

COPING WITH CHAOS  
Psalm 4  
ALDERWOOD COMMUNITY CHURCH  
S062710  
[cf. S041397]

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 4:1** *A psalm of David. 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.* <sup>2</sup> *How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? [BETTER, *lies*]* *Selah* <sup>3</sup> *Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD will hear **when I call to him**.* <sup>4</sup> *In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, **search your hearts** and be silent.* *Selah* <sup>5</sup> *Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD.* <sup>6</sup> *Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.* <sup>7</sup> *You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.* <sup>8</sup> *I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

**BIG IDEA: THERE IS A BIBLICAL PATHWAY TO INNER PEACE.**

INTRODUCTION:

- One man said, “When I started out in life, I resolved to hit a home run every time I came to bat. Now I’m in the seventh inning, and all I want to do is get through the game without getting beamed.”
- **Marilyn Monroe** took her own life in depression. In an interview she said, “*If I can realize certain things in my work, I come the closest to being happy. But it only happens in moments. I’m not just generally happy. If I’m generally anything, I guess I’m generally miserable.*”
- Can you identify with voices of discouragement and despression? If you can’t, give it a few days or months. Sooner or later something unforeseen will happen and you too will be fighting for air. It’s just the nature of life on this stubborn planet that is no friend the soul. Bad things happen to good people.
- “*Martin Luther was subject to such fits of darkness that he would secret himself away for days, and his family would remove all dangerous implements from the house for fear he would harm himself. In the midst of one of these times, his wife, Katherine, entered his room dressed in mourning. Startled, Luther asked who had died. She replied that no one had, but from the way he was acting, she thought God had died!*” (Kent and Barbara Hughes, Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome, Tyndale, 1988, pp. 143-44)
- In Psalm 23 we read about the green pastures and the quiet waters, but here in Psalm 4 we stagger with David into the desert of distress. Talk about everything looking down! Yesterday David was in command of the palace. In a completely unexpected turn of events, his son Absalom had launched a coup. He had stolen the hearts of many of the most powerful and influential politicians and military leaders in the country. He was determined to seal his bid for power by putting his dad to death. So David packed his bags, grabbed those still loyal to him and hightailed it east out of Jerusalem, running for his life. In less than 24 hours David had fallen from king to fugitive, from respect to shame, from palace to tent, from gold to dust.
- And we get to read his prayer.
- As we do, I want us to learn how to cope with chaos—How to find God’s peace when nothing in our circumstances breeds peace.
- Here is the prayer acrostic we’ve been studying the past several months:  
Adoration  
Confession  
Thanksgiving  
Supplication
  - Intercession=Praying on the behalf of others
  - Petition=Praying for myself—***This is what we are addressing today.***
- **Here are three Tarilmarkers on the biblical pathway to inner peace...**

I. THE FIRST TRAIL-MARKER IS “ASK!”. Verse 1, when I call to you. Verse 3, when I call to him. Verse 8, I will lie down and sleep in peace...

- You would think that praying would be the easiest thing in the world to do. You don't even have to open your mouth to ask God for help. You can just **think** to him. You can pray without moving a muscle.
- But I happen to know that calling on God when in trouble is not always easy and it's not always instinctively the first thing people do, including Christians.
- That must be why the Bible has **commands** about praying:
  - **I Thessalonians 5:17** “pray continually”
  - **Philippians 4:6** “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”
  - **James 1:5** “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God”
- **F. B. Meyer:** *The greatest tragedy in life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer.*

A. Ask Because He Is Righteous-- O my righteous God (v. 1)

- Biblical definition of “righteousness”—That God always does what is right. Because he IS right. He is the unwavering embodiment or rightness.
- **SPURGEON:** *I cannot imagine any one of you tantalizing your child by exciting in him a desire that you did not intend to gratify. It were a very ungenerous thing to offer alms to the poor, and then when they hold out their hand for it, to mock their poverty with a denial. It were a cruel addition to the miseries of the sick if they were taken to the hospital and there left to die untended and uncared for. Where God leads you to pray, He means for you to receive.*<sup>1</sup>

B. Ask Because He Is Capable-- Give me relief (v. 1)

- Cf. **verse 8**, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.
- **JOHN PIPER:** *says that a prayerless Christian is like a bus driver trying to push his bus out of a rut by himself because he doesn't know that Clark Kent is on board. If he knew, he would ask.*<sup>2</sup>

