



Article:	“Peace, be still”: Learning Psalm 131 by Heart
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Introduction¹

In the 1990's Daniel Goleman – a writer for the New York Times – came out with a groundbreaking book² on the emotions. And in the book he concluded that the alarming levels of teenage violence, chronic depression, eating disorders, social anxiety, and drug abuse, are not simply down to poor education and declining moral values... but rather, they're caused by what he called: a poverty in “emotional intelligence.” Goleman argued that you can be Oxford educated and socially inept. You can be morally grounded, but relationally at sea. And his exhortation was that we don't just need better schools or laws, but more importantly, we need an “emotional education”. We need competency with regard to the “interior life.”

In the 4th century Aristotle wrote, "Anyone can become angry - that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – this is not easy." *Nicomachean Ethics*

In this article David Powlison invites us into the interior world of someone who's engaged in life, but not overwhelmed by it. The Psalmist, King David, had more pressures, responsibilities, challenges, threats and opportunities than most of us face in a lifetime – and yet, by God's grace, he found rest for his soul. The aim of this article is to show us how he found it and where.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. Can you describe the experience of a “noisy” interior world? What does that “noise” reveal about ourselves?
2. How does knowing the author of this Psalm (with all his immense responsibilities and challenges) help us form a biblical understanding of peace? What are some counterfeits to biblical peace?
3. How does Psalm 131 appear to be structured? How does it progress?
4. On page 4 Dr Powlison gives an example of internal dialogue we might have with ourselves. What strikes you about what is said? Where can you relate?
5. How are pride and insecurity, which seem to be opposites, actually two sides of the same coin?
6. How can a hymn such as “Be Still my Soul” teach us to quiet our heart?
7. What are some of the names, titles, and descriptions used to identify the people of God? Which one(s) are most meaningful to you?
8. Personalizing: give an example of a “ladder to nowhere” that you can often erect in your own life? You might identify these by using the categories of: achievement, acquisition, appetite, and avoidance.
9. Given our own personal “ladders” what does it look like for us to “hope in the LORD”?
10. Spend some time reading and praying Psalm 131 together.

¹ Introduction and discussion questions by Bobby Warrenburg

² Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: why it can matter more than your IQ*. New York: Random House, 2006