

O Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, we pray this evening that you would come now to your word, O Lord, and pour out your Holy Spirit, that we would not be drunk with wine. but be filled with your spirit and his fruit, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We might live our lives gripped by your mercy, which is always more than our fears and our worries and our anxieties and our sins. And we offer these prayers tonight in Jesus' name. Amen. Please take your seats. If you would, please turn with me in your copy of the Word of God to Psalm 4 this evening. Psalm 3 is the morning psalm, and Psalm 4 is often regarded as the evening psalm. And once upon a time there was a farmhand in Wales or some other Celtic country and he was hired by his master and it was a particularly slow time for hiring competent labour and the master went down to the square to hire the hand for the day and this particular hand was the only man there. And the master said to him, well, what is your particular skill, son, that I should hire you to work on my farm? And the lad said, sir, I can sleep well on a stormy night. And the master thought, well, that's strange. But you're the only one here, so come along. So the man works hard and does very well for several weeks. And then one night, this almighty storm comes down the valley onto the farm. And the master runs to the slaves' quarters, or the servants' quarters, and finds this hand fast asleep in the bed. He shakes him. Wake up, you lazy waster, he says. Help me. The storm's coming. But the man's snoring, fast asleep, unrousable. So the master runs out to the field, down to where the sheep wander. But they're not there. because they're in the pen. And then he thinks of the horses and the cattle, runs to the pasture where they are, and they aren't there either. They're safely in the barn. And then the master runs out to the hay and thinks it'll be blown asunder, but it's all battened down under tarps, firmly secured. And then the master realized that he could trust his servant because he could sleep well on a stormy night because all of his earthly affairs were squared away. Well, in Psalm 4, we learn this evening that the secret of true and lasting peace that will enable you and me to sleep well on a stormy night isn't found in having our earthly business squared away, which is nothing to be laughed at, you understand, but the real secret of sleeping well on a stormy night is when our souls are squared away with God. To read the Psalm together this evening, that's something to consider. Is your soul squared away with God, my brother and my sister? Can you sleep well on a stormy night? Let's read together the word of God. Psalm 4. To the choir master with stringed instruments, a Psalm of David. Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness. You have given me relief when

I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. Amen. How long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies, Selah? But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him. Be angry, or better translated, tremble, and do not sin. Ponder in your hearts, on your

beds, and be silent, Selah. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in Yahweh, in the Lord. There are many who say, who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and new wine abound. In peace, I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety. Well, as we'll see over these next few weeks, and as I hope we have seen already, one of the most important principles of deriving benefit from a psalm, of sucking the cud, or the honey out of it, is to really try to figure out what was going on in the psalmist's life when he wrote this psalm. And that's important. And this evening, it seems to be that there's a time of famine, probably caused by a period of prolonged drought in the ancient Near East. The psalmist is hearing people

complain. It seems that they don't have grain and new wine. And he says in verse seven, you have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In other words, grain and wine are not abounding. The stock market is down, the harvest is failed, and people are beginning to complain. There are many who say, who will show us some good? Or any good, as the New American Standard puts it. And David, as the king, is praying. But God seems to have the slows. God's not answering. If you look at verse one, answer me when I call. Answer me, oh God. He wants God to answer because God is not answering. You have, in the past, given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. David is praying and nothing seems to be happening. Does that ever happen to you?

Happens to me. Happened to David. And in the ancient Near East, that was a particular problem because kings were supposed, if they weren't actually regarded as divine, they were expected to have a direct access to God. John Eaton, in his kingship in the Psalms, speaks about archeological evidence. Like Pharaoh, for example, said, Everything proceeding from the lips of his majesty, Pharaoh, his father, Ammon, who's a god in their pantheon, causes to be realized there and then. The sun god rises in the horizon each day to hear all his prayer. And you can find similar inscriptions for the Assyrian gods and the Assyrian kings and the Babylonian gods and the Babylonian kings. As soon as I pray, I get the answer. That is the pagan king in the pagan land. Well, here's David, the godly king in the godly land. He's praying, and God is doing nothing, which is a problem. And he's beginning to get criticism