C. Ask Because He Is Merciful-- Be merciful to me (v. 1)

- **Psalm 65:2**, O you who hear prayer...
- **James 4:2** You do not have, because you do not ask God.
- Spurgeon: *"The other evening I was riding home after a day's work; I felt very wearied and sore depressed, when swiftly, and suddenly as a lightning flash, that text came to me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee.' I reached home and looked it up in the original, and at last it came to me in this way, 'MY grace is sufficient for THEE,' and I said, 'I should think it is, Lord,' and burst out laughing. I never fully understood what the holy laughter of Abraham was until then. It seemed to make unbelief so absurd. It was as though some little fish, being very thirsty, was troubled about drinking the river dry, and Father Thames said: 'Drink away, little fish; my stream is sufficient for thee.' Or it seemed like a little mouse in the granaries of Egypt, after the seven years of plenty, fearing it might die of famine. Joseph might say: 'Cheer up, little mouse; my granaries are sufficient for thee.' Again I imagined a man away up yonder in a lofty mountain, saying to himself: 'I breathe so many cubic feet of air every year I fear I shall exhaust the oxygen in the atmosphere.' But the earth might say: 'Breathe away, O man, and fill thy lungs ever; my atmosphere is sufficient for thee.' O brethren, be great believers! Such faith will bring your souls to heaven and heaven to your souls."*

II. THE SECOND TRAIL-MARKER IS “RISK!” Verse 1, Give me relief from my **distress**.

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “Thought-Reading Extraordinary,” *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1885; reprint, Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1973), vol. 30, pages 539-540.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986), 41.

- Some risk happens to us just because of the uncertainty of life. Your spouse moves out on you. Your boss calls you and tells you job is eliminated...
  - Other risk comes when we decide to stick our necks out for God. When we say, *Dear God, let's do an adventure together!* When we seek to answer the question: *What is going on in your life that can only be explained by the power of God?!*
  - **YANCEY:** *The very word prayer comes from the Latin root precarious—a linguistic cousin to precarious.*<sup>3</sup>
    - So I looked up "**precarious**" in my dictionary=1. *Dependent on circumstances beyond one's control; uncertain.* 2. *Dangerous because insecure or unsteady.* 3. *Based upon uncertain evidence.* 4. *Dependent on the will of another.*
- A. Risk Because It Glorifies God-- *How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?* (v. 2)
- E.g., Paul asking 3 times—*My power is made perfect in weakness.* [**II Corinthians, 12:9**, *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect **in weakness**." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*]
    - If you were sick and you had a choice, would you prefer to be made 1) healthy, OR 2) in your sickness be made a better vehicle for the display of God's power???
  - *What is something you would like to believe God for, but you think is just impossible*" (Question in a small-group Bible study in a pastors home, related by **Dennis Rainey**, *The Tribute*, Thomas Nelson, Publishers, Nashville, 18)
  - **Eileen Guder** wrote in the book titled, **God, But I'm Bored**: "You can live on bland food so as to avoid an ulcer; drink no tea or coffee or other stimulants, in the name of health; go to bed early and stay away from night life; avoid all controversial subjects so as never to give offense; mind your own business and avoid involvement in other people's problems; spend money only on necessities and save all you can. You can still break your neck in the bathtub, and it will serve you right."
  - **Jim Cymbala**: *I have discovered an astonishing truth: God is attracted to weaknesses. He can't resist those who humbly and honestly admit how desperately they need Him.*
  - I pray every time I eat. That was engrained in me from my childhood. Jesus did it when He prepared to eat. Now I could just pray one prayer: "*God thank for all the food I will eat the rest of my life and please bless all that food, Amen.*" Wouldn't that be more efficient? Think of all the time I'd save. If I prayed for a **quarter minute** three times a day for a 70 year life span, I could add **13 days** of useful time to my life by a one-time prayer! But what would I lose? I would the regular reminder of my creaturely dependence upon God. When I am distressed, I need to pray a lot about it because every prayer reminds me of my dependence on God.
  - Does God hear the prayers of unbelievers? **God listens to the godly**
    - **Robert Fulghum** visited a Buddhist Temple near Tokyo. In it was a huge case containing Buddhist scriptures mounted on a base with spokes, like a turnstile, which turns. When you visit this temple you are supposed to push hard on the heavy wheel and give it one revolution. Then you ring a bell so the gods will notice what you've done. "*Afterward, you write your troubles on a piece of paper, fold the paper, and leave it hanging on a wood-and-bamboo fence. In time the rain and wind and sun will dispose of your page of troubles.*" He calls this "*a touching base with elemental needs. A finite gesture toward infinite concerns.*" (Uh-Oh, Villard Book, 1991, p.122)
    - I don't think so. God doesn't hear all prayers. The one reason David was convinced that God would hear him was that he was a **godly man**. That didn't mean David was perfect, but it does mean that the characteristic of

<sup>3</sup> Philip Yancey, *Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 13.

his life was that he was seeking after God and trying to please Him. If someone had interviewed a man on the street in Jerusalem and asked, what will you most remember David for, David would have wanted that man to say, “Well, he did a lot of things, but if you want the most important characteristic I guess I would have to say that it was in His love for God.”

