

# Gladness in the Madness

Psalm 4

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**Main idea:** Only God can cause the fearful heart to know calm contentment in the fire of adversity.

Psalm 4 is called by Old Testament scholars a “twin-psalm” because, like Psalm 3, it reflects *the same man, in the same setting*, but at a *different hour*. Psalm 3 is a morning psalm reflecting *the morning after David’s trial started*. Psalm 4 is an evening psalm reflecting the nights after David’s trial *commenced*. In Psalm 3 we learned that *bringing your complaints, placing your confidence, and giving your conflict to the Lord* helps prepare you to face the battles of the day. Now, in Psalm 4, David *corrects our thinking, directs our discipleship, and increases our faith* by showing us that *only God can cause the fearful heart to know real gladness in the madness of adversity*. Step with me into this evening Psalm.

For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!  
You have relieved me in my distress;  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.  
<sup>2</sup> O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach?  
*How long* will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? *Selah*.  
<sup>3</sup> But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself;  
The LORD hears when I call to Him.  
<sup>4</sup> Tremble, and do not sin;  
Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. *Selah*.  
<sup>5</sup> Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,  
And trust in the LORD.  
<sup>6</sup> Many are saying, “Who will show us *any* good?”  
Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, O LORD!  
<sup>7</sup> You have put gladness in my heart,  
More than when their grain and new wine abound.  
<sup>8</sup> In peace I will both lie down and sleep,  
For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.

## Outline:

Is it possible to have a God-ward focus in the midst of adversity?

- A. David’s Request (v.1)—Urgency and Confidence
  1. Remember God’s character. (v.1a)
  2. Remember God’s help. (v.1b)
  
- B. David’s Rebuke (vv.2-6a)—Warning and Counsel
  1. A word to the slanders (v.2)
  2. A word to the self-deceived (v.2b)
  3. A word to the seething (v.4a)
  4. A word to the self-willed (v.5)
  5. A word to the short-sighted (v.6a)
  
- C. David’s Relief (vv.6b-8)—Joy and Peace
  1. Favor me with goodness. (v.6)
  2. Fill me with joy. (v.7)
  3. Flood me with peace. (v.8)

## Introduction:

Once you've had the experience, you'll never forget it as long as you live. Gospel singing from a black choir in an urban church on a Sunday morning.

Some of you know what I'm speaking of. What is unique about the black choir expression in worship besides the rhythmic movement and the vibrant, soulful voices is that it just feels like they are "talking to you." One moment it seems as if the choir is raptured in their own world of worship or lament, then suddenly, they shift and start "talking"—or shall I say, "preaching"—right to your heart. And once they have come down into the pew and moved you in your seat, they pivot, take you back to heaven, and leave you celebrating in the glory of God! My goodness! If only a pastor could *preach* like a black choir *sings*!

2

Here in Psalm 4, David wrote a prayer song for the choir director that speaks to everyone in church today.

## Context:

The small description underneath the main title written in your Bible is a part of the inspired text of Scripture. **"For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Psalm of David."** It is not added by translators, but it's inspired by the Holy Spirit to tell us either of *the author, the setting, or the purpose of the psalm*. The word for **"choir director"** means the overseer of the music. The word signifies any superintendent, foreman, or leader of the praise band. Fifty-three of the Psalm are inscribed to *the chief musician*. Why would David write a prayer song for the **"choir director"** at a time of anguish and adversity? The short answer is that the king desired to teach the whole church something about *how to have a God-ward focus in the midst of adversity*.

Let's recapitulate the background recorded in 2 Samuel 15-18. David is God's anointed and appointed king, but his son Absalom has become a usurper. He has turned on him, stolen the hearts of the people, and attempted a coup to dethrone him. David has had to flee the city with nothing more than the clothes on his back and about 600 men. He is barefooted and broken-hearted with grief. The story does not have a good ending. Later when the word comes to him that Absalom has been killed, David doesn't celebrate—he is a father. He crumbles into grief, and you can hear those cries of a father echoing down the years of history—"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33).