from his senior statesmen. If you look down in verse 2, O men, the footnote of the ESV is helpful, O men of rank. The Hebrew is bene ish, sons of man. And B'nai Ish are great men, David's cabinet, his officials, his elder statesmen. And these elder statesmen, David says, these men of rank, he's saying to them, how long shall my honor be turned to shame? Well, David's honor, literally David's glory was his God. And what they're saying to David is, David, all this talk of faith is a waste of time. You're praying, nothing is happening. We need a plan B, David. You're wasting your time calling upon your God. How long will you serve vain words and seek after lies? The Hebrew is empty words and lies, and that's commonly associated with idolatry in the Psalms. Like in Psalm 24 verse four, David speaks of the man who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift his soul to what is false or to the lie. And he's lifting his soul to the God who is a lie, a false God. Or Psalm 40 verse four, blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie. We see the same thing in Amos 2 verse 4, when the prophet says, thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Judah and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his statutes, but their lies have led them astray, those after which their father has walked or have walked. So these lies aren't just false ideas, they're false gods. You walk after gods in the Old Testament, and the fathers walked after these lies. And so David is saying here, how long shall my glory, God, be turned into shame? How long will you love emptiness, empty words, and seek after lies? In other words, these advisors are telling David, it's time to look for another God, a new God. And of course, in Cana, Baal, the shadow of Baal, was always lurking in the background. Baal, after all, was the king of the Canaanite pantheon, and he was the god of the storm. His effigies are often pictured with him holding a lightning bolt in one hand and a hammer, thunder, in the other hand. And it was paganism par excellence, right? The way it worked was this. The Israelite men would go down to the Temple of Baal, where there were, as Dr. Davis would say, holy whores. And they would sleep with them. And when they did, Baal and his consort Ashtoreth would kind of get off on that. They would look down and be excited by what they saw going on in their temple. And they would then engage in kind of a heavenly lovemaking spectacle. And the storm in the heavens was an earthly reflection of their climax in the celestial bedroom. It's all very profane. But the thing about it is, it's actually fun even when it doesn't work. And so you can imagine the Jewish man saying to their wife, you know, there's no storm. The kids

are hungry. The harvest is failing. We're going to go down to the Temple of Baal, love. And I've got to take one for the team, as it were. But I'll be thinking of you. And you can see the attraction of these false gods, and we laugh, but idols always promise shackles and sex. The false gods always corrupt our view of money and our view of sex. It's that way in our day, and it was that day in David's day. So here's David trusting God and coming under pressure. to turn away and put his trust in other things. Now what on earth does that ever apply to us in our day and age? Well maybe you're at work and maybe things aren't going well in the business and you're coming under pressure from the board or your management team to kind of fudge the quarterly reports. Don't trust God and talk about integrity. The shareholders want a positive word. Or maybe you're a pastor, you're an intern here, or soon to be a pastor in a small church, and maybe your church is the shrinks, and you'll hear from your elders, don't talk to me about growing a church through the simple preaching of God's word. We need something more, something better, something bigger, something frankly more fun. Or maybe you're a husband or a wife, and your spouse is complaining about the tithe. Can you imagine, honey, what we could do with that? I mean, the tithe, it doesn't matter how much you make, a tithe is a ton of money. And it could make a world of difference to our finances if we just didn't give to the church and we kept the money for ourselves. And besides, nobody would know. And maybe your spouse is, and you're saying to your spouse, but God would know. But the pressure's real. Or maybe you're a student applying for medical school, as a friend of mine did, and she had MCAT scores that were off the charts and applied to one of the top medical schools in the country and was a shoe-in to the job. And then they asked her in an interview, if you were asked to perform an abortion, would you assist? And she said, no, I couldn't do that. And immediately, the smiles were wiped off the face of the interviewers. The interview came to a polite end quickly thereafter, and she didn't get the position. And you could think of a thousand similar examples when you come under real pressure to compromise your faith, and rather than trusting God, and this is no let go and let God theology. There's a place for human, um, for human activity, but never human activity that casts off God as our sole rock of support and protection, and to look for other things instead. That's the pressure David is facing in the psalm. And David says in such times, remember four lessons. First of all, you have a God to seek. Secondly, you have a line to hold. Thirdly, you have a joy to prize. And fourthly, you have a place to rest. That's how you respond when you face pressure to compromise your faith. First of all, David says,

