

Umbellifer Autumn retreat



A contemplative journey with Psalm 131

As Autumn gathers around us and the earth begins its quiet turning inward, we are invited into a different rhythm and way of being – to let go and lean in.

*And so nature, weary from holding
the summer's luscious measure,
folds into the ground,
lays her head down,
slows and deepens her breath.*

*Beloved, would that you learn from her
and fall into the sacredness of rest.*

Gathering & Slowing - *Leaving the pace of ordinary life*

Opening invitation:

You are invited simply to be here. To notice. To listen. To receive.

LISTEN: MUSIC. Rizza In God Alone



PSALM 131

- 1 My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
- 2 But I have calmed and quieted myself,
I am like a weaned child with its mother;
like a weaned child I am content.
- 3 Israel, put your hope in the Lord
both now and forevermore.

NOTES:

An Expression of True Orientation: Brueggemann classifies Psalm 131 as a "Psalm of Orientation," specifically reflecting a domestic life that is in good, peaceful order. It is the voice of genuine gratitude, trust, and piety.

A Counter-Cultural Protest: For Brueggemann, the speech of the Psalms is inherently revolutionary. In a world that demands self-sufficiency, aggressive accumulation, and constant upward mobility, Brueggemann notes that true satisfaction does not come from greed. He views the quiet contentment of Psalm 131 as a radical rejection of "the closely managed world of public survival" and an embrace of the "weakness of neighbour love" and divine generosity.

John Goldingay approaches the text with a blend of rigorous grammatical exegesis and pastoral realism. In his major three-volume commentary, *Psalms*, he boldly subtitles his section on Psalm 131: "*How I Gave Up Trying to Fix Things, and So Should You.*"

Surrendering the Burden of Omniscience: Goldingay focuses heavily on verse 1 ("I do not concern myself with great matters"). He teaches that human anxiety often stems from our arrogant assumption that we must understand, control, and repair everything around us. Psalm 131 is the antidote to this exhaustion.

The Reality of "Straight-Talking" Faith: Goldingay emphasizes that the Psalms are the densest theological material in the Old Testament because they model how to talk to God honestly. Psalm 131 is not a naive denial of problems; it is a mature, conscious decision by someone who has wrestled with ambition and chosen to sit quietly in the presence of a God who is fully capable of handling the heavy lifting

Both scholars' insights converge beautifully on the central metaphor of verse 2: **"like a weaned child with its mother."** An unweaned infant views its mother merely as a source of food; it cries and clamours when it wants something. A **weaned child**, however, has moved past that urgent demand. It sits on its mother's lap simply to enjoy her presence, love, and companionship, rather than what she can provide.

1. Laying Down the Burden of the New Season- *"I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me."* (v. 1)

A new season naturally forces us to look ahead. We worry about changes, demands, and unknown outcomes. We arrive at this morning retreat with minds crowded by "great matters"—the heavy things we feel responsible for fixing, managing, or figuring out.

Theologian **John Goldingay** notes that human anxiety often stems from the arrogant assumption that we must control everything. He playfully subtitles this psalm, *"How I Gave Up Trying to Fix Things, and So Should You."*

- **Leaning into Faith:** To lean into a new season in faith does not mean having all the answers. It means surrendering the burden of needing to know the future.
- **The Act of Relinquishment:** For the next few hours, you are invited to put down "things too wonderful" for you. You do not need to solve the upcoming season today. You only need to be present to this moment.

2. Rest as Holy Resistance- *"But I have calmed and quieted myself..."* (v. 2a)

Our culture views rest as something you earn *after* you have produced enough results. It tells us that to prepare for a new season, we must run faster, work harder, and assert ourselves.

Walter Brueggemann reminds us that the quiet trust of Psalm 131 is actually a radical, counter-cultural protest. By stepping away for this morning retreat, you are actively resisting a system built on frantic striving and scarcity.

- **The Sacredness of Rest:** Rest is not a luxury; it is a sacred declaration that the world does not rest on your shoulders.
- **A Conscious Decision:** Notice that the psalmist *actively* calmed and quieted themselves. It didn't just happen. Silence is a deliberate choice to trust God's sovereignty over your timeline.

3. From Appetite to Abiding- *"...like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content."* (v. 2b)

This is the central image of our retreat. An unweaned infant clings to its mother out of desperate appetite—it wants milk, comfort, or a quick fix. If it does not get what it wants immediately, it panics.

A **weaned child** has matured. The child still sits on the mother's lap, but the frantic panic of "what can you give me?" is gone. The child rests there simply to enjoy the mother's love, presence, and companionship.

