



## Psalm 4 - Confident Plea for Deliverance from Enemies

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

### Introduction

This psalm expresses quiet trust amid troubling circumstances, combining the categories of individual lament and confidence. Many take this as a companion to Psalm 3 because 4:8 seems to echo 3:5. If there is a connection, the past tense of 3:5 sets it in the morning, while the future tense of 4:8 sets it in the evening; any further connection is speculative.

### Psalm 4:1 - Confident Prayer.

The recollection of past experience (You gave me room when I was in distress) between two urgent requests is similar to the rhetoric of 3:7: past experience emboldens the faithful to confident prayer.

- <sup>1</sup> 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.

### Psalm 4:1

Answer me when I call. There is passion in David's cry. He does not want to just cast up words towards heaven. He needs God's attention to his present problem. Often power in prayer is lacking because there is little passion in prayer. It is not that one persuades God by emotional displays, but God wants people to care deeply about the things he cares deeply about. The prophet Isaiah spoke with sorrow about the lack of this in Israel: <<*There is no one who calls on your name, or attempts to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us,*

*and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity>>* (Isaiah 64:7). This is a good example of David stirring himself up to take hold of God.

O God of my right. David knew that his righteousness came from God, and not from himself. He calls upon the God who makes him righteous.

You gave me room, be gracious to me. In a familiar pattern, David uses past mercy as a ground for future help. “God, I know you have not blessed me thus far to abandon me, so have mercy on me.” This is another instance of David’s common habit of pleading past mercies as a ground for present favour.

### Psalm 4:2-3 - Words to the Faithless.

The singer turns from his prayer to address those who slander the pious; such people should know that the Lord has set his favour upon the faithful and will listen to their prayers.

<sup>2</sup> How long, you people, shall my honour suffer shame?

How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? Selah

### Psalm 4:2

How long. David asks a valid question. Just how long will the ungodly keep to their way? They cannot keep to it forever, so they may as well abandon it now and be blessed.

Shall my honour suffer shame? David’s distress is not selfish but comes from the deep understanding that, as God’s anointed king to shepherd the people of Israel, any shame that comes upon his honour also reflects on God. However, the final understanding is that it will be those who try to put him to shame that will themselves suffer that fate: *<<Let all those who rejoice at my calamity be put to shame and confusion; let those who exalt themselves against me be clothed with shame and dishonour>>* (Psalm 35:26).

How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? Many try to connect Psalm 3 with Psalm 4, thinking that this was also written in connection with Absalom’s rebellion. This is probably incorrect because the focus in this psalm is not David’s physical safety or kingdom but his reputation. Wicked men slandered David. In this psalm the problem is one of malicious slander and lies. It is the psalmist’s reputation rather than his person that is being attacked.

<sup>3</sup> But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself;  
the Lord hears when I call to him.

### Psalm 4:3

**Set apart.** The same Hebrew word is rendered set apart in Exodus 8:22, and <<*make a distinction*>> or similar in Exodus 9:4, 11:7 and 33:16; the idea is that God sets his special attention and affection on a person or a people in order to distinguish them from others. David knew that he and other godly people were set apart for God.

The **faithful**. The Hebrew word *hasid* is the adjective form of ‘steadfast love’, Hebrew *hesed*. This term, variously rendered ‘godly,’ ‘saint,’ ‘faithful one,’ and ‘holy one’ in the Psalms, refers to those who have genuinely laid hold of God’s steadfast love; here it is singular, to stress that each faithful member of the people may have this confidence, provided they do what is right: <<*Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales. Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come*>> (1 Timothy 4:7-8), and: <<*Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?*>> (2 Peter 3:11-12).

**The Lord hears when I call to him.** The ungodly have a disaster waiting for them, but the godly have a great reward in the Lord. This is why David knows the Lord will hear when he calls out to him.

Each Christian should have the same assurance. They should be confident that God will hear their prayers. When prayer seems ineffective it is worthwhile for the individual to take a spiritual inventory to see if there is a reason for unanswered prayer. The Bible reveals that there are many reasons why prayer may not be answered.

### Psalm 4:4-5 - Words to the Godly.

The singer tells the godly not to give in to the anger that would lead them to take revenge; instead they must remain steadfast in their worship and trust.

- <sup>4</sup> When you are disturbed, do not sin;  
ponder it on your beds, and be silent. Selah

### Psalm 4:4

**When you are disturbed, do not sin.** This should perhaps be taken as a conditional sentence: ‘If you feel anger at those who slander you, which you may well do, nevertheless do not sin by seeking revenge against them.’ The way to prevent sin is to ponder and be silent; that is, reflect on how the Lord has shown himself

trustworthy. This does not discourage the faithful from using legal recourse when necessary; instead it speaks against personal revenge that circumvents the law and consumes the lives of the vengeful. This is confirmed by Paul: <<**Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger**>> (Ephesians 4:26).

- <sup>5</sup> Offer right sacrifices,  
and put your trust in the Lord.

#### Psalm 4:5

Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord. David knew the value of religious observance, i.e. the requirement to offer the sacrifices, yet he also knew that they could not replace trust in the Lord: <<**For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings**>> (Hosea 6:6), and: <<**Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners**>> (Matthew 9:13). When religious observance is coupled with true trust in God: <<**Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me**>> (John 14:1), one draws near to God and experience the benefits of drawing near.

#### Psalm 4:6-8 - Words to the Lord.

The singer finishes by offering a plea to the Lord. Each godly person is to see himself giving the plaintive cry of v.6, and is to find the answer in remembering all that the Lord has done for him (vv.7-8).

- <sup>6</sup> There are many who say, ‘O that we might see some good!  
Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!’

#### Psalm 4:6

O that we might see some good. The voice of the ungodly cynic echoes in David’s ear. After continual disappointment from man, one begins to doubt if God will show one any good.

Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord. Despite what the cynics say or think, David trusts that the Lord will show him good. He claims it upon the Aaronic promise of blessing in Numbers 6:24-26: <<**The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace**>>.

- <sup>7</sup> You have put gladness in my heart  
more than when their grain and wine abound.

### Psalm 4:7

You have put gladness in my heart. When it is known that the face of God shines favourably, it puts gladness in the heart. Although David was in distress, vexed by ungodly men all around him, he could still have gladness in his heart, because the Lord put it there. Gladness or joy in the OT is not focused on materialistic prosperity in itself; as confirmed by: <<**Better is a little that the righteous person has than the abundance of many wicked**>> (Psalm 37:16), <<**But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, to tell of all your works**>> (Psalm 73:28), <<**Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it**>> (Proverbs 15:16), and: <<**Better is a little with righteousness than large income with injustice**>> (Proverbs 16:8).

More than when their grain and wine abound. The ungodly can be happy when the money is coming in and everything is prosperous. David can be happy even in distressing times because the Lord put gladness in his heart.

<sup>8</sup> I will both lie down and sleep in peace;  
for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

### Psalm 4:8

I will both lie down and sleep in peace. David can sleep well at night, even in distressing times and surrounded by the ungodly. He sleeps well because his safety is from the Lord, not from circumstances or even feeling: <<**And you will have confidence, because there is hope; you will be protected and take your rest in safety**>> (Job 11:18).

For you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety. The idea here is not that it is the Lord and none other. Instead, the idea is that David finds safety in solitude with God: <<**See, I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will settle them in safety**>> (Jeremiah 32:37).