

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep

Psalm 4

Studies in the Psalms #4

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EARLY one morning this week I was at the beach to get some exercise and I found myself in an interesting situation. Up in front of me, facing the ocean was a person doing yoga and soaking in the vibes of the sea. Behind me, facing the sun was a group of three older people doing tai chi and soaking in the rays of the sun. Everyone is looking for inner peace and harmony with the world in a chaotic world. That's what Psalm 4 is all about. It's about the inward peace the child of God has in the Lord while experiencing a difficult world.¹ Like Psalm 3 it's another **Psalm of David** but this one was written **to the choirmaster with stringed instruments** (Title), meaning, it was to be used in public worship; yet it's general enough to be prayed and sung at all times. Based on Psalm 3:5, Psalm 3 has been seen as a morning prayer. And based on Psalm 4:4 and 4:8, Psalm 4 has been seen as an evening prayer. There are other similarities we'll see as we go through.

How do I find and express inward peace while I live in difficult world? Jesus, too, faced many accusations. His own family at one time thought he

¹ Adapted from Kidner, 55.

was crazy (Mark 3:21). The religious leaders of his people hated him at every point of his ministry. He came to his own Jewish people but they rejected him *en masse* (John 1:11). I hope you're seeing with me that the Psalms we pray and sing are not only about Jesus but were prayed and sung by Jesus, too. He not only prays for us today as our heavenly intercessor; he prays with us as our sympathizer. The Son of God who became man for us, undergoing our sorrows and experiencing our grief (Isa. 53:4) so that he would be a sympathetic high priest for us (Heb. 2:17; 4:15).

Crying to God for Help (v. 1)

How do I find and express inward peace while I live in difficult world? David begins by *crying to God for help*: **answer me when I call, O God** and then he ends this prayer with **hear my prayer!** (v. 1) We call this an invocation or a calling upon the Lord. What's the mood? Boldness! It's the kind of prayer we are exhorted to engage in: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16); "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near" (Heb. 10:19, 22).

But he's not just crying crocodile tears here. He's crying out *to God*. Now you have to realize something awesome. As we go through the Psalms and all the practical prayers, we're going to see how they are rooted in theological truths. When you pray, what do you call God? In Psalm 3 the Lord is shield, glory, and head-lifter. Here David again appeals to the attributes and characteristics of God.

Look at the content of David's cry: **O God of my righteousness!** (v. 1) He's saying, "God, you are my ultimate vindication against false accusations of **men** who turn **my honor...into shame** and who **love vain words and seek after lies** about me (v. 2). And he calls him **God of my righteousness**. We don't pray to a distant God in a galaxy far, far away. He's personal and we appeal to him personally. And it's this vindication that he further expresses with **be gracious to me**. For God to help David by vindicating him is for God to show grace to him.

So he's crying out to God to hear him and to answer him because he is the God of vindication and grace. But why can he pray this? Better yet, who are you to so boldly ask God anything? This is where a little poetry lesson helps us. Verse 1 contains three lines. You have **answer me** at the beginning of line 1 and then **righteousness** at the end of line 1; these are paralleled in

line 3 with **gracious**—but it’s at the beginning—and then **hear my prayer**—but it’s at the end. It’s a poetic “X” if you diagram it. And the key is what is in between it all in line 2. Here is the basis for boldly asking these things of God. It’s because God is as a deliverer: **You have given me relief when I was in distress** (v. 1). That word there **distress** is the adjective form of the noun we heard in 3:1 last Lord’s Day for “enemies.” He’s looking to the past to say, “God, you’ve given me relief in the past; remember when...” This gets to the root of what true hope is in prayer. Our hope right now is a confidence that in the future God is going to help us based on what he has already done in the past.

This teaches us a really practical truth about our attitude in prayer. “Are we there yet?” Children, how many of you have ever asked your parents that when you were on a trip in the car? The attitude of a child is go from point A and get to point B. Period. End of story! Isn’t that our attitude in prayer? We want it all, and we want it now. God is point A and what I want is point B. “Are we there yet?” But very practically Psalm 4 teaches us to enjoy the journey, so to speak, by focusing on God; by worshipping God along the way. And then all of a sudden, you’ve been so focused on him, that, “Oh, there’s my answer. Thank you, Lord!”

