

Psalm 131 *A Song of Ascents, of David. O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty; nor do I involve myself in great matters, or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother. My soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever.*

What a sweet, gentle, relaxing psalm this is. It is so unlike many of the others that have a troubled or even angry tone to them. I have entitled my message today *"In the Lord's Lap,"* because this simple, short psalm reads and feels to me as if I have climbed up into the lap of my Heavenly Father just to lay my head on His breast and sense His love and protection, and how meek and insignificant I am compared to His vast greatness.

Of this psalm the great preacher Charles Spurgeon said: *"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 [one mature] in Christ."*

At first read we might accuse David of being just the opposite of what he professes. For to profess, *"O Lord, my heart is not proud"*, if said with an air of cocky confidence, would be interpreted as a statement of pride. The very moment we confidently claim humility, is the moment we betray our lack of it. But, as we read the entire psalm we sense that David is not touting his lack of pride. Rather, he is exemplifying an attitude of childlike submission that each of God's children should embrace.

O may each of us who claim to be a follower of Christ learn the serene joy of childlike submission and relaxation in the loving arms of our Heavenly Father. May we learn the secret of quieting our soul in His presence and ceasing to strive and be anxious, only trusting and yielding to His promised faithful care. This is the basic heart and soul of this precious psalm 131.

A WORD ABOUT "A SONG OF ASCENTS"

The first words of the psalm are *"A Song of Ascents, of David."* So let me comment briefly as to what this might refer.

Though most of the 150 psalms are generally unrelated to one another in order, there are 15 consecutive psalms that are all entitled "A Song of Degrees" (in the earlier "authorized" translations such as the King James Version) or "A Song of Ascents" (in the more recent "revised" translations such as the New American Standard Bible or New International Version). These 15 are Psalms 120-134. 10 of them are anonymous, 4 are ascribed to David and one to Solomon.

The most common theory about the meaning of "A Song of Ascent" is that these were songs sung by Jewish pilgrims as they ascended to the holy city of Jerusalem to celebrate one of the annual feasts. The chief problem with this theory however, is (1) there is no indication that said pilgrims ever sang a predetermined set of songs on their journeys, and (2) most of these 15 psalms have little or nothing to do with such a pilgrimage or ascent to a holy feast.

J. Sidlow Baxter has a strong belief that the 10 anonymous psalms in this set of 15 were written by King Hezekiah, and that the "degrees" refer to the only other degrees mentioned in the Bible – that of the steps or "degrees" on the sun-dial built by Hezekiah's father, Ahaz. (2 Kings 20:4-11). Hezekiah had 15 years added miraculously to his life by the Lord. And this miracle was authenticated by the shadow of the sun-dial going backwards on the steps or "degrees" of the sun-dial. Baxter believed the 15 psalms entitled "Song of the Degrees" are the songs Hezekiah

wrote (10) and assembled (5) to commemorate this miracle of his healing and extended life by 15 years. See the Appendix to my notes if you want to investigate this theory further.

REGARDING PRIDE

David begins the lyrics of this psalm addressing Jehovah God and saying, “*O Lord, my heart is not proud.*” And as we have already noted, this was undoubtedly said with a contrite spirit of submission and yieldedness to His Lord God. And this must always be our posture as well.

We note that pride is the sin of Satan that cast him out of heaven.

Isaiah 14:12-15 *Oh how you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit.*

And we further note that God hates the arrogance of pride, as written in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 6:16-17 *There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, ...*

Proverbs 8:13 *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverted mouth, I hate.*

And most of us should be familiar with these additional proverbs:

Proverbs 11:2 *When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom.*

Proverbs 16:18-19 *Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Clearly we are not to be people of pride. God hates, yes despises pride as the ultimate act of rebellion. To be able to say with David, that “my heart is not proud” we must acknowledge that nothing good in ourselves is of our own making, but is alone from God. Pride is not necessarily trying to ascend above God, as it was for Satan. Pride can simply be boasting in anything but in God alone. In reality, it is thinking way too highly of ourselves!

