



What to Do With the Noise Inside You

Psalm 131

Pastor David Sunday

August 28, 2011

Let's turn in our Bibles to Psalm 131. Charles Spurgeon said of this Psalm, "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 a man in Christ. It teaches that lowliness is one of the highest attainments in the spiritual life. Let's listen to God's Word:

*"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.
²But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child is my soul within me.
³O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time forth and forevermore."*

This is God's Word for us, His people. There are three reasons why I chose to preach on this Psalm on this Lord's Day, which may be considered the last Lord's Day of the summer. This is the day of our church picnic. The first reason is the prayer of one of our senior saints in our July extended prayer meeting. I'd encourage you to come to these. I believe that when it's all said and done, whatever good that has been accomplished by God through this church will somehow be linked to the activities of God's people in prayer.

One of our senior saints prayed that night and in the course of his prayer he was asking God to teach us to be still. He said very deliberately, "Lord, help us to listen, LISTEN, LISTEN." That left an impression on me that night. I need to listen. I need to be still before the Lord. Then a couple weeks ago I was meeting with one of our college students. I was so encouraged by him as he spoke about how God was cultivating a love for prayer in his life. He said that one of the things he's been learning about prayer is the importance of being still, and quieting his heart before the Lord. Most of all, I chose to preach on this Psalm this morning because I know someone in particular in this congregation who really needs to hear it. In fact, you could pray for him right now, that this person would really get this message. That of course would be myself.

Lately, I've been aware of some static noise going on in my mind. I've had too much commotion going on inside me and the Holy Spirit through the Word of God is admonishing me. Through this Psalm He's been speaking to me about my need to calm and quiet my soul before God. So I preach to myself today, which is an exercise I hope all of you do on a regular basis. Martin Lloyd Jones was absolutely right when he said we spend far too much time listening to ourselves, and not nearly enough time talking to ourselves, preaching to ourselves. We need to get a hold of ourselves and we need to say, "Self, be still." Like we just sang in that Psalm, 'Still, my soul, be still'. The English Standard Version Study Bible comments on this Psalm 131, "This Psalm of confidence in the Lord models the ideal frame of soul before God." What's the ideal frame of soul before God? It's a calmed and quieted soul in verse two. This must be very important if it is the ideal frame of soul before God. The ideal frame of soul before God is not a restless soul. It's not a fretful soul. It's not an irritated soul. It's not a self-preoccupied soul. It's not a touchy soul. It's not a despondent soul. It's not a busy, busy, busy soul. It's not a competitive soul. It's not a soul that is consumed with pressure. No, a calmed and quieted soul is what honors our Lord. He says to us in Psalm 46:10, "*Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*"

So be still. Recognize My sovereignty and be still—be calm—before Me. Or in John 14:27, our Lord Jesus says, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*" In Philippians 4, those famous verses beginning in the middle of verse five, it says,

"The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

If a calmed and quieted soul is the ideal frame of soul for a believer, then we need to be constantly cultivating it. Psalm 131 is designed to guide us in that process. This Psalm of King David's became so precious to the Israelites that they included it in this special collection-called the Songs of Ascent. These were the songs they sang when they made their annual pilgrimages up to Jerusalem. They were ascending because Jerusalem was the high point in Israel. Wherever they were coming from, they had to ascend to get there. They would sing these songs on their journeys. What were they doing when they gathered in Jerusalem? They were reorienting their lives and their hopes and their desires and their dreams around the living God. They were worshipping Him in His temple. As they made their way to Jerusalem they would sing these Psalms, which are very instructive and very

probing, as a way of making their souls ready to worship God in Jerusalem together. Toward the end of the Psalms of Ascent they were coming to the close of their journey and they were recognizing their need to calm and quiet their souls before God, so they would sing Psalm 131.

David Powlison has written a wonderful article on this Psalm called "Peace, Be Still". His article has helped to shape a lot of my thoughts for this sermon today. Powlison says of Psalm 131, "We are invited to do some holy eavesdropping. We are listening in on a man as he opens his heart before God. We're given inner access, intimate access, into his inner life. He's sharing with us through his prayer to God how he has learned composure. How he has learned to calm and to quiet his soul. He's inviting us to join him on the journey."

Psalm 131 is show and tell on how to become peaceful inside. This is God's will for you. This is God's will for us, that we be still and calm and peaceful and contented and trusting in Him. Not ruffled, irritated, agitated, restless or fretful. We need to ask ourselves some questions as we look at this Psalm. I have a question for each verse.

Verse One, Question One: "Why is it noisy inside me?"