- **Shifting Our Posture:** As we stand on the cusp of a new season, our prayers can become frantic like an unweaned child: *"God, give me clarity! Give me a plan! Resolve this problem!"*
- **The Posture of Contentment:** Brueggemann and Goldingay invite us to transition into the deep contentment of the weaned child. We are invited to rest in God's presence, not for the answers He can provide, but simply for *who He is*. We can step into the future because we are held by the One who is already there.

Moving into Silence -

Psalm 131 is a **Song of Ascents** — a pilgrim song, but one whose movement is surprisingly downward and inward: away from striving and towards quiet trust.

Prayerful Reading of Psalm 131 Read the Psalm slowly.

First reading — Listen

Read slowly and notice the words, phrases or images that catch your attention?

Wait in Silence.

Second reading — Receive

Read again. Use the notes as ways to dwell in the text. Notice and be attentive to what opens up.

What is God drawing your attention towards?

Don't analyse it, simply receive it.

Wait in Silence.

Third reading — REST

Read the Psalm one final time.

You don't need to do anything with or make sense with what has arisen. Simply remain with God and what you are beginning to notice and be attentive to from the Psalm.

Notice what stirs within you/ your response—feeling, longing, resistance?

Wait in Silence.

Write down the **one word/phrase/doodle the image from the Psalm** that resonates/sticks with you that you can carry through the retreat.

Movement One - Laying Down the Burden of the New Season

"I do not concern myself with great matters..."

Autumn naturally makes us look ahead. The new season brings questions:

*What will happen? What will be required? What will I need to manage? What might go wrong?
What should I be doing now?*

We can arrive carrying a great many **"great matters"**. John Goldingay's striking pastoral reading of Psalm 131 points towards giving up our attempt to **fix everything**.

The invitation isn't to become irresponsible or indifferent. It is to recognise that we are **not God**. We do not have to know everything, control everything or carry everything.

Key thought

**Faith does not require us to know the future.
Faith allows us to entrust the future to God.**

There are seasons when the work of God is hidden. Just as the tree appears bare, but life has not ceased.

Read: **"I do not concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me...."**

Wait in silence - perhaps repeat/murmur this sentence and as you hold it and ponder it for yourself - what is God doing in you? What is he inviting you to attend to?

Then ask:

What might I need to stop occupying myself with?

What would it mean to trust God with what I cannot resolve?

Not necessarily solve it. Not deny it. Simply **put it down**.

Movement Two -Rest as Holy Resistance

“But I have calmed and quieted myself...”

Now move from **laying down** to **being still**.

Rest can sound harmless, but in a culture organised around productivity, achievement and constant availability, choosing to rest can be deeply counter-cultural.

Walter Brueggemann's reading of the Psalms helps us see Psalm 131 as a quiet protest against the demand to live by striving, accumulation and self-sufficiency.

Key thought

Rest is not a reward for having done enough.

Rest is a declaration that the world does not depend entirely upon me.

Notice the language of the Psalm: **“I have calmed and quieted myself.”**

There is intention here. The Psalmist **chooses** a different posture.

Contemplative practice - Invite everyone to sit comfortably. Hands open. Feet grounded.

Breathe slowly. With each breath pray with these words:

Breathe in: *I am held.*

Breathe out: *I can let go.*

Then simply sit. No words. No music. No instruction.

When ready, ask yourself: **What does it feel like to stop trying?**

Feel free to use this song a worshipful offering/prayer

[Listen- Celtic Worship -Where can I go.](#)



A deliberate pause - Learning from the earth

The invitation is to take a pause, outside if you wish, in silence. To take your time to walk, stop and sit a while, gaze, listen, observe, listen to what you hear around you.

If helpful listen to this music allowing it to lead you prayerfully as you walk, sit, gaze and listen.

LISTEN - MUSIC. - Arvo Part Spiegel im Spiegel



OR Debbie Wiseman Glorious Garden - Holly



Allow this time to be restful in God's presence.

Read or recall the poem:

*And so nature, weary from holding
the summer's luscious measure,
folds into the ground,
lays her head down,
slows and deepens her breath.*

*Beloved, would that you learn from her
and fall into the sacredness of rest.*

Notice: **What is happening in this autumn season that I notice and might learn from?**

Look for:

- something falling
- something letting go
- something becoming bare
- something resting
- something hidden
- something waiting

Return quietly - noticing and listening, continuing in prayerful reflection attentive to what God is opening for you.

Movement Three - From Appetite to Abiding

“Like a weaned child with its mother...”

