

**WEEK TWO  
ADULT SMALL GROUP  
PRIDE AND ARROGANCE  
LEADER GUIDE**

**THEME:** This week we examine verse 1 of Psalm 131 and consider how the destructive path of the proud and arrogant is dissolved through trusting in God

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**ICEBREAKER:** Each week the discussion begins with a question that allows the group to share from their own personal experiences.

- What is something you are an expert at?
- What is something in which you wish you were an expert?

**OPENING PRAYER: Psalm 131 (CSB)**

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me. Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like a weaned child. Put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever. Amen

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**OPTIONAL DISCUSSION: WEEK ONE IN REVIEW**

Using the supplemental guide, discuss with the group their experiences with week one's devotional through the Psalms of Ascent, the artistic expression, and the breathing prayer exercise.

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**QUOTE:** Eugene Peterson

*Psalm 131 is a maintenance psalm. It is functional to the person of faith as pruning is functional to the gardener: it gets rid of that which looks good to those who don't know any better, it reduces the distance between our hearts and their roots in God.<sup>1</sup>*

**DISCUSS:**

- What is the purpose of pruning a plant?
- What is the purpose of God pruning our lives?
- What might God be wanting to prune in our lives through Psalm 131

**READ VERSE 1:**

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty.  
I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me.

**DISCUSS:**

- What is your reaction when you read Psalm 131?
- Do you struggle to claim this verse in your life? Why?

**SAY:** This week we are focusing on verse one. The first verse reminds us of the dangers of pride and arrogance. It shows our tendency to see ourselves as superior and desiring control by being involved in things beyond our understanding. Many people read verse one and give up. Can we ever honestly say that we are not proud or arrogant? Can this psalm be read any other way than tongue in cheek?

**QUOTE:** Matthew Henry

*Some have made it an objection against singing this psalm, stating that we cannot say, 'My heart is not proud, my eyes are not haughty....' But we should sing this psalm for the same purpose that we read it; to teach and admonish ourselves and become what we ought to be.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Eugene. Long Obedience in the Same Direction. Pg. 149

<sup>2</sup> Henry, Matthew, Commentary on Psalm 131 ([www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Psa/Psa\\_131.cfm?a=609001](http://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Psa/Psa_131.cfm?a=609001))

**DISCUSS:**

- So many people want to move past this Psalm because the first verse seems impossible. How can verse one inspire us to become what we are not?
- Why do you think the psalmist needs to do away with a proud heart and haughty eyes?
- What would it take for you to say with confidence, “my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty?”

**PRIDE:**

**QUOTE:** Eugene Peterson.

It is difficult to recognize pride as a sin when it is held up on every side as a virtue, urged as profitable and rewarded as an achievement. What is described in scripture as the basic sin, the sin of taking things into your own hands, being your own god, grabbing what is there while you can get it, is now described as basic wisdom: improve yourself by whatever means you are able; get ahead regardless of the price, take care of me first.<sup>3</sup>

**Discuss:**

- How does Peterson define pride? (the sin of taking things into your own hands, being your own god, grabbing what is there while you can get it.)
- How does culture define pride? (as basic wisdom: improve yourself by whatever means you are able; get ahead regardless of the price, take care of me first.)
- Do you agree or disagree that pride is seen as a virtue in our culture? Why?
- How does pride cause us to usurp authority from God?

**OPTION: WEEK TWO VIDEO DISCUSSION**

In this week’s video, Dave dives deeper into the ideas of the proud and haughty. Use the supplemental guide to process this theme more intensely.

**SELFISH AMBITION**

**SAY:** Haughty is not a word that we commonly use these days. Some commentators state that being haughty connects with selfish ambition, the desire to seek our own advancement before the good of others.

**QUOTE:** from Exposition of the Bible, Volume 3

*Lofty [haughty] thoughts of self, breed ambition... worldly ambition is aiming at prominence and position.<sup>4</sup>*

**QUOTE:** Eugene Peterson

Ambition is aspiration gone crazy. Aspiration is the channeled, creative energy that moves us to growth in Christ... Ambition takes these same energies for growth and development and uses them to make something tawdry and cheap.<sup>5</sup>

**DISCUSS:**

- What is the difference between aspiration and ambition?
- When does aspiration become unhealthy?
- What is the danger of ambition?

**PROVERBS:**

**SAY:** While we often praise the proud and haughty, the Bible speaks of their peril. Pride leads us to believe that we know what is best, at first for ourselves and then for others. Soon we begin to think that we know better than God.

<sup>3</sup> Peterson, Eugene. *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. pg. 152

<sup>4</sup> Exposition of the Bible, Volume 3

<sup>5</sup> Peterson, Eugene. *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

**Proverbs 16:18, NIV**

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.

**Proverbs 21:4 (NIV)**

Haughty eyes and a proud heart— the unplowed field of the wicked—produce sin.

**DISCUSS:**

- How does pride and arrogance lead to destruction? Can you think of examples?
- What type of sins do pride and arrogance produce?
- What negative effects have you seen come from pride and arrogance in your life?