When it's noisy inside we need to ask ourselves, "Why? Why is it noisy inside me?" This noisiness takes on different tones for different seasons and different personalities. I don't know what it sounds like for you. At times it comes in a minor key as we are haunted by failures or despair, corroded by regrets, irritated by people or dissatisfied with our circumstances. There's this static noise, a kind of requiem of despondency that's going on in the back of our minds. Sometimes the noise comes in a major key. It sounds very militaristic, very triumphalistic. As our souls feel driven by pressures and demands and we are determined to succeed, to achieve status and recognition. This music is playing in our minds: You must do better. You must achieve. You must succeed. But the effect is the same, our souls are not calm and quiet before God.

What does the noise inside you sound like? What makes you fretful and agitated? Or sullen? Or belligerent? What makes you worried or wearied or hopeless? What makes you lose your composure? What disrupts your calmness and quietness of soul? Usually we think it's our circumstances that do this. Usually we think, "If my circumstances are good, then my soul will be calm and quiet." In fact, chances are if we come here today feeling really good, calm and quiet, it might be that we are simply feeling good about things because we have had beautiful weather this weekend. It can't get any better than yesterday. Maybe you went outside and just felt so good, so you come with a sense of well-being today.

Maybe you had a good week at work, or maybe you had a great time with friends or with your spouse on Friday night and you're still basking in the nice feelings that come from that. It's the Louis Armstrong philosophy of life:

I see trees that are green, red roses too
I watch them bloom for me and you
And I think to myself, what a wonderful world

(Robert Thiele; George David Weisse)

Some people think that's where calmness and quietness of soul comes from. Circumstances can be good but the calm and quiet of David's soul in this Psalm is not caused by his circumstances. David is living a busy, chaotic life. He is being chased and pursued by enemies. As king of Israel he is pressured by enormous responsibilities and yet, it is quiet inside him. There is peace. It is well with his soul.

There is a wellness that does not depend on circumstances. Other people think that calm and quiet souls are just a reflection of personality. Some people are just more easy-going than others. They are the type who don't get ruffled, even in the middle of pressure. Others are detached from life's problems; they are stoic. They are indifferent to the storms that rage and the troubles that rage around them. Some other people just have low expectations in life so they are easy to please but that's not what this Psalm is talking about.

This is not a Psalm for sedate, easygoing personalities. This is a Psalm for real life. It is for the times of commotion and turmoil, amidst the pressures and the heartaches, amidst the outrages, the thrills of victory and the agonies of defeat. This is a Psalm for engaged personalities. This is a Psalm for people who care about what's happening in the world and in their lives. This is a Psalm for people who are involved in their families and in their struggles. It is for active people, for ambitious people. It is telling us that we can have a calmness and quietness of soul that's not dependent on our personalities or circumstances because the noisiness inside us is not caused by our circumstances. It is not the inevitable side effect of my personality. The noisiness inside me comes from something deeper than that, in fact, something uglier than that.

In verse one David describes the effect of a calm and quieted soul. "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." So the effect of a calm and quiet soul is that it is a humble soul, a meek soul, a modest trusting soul. If it's noisy inside me, that's telling me something about my soul, my passions, what's driving me, what's moving me and

controlling me. The noisiness inside me is telling me I'm under the influence of pride, arrogance and selfish ambition. If I want to know why it's noisy, all I have to do is turn this Psalm into its opposites. Do what David Powlison calls the anti-Psalm. What would it look like if this Psalm said the very opposite of what it's saying? It would look like this:

Self, my heart is proud.
I'm absorbed in myself.
My eyes are haughty.
I'm always looking down on other people.
I chase after things that are too great and too difficult for me.

So, of course I'm noisy and restless on the inside. You see, if I really want to shut off the noisiness inside me then I have to find the control switch. I have to find what's powering that constant noise. Where is it coming from? If there is constant static sound in the background of your house or neighborhood, you might have to look and see if someone left a radio on somewhere. If there's a constant, crackly, static sound always playing, then you have got to get to the source. Verse one tells me that this noise is coming from two loudspeakers in the depths of my soul. They are the loudspeaker of pride and the loudspeaker of presumption.

