

PATERNAL PIETY // Psalm 4

From the series, Summer in the Psalms

Psalm 3 and 4 share a common Davidic authorship, along with similar themes of prayer and deliverance. However the occasions for which these two psalms were written are not the same. Psalm 3 is set in the context of David fleeing physical threats from his son Absalom (cf. 2 Samuel 15). But David is fleeing a different kind of threat in Psalm 4—the verbal and relational. David’s reputation is under attack. People mock him, the scoff at his kingship and the ridicule him to his face. David thus prays for deliverance, takes confidence in God, and thus declares his rest in joy and peace.

What makes this psalm relevant for us today? One matter in particular: sleep. Though the mention of sleep doesn’t appear until the final verse, many take Psalm 4 as a “evening” psalm (and Psalm 5 as a “morning” psalm, by the way). Readers of Psalm 4 learn the importance of sound sleep, and how to sleep well in the sovereignty and strength of God. So it must be asked, “How are you sleeping?”

The psalm has three sections. You may choose an alternate outline of: Prayer, Praise and Peace.

1. David’s appeal to God (v. 1)

David’s first response (not his last resort) in a time of difficulty is prayer. He appeals to God, not on the basis of his own righteousness, but that of God. He is appealing to God because God has given him a right standing. This is not only a humble but also an honest appeal. The best motivation to prayer is not the open ear of God, but past answered prayer—we know who God will be when we consider who God has been to us in the past. Those who seek to sleep soundly must begin with a priority of prayer.

2. David’s appraisal of his enemies (v. 2-5)

David turns his attention to his enemies. They have dishonored him, but his appraisal reveals that this is not an issue of them defaming his reputation, but of defaming God’s glory. They have sought after lies and “vain words.” Men will fill their lives with empty speech in order to drown out their own consciences over their reprobate status. White noise and busyness of life is often a spiritual issue.

David then looks at the godly, whom God has set apart for himself. He addresses these godly ones with the reminder to “be angry and do not sin”—live Spirit-filled, self-controlled lives (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). When a priority for prayer is combined with a desire for God’s glory, the result is a pious, godly life, and sound sleep. The godly are invited to “ponder” and “be silent.” We notice the progression from silence to sacrifice to surrender. We’re encouraged to turn off the noise in our life and ponder in our own hearts.

3. David’s approach to sleep (v.6-8)

God has put a joy in the heart of the godly that surpasses satisfaction with any earthly delight, even beyond the personal reputation that David was seeing defamed. God offers peace. David had consciously chosen to be silent. Now, he makes the choice to lie down and sleep.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is prayer your first response or last resort in times of difficulty?
2. How does God’s faithfulness in the past motivate us to pray now?
3. How does silence lead to sacrifice and surrender? How can we cultivate more silence in our lives?