Preaching to Your Neighbors (vv. 2–5)

“Okay, so I find peace in a difficult world by crying out to my God. But it’s still a difficult world. Are you saying all I do is pray and then duck?”

Notice how the Psalm is so realistic. This is not just pious mysticism. As I am crying out to my God for help I am also to be *preaching to my neighbors*.

Note that in verses 2–5 David gives us five brief exhortations to our enemies:

*First, we exhort our enemies to turn from lies: **O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?*** (v. 2) In 3:3 David said the Lord was his “glory,” meaning, he was weighty and substantial. We, too, have honor. Our honor is our name. And people want to tear it down, don’t they? “So what do I say if they don’t stop slandering me?” **But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him** (v. 3). Just like the Lord made a “distinction” between Egypt and Israel, the Lord does with us in this world (Ex. 8:22; 9:4; 11:7). This means you need to learn that when people say things about you remember what God says about you!

*Second, we exhort our enemies to turn from anger: **be angry, and do not sin*** (v. 4). We tell people, “Sleep on it, and then come talk to me.”

*Third, we exhort our enemies to grieve over their sin: **ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent** (v. 4). “Stop pointing the finger at me when there are three others pointing back at you.”*

*Fourth, we exhort our enemies to restore broken relationships: **offer right sacrifices** (v. 5), or, “sacrifices of righteousness.” This meant going to the tabernacle and later temple with an animal. When you sacrificed you would confess your sins and with the fellowship offering, you would even share a meal in celebration as things were put right.*

*Fifth, we exhort our enemies to trust the Lord: **put your trust in the Lord** (v. 5). And that’s really what it comes down to, isn’t it?*

It’s that easy, right? Maybe I should write a best-selling Christian self-help book with this five-step plan to inner peace and harmony with your enemies! Even if you do this as outlined, you know that people’s hearts are full of sin. There’s a line in Shakespeare’s play, *Macbeth*, where Macbeth describes life in this way: “It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”² This is what so many of your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers think. Life signifies nothing. And this is how they live. But we are still called by God to do the right thing!

² *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5, lines 25–27.

Thanking God for His Help (vv. 6–8)

So I find inward peace by crying out to God when my enemies assault me. And in that peaceful state of mind I preach to them the truth of God's Word, regardless of whether they receive it and act on it or not. And in the end, it is living in peace with God and seeking to be at peace with all people that my life is one of *thanking God for His help*.

You see how David brings this Psalm full circle as he quotes from his enemies, and in doing so, he brings Psalms 3 and 4 full circle: **There are many who say** (just like we heard them in 3:1, 2), **“Who will show us some good?”** So what does David pray? **“Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!”** He's quoting here from the Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6, which the priests would pronounce over worshippers in the tabernacle. One writer said it like this: “Surrounded once again by ‘many,’ David surrounds the ‘many’ with prayer.”³

Now notice how thankful he is. He's surrounded by enemies who aren't listening to him, yet—get this, yet—he says, **You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound** (v. 7). The world may look to have everything, but in reality they have nothing.

³ Futato, 41.

And I may look to have nothing, but in reality I have everything. Why? Because I have the Lord! “Be still my soul, the Lord is on thy side,” as the hymn says. On my side is he who by his death and resurrection has justified me already from my sins in the sight of Almighty God and who will one day vindicate me from all the sins against me by my enemies.

This is why I can rest my head on his pillow at night: **In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety** (v. 8). The night before the English Protestant martyr, Nicolas Ridley, was to be burned at the stake, he did several astonishing things. First, he shaved. Then he bathed. Then he ate his last meal and said he was doing all this because the next day was his wedding day. Finally, his brother came to where he was being held and offered to spend Ridley’s final hours with him, because obviously Ridley had to be afraid. But Ridley refused! Then he said, “I mind (God willing) to go to bed, and to sleep as quietly to-night, as ever I did in my life.”⁴

You too can pray at night, “Now I lay me down to sleep,” because God is **God of my righteousness**. Amen.

⁴ *The Works of Bishop Ridley* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1849), 292–293.