

# Pursuing Peace in Present Pain (Psalm 4)

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 22 June 2025

Preacher: Evan Alexander

[0:00] Amen, amen. Children, at this time you are dismissed for Children's Church.! It's a tiring week.

I can speak for my children at least when they finally got home and settled down. Now, they slept pretty well after a few hours straight of running and dancing and trying their best to pay attention during lessons.

And some of you volunteers likely went home and some of you may have crashed due to physical exhaustion from corralling them from place to place and trying to keep up with the motions of the songs. And it's just, it's a tiring week, right?

But some of you perhaps didn't sleep quite as easy. There are times in our lives where we lay awake at night, unable to drift off into peaceful slumber.

I know when I was young, many, many, many years ago, right? When I was young, the excitement of leaving for a mission trip or a youth camp would often keep me awake with some blissful anticipation of what was to come the following week.

[1:16] Or maybe it was the nerves of starting a new grade in school with a new class, a new teacher. New chapters of life seemed to add to the anxieties and worry would start to preoccupy in my mind as life has developed over the years.

These anxieties that sometimes keep me awake have grown more complex. Pervasive thoughts about ministry, just whether or not I'm doing my best. Thoughts about my family, intrusive thoughts about parenting and marriage, replaying every shortcoming I seem to have and the relationships I hold most important and that are the closest to me.

Then there are the parasitic thoughts about life circumstances, finances, health, loss, and what is to come, whether it's scrolling through bank statements or scrolling through test results on my chart.

There just seems to be an ever-growing list of things that are there to keep me awake at night. Present pain that causes my mind to not rest well.

And that can seem a little uncomfortable to admit in a church setting, right? We put on our Sunday best, we gather together, we say that we're blessed and highly favored, and then we go home to our problems to deal with them ourselves.

[2:23] And we're tempted to deal with them ourselves. But I want to challenge myself and each of us today that when it comes to pursuing peace in present pain, that's something we as a church are called to do together, to pursue peace in present pain together.

If you have your Bibles, we'll be in Psalm chapter 4 this morning, the fourth Psalm. Last week, Pastor Brett led us through Psalm 3, which was a personal Psalm of David to comfort him during a time of just a fractured family dynamic.

Well, Psalm 4 is believed by some to be written in a very similar context, although that's not known. And it really doesn't change the meaning of the message, if you think about it, of what David was going through, because it's very pertinent for us today.

Psalm 4 is a psalm to the choir master. I mean, this is a psalm not meant to comfort David personally. It's one for the nation of Israel to sing together in corporate worship.

Writing on a different yet similar psalm, there's a pastor named Ligon Duncan who gives a helpful perspective for us to keep in mind as we navigate this text together. He writes, friend, your life may be filled with far more suffering than my own, but Scripture teaches that your troubles don't belong to you alone.

[3:37] God placed psalms of lament like this one in Scripture so that we could all learn how to cry out to the Lord in our sadness and our grief together. Psalms like this one teach us to share in one another's suffering and to bear one another's burdens.

So how does David teach us to pursue peace in present pain, and how do we do that together? Well, let's turn our attention to Psalm 4. To the choir master with stringed instruments, a psalm of David.

He writes in verse 1, answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness. You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. O men, how long shall my honor be turned to shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Say, La. But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

Be angry and do not sin. Ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent. Say, La. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

[ 4 : 38 ] There are many who say, who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. I love this if you want to underline it. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

In peace I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. So when it comes to pursuing peace in present pain, one of the first things we see in this passage is that, David, it reminds us to pray with bold assurance.

To pray with bold assurance. He writes, answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness. The audacity that David expresses here in addressing the creator God in such a manner.

Who are we to think that an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present, never-changing God would care about us? Yet David addresses him and says, answer me, O God of my righteousness.

The reason he cares about us is because he's not just a God. He's my God. He's the God of my righteousness. Charles Spurgeon explains David's use of this name.

[ 5 : 44 ] He writes, it means, thou art the author, the witness, the maintainer, the judge, the rewarder of my righteousness. To you I appeal from the calamities and harsh judgments of men. Here in his wisdom let us imitate it and always take our suit not to the petty courts of human opinion, but to the superior court, the king's bench of heaven.

You see, our status before God is not grounded in our own righteousness, our own ability to approach the throne of God. Instead, it's grounded in the warm welcome of our God.

The God of our righteousness that has torn the veil and welcomed us in by the blood of his lamb. And we see this welcome expressed in passages like Hebrews 4, 15 and 16 where the author of Hebrews writes, for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us.

So Jesus understands our weaknesses. He writes, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. And based on that, he further writes in verse 16, Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So when the pain and pressure of life starts to push our backs against the wall, when it seems as though it's too much for us to handle, God is reminding us through this passage here that we must first pray with bold assurance.

