants you to come to Him in all of those places. In fact, Jesus Himself, when He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, was under tremendous emotional duress during that time of prayer. (Matthew 26:36, Mark 14:32, Luke 22:39-41)

What am I saying? I'm simply saying that God wants to commune with His people. And He has promised to lead us in the way we're to go. But to be led,

we have to hear His instruction. And to hear His instruction, we have to quiet our hearts long enough so we can hear His voice. That's what I'm saying. We have to quiet our hearts long enough so that His voice can be heard.

One of my favorite passages in the Bible about being led, and there are wonderful promises in the Scripture. But one of my favorites is Psalm 32. Let me put it here for you. Verse 8,

Psalm 32:8 (ESV)

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

I will (God's speaking here,) instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

This is a wonderful promise from God's Word. And the instruction and the counsel of the Lord, is something that doesn't come easily to, if at all, to the person who is tuned in to the voice of their soul.

Listen, this promise right here is going to be nothing more than words on a page for those of you who are so tuned in to your souls, like me, that you never get around to hearing His instruction. So, how can He lead you?

In order to hear the still, small, voice of the Holy Spirit, you and I have to do as David did. And we have to say to our soul, quiet down now. Quiet now. That's what I would say to my kids if they were being too loud in a situation where we needed them to be quiet. (Pastor Paul fingers to lips) I'd say, shh, quiet. Quiet now. You be quiet. Sit still. Right?

How many times do you say that to your kids when you're raising them? Sit still. But you learn to say to your soul, sit still. Quiet. Because I'm listening to my Father's voice now. And I want you to sit still. And I want you to stop talking right now. It may seem like a strange sort of an idea, but David did it. I have quieted my soul within me like a weaned child with its mother. My soul is quieted, contented. I've trained it to sit still; be quiet.

Let me end this morning with two very quick passages. I want to share first from Psalm 46,

Psalm 46:10a (ESV)

Be still, and know that I am God.

Be still, and know that I am God.

We love to quote this. Sometimes I think we think that the idea of be still simply means, a cessation of activity. But there are other kinds of stillness. You see, my heart also has to be still, to know that He is God. Not just stand still.
"Be still,..."

And then finally, Isaiah 30:15, the first part,

Isaiah 30:15a (ESV)

For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."

For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."

Wonderful, wonderful statement from God. What is going to generate that trust in my heart? It's learning to get quiet before Him. Learning to control my soul. Saying, stop it, sit down, be quiet. It's time for me now to talk to my Father. And I need to talk to Him and I need to hear His voice. And if you keep blabbering in my ear, I'll never hear Him. Because His is a still, small voice that takes my attention and my concentration. Because it's a spiritual reality.

Listen, if you're a born again Christian today, you have been given spiritual ears. Your spirit has been made alive. You thought that somehow your spirit being made alive, it's like, well, I know it says that in the Bible, but I've never really experienced what it means to have an alive spirit. You know why? Your soul's been just hogging up all the spotlight. And because your soul is the center of attention on any given day, the spirit just fades into the background and you can't hear what's going on.

But that spirit, that spiritual you, is just as alive as the physical you right now, and the emotional you. And let me tell you something, you calm your soul, you will hear the voice of God. He is there. He is speaking. He is leading. He is guiding. When you quiet your soul, make sure you have a pen and paper handy. You're going to want to write things down. Because God is going to lead you in the way you are to go. That is a promise people.

You think God is going to go back on that promise? He cares very much about that promise. We start thinking maybe He doesn't even deal with that kind of, in that sort of intimate fellowship anymore. Oh yes He does! We've just not been listening.