Psalm 4 is a window into the heart of a man in the middle of an unthinkable trial—and the trials that he faces are like a war on his soul. This is not a Psalm of penitence, but rather, of both lament and confidence. It is a Psalm of trust. It is a textbook if you will, on *how do you fight in the fire? How do you win in the war on your soul during a trial? And, how do you avoid falling into depression and blaming God for being unfair, unfaithful, and unloving?*

Brothers and sisters, can we talk? When the *unthinkable* comes your way, when things that *you did not choose* come into your life, where does your *heart* run? Where do you turn when you are being *treated unjustly* and *criticized unrighteously*? The New Testament commentator, P.C. Craigie, was right when he wrote, *"There are days in the lives of all human beings which require a psalm like this at their end."*<sup>1</sup> What I want you to be on the lookout for are not just the points of the outline, but rather, what happens to David when he turns to the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Boice, p.39

## Outline:

The psalm breaks easily into three parts:

- In part 1 (v.1)—we hear David's request.
- In part 2 (vv.2-5)—we hear David's rebuke.
- In part 3 (vv.6-8)—we hear David's relief.

## Exposition:

Is it possible to have a God-ward focus in the midst of adversity? Yes, David teaches us, but you must first turn to God. Notice,

### A. David's Request (v.1)—Urgency and Confidence

- Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!  
You have relieved me in my distress;  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

We are all tempted to *run from God* when trials come, especially if the trial is in part due to our own sin. David does not run *from* the Lord but *to* Him. Three of the four verbs are imperatives which reveal David's personal urgency ("*answer me, be gracious to me, hear my prayer...*"). Two tones are heard that are only found in the heart of a man who knows God in a saving way—there is *urgency* on one hand and *confidence* on the other. Here David teaches us two ways to find confidence in God in the midst of urgent circumstances and adversity.

#### 1. Remember God's character (v.1a)

Notice where David starts as the evening falls. He does not start with *his experience*; he begins with God's character—"Answer me when I call, **O God of my righteousness!**" It can be translated, "*O my righteousness God.*" He appeals to God *on the basis of God's righteousness*. Although there are so many people around David responding to events based upon expediency (*self-interest, self-concern*), he turns to One who, *by His very nature, does what is right*. He knows that God is the One who will never deviate from what is right. This is a source of great confidence.

- **Exodus 9:27**—After the hail rained down upon Egypt, Pharaoh acknowledged, "...the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones."
- **Psalm 7:11**—God is a righteous judge...
- **Psalm 11:7**—For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face.
- **Daniel 9:14**—Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice.

*Righteousness* is not only *what God possesses* and *what He demands*, but righteousness is also *something God requires that we do not have* (Rom.3:10). The good news is that God not only *possesses* and *demand*s righteousness, but He also *provides righteousness* (2 Cor.5:21). Now, if you have received righteousness from God to justify you and the Spirit to sanctify you, then you may

safely confide in God to keep you in righteousness. Since God has done the greater, He will do the less.

By remembering God's character, David is reminding himself that he cannot take unrighteous requests to a righteous God and expect that God will answer in his favor. As David thinks about *God's righteous character*, it gives him confidence that God will show him to be in the right, even though he is being *misjudged* and *persecuted*.

Might you find confidence in that fact today? You are being *misjudged* and *persecuted* on your job, by your family, or even by some in the church, but might you find confidence in this unchangeable fact: *God is righteous and He will right every wrong soon*? How do you find confidence in adversity? *Remember God's character*.

## 2. Remember God's help (v.1b)—

You have relieved me in my distress...