Now there is a place for being proud of another’s accomplishment, or even of your own as it is giving thankfulness to God for allowing you to succeed for Him.

2 Corinthians 1:12 *For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you.*

2 Thessalonians 1:4 *Therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.*

Let this personal favorite verse of mine on pride ever be your guide:

Proverbs 27:2 *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips.*

REGARDING HAUGHTY EYES

David goes on to say “*nor are my eyes haughty*” or some versions say “*nor are my eyes lifted up*” We can understand this second rendering from Young’s Literal Translation which says, “*nor have mine eyes been high.*” This is David’s way of visually describing pride – eyes that have that “haughty look” that look down on others. Can you see them? They are slightly squinted with a condescending gaze that says, “I am better than you.”

It has been well said that, “where the desires run the glances usually follow.” Or, when pride is in the heart, the eyes will show it!

Psalms 10:4 *The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, “There is no God.”*

Pride and haughty eyes are clearly related. But perhaps a distinguishing between pride and haughty eyes would be that pride focusses on one’s own self-greatness, whereas haughty eyes focus on another who we see as inferior in some way or unimportant. David in this psalm guides us to acknowledge that we are not great unless by the greatness of God. And we are not more important, or special, or loved than any of the other of God’s creation. Yes, we who are followers of Him are chosen by Him and gifted uniquely by Him, but that never gives us permission to look down on another. Remember the admonition of Paul to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:3 *Do nothing from selfishness of empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.*

This admonition gives us no room for haughty eyes or “looking down” on another. If anything, we should be “looking up” at others with respect.

Jesus taught that the eye indicates the health of the heart, or soul, and that “haughty eyes” will betray a prideful heart.

Matthew 6:22 -23a *The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.*

Do you remember Jesus’ teaching on the talents? (Matthew 25:14ff) Remember that a man gives his various servants talents (money) in accordance to what he felt he could trust them with while he was away. To his most trusted servant he gave five talents. The others were entrusted with less, but they believed they should be trusted with more. “*What a haughty heart must one have who will not serve God at all unless he may be trusted with five talents at the least!*”

REGARDING GREAT MATTERS and THINGS TOO DIFFICULT

“Frequently 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 only great works. Fill your sphere 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.” (Charles Spurgeon)

A person does well to know his (or her) own size. Ascertaining his own capacity, he will be foolish if he aims at that which is beyond his reach, straining himself, and thus injuring himself. Such is the vanity of many, that if a work be within their range they despise it, and think it beneath them. The only service which they are willing to undertake is that to which they have never been called, and for which they are by no means qualified. How sad.

This is not to say that we should not reach for the best we can be, or that we should not dream big. Life should be an adventure to see what God has ordained us to accomplish, and to stretch for the stars, as it were. It is true that great futures are built on great aspirations.

But this psalm teaches us to learn our limitations and not strive to exceed beyond them. It reminds us the secret of contentment in what God gives and “blooming where we are planted.” Yes, we should dream big and reach for the stars. But if the stars become out of reach and the dreams become fantasies, then we must thank God for what stars He has given us the ability to reach and the dreams He has already made come true. True contentment is found in not exceeding our limitations and in reveling in the boundaries appointed for us by providence.

Many strive to become a large fish in a smaller pond, only to find it very uncomfortable and stressful. Likewise size 12 feet never will feel comfortable in size 9 shoes. Learning who we are and learning to live within oneself is a source of great peace and joy.

Surely, to fail to achieve to our potential is a great loss, and a waste of God's giftedness. But to wish and strive to be what we never can or should be is a great loss as well.

1 Timothy 6:6 *Godliness is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.*

In other words, just living a godly life should bring one contentment and satisfaction.

REGARDING COMPOSING AND QUIETING THE SOUL

I think most of us know what it means to "compose" ourselves. It is to take stock of our situation and our place in it and calm and focus ourselves. Young's Literal Translation gives it to be "comparing" ourselves – as if to correctly assess ourselves in relation to others. Knowing who we are in relation to others is a great comfort.