We see pride in the first two lines of verse one and presumption in the last line of verse one *when* says, "*O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.*" He is confessing before the Lord that he has renounced pride. He has mortified pride. He has cast it down. He has put himself in his proper place before God. He is humble, contrite and broken before the Lord. "*O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.*"

What are some ways the loudspeaker of pride produces static noise in our souls? Let me list a few that come from the article I've been meditating on this week. It reads, "Pride says things like this: You know, I just want a little respect and a little appreciation. We start getting agitated about that. Where's the respect? Where's the appreciation? Or pride says, 'I just want some approval and understanding.' Or pride says, (this often in the minds of pastors), 'I just want my church to thrive, my sermons to go well, my ministries to be successful and our worship to be moving. After all, it's for God.' Or pride says, 'I just want some satisfaction and some compensation for the way others have wronged me. If only they would own up and treat me right, then I would be at peace. If only I had a little better health, a little more money, a more meaningful job, nicer clothes, a restful vacation, then I'd be satisfied. I just want a measure of success in life. I just want a little bit of recognition as an athlete, as a beauty queen, as an intellectual, a musician, a leader or as a mother. I *want*

control. *I want control.*' So our hearts get agitated seeking after these things, craving these things, even saying, 'These things are legitimate. I deserve these things. I have a right to these things.' David says in this Psalm, 'I had to come to a point where I realized that my heart was just lifted up before you God. I was lifting myself up as if I had a right to this. Now, I have calmed and quieted my soul. Now my heart is not lifted up in pride any longer.'"

These types of thoughts rattle around in our minds and make us restless. If our minds were an I-pod shuffle, these are the types of MP3s we would be playing all the time: I want, I want, I desire, I need, I must have control. David says, "I've cut off the power of that loudspeaker. I've thrown away the ear-buds. I'm not listening to that noise anymore. *O Lord, my heart is not lifted up.*" Then he says, "*My eyes are not raised too high.*" Haughty eyes is what he is speaking of here. Often our pride is revealed in our attitudes toward other people. A lofty heart, in the first phrase, says, "I'm right in myself. I've got it all together. I'm in control." Haughty eyes in the second phrase, "*My eyes are not raised too high*", say, "I'm right compared to you. I'm better than you." A whole lot of the noise inside us is the noise about the comparisons we're making to other people.

Many times we compare ourselves favorably, looking down on others, nitpicking others, judging others, belittling others, feeling superior to others. But then, sometimes we compare ourselves unfavorably to others. We're full of envy or intimidation, or we're afraid of failure and rejection from others. This is just another species of pride called wounded pride. Wounded pride is when I wish I was better than you but I don't think I am so I am disappointed. My eyes are just raised too high. When all the noise inside me is about me, I cannot love others. I cannot honor others. I cannot care for others and esteem others. David says, "I'm done with that. I've cut the cord of that loudspeaker too. I've stopped comparing myself to other people and deriving my joy and my peace from how I measure up in relationship to them."

David says in this last line in verse one, "I am also going to the loudspeaker of presumption. I've cut off pride and now I'm going to take a sledgehammer to presumption." I love this phrase at the end of verse one, "*I do not occupy myself.*" I do not exercise myself. I do not run after things too great and too marvelous for me. This is where a whole lot of the noisiness inside of us comes from. We're exercising ourselves with things that are beyond us. We're chasing after impossibilities. We're running after things that we cannot possibly control. We're fretful over things that are only in God's hands. We have nothing to do with them. We're failing to recognize our place in God's big world and

submit ourselves to Him. *“I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.”* We can fall into that trap with our station in life. Overestimating who we are. Overreaching our place, wishing we were at a different station. Wishing we weren't in the job we are in or in the position we are in. We've got these great notions—these grandiose notions—of who we are and who we should be.

Spurgeon said, “Many people through desiring to be great have failed to be good.” They've been craving after something that's not for them. Robert Murray M'Cheyne says, “It has always been my aim and it has been my prayer to have no plan as regards myself. Well assured as I am that the place where the Savior sees meet to place me, must ever be the best place for me.”

We can go after things that are too great and too marvelous for us with our understanding. There are many perplexing things in this world. Suffering is very perplexing. Why people suffer and why others don't. There are lots of questions we cannot find ultimate answers to but we could start to probe into mysteries that God has not revealed and start to transgress the wisdom of Deuteronomy 29:29 which 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.”* We become agitated and restless because we are probing into that which is beyond us. Spurgeon said that a child might sooner hold the Atlantic and the Pacific in his two hands without spilling a drop, than you and I will ever be able to hold all the revealed truth of God within the compass of our narrow minds. We cannot know everything and we cannot understand even half of what we know. I've given up wanting to understand, as far as I can. I'm content with believing all that I see in God's Word.

Sometimes we grasp after things too great and too marvelous for us in our attempts to control other people. Controlling their attitudes, choices, what they think of us, controlling how our children act and behave. What are we doing? We are occupying ourselves with things too great and too marvelous for us. You know what? Jesus taught us we're not even able to obtain our daily bread. We need to pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread.”* We're dependent on God for the supply of our most basic needs. We are to live before Him as simple, trusting children. We are to rest in His faithful care and provision. Are you agitated right now in your mind by the uncontrollables in life? Your health situation? The health of a loved one? Your financial condition? So many people in our economy today are *agitated* over the state of the economy and it is troubling. Instead of calming and quieting our souls before God, we could lose all our peace by becoming

anxious and fretful like the rest of the world around us and thereby lose a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God.