Psalm 131 gives us an extraordinary image: the weaned child resting with its mother. The image is not about detachment. The child is still **close**. The difference is that the relationship is no longer driven by frantic appetite.

We can sometimes come to God in the same way: Give me an answer. Give me clarity. Fix this. Tell me what happens next. Make this difficult thing go away.

These are understandable prayers. But Psalm 131 invites another possibility:

Can I be with God without needing God to give me something?

From appetite to abiding

Appetite asks:

What can God give me?

Abiding asks:

Can I simply be with God?

Appetite seeks:

certainty, answers, resolution.

Abiding receives:

presence, love, companionship.

Consider:

Where am I being invited to slow down?

What am I weary from holding?

What has perhaps run its course?

What am I trying to keep alive that God may be inviting me to release?

Wait with God in the silence. As you sit in God's presence simply pray:

I am here.

You are here.

That is enough for now.

Then read verse 2 again: **“I am like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child I am content”**

Ask: **What would abiding-rest with God look like for me this autumn?**

Letting Prayer Take Shape - the French Pantoum

The pantoum as a way of **gathering and returning to the words, images and insights that have surfaced during the morning.**

The form uses repetition: lines return, but as they return they can acquire a different meaning. This mirrors contemplation. We return to the same Scripture. We return to the same question. We return to the same word. But we are not quite the same.

1. Focus/gather up your reflections from this retreat time by now writing down in free flowing form what rises from within you.

2. Write without judgement or too much thought, allowing yourself to be surprised by what emerges in the process. Do not be concerned about logical flow.

3. Avoid editing as you go; simply allow words to flow out onto the page.

NEXT _____

4. Once you are content with having 'downloaded' your reflections, re-read what is on the page(s) and as you do so underline at least 6 phrases that stand out for you, that maybe surprise you, that evoke an inner response.

5. Take the 6 phrases you have underlined from writing and enter them into what is a *French Pantoum* form of poetry. [*see method below*].

Simply carry out the instructions without focussing deeply on the order.

METHOD:

STANZA 1

Line 1: _____

Line 2: _____

Line 3: _____

Line 4: _____

STANZA 2

Line 5 (repeat of line 2 in stanza 1): _____

Line 6 (new line): _____

Line 7 (repeat of line 4 in stanza 1): _____

Line 8 (new line): _____

STANZA 3

Line 9 (repeat line 6 of the previous stanza): _____

Line 10 (repeat line 3 of the first stanza): _____

Line 11 (repeat line 8 of the previous stanza): _____

Line 12 (repeat line 1 of the first stanza): _____

6. After you are done, take time to read the poem that has emerged.

7. Notice the feelings that arise as you read.

8. Feel free to edit for clarity or flow, but allow it to be a raw, immediate experience of, and reflections on what has arisen for you from Psalm 131.

[As you journey on you may care to take this poem with you and sit with it and discover more of what God may unfold for you.]

Holding the Prayer Before God

- Sit quietly with what has emerged
- Where do you notice God at work in you?
- What might 'tending' feel like in your life right now?

A way of living the invitation - A Rule for cultivating a quiet heart

* Note: a **rule** not as a list of rules to obey, but as a simple framework that helps us live attentively with God. A rule of life is not another thing to succeed at. It is a way of making space for what matters.

The invitation is to take time to create a **small rule for the season ahead** — something that can carry you through autumn and winter.

Four simple questions (Under each heading write one or two simple practices)

REST

What helps me genuinely rest?

RELEASE

What do I need to stop carrying or doing?

ATTEND

What do I want to make more space to notice — God, creation, people, myself?

WAIT

Where am I being invited to trust rather than hurry?

Then ask:

Is this life-giving? Is it realistic? Does it create space rather than another burden?

And then ask:

“What are the three things I most want to carry into autumn and winter?”

My *Autumn–Winter* Rule to cultivate a quiet heart

I will rest by:

I will release:

I will abide with God by:

I will practise waiting by:

When I forget, I will return to:

“I have calmed and quieted my soul.”

Hope in the Lord

Return together to Psalm 131.

"Hope in the Lord from this time on and for evermore."

LISTEN- MUSIC. Todd Fields Doxology (God be praised)



Closing blessing:

May you have courage to let go,
wisdom to slow down,
grace to rest,
patience to wait,
and faith to trust the hidden work of God.

May you learn from the earth
when to release,
when to become quiet,
and when simply to be.

May your soul be calmed and quieted,
like a child resting in the arms of love.

And in the shortening days,
may you discover that God is not less present
in the descent,
but perhaps more deeply encountered there.

Hope in the Lord,
from this time on and for evermore.

Amen.