

Prayers

To God

Ask the Lord for the strength to serve Him this day. Take regular opportunities to touch base with God and check out that you are indeed serving the Lord

For myself

Lord God, heavenly Father, I know that I am not yet the person You can lead me to be. Day by day, change me into Your mature servant; make me into someone who is able to be sensitive to the needs of others, and is evidently at peace in the world. I put my trust in You for all these things, and I look forward to all the possibilities of life that lie ahead of me. AMEN

For others

Weekly theme: The press

Pray for the proprietors of newspapers, both those printed and those who present their work on-line. Pray that they will have the integrity to pursue truth, and not use this principle as mere cover for the sordid pursuits of profit or sensationalism.

Meditation

Brother, sister, live your life to the full,
But never forget that God is Judge.

Make your decisions, make your judgements,
But do not point the finger; God is Judge.

Enjoy your work, your living and your loving,
But He who gave you life is God; and He is Judge.

Take your choices, pursue the best,
But do not exploit the poor; God is Judge.

Use your earnings, enjoy its fruits,
But remember your reward is God; and He is Judge.

Choose to follow Him, your Judge and Saviour,
Lest He decide you are an enemy.

The choice is yours and yours alone;
He longs to be your friend; do make it so.

Bible Passage

Psalm 4

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of David.

- ¹ Answer me when I call to you,
O my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
be merciful to me and hear my prayer.
- ² How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

Selah

- ³ Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for Himself;
the LORD will hear when I call to Him.
- ⁴ In your anger do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.

Selah

- ⁵ Offer right sacrifices
and trust in the LORD.
- ⁶ Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?"
Let the light of Your face shine upon us, O LORD.
- ⁷ You have filled my heart with greater joy
than when grain and new wine abound.
- ⁸ I will lie down and sleep in peace,
For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Review

Psalm 4 is rather like psalm 3; it is a psalm which expresses confidence in God while the writer is in the midst of uncertainty. It therefore encourages the faithful to face adversity with courage, and to turn to the Lord in the midst of difficult circumstances.

At the very beginning, psalm 4 has a heading, called a 'superscription'. We read about superscriptions yesterday, and discovered that they can be an important part of the psalm, linking it to a possible author or collection of psalms, and sometimes indicating the music to which it was once sung. Here, the superscription is clearly addressed to the musical director of an act of worship, and it says specifically that the psalm is to be accompanied by stringed instruments (4:1). How we would love to know what kind of stringed instruments were used in ancient Israel! But we can only assume that they used some ancient form of harp or lyre.

The superscription concludes with the words '*a psalm of David*' (4:1), and this is thought to mean that David wrote the psalm. Now this may indeed be the case, but these words do not prove this. The phrase itself could mean either that David wrote the psalm or that it was part his own collection, or that the psalm was placed in a collection from the time of his reign. Personally, I tend to think that a psalm can be said to be written by David when it contains two things; firstly a superscription that refers to him, and secondly, a theme that relates to the story of David as found in Scripture. As we will find out, Psalm 4 has a number of themes that connect with David, so I am personally happy to believe he wrote it.

The psalm as a whole is a call to God to demonstrate His righteousness, but it begins with an immediate and perhaps urgent call for help; he calls for '*relief from my distress*' (4:1). What could this be? If we were reading this psalm for ourselves, we would use it for any personal distress we might think of. However, David had something far more specific in mind. As the psalm continues we discover more about what was troubling him, and if we imagine him as the king surveying the state of the nation a troubling picture emerges from this psalm about the state of those pursuing him and the nation of Israel herself.

To begin with, David complained that men were abandoning God; he said they were turning '*my glory into shame*', and they loved '*delusions and ... false gods*' (4:2). After this sentence, David called for a pause, adding a '*selah*' at the end of verse 2. In this way, he asks those who read the psalm to stop and think about what they had just heard; it is a shameful thing for God's people of any age to turn away from their Lord and God.

After the '*selah*', David speaks prophetically to the people of Israel, as if to confront the sins of apostasy he has encountered. In verse 3, David firstly warns the people that God knows full well the difference between those who are His own and those who are wandering from the pathway of Israel. He says '*the Lord has set apart the godly for Himself*' (4:3), and then in contrast to the faithlessness of those who are questioning God, he sets out his own faith, saying '*the Lord will hear when I call to Him*' (4:3). This is no arrogant claim that David can summon God at a moment's notice. It is the properly proud claim of one who has stayed in a close relationship with God, which does not succumb to the vagaries of human sin and doubt because it is steadfast and secure.

