

Psalm 4

I was in trouble this time. Big trouble. I always thought myself to be a pretty good swimmer but this time I was out of my depths. I was clinging on with just one hand onto a rocky groove, my body horizontal. The current of the stream was too strong and it was trying to sweep me to the water fall edge. It wasn't even deep water, just below waist height. And here I was a young university student on a holiday/mission trip to Malaysia in big trouble. I had got caught out by the strong current and was at risk of being swept over the waterfall. Now it wasn't a big waterfall but I could still get hurt.

I managed to grasp a hand hold on a rock but the current was too strong. I couldn't get out of the current. My uni friends were close by. For some reason, I didn't scream or cry out. Who knows why not!? Perhaps fear... perhaps I didn't want to make a scene. Who knows!? You know how uni kids are.. rather die than make a scene!

So I called out to my friend. I needed help! Like now! My friend saw me, came up to me. And to my dismay, instead of being alarmed or getting others to help me. He looked at me, and like any good tourist on a mission trip, he pulled out his camera and took a picture of me.

I couldn't do anything. I couldn't save myself. I needed him to pull me out of danger to get me out of the water's current. With one hand gripping onto the rocky groove, and with my other I reached out and grabbed his hand and yes... he did finally put that camera down and pulled me out of the rip. I was in utter need of help. I called to him and he pulled me to safety.

Now have you experienced a situation where for the life of you, you couldn't free yourself. You need the help of someone else to set you free. It could be a sickness or chronic back pain or a problem with your child or even financial problem... this problem is so painful so overwhelming that you just can't get out. The waters are overwhelming and you feel you are slipping away under its crushing weight.

Friends, psalm 4 is a sure help for you and I. Psalms 4 is a psalm of david, it's a call of someone in deep trouble. Some people are out to get him. Verse 2 "O men" here is no ordinary men but men of rank or power who are turning against him. He is innocent. He has done no wrong but yet these men are out to get him. They are enemies with considerable power and resources. They are ruining his reputation, turning his honour into shame. They have a web of lies against him. David is under the pump, perhaps a noose is tightening around his neck. Perhaps rebellion in the ranks.

David experienced many trials and tribulations. He was up against a giant of a man Goliath. He was teenager at that time but was faced with a champion fighter. All he had was a sling and couple of stones. Talk about a mismatch. yet david slewed him and cut off his head.

David did all his master Saul wanted of him. He brought him victory after victory but King Saul, his boss was jealous of him. He wanted David dead. David was innocent. But Saul tried to kill him.

Finally, david's own son, Absalom, wanted to usurp him to become king. David had to flee from him to save his life. His son, his very flesh and blood wanted him dead. Imagine how you would feel if you were david. What anguish! Not only is your son against you, but he is out to kill you. His trusted "loyal" officials were plotting and conspiring against him.

We are not sure which story forms the backdrop for psalm 4 but you get the idea that david had a hard dangerous life and called on the Lord many times for help.

What can you do when tragedy strikes? What can you do when illness comes and doctors have no answer? What can you do when you are innocent and evil men want to harm you?

Psalm 4 teaches us 3 responses.

1/ the first response is to cry out to God for help. You don't need any fancy prayers. You don't need to close your eyes, bow your head or find the right words to ask for help. When you are drowning, you don't need to

spell out your distress. God knows. Matthew 6:8 says that “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Before you utter a single word of prayer, he already knows. Better than you understand yourself.

We only need to turn to him and he is already there waiting. “Help.” “Have mercy.” “God help me”
Our earnest prayers is all you need before God.

Verse 1 is better translated “answer me when I call to you, O God of my righteousness” (rather than “my righteous God” of the NIV).

God of MY righteousness. It is not because I earned it that I can come before God. It’s not because I helped my sick neighbour or gave to charity or shock horror washed the dishes 2 days in a row that I earned enough karma to be right with God, to get his help.

No! God is the one who makes us right with him. It is his righteousness that puts me in right relationship with him. So that I can talk to him and ask for help. He prepares “a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” He anoints “my head with oil” NIV Psalm 23:5.

How great and gracious is our God that he makes us right with him. He hears our prayer when we call and only him alone gives us relief in our distress. When we hit rock bottom, when we have exhausted all our resources to fix our problems, when we are on our knees in despair, we learn to come to the end of ourselves. We realise how weak we are.

JUB 1 peter 1:24 “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away.” When we are brought to our knees, we realise how dependent we are of our Father in heaven.

The 2nd response we learn from psalm 4 is how to respond when we are persecuted by other people.

In April this year, (CNN Doug Chris) in the USA, a 74 yo gentleman Robert Gowin Sr, was walking home after having Easter meal with his family. A stranger came up to him on the street and after talking to him, shot him dead. This story was famous because the killer uploaded the slaying onto Facebook. But what was most remarkable was the daughter of the victim’s reply to the situation.

The killer was on the loose and they interviewed the dead man’s daughter. What would you say? Hunt him down? Kill him please!? What ever you do, don’t let him escape?