And to "quiet" our soul reminds us of the great teaching in Psalm 46:10. We often see it quoted this way: *"Be still and know that I am God."* But literally it translates: *"Cease striving and know that I am God."* If only we would learn to cease striving so hard and rather trust in the Lord, we would find the greater peace. When David says "surely" I have done these things, he teaches us that "surely" this is the way to true satisfaction and peace in life. Know who you are in relation to God and others and cease striving on your own and trust God. Amen to that!

REGARDING BEING LIKE A WEANED CHILD

A weaned child is not one who is feeding, but one who *has* been fed and is now full and resting in contentment. Furthermore, a weaned child is not one who is but a first-born infant, but one who is beyond only being satisfied with the simple "milk" of God's Word, but is growing on the great provision of the "meat" of God's word.

So, David's picture is of a child of God – and we should see that child as ourselves – contently in the Lord's lap, having been fed by God's goodness, and growing day by day in the deeper truths of God's Word. That is the picture of a spiritually weaned child.

And then as if to emphasize the spiritual analogy, he says that it is his *soul* that is like that weaned child. The very essence of who he was, was resting securely and peacefully in the provision and care of his Lord, anxious for nothing. If he was a cat he would have been purring loudly!

Psalm 139:13-16 *You formed my inwards parts. You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me.*

REGARDING HOPING IN THE LORD

What gives us the greatest reason to have hope in God for the future? Answer: to be content in the Lord in our present, whatever the circumstances. When we fully rest in the arms of our God, we find our future to be secure. David bid Israel hope in the Lord *"from this day forth and forevermore."* The "this day" reminds us that there is a beginning to our security and hope. And that beginning is to be "today." From our human perspective there must be a starting point to every spiritual victory, and it should begin with our complete trust in God today.

For any listening to this message who has never had a "starting point" of your trust in God, make today that starting point. For some, it might be "today" that you give your heart to Jesus for the first time, trusting in His death on the cross as payment for your many sins and trusting in His resurrection from the grave as assurance of your new life in Him, starting today.

For others, it might be that “today” is the day you begin to fully trust God for that for which you have been anxious for so long. You begin today to “cease striving” and know that He is the God who will provide for you as you wait on Him.

Just climb up onto the lap of your Lord. Tell him you will not be proud, nor haughty, nor strive for what is beyond your reach. Compose yourself, quiet your soul and rest your weary head and heart on His Almighty breast. And drink in the peace and calm and assurance of a bright future.

This image is not a magic wand, but it is the supernatural answer by God to a supernatural calm and way to survive and thrive through the storms of life. We are to see ourselves as a weaned child resting against his mother, in complete contentment.

Read the psalm aloud, as if it were you praying and affirming the truth that David affirmed so long ago. Do for God what the psalm promises you will do – not be proud, rest, and trust. Learn to live your life in that space. Now visualize yourself on the Lord’s lap, as I sing this psalm for you to close the message.

O Lord, my heart is not proud,
Nor are my eyes lifted up,
Nor do I involve myself in great matters
Nor in things too difficult for me.
Surely I have composed and I have quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child rests against his mother.
My soul is like a weaned child within me.
O Israel hope in the Lord; Israel hope in your Lord
From this day forth and forevermore, forevermore.
O Lord, my heart is not proud,
Nor are my eyes lifted up,
Nor do I involve myself in great matters
Nor in things too difficult for me.

Amen.

Appendix: SONG OF ASCENTS (or DEGREES)

√ Earlier (authorized) translations call them “song of degrees”, whereas later (“revised”) translations use “song of ascents”

√ “Song of Ascents” refers to the belief that these songs might have been sung by pilgrims on the way to the major Jewish feasts as they would “ascend” the heights of Jerusalem. The problem with view is at least two-fold. (1) There is no indication that there was a liturgy of pilgrim songs sung by those coming to the feasts, and (2) the majority of these 15 psalms have it seems “nothing at all” to do with pilgrimages, that would make them appropriate to be sung on the way up to Jerusalem.