Now, this pictures David looking back. The verb "**relieved**" is in the past tense, meaning that God has already done this for David. He looks back on *mercies received*. The word "**distress**" carries the idea of being *pressed* or *squeezed in tight places*—to be in dire straits! Perhaps you are there now—pressed by financial hardships, distressed by family problems, or even upset by personal failures—David had been there in the past, and he remembered that *God did something for him*; He "**relieved**", or literally, "*made an open space*" for him to *find relief*. It is a beautiful picture of being set in a large open space and made joyful by deliverance. The same idea is found in Psalm 18:18,

- They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my stay.

He was my open space! My relief! All this leads David to expect God's grace to be given to him again—**Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.**

Now when we plead for *grace*, it implies what we have a lack of resources. We don't appeal earnestly to God when we think we have enough, and this is why God sovereignly permits us into places where we find ourselves desperate and helpless. I think we can biblically say that *God finds no pleasure in our desperation*, but what we don't always see is that our helplessness is often the display-case of God's grace and our faith (2 Cor.12:9-10).

Do you think David was in despair? It doesn't sound that way, but he has *confidence* that Yahweh will hear him because of His righteous character and His previous help. David started with *God's character* and then *remembered God's past mercies*; this leads David to plead for *God's grace*.

**Application:** What does this opening snippet of David's prayer intended to teach us? We can see two rays of light for sure:

- *God's character* and *God's help* always go together. You can count on God to be true to His nature.
- *Biblical prayer thinks about God more than we are prone to do*. In other words, don't think that you are not praying right if you are not feeling emotionally elated when you pray. Prayer is worship that is both *intelligent* and *desperate, thoughtful, and urgent*.

## B. David's Rebuke (vv.2-6a)—Warning and Counsel

Here is where a shift takes place. David moves from *talking to God* to *talking to or teaching* people. If this were a black choir director directing the choir, the shift would be heard as he motions for a key change and the organ elevates to a higher note. This is when the choir starts preaching to you. This is what David seems to do as he pens this psalm for the choir director. As he starts to preach, he has various groups in view. These groups may very well be represented in the 600 men in the cave with him. They are not all godly men, some are, and some are not. The same is true in church today. Who are these groups that David speaks to? Five groups can be identified.

### 1. The first group could be called the "slanderers." (v.2a)

<sup>2</sup> O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach?

To bring a "**reproach**" upon David's honor was *to seek to ruin his reputation*. David speaks of his "**honor**," which consists of three ingredients: *reality, sincerity, and integrity*. David had all three, but those who attacked him did not. He confronts these adversaries by asking them, "*how long will you seek to destroy my glory (a reference to the success of his life lived for God)?*" According to Psalm 3:3, David's glory was God himself. And whenever God blesses one of His children, it awakens the enmity of the unsaved and slander is the way they give vent to their jealousy. God blessed Abel; Cain got angry. God blessed David; Saul grew jealous. *Don't be surprised when hostility comes from the circles closest to you*. These are those who bring empty charges against David with no basis on fact and spread lies about the king. Perhaps, they are sitting out by the campfire, dropping *innuendos, insinuations, accusations, falsehoods, half-truths* or just *flat-out lies*.

*"...You know maybe David did the boy Absalom wrong and abused him in some way. We all know the twisted stuff these rich folk can be into..."*

*"...They say that Absalom is more sympathetic than the old man; he has a more relatable style; perhaps it's time for a change..."*

On and on it goes. The devil always uses people like this to *discourage the saints*. We see an example of this with Sanballat and Tobiah seeking to demoralize and distract Nehemiah from the work God called him to do (*Neh.4*). Just as the devil is a slanderer, they slander as well, but in a more cunning way. Like the store owner that turns the sign around in the window which says, "We're closed!" but still does business behind closed doors. Slanderers today conceal their attacks in secret conversations. But God's Word says, "*For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed*" (*Luke 12:2*).

What defense does David have? What defense do you have against those who attack your character? David goes to God in prayer; so should you.

### 2. The second group could be called the "self-deceived." (v.2b)

- How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? Selah.

Who are the self-deceived? They are those who *devote their lives and energies to that which have no eternal value*. "**To love what is worthless**" is to *pursue vanity*—to chase after a thing with no value. To "**aim at deception**" points to the lies which they spoke to undermine his leadership.