remember, you have a God to seek. Verse one, answer me when I call. David Dixon, the great commentator

on the Psalms from Scotland in the 19th century, he said, though there be many and diverse troubles of the godly, yet there is but one God to give comfort and but one way to draw it from God, namely, by prayer in faith. Don't stop praying. Here's David. God has the slows. God isn't

answering. And he goes, answer me, O God, when I call the God of my righteousness. Now, there's a number of ways you can take that. It could be the God who maintains my right. When I'm criticized, like in Psalm 37, do not fret because of him who prospers in the way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him. Commit your way to the Lord.

Trust also in him and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the night and your justice as the noonday. That's one way of taking the Psalms. But from the perspective of the New Testament, it's hard not to see this as the God who is my righteousness. That's a wonderful thought. That God, that our righteousness is not on earth, it's in heaven. that you might not have any righteousness of your own. And none of us do. Even our best righteousness, the psalmist says, are like filthy, Isaiah says, are like filthy rags in God's sight. Ah, but the wonderful thing about Jehovah or Yahweh is you don't need any righteousness of your own because you have all your righteousness in God. And Christ was delivered up because

of our transgressions. Christ died on the cross, Paul says, because God regarded you as a transgressor. But he was raised because of our justification. He died because God regarded you as a sinner. And he was raised because God no longer regards you as a sinner, but completely and perfectly and infinitely righteous with the righteousness of God the Son himself. Therefore, Paul says, having been justified by faith, we have access by grace, by faith into the grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And more than that, Paul says, we also glory in tribulations knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope, and a hope that does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Answer me, O God, when I call,

O God of my righteousness. And that's actually an important lesson. you only ever take the criticisms of men seriously when you forget the justification of God. Think of it like this. I was telling the staff this the other week in a staff meeting, if Donald Trump lost \$10 or even \$1,000, right, and got mad, you'd think, you've got billions of dollars in the bank account. You can afford to lose \$1,000. And Christian, God has forgiven

you all of your sins. And he's imputed into your spiritual

bank accounts all of the righteousness of his son. And when your wife criticizes you, often justly, you get all bent out of shape. Because you're too proud to hear her criticism. And because you've forgotten the justification of God. When I was, sorry, you have given me relief when I was in distress, or literally, when I was in a tight place, like Luke Skywalker in the Trash Compactor, the walls are coming in on you, right? You're in a tight place. You relieve the pressure, that's the idea. Spurgeon says, this is another instance of David's common habit of pleading past mercies as a ground for present favor. Here he reviews his Ebenezers and takes comfort from them. It is not to be imagined that he who has helped us in six troubles will leave us in the seventh. God does nothing by halves, and he will never cease to help us until we cease to have need. The manna shall fall every morning until we cross the Jordan. Isn't that lovely? Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. Grace is the master argument in prayer because it's the kind of prayer or the kind of argument any sinner can make after committing any sin on earth. Be gracious to me, O Lord. I deserve nothing but your wrath." You have this wonderful penchant of giving people who do deserve your wrath, your love. That's the first thing then. We have a God to seek, a God to seek. Archbishop Leighton, who was a Glasgow Bishop back in Spurgeon's day, maybe a bit before, said, certainly there's nothing that cuts the air so swiftly, nothing that takes so sublime, so happy, and so auspicious a flight as prayer, which bears the soul on its pinions and leaves far behind all the dangers and even the delights of this low world of ours. When people put you under pressure to forsake your faith, remember You have a God to seek. You have a person to trust and a place to run. That's the first point. Secondly then, you have a line to hold. And we're gonna see this here from verse two down to verse five. And David here is speaking to his unbelieving cabinet. He says, oh men, how long shall my glory be turned into shame? How long will you love empty words and seek after lies? Here is evidence of man's natural depravity. They trash treasure, they trust emptiness, and they embrace lies. And David points right to them. But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him. Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, says, when God chooseth a man, he chooseth him for himself, for himself to converse with, to communicate himself unto as a friend, a companion, and his delight. Now it is holiness, Goodwin says, that makes us fit to live with the holy God forever, since without it, No man can see his face and live, but know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. Now, David here, he's not trusting in his righteousness, I think, so much as he's recognizing God's work in his heart. God has given me a reverence for him, and God has set me apart as special, and when I pray on