[ 7 : 08 ] Prayer is important. We pray bold prayers because God genuinely cares for us. Now, we often fail to pray, right? We often fail to pray for many reasons.

We fail to pray because we tend to think that our struggles are beneath God. Or that they're our own doing, so there are problems to fix. But friends, the whole point of the gospel is that we weren't able to fix the depths of our sorrows by our own.

We needed Jesus. Prayer is not some last-ditch effort for when nothing else seems to work. Prayer must be the very essence of our relationships with the Almighty God.

Prayer is necessary. Looking here, David's anticipation for an answer, answer me, O God, is dependent on the fact that he's already called. He's already gone before him.

So the boldness of David's prayer life is grounded in the very character of God, the attributes that he knows of him. And God has consistently shown a care and compassion for his children.

[ 8 : 11 ] And David isn't praying to some unknown God. He's praying to the God of his righteousness. And he further prays, You have given me relief when I was in distress.

So be gracious to me and hear my prayer. David is relying on God's prior faithfulness as the foundation for his request with his present pain. God has been faithful, so I trust that he'll be faithful again.

And we see this reality all the more present in the rest of this psalm, where David continually refers to him as Lord, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, which means that he was calling out to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of Joseph, the God of the Israelites.

The God who had consistently provided for his people and protected them from their enemies and provided for their needs. Now, this morning, I'm not all-knowing. I don't pretend to know everything that's going on in each of your lives.

But I do know personally the reality of what many preachers before me have said. And that is that you're either coming out of a storm, presently in a storm, or a storm's on its way.

[ 9 : 21 ] So when the clouds start to get dark above us, and the pain seems all the more present, I've got to ask, have you prayed about it? Have you gone before your heavenly Father with a bold assurance that he cares, and that he alone is able to provide an answer in his time?

So we pray with bold assurance, but further, we also must ponder the condition of our hearts. Look at this in verses 2 through 3. O men, he's addressing some other people here. O men, how long shall my honor be turned to shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah. But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

Here, David's addressing some of his enemies, perhaps some of the same enemies from Psalm chapter 3. These are some noble men who are using David's current circumstances as an excuse to tarnish his reputation, to attack him and his status before others, to shame him.

His fear is no longer physical dangers, it's his reputation that's at stake. And it's in this that David responds to these men with a reminder probably for himself, God has set me apart for himself.

[ 10 : 35 ] He will answer my call. He will answer when I call to him. David's confidence of God's character and care is carrying over into, give him a confidence before his enemies that are oppressing him.

And he then further writes in verse 4, Be angry and do not sin. Ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent. Selah. Now there are a couple of ways that be angry is translated from the Hebrew to the English.

And thinking about that kind of gives us a little bit of context for what David's intentionally meaning here. This phrase, be angry, can also be translated as to tremble. Now think about the heavy emotions that we feel that cause us to tremble.

It's usually used in context of anger, but it could just be any heavy emotions that we feel. Think about this, have you ever been so angry that you just started to shake? That's what he means here, be angry.

That trembling emotion, the uncontrollable emotions that are there. And often, often, we struggle in two ways primarily with our emotions, right? First, often, we fail to go before God with our actual real needs.

[ 11 : 43 ] We pretty it up. We clean it up in our prayers. We start to hide the real emotions and the real issues, and we fail to take our actual problems to the Lord.

But secondly, our emotions often cause us to sin. They cause us to sin. We start to store up hatred in our hearts that Jesus Christ says is the same as murder.

We start to store up bitterness, anxiety, grief. And each of these things, we store up these emotions, and our grief gets to the point where our hearts are no longer set on the purposes to which God has already set us apart.

In this, our emotions sometimes lead us to sin. And so David instructs his enemies, and I believe he instructs the people of God that would be singing this together. He writes, Ponder, think on, dwell on, search your own heart on your beds, and be silent.

So have you prayed about it? But what's the condition of your heart this morning? What's the condition of your heart and the pain that is present for you? When it looks at this, like, God says it's okay to feel emotion.

[ 12 : 54 ] It's okay to be angry even, but don't let it infect you to the point where your anger and your emotions calls you to sinful disobedience to the God of your righteousness.

We often do everything we can to avoid this task, right? We try to fill the silence. When we got married, my wife, she was used to sleeping with a box fan. So, nearly wed couple, my first task was to get used to sleeping with a big old box fan that would be a sound machine and keep us freezing

all night long.

We couldn't sit in silence had to have a big old box fan. Well, we do that in every aspect of our life, right? We drown out the noise. We distract ourselves with entertainment.

We distract ourselves with sinful pursuits. I was talking with Josh Lorenz, our youth pastor, just the other day about the genuine need that students have to retreat and get away from their distractions and even technology sometimes because it's only sometimes when we separate ourselves from the noise and the distractions that we can genuinely feel our need for God.