It's as if David has his mind on the final day, and forces us to ask the question: When we come to the judgment seat of God, what's going to count?

- Will the possessions that we've got, the very latest gadget, be worth anything then? The Bible is not against them, but we must not fall in love with them. We must learn to keep them in their place in our priorities.
- Will the very fact that you have drunk 1000 gallons of beer or alcohol count when it comes to God's judgment seat?
- Will the very fact that you have been to *certain places*, had *certain pleasures*, or been noticed in a *certain circle* count at the judgment seat of Christ?

The self-deceived chase and pursue things that will be burned up as wood, hay, and straw at the judgment bar of God (1 Cor.3:12-13). One of the visible characteristics of *the unconverted heart* is its preoccupation with temporal things. The unregenerate man or woman thinks about *people, places, and pleasures* a lot, but they *forget about God*.

You would think that it is no great matter to merely forget God, yet it has a heavy doom.

- **Psalm 50:22**—Now consider this, you who forget God,  
Or I will tear *you* in pieces, and there will be none to deliver.

Unconverted people *love things* and *neglect God*. David says, "*how long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception?*" The unsaved man believes and is deceived by many lies.

- They believe, for the most part, that all religions are equally valid. Not true.
- They believe that the Bible contains contradicts. Not true.
- They believe that people who go to church are hypocrites. Sometimes that's true. Not always.
- They believe that living for self and giving God lip-service will save their soul. Not true.

**Selah.** *A snow globe moment is encouraged. Pause and meditate. What are you devoting yourself and your energies to? Is it that which is eternal or only temporal?*

Verse 3—highlights David's counsel.

- <sup>3</sup> But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself;  
The LORD hears when I call to Him.

Do you see what David is doing? He is reminding himself and speaking to them about his identity. **"But know that Yahweh has set apart the godly man for Himself."**

Who is the godly man? First of all, *David is thinking of himself*—not because he is conceited or self-righteous, but because he understands that *God chose him and set him apart for His special purposes*. David was divinely ordained. He did not set himself apart. Yahweh did. It was God who *sovereignly chose* David as his servant and took him from the sheepfolds to shepherd the nation of Israel (Ps.78:70-71). It was God who *sovereignly ripped* the kingdom from Saul and gave it to David (1 Sam.15:28). So, to go against David was really to go against God. You could not say that your heart

was with Absalom and with God at the same time (ex: in Acts 9:4, Saul persecuted the church; Jesus said he was persecuting Him).

Second, David is thinking of *God's people* who have been sovereignly chosen as well, but to be set apart means more than *divine election*. It also means to be *divinely endued or empowered* by God's spirit.

Paul Tripp, the biblical counselor, suggests that one of the great things that gets us into trouble in times of trial is an insidious thing that he calls, "identity amnesia"—in other words, we just forget who we are.<sup>2</sup> The world may not know it, but you are not normal Joe or Jane Doe! We are the children of the Most High God! You have been set apart by God.

The verb "**set apart**" (*pala*) appears in three places in Exodus to highlight *a special protection by Yahweh and a peculiar privilege of access to Yahweh*.

- **Exodus 8:22**—But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land.
- **Exodus 9:4**—But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing will die of all that belongs to the sons of Israel.
- **Exodus 11:7**—But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not *even* bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

If you are a "**godly man**" or woman (that is, *you love what God loves, hate what God hates, and seek to do what God says*), then Yahweh has *special attention and regard* for you. Yahweh has brought you into "covenant" relationship with Himself—he has "**set apart the godly man for Himself.**"

**Application:** David senses that he stands under the special protection and privilege of Yahweh, and you say, "Well, David was a king! Israel's greatest." This is true, but the doctrine still stands for every true believer who stands in David's sandals. David shows us that the weapon against slander is to remember how God regards you and to hold on to what He has said about you. You may not be a covenant king, but you are in the covenant family—*chosen, loved, and called* by God. You are not a second-class Christian. Why should you listen to those who love what is worthless and aim at deception?