earth, he might not answer immediately. But don't ever think that he doesn't listen immediately. When I call, he hears. Immediately, though the answer can take sometimes what seems too long to come. But remember, when you wait for God to answer, as Paul David Tripp says in one of his books, Broken Down House, I think it's that book, it's a wonderful little book. But he says in that thing, the thing about waiting for God is not what you get at the end of the wait, but of who you become as you wait. Waiting for God has a wonderful, sanctifying effect upon the soul. It makes us say, not my will, but thy will be done. And we push down our will, and we wait the Father's time, which is the first and the last, and perhaps the hardest lesson to learn in the Christian life. Tremble and do not sin. David's still speaking to his counselors. The word tremble here in the Psalms has a connotation of fear, not anger. Like in Psalm 99 verse 1, the Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble. He's enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth shake. David is saying to his counselors, rather than being angry with me for trusting God, you should rather tremble at your own irreverence of him. In the quietness of your bedroom, David says, think it through carefully. Ponder in your hearts on your beds and be silent. George Swinnick, another Puritan, said, it was a famous answer which Antestinese, heretofore unknown to me, It was a famous answer which Antestines gave when he was asked what fruit he reaped by all his studies. By them, saith he, I have learned both to live and talk within myself. Bruce Waltke says, this searching should take place upon your bed. In a group, he says, one is inclined to think and act rashly and hypocritically, whereas when offstage and in the privacy of one's own bedroom, one tends to be much more authentic. David says, go back to your bed and be quiet. And remember, you're the same size in the bath, and the great God of heaven towers above you. And ask yourself in that quiet place, are you wise to counsel me to forsake the God who has made all of this and before whom the nations are as the dust of the balance and the fine dust of the scales? Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. Don't sacrifice to bail, David is saying. Sacrifice the kind of sacrifices that God has commanded. It's never wrong to do the right thing, and that's never more true than in church, when we take everything back to the standard of God's holy word. So David here is arguing with his wicked counselors. So we've got a God to seek, and a line to hold, and as men in our households, and maybe a woman here, and your husband's a wicked man, and he's always putting you under pressure, you've gotta hold the line. And we hold that line prayerfully. But at times you must hold that line verbally and speak truth into a situation where people are besotted by lies. I was told by a friend of mine, you pastored in another part of America where there's a very well-known fundamentalistic college. says that when he protests outside

the abortion clinic, it's not uncommon to see cars with the bumper sticker of that college on the back of them at the abortion clinic. Because one thing to condemn abortion when it's somebody else's daughter, but when it's your daughter, and your wife's telling you, or your husband's telling you, it'll ruin the rest of her life. It's only a small bundle of cells. In moments like that, you need theological fortitude. You need to be grounded upon reality and God's word and grounded in the presence of God to resist those kinds of arguments and appoint your interlocutor to God and his reality and his word. A God to seek, a line to hold. Thirdly, a joy to prize. Verse six, there are many, let that word sink into your head. There are many who say, who will show us some good? Lift up, oh sorry, that's the next part. Who will show us some good? We want all this talk of prayer, it's not working, David. We want harvest, we want grain and new wine. That's what we want, David. Many, I know a pastor, a well-known pastor in his early part of his ministry, he had to preach a Scottish revival. He preached the church empty before he preached it full. People left the church in their droves and he just preached the gospel. And a lot of his elders were besotted with liberalism. That a God without wrath brought people without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross. That's liberalism, Niebuhr said. And they put tremendous pressure on him to stop preaching this silly lamb chop theory of the atonement. And they would say, look, the church is emptying, the budget's collapsing. But he held on, and he outloved them, and he outlived them, and he preached the gospel. And after preaching the church empty, he preached the church full. Because people who leave the church for the wrong reasons will more than certainly be replaced by people joining the church for the right reasons. What you attract, you become. Well, David's facing that kind of pressure. Many, who will show us some good? And David says, as much as I would love a good rain, and a good harvest, and good times, there's something better. The smiling face of God. And I'll not trade that. I'll not trade the one to get the other. There are many who say, who will show us some good? And here's David's good. Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and their wine abound. William Seeker, quoted by Spurgeon, says, It is therefore better to enjoy God without anything, without anything else, than to enjoy everything else without him. Can you say that this morning? Sorry, this evening. Thomas Watson says, there's as much difference between heavenly comforts and earthly as between a banquet that is eaten and one that is painted on the wall. Would you rather be a wooden vessel filled with God or a golden vessel filled with treasure? But what if it's the