- **God listens to those who trust in Him. Verse 5,** “...and trust in the LORD.”
  - **James 1:6** “But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.”

B. Risk Because It Grows Us-- *You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.* <sup>8</sup> *I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.* (vv. 7-8)

1. Both Now

- **Martin Luther:** *Except under troubles, trials, and vexations, prayer cannot be rightly made. God says: “Call on me in the time of trouble;” without trouble it is only a bald prattling, and not from the heart; ‘tis a common saying: “Need teaches us to pray.” (The Table Talks of Martin Luther)*
- Once I prayed desperately for a new job... I hated where I was... And it was several years before God answered my prayer. But in God’s “better timing”...
  - I learned a lot about patience and discipline.,
  - God taught me deep lessons about His always goodness to me.
  - And later I discovered that God was working to reassign another pastor and that created the good opening for which I was praying. God wasn’t just moving me; he was moving two pastors.
- **JONATHAN AIKEN:** *Trusting in God does not, except in illusory religion, mean that he will ensure that none of the things you are afraid of will ever happen to you. On the contrary, it means that whatever you fear is quite likely to happen, but with God’s help it will in the end turn out to be nothing to be afraid of.*<sup>4</sup>
- *Some time ago, I took my family to the bicycle store to purchase a bike for five-year-old Jenna. She picked out a shiny “Starlett” with a banana seat and training wheels. And Andrea, age three, decided she wanted one as well.*

*I explained to Andrea that she was too young. I told her she was still having trouble with a tricycle and was too small for a two-wheeler. No luck; she still wanted a bike. I explained to her that when she was a bit older, she would get a bike, too. She just stared at me. I tried to tell her that a big bike would bring her more pain than pleasure, more scrapes than thrills. She turned her head and said nothing.*

*Finally I sighed and said that this time her daddy knew best. Her response? She screamed it loud enough for everyone in the store to hear: “Then I want a new daddy!” (Max Lucado, *The Applause of Heaven*, 1990, 163-164)*
- Well, how long do I have to grow??? Comedian **Bill Dana** tells this story: *An America tourist is in Jerusalem. He’s lost, so he goes up to someone and asks, “Sir, could you tell me how long it would take me to walk to the Wailing Wall?” No answer. Again he asks, and again no response. So he starts to walk away and the man says, “Twenty-one minutes.” So he says,*

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<sup>4</sup> Yancey, 210.

“Well, thanks, but why didn’t you tell me that before?” “I didn’t know how fast you walked.”

- One of Henri Nouwen’s spiritual directors once prayed over him: **“May all your expectations be frustrated. May all your plans be thwarted. May all your desires be withered into nothingness that you may experience the powerlessness and poverty of a child and sing and dance in the love of God the father, the Son, and the Spirit.”**
2. And Forever. Paul reflects in **II Timothy 4:6-8**, *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me **the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day**—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

### III. THE THIRD TRAILMARKER IS “DEMOLISH!”

#### A. Demolish Pride-- *Answer me*—(v. 1)

- Maybe you haven’t been praying. Well, this is a good time to start. Maybe crying out to God just when it starts to hurt doesn’t make you feel very noble...well, you have to start somewhere. Be thankful that the pain has brought you to your knees. God uses to pain to get many people to the place of dependence on Him. It’s not pretty but it works.

- **James 4:2** *You do not have because **you do not ask God.***

#### B. Demolish Anger-- *In your anger do not sin* (v. 4)

- It’s hard to hear God when you are angry...
- Elijah in **I Kings 19:10**, *“I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. **I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.**”*
- God promises a prayer embargo against husbands who are angry with their wives! **II Peter 3:7**, *Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, **so that nothing will hinder your prayers.***

#### C. Demolish Selfishness-- *Offer right sacrifices* (v. 5)

God listens to those who offer right sacrifices. **Verse 5**, *“Offer right sacrifices...”*

- The selfishness that gives the sacrifices that make me look good and feel good but do nothing for God: **Amos 5:21** *“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. 22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. 23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. 24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”*
- The selfishness that withholds sacrifice because I want it for myself, not for God: **Malachi 3:8** *“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ “In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse--the whole nation of you--because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”*
- **J. I. Packer:** *When Jesus says that everyone who asks will receive, he is assuming that those who pray will be disciples who are right with God and not cherishing iniquity in their hearts. (in Your Father Loves You, quoted in CT, “Reflections”)*
- **Psalm 66:18**, *If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened...*

