

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.*

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!

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, thank You for creating me, for loving me through Jesus, and empowering me by the Holy Spirit. In Your strength, therefore, may I love, serve and respect all those I meet this day. You alone give me the gifts and graces to live at peace with others and with You, and live my life with honest intent to do what is right. The Lord's name be praised! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Secularism

Join with me this week in pray against the subtle forces of secularism that prevent Christians from worshipping. Pray for Christians who have been persecuted for their faith.

On-going prayers

- *Pray urgently for the country of Iran and its people*
- *Pray for those planning ahead for the potential flu pandemic*
- *Give thanks for the people that you meet during the day*

Meditation

Lord Jesus,
How do You bring what is good and beautiful out of suffering?

Perhaps we see a little of it in the compassion of a carer,
Patiently nursing someone chronically ill, or with dementia;

Perhaps we see a little of it in the beauty of a marriage,
Which has passed the tests of time; through 'thick and thin';

Perhaps we see a little of it in a truly miraculous healing
Of those with cancer, or heart conditions; through medicine or prayer;

Perhaps we see a little of it in a little child who falls to the ground,
Only to rise and play once more, implicitly trusting that life is good;

We see all this and more, but only make some sense of it because
You suffered on the Cross. You died because we placed You there
And yet You offered only love to us when You were suffering most,
Enduring all to win a Resurrection, making glorious life from awful death!

Bible Study - 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 their 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

This psalm, just like the previous one, expresses confidence in God in the midst of uncertainty; psalms 3-7 are all like this, and these early psalms addresses one of the deepest of human needs, which is to face adversity with courage, and make sense of even the most difficult of circumstances. This theme is common to much of scripture, including Job and the prophets, and ultimately, it is the theme of the resurrection of Christ, from which we gain all our hope.

Psalm 4 begins with a superscription that refers to David, and its contents give a general picture of life from around the time of David. We can picture the king dealing with the problems of a grumbling, discontented community (4:6), for example. He faced the same problems as Moses, centuries before, when they complained to God in the wilderness (Ex 17:1-7, Deut 1:19ff); the problems of leadership do not change with the years! There is one other general point about the psalm. It is traditionally regarded as an evening psalm (see verse 8) and appears in ancient liturgies of Compline, an order of prayer used before going to bed at night. This is just a small point, but if you look back at Psalm 3:5, it is possible that the previous psalm was a for the morning, and the two psalms together make a pair, one for the morning and one for the evening! However, you interpret this; psalm 4 expresses an absolute confidence that inspires peace, something that all people will value when seeking a good night's sleep (4:8)!

Confidence in God is the first thing we notice in verse 1. The psalm begins without any polite requests to God, but with a confident call to help; a more literal translation of the third line would be, 'give me some space when I am trapped'. This is very close to the Old Testament idea of salvation, which is like relief from distress, deliverance from an enemy, or freedom from a situation. Even the idea of 'having space' relates to salvation; look at psalm 23, for example, which describes salvation as like being led into 'green pastures', instead of walking through the 'darkest valleys' (23:4). Salvation is at the heart of a fascinating range of ideas; deliverance, liberation, release, renewal etc. In our psalm, it is about answered prayer (4:1), refraining from sin (4:4), trusting in the Lord (4:5), rejoicing in the Lord (4:7) and dwelling in safety (4:8).

In verse 3, God's people are encouraged to believe that He hears the prayers of the 'godly'. When Scripture uses this word, it means those who have a covenant relationship with God, being part of His people (see Gen 17:2ff, 1 Kings 8:23, Jer31:33). The people of Israel were not only the descendants of Abraham via Jacob, they were also proselytes who

accepted faith in God and circumcision. For all those who made up God's people, they knew that they were special to Him and that He would hear their prayers; their claim was not boastful, but a declaration glorious of fact! No wonder the psalmist demanded that complainers who 'love delusions and seek false gods' (4:2) sort themselves out before going to bed (4:4)! Incidentally, these words are similar to those found in Eph. 4:26 where Paul says 'do not let the sun go down on your anger'. Paul was an Old Testament scholar, and we should expect that he knew psalm 4 well!

The cry of the discontented is heard again in verse 6. They plead for evidence of God's kindness and demand to see some 'good'. They call for the fulfilment of Aaron's blessing in Number 6:26; 'the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace'. However, the psalm declares confidence in the Lord as a fact already proven, needing no further demonstration of power 'You have filled my heart with greater joy ...' (4:7); fear is therefore cast aside to bring peace, safety and sleep (4:8). This last verse seems to echo the famous words of psalm 23 'He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters ...'. Both psalms offer us God's reassurance when we are troubled, and if our troubles are all consuming, then they are prophetic of a greater truth than we often experience in everyday life. They point to God's heavenly victory against all evil, by which we can face all troubles when living in a saving, covenant relationship with our Lord.

It is not always evident to us, but the psalms are all written from the perspective of people who are living in a covenant relationship with God. The complaints and the joys are all part of this relationship, which is why the deep personal or spiritual issues raised by the Psalms are often not fully resolved except through faith or trust in God. As in any relationship, the resolution of a difficulty is not always to be found in logic and reason. We may not always feel the benefits of this relationship, but it is there for us, and the Lord is always waiting for us to trust in Him so that problems can be overcome, as in this psalm. When we stop being controlled by our complaints and reflect upon God, perhaps in the words of this psalm, He will not disappoint.

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 disturbances in your life cause you to sin, and how may this be overcome? (v4)
3. How does the Lord enable you to find peace in the midst of trouble?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

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 exploring discipleship

- 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