**PSALM 131:1B:** I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me.

**ARROGANCE**

**SAY:** Pride leads us to believe that we know what is best, at first for ourselves and then for others. Soon we begin to think that we know better than God. We set our sights on things beyond our reach. In our ambition, we seek to stretch ourselves beyond our paygrade. This leads to arrogance, to thinking our way is best and becoming easily frustrated when things do not go according to our plan.

**QUOTE:** Bernard P. Robinson

*When the Psalmist says to not get ‘involved with things too great or too wondrous,’ he is saying that we are not to seek self-aggrandizement and glory. Greatness and the marvelous pertain more to God than mankind. For us to go about these normally divine activities is to arrogate divine attributes to oneself.<sup>6</sup>*

**DISCUSS:**

- Why do we obsess with things beyond ourselves, things out of our reach or above our paygrade?
- When we choose to seek our own self-aggrandizement (promotion) and glory how does that shape our understanding of God and our relationship with others?
- How does seeking “Greatness and the marvelous” cause us to perceive ourselves as equals with God?

**QUOTE:** Stephen Shoemaker

*The Psalmist has come through to say, ‘I do not occupy myself with things too great or too marvelous for me.’ It is the admission to the end of human wisdom. It says my knowledge alone cannot take me to you. It recognizes what a mature faith must – that trust is deeper than knowledge, deeper than theology.<sup>7</sup>*

**DISCUSS**

- How does the admission that there are things beyond our understanding mature our faith, and deepen our trust, draw us closer to God?

**EXAMPLES IN SCRIPTURE:**

Compare and contrast the following stories. Discuss them as examples of pride, ambition, and arrogance.

**PARABLE OF RICH MAN: Luke 12:16-21 (CSB)**

16 Then he told them a parable: “A rich man’s land was very productive. 17 He thought to himself, ‘What should I do, since I don’t have anywhere to store my crops? 18 I will do this,’ he said. ‘I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. 19 Then I’ll say to myself, “You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.”’ 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?’ 21 “That’s how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, Bernard P.. Form and Meaning in Psalm 131. pg. 183

<sup>7</sup> Shoemaker, H. Stephen. Psalm 131. pg. 93

**DISCUSS:**

- How would you describe the man in this parable?
- What was the man's original issue (very productive land) and what were his solutions? (tear down barns and build bigger ones)?
- What was the problem with the man's plans?
- What is God's response to the man? (You fool, tonight you die).
- Why does God have a problem with this person?
- Do you think he is proud, ambitious, or arrogant?
- What do you think would have been God honoring response to a productive land?

**THE LORD'S WILL: James 4: 13-17**

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like vapor that appears for a little while, then vanishes.

15 Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

**DISCUSS:**

- How does this passage compare with Jesus' parable?
- What do the individuals want to accomplish in the new city?
- Is it wrong to start a business or make a profit?
- Is it wrong to make plans for the future?
- What is the heart of the issue James is addressing?
- How can making plans shift from planning to pride to arrogance?
- Why is it important to remember that "you are like vapor" and to seek the lord's will in our endeavors?

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**PATHS FOR THE JOURNEY:**

Leaders: Here are a few options for continuing your journey together. Choose the option that best fits your group in the time provided. Once you have completed one option, either wrap up your time with the closing prayer or do an additional activity below.

- **Week One Review:** Talk about last week's devotional through the Psalms of Ascent, artistic expression, and breathing prayer. (Best done at the start of the lesson)
  - **Video Discussion:** Join Dave Reiss and he unpacks how Psalm 131:1 and talks about the proud and haughty.
  - **Jesus Connection:** The Rich Young Ruler approached Jesus seeking affirmation that he was on the right track; instead, Jesus pointed out his pride, ambition, and arrogance. He offered a cure, but the price tag was too high for this man.
  - **Prayer Practice:** Every week you are invited to participate in a spiritual prayer practice. This week is Lectio Divina, or Divine Reading. Take some time to practice this prayer exercise as a group.
  - **The Week Ahead:** Take your journey home by engaging in a weekly devotional, music, prayer, art, and more. This week we dive deeper into what it means to be proud, ambitious, and arrogant and how we can begin to move to a calm heart and quiet soul.
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**CLOSING TIME:****QUOTE: Bernard Robinson**

*The Psalmist says 'my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty....' he is speaking of the whole self...In that culture the heart would refer to his way of thinking and eyes to a way of looking at things, perspective. These two add up to a single thought, the renunciation of arrogance.<sup>8</sup>*

**SAY:** This week take time to consider the role that pride, ambition, and arrogance play in your daily life. When are those times that we think that our perspective is the right one, we demand our way and reject the views of others? In those moments, calm your heart and quiet your soul, put your hope in the Lord, and not your own understanding.

**CLOSING PRAYER: Psalm 131****Psalm 131 (CSB)**

Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved with things too great or too wondrous for me. Instead, I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like a weaned child. Put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever. Amen

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<sup>8</sup> Robinson, Bernard P.. *Form and Meaning in Psalm 131*. 182-183