Are you exercising yourself with things too great and too marvelous for you? These are reasons why it's too noisy inside: pride and presumption.

Verse Two, Question Two: "What must I do when it is noisy inside me?"

What must I do when it is noisy inside me? What do I need to do about it? Verse two speaks of resolve. Some translations say, *"Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,"* David says. He's taking a vow and saying, "I affirm this with all my heart. I have taken this matter very seriously. I have imposed a discipline upon myself. I have endured a weaning process. I have calmed and quieted my soul." There is a discipline we must impose. There is a process we need to endure. Just like a baby needs to be weaned from her mother's milk so that she might finally enjoy richer nourishment elsewhere, we must be weaned from things that once meant everything to us in order that we might learn to live upon God and His sufficiency. This isn't easy. It's not easy to calm and quiet your soul. I'm so thankful for the songs we're singing today because they speak to this great matter.

Spurgeon said, "It's easier to tame a tiger, it's easier to calm the wind, it's easier to scoop up the ocean than it is to calm and quiet your soul." Not an easy task. I have to take a bulldozer over my soul with all its risings up of anxiety and fear and distrust and worry. I have to level it. I have to say, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him. He will make straight your paths"* (Proverbs 3:4-5). I have to get a grip on my soul and say, "Soul, hush!" Maybe you'll even use a stronger term than that. "Be quiet! Get a grip! Remember who you are and remember whose you are. Remember who He is. Hush, my Desires. Hush, my Fears. Hush, my Ambitions. Hush, my Agendas. Hush, my Frustrations." This is something I must do.

"I have calmed and quieted my soul," but it's not something I can do on my own. No baby can wean herself, she must be weaned. It's a painful process. There's thrashing about as a mother denies her baby comfort in order to create this appetite for richer food; but it is a beautiful thing when a baby is weaned. He or she can then sit in her mother's lap in peace and she can find comfort in the one who has denied her comfort. One of the sweetest signs of spiritual growth is when we can live without the joys we once thought were essential. We can love the One who took these from us because we've found in Him a greater joy and a greater satisfaction. The Lord will wean our souls by embittering to us the things in which

we seek our rest by sometimes taking them from us-but most importantly, by showing us richer food, better food, more satisfying treasures.

Verse Three, Question Three: “How can I maintain a quiet heart?”

In verse 3 the Psalmist shifts from talking to God and starts talking to us. Here’s the remedy to a restless, noisy heart. *“O Israel,”*—O people of God, whom I know by name, my loved ones, my chosen ones, my royal treasure, my beautiful inheritance, you whom I have redeemed and called by name. You are mine. When you walk through the waters I will be with you and through the fire you will not be burned. *“O Israel, hope in the Lord.”* Find your desires in Him. Look to Him for your security and your comfort. Go to Him for the wisdom you need. Go to Him for the peace that passes all understanding. Go to Him who holds the whole world in His hands and who holds all that is dear to you in the palm of His hand and trust Him. Hope in the Lord, not just once, but from this time forth and forevermore. Here and here alone is how you can keep that noise silenced. That noise that agitates and distresses and distracts you is silenced when you look above yourself and above your circumstances to the One whose understanding no one can fathom. The One who never grows tired or weary. The One who gives power to him who is faint. To him who has no might, He increases strength.

*“...but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:31)

You must put your hope in the Lord who alone has the capacity to never disappoint you, from this time forth and forevermore.

This Psalm is obviously pointing us beyond David. Though David was speaking in all sincerity in this Psalm and it was true of him at that moment, we know that there were many points in David’s life when his heart was lifted up and his eyes were raised too high, when he did occupy himself with things too great and too marvelous for him. There were times when he was not calm, quiet and trusting in the Lord. We’ll read about that as we read through the Bible this year. Here David, God’s chosen king, is sitting on the throne of a greater David. A throne that endures forever. He’s pointing us to His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, whose heart never was prideful. Jesus whose eyes never were haughty, who never failed to trust in God. Jesus only occupied Himself with His Father’s will. His very

food was to do the will of Him who sent Him. Jesus is willing and able to teach us to walk in this way of calmness and quietness of heart. Jesus says to us in Matthew 11:28-29, *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me [why?], for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* It’s a short Psalm, easy to read, but one of the longest to learn. Let’s sing it into our hearts this morning as we stand and say,

“Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change, He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.”

(Katharina A. von Schlegel; Translated by Jane L. Borthwick)

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