kind of

treasure that won't outlive your earthly life, that'll only be here for a moment and then it'll be gone forever? A wooden vessel filled with God or a golden vessel filled with treasure? Who will show us some good?

Lift

up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You've put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. He's not downplaying the gladness of good times, but he's saying there's better things to be had, and that better thing is the face of God. Have you ever known that? I can see it in so many of your eyes that you have. The lights are on, but have you ever known joy in the presence of God, just simply like a little child looking up at his father and just relishing his face, his smiling face? It's a wonderful thing. David knows it, and it's a wonderful sign of spiritual health. Always remember, all that is gold does not glitter. Habakkuk 3, though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of

my salvation. And there are times in life when you'll need such words. And if you have David's faith in David's God, you'll know David's joy despite them, in them, and through them. And lastly, we have a place to rest. We have a God to seek, a line to hold, a joy to prize, and a place to rest. In peace, I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety. There's a blessed simplicity to the Christian life. With one God, one Lord, one faith, one hope, and one place to rest. Remember hearing Dr. Kelly, Dr. Douglas Kelly, what a saintly,

godly man, and he was preaching at Twin Lakes years ago, and he said, you know, speaking to pastors, there'll be a time, and I say this especially to the interns here and ministers of the gospel, but to all of you, he said, there'll be times in life when all you can say, through tears, is the first line of the Apostles' Creed. You'll walk out of a session meeting, and all you can say is, you have nothing else I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. I says, when you can say that,

you're saying a very great deal indeed. In peace, despite all of this pressure, All of this pressure to compromise, all of this pressure to sin, all of this pressure to look for something bigger and better on which to trust, and almighty God, David says, in peace I lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety. Remember when Ridley and Latimer were scheduled to be burned for their faith? during Bloody Mary's butcherous reign. And Ridley's brother offered to spend his last night with him. He said, you're gonna be

burnt tomorrow. Let me stay the night with you in your cell and keep you comfort. And Ridley said, no thank you. I mean to go to bed, he said, and sleep as quietly as ever he did in his life. Whenever they took Bishop Hooker out to be burned before his church in the same season, the sheriff mocked him on the way and said, how do you feel now, Bishop? And Bishop Hooker said, never

better, sir. But two sties, and a stie in the old country is a little fence. But two sties, speaking of the faggots, the wood he'd be burned on, but two sties to get over, and I'll be at my father's house. In peace, I will lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety. Jesus says, let not your hearts be troubled. What's troubling you this evening, Christian? Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many mansions. Were it not so, I would have told you. But I have gone to prepare a place for you, Jesus says this evening. And the preparing of that place is on the cross, opening the door to heaven. Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I'm meek and gentle of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. A God to trust, a line to hold, a joy to prize, and a place to rest. That's how we cope when the pressure's

on. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word. There are deep waters in these Psalms, O Lord, many of us have never experienced, and yet one day we might, and almost certainly one day we shall. If it were not so, you wouldn't have given them to us. And we pray, O Lord, that you would teach us now, in the day of plenty, Oh, in the day of poverty, wherever your providence finds us this evening, give us grace to make David's God our refuge, our strength, and our help in tight places, always close at hand. And we offer these prayers in Jesus' name. Amen.