

1.5.25

Resting in Peace

Psalm 4.1-8

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Many people make New Year's resolutions related to exercise, their diet, or quitting smoking or drinking because they want to improve their health. If you have, I wish you the best of success. Other people make resolutions about reducing how much time they spend on social media or getting out of debt. Improving your choices and actions in any of these areas will improve the quality of your life. I don't hear many people making New Year's resolutions about wanting to improve their sleep. Yet getting a good night's sleep is as vital to your health as regular exercise and eating healthy food. It's remarkable to consider that most of us will spend roughly a third of our life sleeping, yet some people downplay the importance of sleep. Benjamin Franklin was known for his productivity, which he maintained by going to bed at 10 PM and waking up at 5 AM every morning. Urging people to rise early he wrote in his autobiography, *"...there will be sleeping enough in the grave...."*

Throughout history, people have slept on animal skins, hay, and blankets. We have basic mattresses at our house, but some of you may have smart mattresses with temperature related features and frames that can move up and down. You may even have a sleep number you know. People buy such beds in the pursuit of a good night's sleep. But a person can live in a beautiful house and have the most expensive mattress imaginable and toss and turn all night and struggle to get a good night's sleep. Once you have enough basic comfort of something to lie on, a blanket or two, and something to place under your head, the quality of your sleep may have more to do with what's going on **inside** you rather than what you're lying **on**. This is true whether it's physical pain that may make it difficult to sleep, or issues that are causing us to worry.

God designed our bodies to need regular sleep to rest and repair. Going 24 or 48 hours without sleep can seriously disrupt our ability to function or think well. We're made to experience a death and resurrection every 24 hours. Some of you may be getting drowsy at this point. If I see you nodding off, I'll remember that one definition of preaching is talking in someone else's sleep.

The reason I've begun by talking about sleep is because it's so important to our life and well-being and the Bible tells us often about the importance of sabbath, rest, and sleep. One of our readings today for those of us reading through the Bible this year is Psalm 4, which talks about sleeping and resting in peace, which is made possible through a relationship with God.

**Psalm 4:1-8** To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

- 1 Answer me **when I call**, O God of my right!  
You gave me room when I was in distress.  
**Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.**
- 2 How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame?  
**How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?**
- 3 But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;  
**the LORD hears when I call to him.**
- 4 When you are disturbed, do not sin;  
**ponder it on your beds, and be silent.**
- 5 Offer right sacrifices,  
and put your trust in the LORD.
- 6 There are many who say, "O that we might see some good!  
Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!"
- 7 You have put gladness in my heart  
more than when their grain and wine abound.
- 8 **I will both lie down and sleep in peace;**  
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

Life is full of challenges, uncertainties, and moments of distress. We've witnessed that once again this week with national stories like the terrorist attack in New Orleans, or in smaller moments of grief, loss, or anguish over our relationships, work, or health, or that of a loved one. In those moments, we often long for peace. Psalm 4, attributed to

David, offers insights into how we can experience peace and confidence in God during difficult times. **David's words teach us to call on God in prayer (verse 1), trust God in all circumstances (verses 2-5), and rest in God's presence always (verses 6-8).** Each section reveals truths about finding peace amid life's storms.

### I. Call on God in Prayer (Verse 1)

David begins with a heartfelt cry to God: "**Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.**"

Have you ever found yourself in a position of need and grabbed your phone and called someone? Maybe you were hurt, or your car had broken down. How does it feel when something bad happens to call someone, and no one picks up, no one answers, no one is there in your moment of need? It feels lousy and lonely. In David's plea you can hear the longing we all have in moments of need, "**Answer me when I call, O God.**" David's immediate response to distress is **to call on God in prayer**. He doesn't begin by complaining to other people or by trying to fix his circumstances on his own. Instead, he seeks the One who has the power to guide and deliver him. This reflects a deep trust in God's character and faithfulness. How often is prayer our first response rather than our last resort? When trouble comes, do you instinctively call out to God, or do you rely on your own strength and do everything you can think of first and only when none of that works do you sometimes utter the less than inspiring phrase, "Well, I guess all I can do is pray." That doesn't exactly inspire confidence, does it?

David instinctively and immediately calls on God in prayer because David recalls how God has provided relief in the past: "*You gave me room when I was in distress.*" This reflection strengthens his faith, reminding him that the same God who delivered him before will be faithful again. Each of us can reflect on moments in our life when God has brought us through difficult circumstances, like physical pain, the loss of a loved one, the end of a relationship, or changing employment. Let those memories of how God walked with you and brought you through fuel your confidence in God today, especially if you're in a season in between calling on God and seeing or experiencing an answer.

David says, "**Answer me when I call, O God of my right!**" This is a reminder that our righteousness comes from God, not our own efforts. In times of distress, we can rest in the assurance that God's favor toward us is based on God's grace, not our merit. When you pray, do you approach God with confidence in God's grace? Or do you feel the need to earn or deserve God's attention? When Jill and I spend time with our grandsons, they don't have to do anything to earn or deserve our attention, we're happy to give it freely and lavishly simply because we love them. In the same way, we don't have to do anything to earn or deserve God's love, care, time, or attention. God is happy to hear from you and to be with you simply because God loves you. Because David has the habit of turning to God in prayer as his first response in times of distress, that enables him to trust God in all circumstances.