Of course, something had upset God's people and those who were struggling with their relationship with God, so David spoke to them with a word of caution and warning. He said, '*in your anger do not sin*' (4:4), which is advice pertinent to many of life's problems and uncertainties, even today. David continues by encouraging the believer to spend time with God, especially when alone and going to bed at night. This is the time to come close to God, to deal with personal issues such as anger and see them in the light of God's presence, to '*search (the) heart and be silent*' (4:4).

After a further pause for reflection (as indicated by the '*selah*' at the end of verse 4), David issues further advice to the doubters of Israel. He calls for '*right sacrifices*' (4:5), or as we might say today 'right worship'. The state of people's relationship with God is indicated by the integrity of their worship, and while David wanted the people of Israel to offer the right sacrifices to God to show their intent to do His will, the equivalent message today would be one that calls God's people to worship God in '*spirit and in truth*' (John 4:24).

Only David, the true King of Israel, could call the people back to their Lord, to abandon their pessimism and receive again the light of God's love. So instead of chastising the people further, David showed them the power of godly prayer and called on the Lord to bless the people, '*let the light of Your face shine upon us O Lord.*' (4:6). The concluding verses of the psalm then end with David's powerful description of a righteous man, who finds that God has blessed his harvest (4:7), so he can lie down to sleep, at peace. God alone enables someone to both sleep well, and ' *dwell in safety*' (4:8), when all others around are in turmoil.

Because verse 8 of Psalm 4 speaks about lying down to sleep, the psalm is traditionally regarded as an evening psalm. It has been used in the Christian church for centuries as part of the ancient order of Compline, a liturgy of prayer spoken at night time just prior to sleeping. It is worth noting that the previous psalm, psalm 3, contains a brief reference to rising from sleep (3:5), which suggests that by contrast, psalm 3 is a 'morning prayer'. Certainly, psalms 3 and 4 are traditionally regarded as a pair of prayers, one for the morning and one for the evening!

The message of Psalm 4 is that we should respond in a godly way to daily problems. We can easily look at the sins of others around us and in the church, and we will sometime see

godlessness and false religion, anger and complaint, in others, but we must account for our own sins before God. If we follow David and bring our problems to the Lord, then He will help us and lead us towards the peace for which we long. Psalm 4 describes living in a true relationship with God, and it describes the way of dealing with the power of sin, which is to bring them to the Lord in prayer. Today, we know that Jesus has set us free completely from sins, where David did not know this great and complete salvation. I would suggest however, that David was given insights into the heart of both God and also his own people, and these are both true to the Gospel and effective in practice.

Discipleship

Application

Turning to the Lord

When any of us find that life is hard and we are drawn away from the Lord, we need others to help us return to the heart of our faith. The enemy attacks and we are pulled away from the truths in which we believe, or we find that we have no power to master certain sins that bedevil us over a period of time. Psalm 4 is a useful aid to us at times such as these, for if we read it carefully it will help us take the necessary steps towards reconnecting with our Lord again. We need to remember that we are God's and that he has set us apart (4:3); we need to think about God in those quiet and private moments when we go to sleep (4:4); we must offer true and right worship to God (4:5);, to be ready to receive what God will do for us (4:7) and lastly to rest in His love (4:8).

Taking confidence in Christ

It can be profoundly difficult to stop complaining about a problem and start believing that the Lord has a solution! We do need to take a step of faith if we are to be set free from our problems however, as this psalm clearly shows. In the light of Jesus' life and death, we may have confidence that God will deal with us and help us take such steps, so we need to put together our own desire to find solutions to life's problems with God's desire to help us. If we can do this in worship, then we are on our way to resolving many of life's problems!

Ideas for what to do

- This psalm challenges us to keep returning to the Lord when we feel that either we or others around us are complaining. Complaint can quickly lead to a downward spiral of unhappiness. Try to turn away consciously from complaining to trusting in the Lord.
- Pray for all who have difficulty accepting God because of the terrible things that happen in their lives. Pray for any you know.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Recall occasions when you have had to wait until the Lord has helped you. Why do you think you have had to wait?
2. What difficult in your life cause you to sin, and how may they be overcome?
3. How does the Lord enable you to find peace in the midst of trouble?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, You give perspective to my life. Some things that seem so all embracing are really just another part of life when seen in the light of your love. Other things that I quickly pass by are important signposts you have placed for me to notice. Keep working on me, Lord Jesus, and fill me with Your Holy Spirit, so that I do not miss my way!