And that's a problem not just for students, that's a problem for many of us. We don't let ourselves sit and think on it. We distract ourselves to numb the present pain.

[14:08] It said 89.2%, almost 90% of people scroll on their phones before going to sleep. We don't want to be left alone with our thoughts. We don't want to sit there and dwell on things. So we scroll, we try to distract ourselves and often we drown out all the noise to the point where we drown out the very voice of God that we're hoping and praying for.

Ponder in your hearts, on your beds and be silent. It may just be in the quiet contemplation of the condition of our hearts that you begin to hear the answer from God that you've been desperately wanting to hear.

Pray with bold assurance. Ponder the condition of your heart. Further, put your trust in the Lord. Verses 5-7, he writes this. Offer the right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord.

There are many who say who will show us some good. Lift up your face upon us, O Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. Looking at this passage here, he says, offer right sacrifices, put your trust in the Lord.

You see, the trembling emotions of verse 4 also bear the context of trembling and standing in awe of the presence of God. Which carries over into verse 5 here, offer right sacrifices in the presence of God himself.

[15:30] How we live, how we move forward in our pain matters. How we live and how we move forward in our pain matters. It's one thing to take our request to God.

It's another thing entirely to trust him with it. Put your trust in the Lord. These enemies that David is addressing, if in the ponderings of their heart, come to the conclusion that they either do not know God or are distant from God, David instructs them of how to get back to God or to him in the first place.

Offer right sacrifices, put your trust in the Lord. And that's always been the way. Throughout all the scripture, that's always been the way. In the Old Testament, under the Old Covenant, certain sacrifices were necessary for sin to be covered and for God's people to be right with him.

And while those sacrifices were absolutely necessary and they were strict guidelines for those to be done reverently and appropriately and correctly, the heart behind the sacrifice was always important.

The heart behind the sacrifice was always to be one of trusting in the Lord. Consider Abraham a pillar of a figure in the book of Genesis. It wasn't his grand use of sacrifices that brought him into the good pleasures of God.

[16:45] It was that he believed. It was that he trusted. It was that he had confidence in God Almighty. Notice this in Genesis 15, 6. It writes, And he, Abram, believed the Lord.

And he, God, counted it to him as righteousness. He believed. He didn't just know facts about God. He knew God's character and he had confidence in his faithfulness.

He trusted in the Lord and he was counted as righteous. He was brought into the family of God. Under the new covenant, in the New Testament, however, what we see in the New Testament is that the ultimate sacrifice has already been given.

It's already been done. The blood that has been shed by Jesus Christ has already taken place so that by his stripes we may be healed. By his blood, we may be forgiven. Through his death, we might have life.

Romans 10, 9, that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. There's no further sacrifice necessary to bring us into salvation.

[17:53] Christ's work on the cross is finished work. But all too often, we attempt to sacrifice the wrong thing to fix our pain. Friends, it doesn't work.

We sacrifice and spend more hours at work to put more money in the bank and give us comfort, but friends, that doesn't fix our pain. We sacrifice our morals to gain status with others and favor with others, but that doesn't fix our pain.

There are many who will abandon their responsibilities, abandon their families even, trying to seek some peace, but that doesn't fix our pain. Unless we turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in his wonderful face, we'll find no other substitute that can fix our pain.

Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. The Apostle Paul shows us what this practically looks like in Romans 12, 1 and 2 where he writes, I appeal to you, therefore, I beg of you, I ask of you, brothers, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

So as we trust in the right sacrifice, Jesus, by the mercies of God, we further live our lives as a living sacrifice, set apart, holy and acceptable to God in spiritual worship.

[ 19 : 25 ] Now, I'm gonna be honest, worship in the midst of our pain seems a bit counterintuitive. It's hard. I'm reminded by the story of Robertson McQuilkin.

He was the president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary for 22 years. He'd served alongside his wife, Muriel, for 12 years in Japan as missionaries. Well, long story short, Muriel, his wife, began to show signs of Alzheimer's and he eventually left the role of president at a seminary to care for his wife full time.

That's a story he writes about in his book, A Promise Kept, which I strongly encourage anyone who's married or looking to be married or is responsible for the long-term care of a loved one. It's an incredible book. But as he's writing about the love that he has for his wife, Muriel, he also reminds the readers consistently of God's love for each of us.

And he uses this phrase in one part. He writes, the heavy heart lifts on the wings of praise. You see, worship in the midst of our pain seems like the last thing that's easy to do, but it's often in putting our trust in the Lord and worshiping him in the midst of our pain.

Often that's the only way for our heavy hearts to be lifted once again. Put your trust in the Lord. The goodness of God's presence and the joy found in the Lord are unlike anything else this world can provide or offer.