## **II. Trust God in All Circumstances (Verses 2-5)**

In verses 2-5, David addresses those who oppose him, likely enemies who spread lies and cause trouble. His words provide a call to self-reflection and repentance on their part. David laments that people pursue, seek after, or fall for "vain words" and "lies." This may refer to false accusations being made against him. but it also speaks to humanity's tendency to believe and pass on things that aren't true. We see this with the first people we meet in the Bible, and we still see it today in people's willingness to believe and seek after lies to confirm what they'd like to be believe to be true or in their pursuit of things that cannot truly satisfy—power, the approval of others, or wealth. Lies, what are now euphemistically called things like misinformation, disinformation, or misspeaking are harmful. In Psalm 4 it appears that David's honor or reputation has been damaged by lies. Honor is of great importance. It's the dignity and respect that belongs to your position in relation to family, friends, and community. There are lies that can be spoken about us or other people or lies about God that we can be tempted to believe. David says to all who listen - seek and speak the truth, don't believe and don't share lies.

In the face of lies David trustingly declares, "**But know that *the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him.***" Those who belong to God are under God's special care. David's confidence comes from knowing that he's

chosen and loved by God. David knows his identity is not based on the judgments of others or even himself; it comes from his relationship with God. There's a feature on most cell phones that says "Favorites" and it's marked with a star. I only have a few special people in my Favorites. I'm guessing the same is true for you. When anyone in my Favorites calls me, I try to answer immediately if possible. God has you in Favorites, and God hears when you call. Now consider this, how would you feel if someone who was important enough to you be in your Favorites, never called you? David has the assurance that he's set apart in God's Favorites, and so he doesn't hesitate to reach out because he knows the Lord hears when he calls. If you live with the assurance that you're set apart by God, that truth will change the way you face challenges, because you'll know you're never truly alone.

David gives practical advice: *"Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent."* Anger is a natural emotion, especially if like David, we know someone is telling lies that are hurting us or others, but anger can lead to sin if not handled wisely. Psalm 4 advises reflection and silence rather than rash words or actions. Verses 2-5 are addressed initially to David's detractors who have been lying and trying to harm him and his reputation. It seems he's encouraging them to do what perhaps he did. To sleep on his response to them, to take time to reflect, rather than responding immediately in anger. How do you handle anger? Do you take time to pause and reflect, or do you react impulsively? What steps can you take to *"be angry and not sin"*?

David calls for "right sacrifices" and trust in the Lord. True worship flows from a heart that's surrendered to God. Trusting God means laying down our fears and desires at the Lord's feet. If there are areas of your life where you're struggling to trust God, ask yourself what you gain by not trusting God, and what you might gain if you do?

### **III. Rest in God's Presence Always (Verses 6-8)**

Psalm 4 concludes with a powerful declaration of trust and peace. David contrasts those who seek earthly blessings apart from the God who provides them (verse 6) and those who seek the Lord. True peace comes not from material abundance

but from God's presence and a relationship that sustains us in good times and bad, and give us peace, joy, and gladness. That's why we want to be more focused on seeking God's presence than seeking God's blessings.

David testifies that God has given him greater joy than those who celebrate material prosperity ("when their grain and wine abound"). This is the joy that comes from a deep relationship with God—a joy that transcends circumstances. Joy in the Lord gives us strength and is a characteristic of devoted disciples. Where are you finding joy in life right now? Some of us may have to look harder than others, but I encourage you to keep looking. Happiness is often the result of what happens to us and our circumstances. Joy is rooted in your relationship with God and in things that are lasting.

Finally, verse 8 has led believers through the ages to use Psalm 4 as an evening prayer. The psalm ends with a beautiful picture of peace: ***"I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety."*** Whether our honor has been injured by lies, misunderstanding, or a lack of appreciation, like David, we can have confidence in God's protection that allows us to rest in peace, even in the face of trouble. Are you able to rest in God's peace, or do worries keep you awake at night? What steps can you take to surrender your fears to God and trust in God's presence with you? Psalm 4 is a powerful reminder that **peace is not found in the absence of trouble but in the presence of God**. Through prayer, trust, and worship, we can experience a deep and abiding peace that transcends our circumstances.

This week, take time to reflect on the truths of Psalm 4. Perhaps say this verse to yourself each night as you're going to sleep. ***"I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety."*** Commit to turning to God in prayer, trusting God's faithfulness, and resting in God's presence. May the peace of God guard your heart, mind, body, and spirit, now and always.

**Prayer:** Merciful God, we thank You for the assurance of Your presence and peace. Teach us to turn to You in every moment of distress, to trust Your faithfulness, and to rest in Your presence. Fill our hearts with joy that surpasses understanding and grant us the peace that only You can provide. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. David begins by calling out to God in prayer (Psalm 4:1). How does this verse inspire you to approach God in your own times of distress?
2. Why do you think people are so susceptible to loving vain words and lies? Why is God's Word so strongly against those who love vain words and lies (Psalm 4:2)?
3. David reminds us that God sets apart the godly for Himself (Psalm 4:3). What does it mean to be "set apart" by God, and how does this influence your daily life?
4. How can we "be angry and not sin" (Psalm 4:4-5)? What practical steps can you take to pause, reflect, and respond in ways that honor God during times of frustration or conflict?
5. David expresses confidence in God's protection and peace (Psalm 4:8). How can we cultivate a similar sense of trust in God amidst personal challenges? How has your faith in God brought you peace during difficult circumstances? Can you share a specific example?
6. What stands out to you most about David's attitude in this Psalm? How can his perspective shape your prayer life?