This is what Yahweh says of you if you are His.

- **Isaiah 43:1-2**—But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel,  
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name; you are Mine!  
<sup>2</sup> "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.  
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,  
Nor will the flame burn you."

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Trip, Psalm 4, sermonaudio.com

Do you believe this? I'm not asking if you agree with this *theologically*, but are you embracing this *functionally*? Does the fact that you belong to God settle your anxiety in times of adversity?

I am speaking to someone today who may not be listening to whispering chatter of the lost crowd at work, or the blistering attacks of your enemies, but you do listen to *the hidden accusations of an overly-sensitive conscience*.

**Illustration:** Maybe you can identify with one of the first nation's leaders. Paul Boller tells of the time Thomas Jefferson went into a Baltimore hotel to ask for accommodation. He was in his working clothes, apparently a bit splattered with mud, and the proprietor, giving him the once-over, retorted, "We have no room for you, sir." Jefferson repeated his request, and when it was denied once more, called for his horse and left to find a more congenial reception somewhere. A friend soon came in and told the proprietor that the man who had just left was Thomas Jefferson, the Vice President of the United States.

Talk about anguish and remorse! He had thought he was dealing with a dirty farmer. But because someone thought Jefferson was a dirty farmer didn't change the fact that he was Vice President. Those who despise us may regard us as a step above scum, but that does not alter the fact that we are covenant ones whom Yahweh has "set apart for himself."<sup>3</sup>

If we stay with the music choir analogy, the choir is cooking now! The key has gone up even higher, as the director is in full stride if you will. Using my sanctified imagination, I see the choir shifting from rocking side-to-side to stepping back-and-forth. A string of imperative verbs continues in the plural form.

He moves now from *the slanderers* and *self-deceived* to...

### 3. The third group is the "seething." (v.4)

- <sup>4</sup> Tremble, and do not sin;  
Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. *Selah*.

Whenever we're going through times of suffering or adversity, it is *easy* to be *so engaged* in our suffering that we stop *paying attention to what's going on in our heart* in the suffering. And often in our hearts, we are tempted to get angry. Angry at the inconvenience. Angry at the injustice. Angry at the misery caused and felt in life and to those around you.

When my older brother, Paul, passed away when I was 15, I was so overcome with grief that I could barely hold my head up to stop from drowning. But, while our family was heartbroken, the hidden questions of "why?" kept crashing up against my soul like waves in the ocean: "Why did Paul do this? Why, God, did you allow this? Why isn't everyone as upset as I am? Why are we pretending everything is okay? Why? Why? Why? Why?" And what I failed to see is that anger started to take over my mind, my emotions, my conversations, and my reactions. Sometimes it was cold-silence, and other times it was emotional outbursts. Like that silent killer called high blood pressure, anger is silently taking hold of your blood vessels and creating tension in your entire body and soul.

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from *The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life* by Dale Ralph Davis

David is speaking to people who are seething with anger. Perhaps you are *a wife* who vents her anger in cold rejection of her husband. Perhaps you are *a parent* who is always “barking” at the kids and irritated. Perhaps you are *the teenager* who cannot get what he or she wants and now you are indifferent. Perhaps you are *the husband or father* who drinks in private to kill the pain or screams in traffic. Whatever situation you are in, listen to David’s warning and counsel.

Admittedly, scholars take the word “**tremble**” in one of two ways.

**The first** is “*in your anger do not sin...*” The Apostle Paul picked this up from this very psalm and used it in Ephesians 4:26 to admonish Christians to “*BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*” In other words, not all anger is sin; God gets angry (*Ps.7:11; Ex.32:12; Rom.1:18*).