[ 20 : 50 ] You see, even in our deepest and darkest moments, God gives us a joy that surpasses the temporary fleeting relief that we could find through any earthly measure. Verse seven, I love this.

You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. So David reminds us to pray with bold assurance.

Ponder the condition of our hearts. Put your trust in the Lord. And finally, at the end of it all, he tells us to peacefully lie down and sleep.

Verse eight, in peace. I will both lie down and sleep. For you alone, oh Lord, make me dwell in safety. Now it's one thing to lie down, right?

But it's another thing to lie down and go to sleep. And he's saying that he can do both of those because God is his great comforter. Charles Spurgeon comments on this truth writing that a good conscience is a good bedfellow.

[ 21 : 51 ] How many of our sleepless hours might be traced to our untrusting and disordered minds? They slumber sweetly whom faith rocks to sleep. No pillow so soft as a promise, no coverlet as warm as an assured interest in Christ.

David tells his enemies, look, you guys need to sit in your bed and think about your life for a little bit. But he tells himself, in peace, I will lie down and sleep.

I will rest in the consistent and faithful care of the God of my righteousness. This calm assurance of our position with God in Christ can comfort even the most broken aspect of our lives.

Now this does not discount our distress. This does not treat lightly our pain. Instead, it just uplifts and reminds us of the great love that God has demonstrated through the ultimate sacrifice for our sin and pain.

Enduring that very pain upon himself on a sinner's cross so that peace may be possible for us in the presence of pain. Russell Moore comments on his book The Storm Tossed Family.

[ 22 : 59 ] He writes, you can grieve over your past but you cannot change it. You can also, though, know that while you may be shaped by your past, you are not defined by it.

Whoever has hurt you has really hurt you but they have not defeated you. You have survived. Your life is hidden in Christ. Your future is not that of a victim but as a joint heir with Christ.

So this morning if you are a son or a daughter of the Most High God, you can both lie down and sleep knowing that he will answer in due time and that whatever evils or shame this world may throw your way, you can find peaceful slumber.

Why? Because you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. See, my trust, my confidence, my peace, my joy, my rest, even my sleep is found in God alone and when we turn our face to him, it makes all the difference.

This past week, as Miss Savannah mentioned, our theme verse for VBS was Psalm 16, 8. It said, I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand I will not be shaken. So this morning, I may not know what may keep you up at night but in every situation of our life, in every pursuit of our being, the pursuit of peace looks the same.

[ 24 : 25 ] I love how a pastor posted it the other day. He wrote, Dear Christians, in times of peace, Christ. In times of trouble, Christ. In every storm, Christ. When days are long, Christ.

When nights are longer, Christ. In all of life, Christ. In final breath, Christ. For all eternity, Christ. Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ.

It may be a little more familiar for some of you. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory.

and his grace. Friends, this morning, perhaps you're tired. Tired of being anxious, tired of feeling stress, tired of present pain.

Psalm 4 is a psalm of the meant, meant to be sung by the church so that we can join together, lift one another up, fix our gaze together on God, and by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, find peace in him alone.

[ 25 : 25 ] We're going to sing a verse of invitation as we close this morning. And if you've never placed your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, then that's where we start. That's your only application if that's where you're at. All week long at Vacation Bible School, I encourage students to respond to the gospel with the ABCs.

Admit that you're a sinner, believe in Jesus Christ, and confess him as Lord, committing your life to him. So this morning, if you've never placed your trust in Christ, that's where we start. But for the rest of us, if you have placed your trust in the Lord, you can pursue peace in present pain because the God of our righteousness, the God of our righteousness gives us everlasting joy and peace, even rest in him.

Let's pray. Father, we love you so much. Thank you for this day that you've given us. Lord, I pray that as we think on these things, Lord, may we just come before you as ourselves. May you help us to bring our problems, our distress to you because, Lord, you're the only hope we have.

Lord, may you protect us and guide us, and Lord, may we repent of the ways in which we've sought things that only you can provide through other means. So, Lord, today, as we respond, as we close, Lord, I pray that if there's anyone that needs to give their life to you, they may do so during this time. But, Lord, also, for each of us, may you help us to put our faith, our confidence, our ultimate trust in you alone. And may we rest each and every day because you, O Lord, are the God of our righteousness.

[ 26 : 59 ] We have nothing else apart from you. Lord, we love you. Bless this time of response. In your name we pray. Amen. At this time, I'm gonna stand here at the front as Clay sings and leads us in a song. If you will stand with us today as we sing, if there's any need on your heart, if you wanna speak to me or I'm here now and also after the service, if you wanna give your life to Christ, if you wanna join the church, now's the time to respond.

But let's sing together and worship. Let's sing together Let's sing together Let's sing together Let's sing together Let's sing together Let's sing together Let's sing together and worship. Let's sing together Let's sing together and worship. Let's sing together and worship together and worship together