#### D. Demolish Unbelief-- *and trust in the LORD* (v. 5)

- **Luke 18:1** Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and **not give up**.
- Because persistent prayer is an act of **faith**. In II Kings 13 the prophet Elisha is near death and is being visited by Jehoash, King of Israel who was threatened by the enemy Arameans. **Verse 18** “Then he said, “Take the arrows,” and the king took them. Elisha told him, “Strike the ground.” He struck it three times and stopped. 19 The man of God was **angry** with him and said, “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times.” So keep pounding your arrows of prayer until you see the answer of God. If you quit, you lose.
- The Problem of Skepticism:
  - Skepticism dishonors God. One of the most common greetings Paul uses in his letters is wishing his readers, “*faith, hope and love.*” If you have faith in God, you have to have hope. He is so powerful and so good. To be skeptical is to devalue God Himself.
  - Skepticism spreads. Cf. **Exodus 17:1** “The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. 2 So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?” 3 But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” 4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” 5 The LORD answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”
  - **HYBELS:** Probably every human being alive is standing in the shadow of at least one mountain that just will not move: a destructive habit, a character flaw, an impossible or work situation, a financial problem, a physical disability. What is your immovable mountain? Have you stood in its shadow for so long that you’ve grown accustomed to the darkness? Do you end your prayers by thinking, *What’s the use?*<sup>5</sup>
  - **HOW DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER?**
    - If the request is wrong, God says, “No.”
    - If the timing is wrong, God says, “Slow.”
    - If you are wrong, God says, “Grow.”
    - But if the request is right, the timing is right and you are right, God says, “Go!”<sup>6</sup>
- **Mark 9:17**, A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” 19 “O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” 20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the boy’s father,

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hybels, *Too Busy Not to Pray* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, 1988), 85.

<sup>6</sup> Hybels, 88—borrowed from a pastor friend.

*"How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." 23 "If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

CONCLUSION: So here's the payoff... We have confronted the Anxiety Sleep Robbers!

- Have you noticed how often David and the other Psalm writers talk about their beds?
- Like **Psalm 6:6** *"I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears."* It's because the night unwraps your soul. When you lie down to sleep or when you awake in the lonely hours of the night, there is nothing except you and your thoughts. The entertainment plug is pulled, there's no one to talk with, and it's too dark to walk or work in the garden. Your naked soul lies there quivering on the pillow, all bravado aside.
  - **Psalm 16:7**, *"even at night my heart instructs me."*
  - **Psalm 127:2**, *"he grants sleep to those he loves."*
  - **119:148**, *"My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises."*
- *"At the 1995 Mayoral Prayer Breakfast in Washington D.C., ten-year-old Ashley Danielle Oubre', delivered a memorable speech that brought the audience to its feet in two standing ovations.*

*"Good morning, Mayor Barry, platform guests, ladies and gentlemen. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to the leadership of the greatest city in the world on behalf of the children. I wondered what I would say to you when I was first asked if I would make a presentation. Being young limits the experience you have in most areas, but not as being a child.*

*"Jesus said, 'Unless you become like a child you cannot enter the kingdom.' When I think about my friends, who are all young people like myself, many things come to mind.*

*"Children play together, have lots of fun, and sometimes fight, but the very next day we make up and play again. Wouldn't it be wonderful if mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, neighbors and our leaders would be more that way? It hurts us when we see you fighting and not making up.*

*"When you tell us something, we believe it, and we don't ask many questions. We have faith and trust in you until we grow up and find it's not really that way with adults. I think you tell us Bible stories because we are children. The Bible stories do us a lot of good, but you don't tell each other Bible stories. Are they only good for children?*

*"You teach us that when we have a problem, we should talk it out with others and with Jesus. You say that we should pray about it and keep our hearts w right for Jesus. You say that Jesus can solve all our problems, both big and small. But we notice, when people get older and have problems, they are embarrassed to talk like that among themselves. We wonder if you really mean it, or is Jesus only for kids? I am still young enough to believe that Jesus knows how to solve my problems, the problems of the city, and of the world. I hope I never grow old enough to stop believing and that you all become children in search of God's kingdom.*

*"Thank you very much for listening to me. God bless you all!" (in Ravi Zacharias, Deliver Us from Evil, p.198)*

I've told you a Bible story this morning.

- I hope you don't think it's just for kids.
- I hope you believe that Jesus can solve all your problems.
- I hope that you will be godly.
- I hope that you will pray about your distressing situation.
- I hope you will look up when everything's looking down.
- And I hope that you will have a really good sleep tonight.

Alderwood Community Church

Timothy G. Walton  
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