It is possible to be angry and not to sin, that is to feel and express a righteous and reasonable displeasure at wickedness without malice against anyone. But our affections have been *distorted*. Our reality is often *consumed with self-love*, and as one author put it, “instead of imitating God, we try to play God by assuming the right to draw the lines, defining what should and should not be.”<sup>4</sup>

This is why when Paul read Psalm 4:4 and applied it to Christians, he admonished us, “Don’t let your anger carry over into sinful acts; deal with it quickly at the early stage, while the sun is still up; and if you allow the sun to go down, you’re going to give the devil an opportunity to lead you into sin.”

This is why the ancient church listed “anger” as one of the seven deadly sins. Because anger isn’t merely a sin that causes chaos, it’s an emotion that is indicative of something deeper—something in the subconscious desires of the human heart.

**The second** way it can be translated is “tremble...” or *stand in awe of God and don’t sin*. Surely, sitting around the campfire are some pro-king, pro-David supporters who were “ticked off” at what was going on. Like supporters at a political rally that get carried away and take it too far, we face a danger too—if we don’t deal with anger the right way.

Question. When you are angry, and you have what you feel is a “legitimate” reason or cause to be so, how do you “be angry, but sin not?”

Answer. Primarily by focusing on the last verb in verse 4, “*Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.*” In other words, *be quiet. Keep your thoughts to yourself.*

Now, do you know how hard it is to be silent when in a trial? It is very hard because inside of you there is a complaint. And if we say that we believe in the sovereignty of God, listen, that *complaint* is not just against people and circumstances, that complaint is against God!

So, David says, *keep quiet. “Meditate in your heart upon your bed...”* Speak in your heart. He is not advocating *repression* or *denying your feelings* or rage. He is not giving us the Old Testament version of the “counting to ten” exercise. What happens when you reach eleven? He is instructing us that in times of adversity and pain, one of the godliest things you can do when you are irate about unjust

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<sup>4</sup> Marshall Segal, *Killjoys, the Seven Deadly Sins*, p.42

suffering is to KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT. No offense. Why? Because anger needs to be controlled in a proper fashion. That's the immediate thing to do, but that won't hold you very long.

So, in verse 5, an ongoing positive activity directing the...

#### 4. The fourth group is the "self-willed." (v.5)

- <sup>5</sup> Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,  
And trust in the LORD.

What are the sacrifices of righteousness? They are *righteous sacrifices* or those which involve an atonement for sin. Who offers the right kind of sacrifices which God approves? Those who "trust in the LORD" and who desire to worship Him in spirit and truth. In times of trial and adversity, the last thing your flesh wants to do is be around people who may not seem to really care about what's going on in your life. But come up close and listen, dear friend. It may not feel like the first thing to do, but *it is the best thing to do because worship is never sweeter, truer, and more God-honoring than when you're in a trial, and you worship God just because He's God.*

The Psalmist has rebuked *the slanderers, the self-deceived, the seething, the self-willed*, and now he speaks to one last group.

#### 5. The fifth group is the "short-sighted." (v.6a)

- <sup>6</sup> Many are saying, "Who will show us *any* good?"

This is the group that can't see any good in the circumstances at all. They are in the pit of discouragement. We can deny our tendency to be this way, but if we are honest, sometimes we feel this way too. It is the feeling of *despondency*. What good is it to follow David? What good will come to us? What is our future outcome with David?

David's response is impressive. I probably would have said, "*Hit the road Jack, and don't ya' come back no more, no more, no more, no more...*" But remember, David wrote this to lead a worship service. So, he draws a line from the benediction of Aaron in Number 6:24-26. He prays.

### C. David's Relief (vv.6b-8)—Joy and Peace

- Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us, O LORD!  
<sup>7</sup> You have put gladness in my heart,  
More than when their grain and new wine abound.  
<sup>8</sup> In peace I will both lie down and sleep,  
For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.

What do *you need* and what do *I need* in the skillet of affliction and the frying pan of pain? More than anything else, WE NEED TO SEE GOD. When a man's *back* was turned away from you that meant *you were not pleasing to him*. But when a man's *face* was turned toward you, and his eyes met yours, then you could safely assume that *you were pleasing to him*.