Yet his daughter said she would forgive the killer. Her dad taught her to forgive and she quoted Jesus words “they know not what they do.”

Her words were “the thing that I would take away the most from my father is he taught us about God, how to fear God, how to love God and how to forgive.” (Huffingtonpost.com.au)

When someone’s wronged you, hurt you, it’s inevitable you will find yourself thinking angry thoughts against them. I know I have. I learned over the years that forgiveness help me. Helps the anger from engulfing me and overwhelming me. Prayer helps us work through our anger. There is no mention of David forgiving his detractors in psalm 4 but it records him praying about or for them. It’s a start and it takes us on the road to recovery. We learn 3 practical things here when praying about our enemies.

The first is know your secure position in Christ. V3 “know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself” NIV. God has chosen us as his. We belong to him. We are children of the most high God. Nothing can happen to us beyond what he allows. Even when faced with enemies who are in position of power, we can trust that God is in a higher position, in complete control. Scripture tells us that even the hair on our heads are numbered. That’s how much he cares for us. Luke 12:7 “fear not therefore, Ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

The second thing to do is we pray about and for our enemies. Pray that they don’t hurt us. That’s very useful and powerful. V4 NIV “tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.” David is referring here to his enemies.

Like the psalmist we ask and pray that our enemies just be angry and stay on their beds and be silent. You guys just be angry. You guys just stew in your anger in your bed but don't act against me. Don't harm me. We can ask God to help restrain evil doers so that they do not act on their evil desires. God is that powerful. Although, sometimes he allows bad things to happen in his sovereignty.

The third thing, in v5, pray for them that they get right with the Lord. Let them put their trust in the Lord. Pray that God will soften their hearts, turn from their evil ways and trust in God.

So, to respond to your enemy: know that you are secure in the almighty God, pray for your enemy that he will not hurt you and pray also for them that they might get right with God.

Now to the third and final response, is to simply hold on to the Lord when you begin to doubt. We need to hold on to God's personal word to us when we in pain, in doubt, in utter distress. For it's then we are most vulnerable to being led astray. Our enemies can be people who are just out to get us but many a time, we are our own worst enemy. It only takes a little whisper of doubt to plant that seed in us. Is it all worth it? Is God even real? Does he care about me? How can he even help me in my distress? Can he?

In verse 6, many are telling David... "who will bring us prosperity?" And again in v7, although it doesn't exactly say, they may be taunting David that they abound in wine and grain.... People are sowing doubt in his mind. Whose gonna give us something good? Where is the good?

So what do we do when we doubt or when others are taunting us? Friends we hold on to the word. God gives his word to help us and he reminds us about God's words in the bible through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is able to make the Word of God alive to us. Real to us as he personalises it for our own particular trouble and hurt.

You know the verse 6 it says "let the light of your face shine on us" is actually the benediction from numbers 6 that sometimes we hear at the end of the service.

Numbers 6:24-26 NASB

The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.

This is a benediction that David probably heard hundreds of times before in worship services. But this time, in his prayer to God for mercy, he remembers it and personalises it. God is able to personalise his word to help David. You know how sometimes we read the same things over in the bible but then suddenly wham! The verse that you always knew takes on new significance as God reveals it to you.

Friends, we need to hear God's word afresh for us in our particular situation. The Lord is able to personalise and tailor his Word for us. We need to be receptive to the Lord. We need to come to him in prayer and expectation that he will speak to us. That he will give us a word for me. For my specific situation or problem. He is my peace. He is the real giver of joy in my heart no matter what circumstance I am in.

A bit more than a year ago, my father died. He had heart trouble but he didn't know and neither did his doctors. By the time it came to light. His life was hanging by a thread. Only 1 small artery was supplying his heart. That was all that was left. How he was still alive was remarkable.

My dad suffered a cardiac arrest, a complication after surgery. They were resuscitating him. He was in Melbourne and I was in Sydney then. I went to my room and picked up my bible and read from psalms. I read from psalm 16, a psalm of David too. Psalm 16:9 read "therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoice so my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay..." I took that as a sign that my father would live. Almost immediately after, the phone rang and I got the news. My father had pulled through. It was through these brushes with death, that my dad's spiritual heart was softened and he returned to the Lord. He died some months later but he was secure in his salvation. God knows what is in our heart before we even call and has the best possible solution for us.

There is nothing that compares with our Lord. He answers when we call when we are in distress. He has chosen us and made us right with him. There is nothing we need to do to make him listen. He is waiting, ready , willing to answer. Nothing happened that took God by surprise. He knew us before we were born. He knows what we are going through now. God is in control and he is our Father. Therefore, we have peace in him. He fills us with joy better than anything else. Indeed, the steadfast love our Lord never ceases. His mercies are new every morning. Great is his faithfulness.

Let's pray. Dear Lord, only you know what pain and suffering each of us go through. But before we come to you, you already know what we need. Please Lord, have mercy on us. Give us your grace and words each day to help us. Lift up your countenance upon us and give us your peace that we may sleep, resting secure in the shadow of the Almighty. Amen.