√ Other popular guesses include:

“A song in the higher choir” (Martin Luther)

Psalms to be sung in a higher key (John Calvin)

To be sung as the Ark of the Covenant was brought up to Mount Zion (Bishop Jebb)

Each psalm graduated in poetic or musical ascent (no proof to this theory)

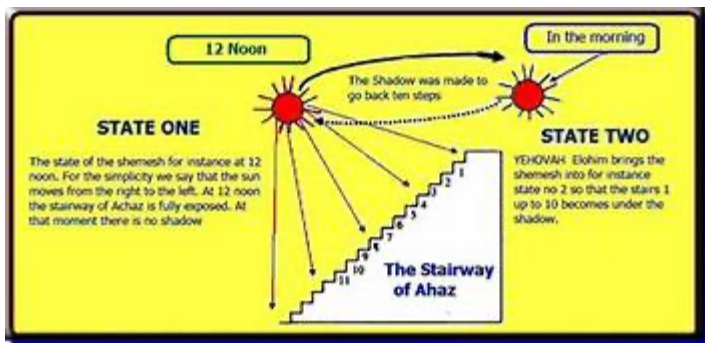
√ J. Sidlow Baxter believed that he had “solved the riddle”, looking no further than the Scripture itself.

1. He first points out that the definite article “the” precedes “degrees”, making the proper title of each, “A Song of the Degrees” suggesting that they refer to specific well-known degrees. He believes “degrees” is the correct translation.
2. He then points out that the only degrees of which the Bible tells us, are the “degrees” on the great sun-dial of King Ahaz, at Jerusalem. This sun-dial was an elaborate and conspicuous edifice, with its scores of steps mounting up like a long, straight stairway, to a considerable height, and on which, step by step, or degree by degree, the shadow from the sun would be cast on the steps, one by one, telling the hour of the day.
3. Then we learn that the shadow of this sun-dial, in the reign of King Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, went miraculously backwards ten steps, or “degrees”, as a sign that fifteen years (the same number as the “Songs of Degrees”) were to be added to Hezekiah’s life. (2 Kings 20:5-11)
4. Is there any likelihood that the “Song of the Degrees” is related to Hezekiah and the degrees on the sun-dial of Ahaz? Yes.
 - a. Hezekiah was the godliest of Judah’s kings (2 Kings 18:5-6)
 - b. Hezekiah was very interested in psalms and spiritual songs
 - c. He restored the temple worship (2 Chron. 29)
 - d. He had a large part in shaping the Book of Psalms into its present form
 - e. He himself was a psalm-writer (Isaiah 38:9ff)
 - f. In that song he references “So we will play my songs on stringed instruments all the days of our life at the house of the Lord.” (Is. 38:20)
 - g. This song of Hezekiah’s in Isaiah 38 follows the story of his being healed and the miracle of the sun’s shadow going back 10 steps (or degrees) on the sun-dial to be a sign of 15 years being added to his life. Then in the song he refers to “his songs” which will be sung as a memorial.
 - h. 15 is the number of years added to Hezekiah’s life and 15 is the number of Songs of the Degrees. And 10 is the number of steps (or degrees) that the shadow went back, and 10 is the number of Songs of the Degrees that are left anonymous – very possibly (probably?) written by Hezekiah.

√ If indeed J. Sidlow Baxter “solved the riddle” of the “Song of Ascents” or “Degrees”, then the 10 anonymous Psalms in that set were written by Hezekiah, and included with 5 others by King David and Solomon. These 15 were sung for years as a memorial to the miracle of the 15 years God added to Hezekiah’s life as He miraculously caused the

shadow on the degrees of the sun-dial of Ahaz to go backwards. Thus they were well-known as “The Songs of the Degrees.”

Baxter further contends that these 15 psalms are carefully arranged in 5 groups of 3 each, with each set having its first song a song of TROUBLE, its second song a song of TRUST and the third song in the set a song of TRIUMPH. You can check for yourself to see that this pattern indeed seems to hold true. This would have been Hezekiah’s methodology for the order of the 15 and the song selection.





"I WILL NOT EAT THEM"