Trials are like mountains—they can block our view of God. Trials are like clouds—they obscure our sight of God. Trials are like caves—they can be lonely places to dwell. That's where some of you are now. Watch it now!

Something happens to David while writing this Psalm to minister to people. Before *his prayer changed his circumstances, it had already changed his heart*. And this lasting, sturdy, abiding joy which so filled his heart was *divine*, **‘You have put gladness...’** it was *internal*, **“in my heart,”** and it was *abundant*, **“more than when their grain and new wine abound.”** In other words, it was not only *divine*, *internal*, and *abundant*, it was also *independent*. It was *“more than when their grain and new wine abound.”*

Some people’s joy depends on their *kids’ happiness*, their *spouse’s words*, their *company’s paycheck*, or their *belly’s satisfaction*. But David was *favored with goodness*, *filled with joy*, and *flooded with peace*. He could go to sleep because Yahweh protected him. And this is the clincher: David came to understand something that we need to embrace while interacting and exegeting our painful circumstances, and that is this,

- For You alone, O LORD, make me to dwell in safety.

You alone. You alone. You alone. You alone. Only God can cause the fearful heart to know calm contentment in the fire of adversity.

## Conclusion:

It was an October night in 1555. It was to be Nicolas Ridley’s last night on earth. The next day would see him burned at the stake for his faith. But on that night before his execution his brother offered to stay with him in his last hours. But the bishop refused, saying, “I intend to go to bed and sleep as quietly as I ever did in my life.” How did you sleep last night? How are you sleeping these days?

David is not unlike you. He was tempted, he failed, he had a family, and he got down sometimes. Psalm 4 is like a finger pointing us to another King, who left His throne, faced the unthinkable, and died and ended up in a cave. The cave was a tomb. But this King, the Lord Jesus Christ, conquered that tomb, defeating sin, death, and the grave so that you and I could have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The grace we need in our suffering is the grace that only Jesus gives. But you must trust Him—Him alone. Have you placed your trust in Christ for your salvation?

Austin Duncan tells the story this way:

“I doubt you’ve ever spent the night in a chestnut tree. But John G. Patton did. His autobiography has been inspiring missionaries since he first penned it at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. John Patton was a Scotsman who became a missionary because he was so compelled by the distant voice of the pagans. He knew that there was a whole world that had yet to hear the Gospel and he heard that almost 200 years before his lifetime, the first missionaries to a distant set of islands known as the New Hebrides that two early missionaries were clubbed to death upon their arrival. It didn’t take much convincing for young Paton and his wife to prepare themselves for the mission field.

Upon leaving, an elder Scotsman warned him that those people that he was going to minister to were cannibals and he shouldn’t go because he was going to be eaten by cannibals. And John Paton expressed indifference by reminding the old man that he soon would be eaten by worms in the ground. And so, he went anyway.

Within a month or so of being in the New Hebrides, his wife and his infant daughter died. He buried them there. He was constantly hounded and threatened by these cannibals. Yet he continued to minister to them. One night in particular when the tribes were very agitated and seeking to kill him, a translator, that he wasn't sure if he could trust or not, told him to go hide in a tree or he would certainly be killed.

And so, he spent the night in a chestnut tree, and in his autobiography, he describes himself in words that we need to hear.

"I climbed into the tree and was left there alone in the bush. The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but yesterday. I heard the frequent discharge of muskets and the yells of the Savages. Yet I sat there among the branches as safe in the arms of Jesus. Never in all my sorrows, did my Lord draw nearer to me and speak more soothingly in my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among these chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend my nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship."<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes, it's in the darkest and most difficult predicament that we sense our God's sovereign presence.

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible: 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

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<sup>5</sup> Austin Duncan, Grace Pulpit, Sermon: *A Throne Makes the Best Anchor*, August 4, 2019