

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Psalm 4

- 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? Selah*
- 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,[a] do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent. Selah*
- 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.*

A mother and her little four-year-old daughter were preparing to retire for the night. The child was afraid of the dark, and the mother, on this occasion alone with the child, felt fearful also. When the light was out, the child caught a glimpse of the moon outside the window. "Mother," she asked, "Is the moon God's light?" "Yes," said the mother. The next question was, "Will God put out His light and go to sleep?" The mother replied, "No, my child, God never goes to sleep." Then the child said to her mother, "Well, as long as God is awake, there is no sense both of us staying awake."

Are there things that keep you awake some nights? What are they? There is a smorgasbord of possibilities that threaten to keep us awake at night. World events, politics, illness, grief, financial struggles, family conflicts, employment issues, personal attacks waged against our character, are just a few that I can think of at the moment. Are there issues that keep you awake with worry, fear or anger?

Psalm 4 addresses our struggles with finding peace within ourselves and with others, even when the cause of our anxieties is out of our control. The psalm is a lament written by David. It is one of 73 psalms of the 150 undisputed psalms attributed to David. It is also one of only eight that we are told in the heading that introduces the psalm, that when it was sung, it was accompanied by stringed instruments, suggesting perhaps that the words to follow are laden with heaviness. The opening words, "Answer me when I call, O God," (The Message translation is, "When I call, give me answers.") also indicate this is a lament. It tells us that the writer is looking to God for help for a problem. David certainly had his share of troubles, some self-inflicted and others imposed on him.

Commentators point out that there are many links between Psalm 4 and Psalm 3. The heading to Psalm 3 tells us that he wrote it when he fled from his son Absalom, and it may be the same reason that David wrote Psalm 4. Absalom was the third son of David. Second Samuel 14:25 describes him as the handsomest man in the kingdom, although he was not the favored son. Solomon, David’s favored wife Bathsheba’s son, was the favored one of David. Likely for this reason and for a variety of other reasons, Absalom eventually rebelled against his father and was killed during the Battle of Ephraim’s Wood.

Listen to Psalm 3 and you will hear the connections between the two psalms: O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying to me, “There is no help for you in God.” But you, O Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. I cry aloud to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy hill. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, for the Lord sustains me. I am not afraid of tens of thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Rise up, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. Deliverance belongs to the Lord; may your blessing be on your people!

As in this Psalm, Psalm 4 laments that he has foes working against him; however, he states confidently that the Lord is with him, and God is the only one who makes it possible to lie down and sleep and wake again with no fear. God, who David knows is righteous, has been David’s guide in the past, getting him through other times of distress.

In verse one David says, “You gave me room when I was in distress.” This can be translated as David saying: “I was in a tight spot, and you provided space for me to move and breathe.” We should note particularly the word “in” that David uses in this sentence, because it tells us that David recognizes God’s presence and help **in** his time of distress, helping him to get through the difficult time, but not necessarily doing a hocus-pocus magic trick to simply make the problem go away. David was going to need to work his way through the situation, but he had God’s help.

In verses two and three, David communicates to those against him, those trying to drag his name in the mud, that he knows God is with him. He testifies to being a child of God because of his faithfulness to God. He is chosen and loved by God. And therefore, he knows, God will help him get through their rebellion against him.

David is also addressing all who hear this psalm, including us, who cry out to God for help. He says that all who are faithful, can be assured that God hears our cries for help, and we can count on God for help as we remain faithful to God.

We might question that when we feel we are not getting a response as quickly as we hoped from God. Sometimes we might think that God will not hear us because we have fallen short of his standards of holy living. But if we have trusted Christ for our salvation, knowing we are forgiven of our sin as we repent, then we should also know that he listens to our cries for help.

As we examine our own faithfulness, we should recognize in ourselves as David did, acceptance and respect for God’s sovereignty over all, including the circumstances that arise in our lives. If we are faithful, we should also find assurance, like David, that our sovereign God loves us; giving us then, confidence to face what lies ahead for us. We will be open to God, and we will recognize God’s guidance and be willing to receive God’s wisdom to help get us through all our challenging circumstances. Faithfulness, is a huge step towards accepting God’s help to “get us through anything.”

A lack of faithfulness to God can stir other detrimental emotions like anger. Anger can only make things worse. David warns of this in verses four and five. He says, “when you are disturbed,” or angry as translated in some versions of the bible, do not sin, or do not lash out. Instead take time to think about how you should respond. Take your situation to God, be silent and wait for God’s guidance, sleep on it, not to allow it to fester, but to allow time to reflect on an appropriate way to respond to your foes,

placing your trust in God, rather than your emotions, to help sustain you through your situation and give an appropriate response.

He goes on to encourage us that we should ward off the urge to need a quick fix, much like the world would suggest, by succumbing to earthly things that might alleviate our tensions for a while, but not be lasting. Instead, we should look for the light of God’s face, to provide spiritual focus that will give us peace, even gladness and greater joy than earthly things can give to our souls.

The last verse, when he says, “I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety,” if we know God, we also know we can trust God. This means we need to work on our relationship with God, as our Savior, Jesus Christ has taught us to do. It’s not as helpful to us if we wait until the last minute to seek God when moments of distress strike us down. Nurturing our relationship with God prepares us and helps us when those moments strike.

Years ago, a farmer owned land along the Atlantic seacoast. He constantly advertised for hired hands. Most people were reluctant to work on farms along the Atlantic. They dreaded the awful storms that raged across the Atlantic, wreaking havoc on the buildings and crops.

As the farmer interviewed applicants for the job, he received a steady stream of refusals. Finally, a short, thin man, well past middle age, approached the farmer.

"Are you a good farmhand?" the farmer asked him.

"Well, I can sleep when the wind blows," answered the little man.

Although puzzled by this answer, the farmer, desperate for help, hired him.

The little man worked well around the farm, busy from dawn to dusk, and the farmer felt satisfied with the man's work.

Then one night the wind howled loudly in from offshore. Jumping out of bed, the farmer grabbed a lantern and rushed next door to the hired hand's sleeping quarters.

He shook the little man and yelled, "Get up! A storm is coming! Tie things down before they blow away!"

The little man rolled over in bed and said firmly, "No sir. I told you I can sleep when the wind blows."

Enraged by the response, the farmer was tempted to fire him on the spot.

Instead, he hurried outside to prepare for the storm. To his amazement, he discovered that all of the haystacks had been covered with tarpaulins. The cows were in the barn, the chickens were in the coops, and the doors were barred. The shutters were tightly secured. Everything was tied down.

Nothing could blow away. The farmer then understood what his hired hand meant, so he returned to his bed to also sleep while the wind blew.

When you're prepared spiritually, mentally, and physically, you have nothing to fear. Can you sleep when the wind blows through your life?

The hired hand in the story was able to sleep because he had secured the farm against the storm. We, as believers in Christ, secure ourselves against the storms of life by grounding ourselves in the Word of God, and growing our relationship of faithfulness with God. We don't need to understand everything in the Word or about God, we just need to hold His hand to have peace and find greater joy in the midst of the storms.

Sleep well. Amen.