

Peace in Your Problems

[Introduction]

In Psalm 4, David experiences problems. It may be Psalm 4 addresses the problem of Absalom's rebellion – like in Psalm 3. We can't be sure. But we *can* be sure that David's problems involve people. In Psalm 4, David moves from distress to peace. Not that his problems are solved. But he finds peace in his problems. I think that's a fair way to sum up Psalm 4: **Peace in your problems**. How does David find peace in his problems? He does two things. First, he speaks to God. Second, he speaks to the people involved. He speaks to the mean, the mad, and the sad.

1. David speaks to God (Ps. 4:1)

When problems come, David's first move is to speak to God. Make no mistake, the simple act of speaking our problems to God is a significant step of faith. Look at verse 1.

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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! (Ps. 4:1)

You can hear David's distress. He's shaken. Off-balance. Desperate. "Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness." He steadies himself by remembering who God is. God is a living God who does right, sees right, judges right, and acts right. And God isn't those things abstractly. He's those things for David. Personally. "God of *my* righteousness."

David's had lots of practice with problems. He's felt this kind of pressure before, and God acted to give relief. So, he says, "Be gracious to me and hear my prayer." Stoop down in kindness to help me. Hear me and do something!

I remember having lots of these moments when my kids were younger. Problems and parenting kind of go together. One of the central motivations to prayer is need. But I'm a slow learner. I can relate to Paul Miller. He says, "**It took me seventeen years to realize I couldn't parent on my own. It was not a great spiritual insight, just a realistic observation. If I didn't pray deliberately for members of my family by name every morning, they'd kill one another.**"

I have anecdotal evidence that this is true! We have five boys. When they were younger, we came home to holes in the drywall on a few occasions. One time there was a hole in the shape of a head. (What happened? I don't know...) Miraculously, the head was shoved through the wall between the studs! Anyway, Miller concludes, "**It didn't take me long to realize that I did my best parenting by prayer. I began to speak less to the kids and more to God.**"

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The point is, problems force us into situations we can't manage or control on our own. We need God to act. The problem is that we're so used to controlling or managing life through our intellect, money, and skill that we practically we don't need God. So, when problems come, we don't have a lot of practice.

But God is faithful to bring problems we can't manage so we learn our need. In other words, God is at work in your problems. David had lots of problems and therefore lots of practice. So, speaking to God is his first move. It's funny and encouraging that Miller says, "it didn't take me long to realize I did my best parenting through prayer." Yeah, only seventeen years! Like so many things in the Christian life, learning to speak to God about our problems takes time. It takes practice. It takes problems.

For David, step one of pursuing peace in his problems involves prayer. He turns to God and asks him to act. "Do something to vindicate me." "Do something to set the record straight." After David speaks to God, he speaks to the people involved. He responds to the mean, the mad, and the sad.

1. David Responds to the Mean (Ps. 4:2-3)

In verses 2, **David responds to the mean**. These are the people causing the problems. They're fabricating stories and speaking lies. He appeals to their sense of right and wrong hoping they'll admit their lies and vindicate him.

O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?
How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? Selah
(Ps. 4:2)

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David says, “C’mon...how long will you keep this up? We both know there’s no substance or truth to what you’re saying. We both know your words are false.”

The footnote above the word “men” informs us that these mean people are also important people. People with power and influence. Kind of like social media “influencers” in our culture. Influencers have the power, authority, and status to affect the beliefs, habits, or actions of others. So, these mean people say things about king David and others believe those things about King David.

Their words turn David’s kingly reputation – his glory – into shame. These are words that do serious damage. These are words that wound deeply.

Words are like that. I don’t know who came up with that phrase: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” It just seems so obviously untrue. And it’s not how the Bible sees the words.

According to the Bible words have the power of life and death (Prov. 18:21); words can be like sword thrusts (Prov. 12:18) and scorching fire (Prov. 16:27). Sword thrusts and scorching fire does serious damage. The words of mean people have done serious damage to David.

David’s problem involves lying words that ruin his reputation. If you’ve ever experienced something like this, you know how hard that can be. So, how does David pursue peace in his problems. He determines to hear God talking.

**But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him. (Ps. 4:3)**

When mean people speak hateful words, David determines to hear God’s words. The word translated “godly” is the Hebrew word “hasid.” One scholar explains, “The hasid is the one loved by God who loves him back.” So, David remembers God’s promise of unending love to him in the Davidic covenant. As God’s anointed king, Yahweh also

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promised David protection and access. David reminds himself that Yahweh DOES hear him when he calls!

In Psalm 3, David does something similar. He hears God talking. One author says, "What we need most is to hear God talking." It's what you need most today. It's what you need most when mean people speak hurtful words. It's what you need most when the voice of problems threaten to overwhelm you.

You are not king David. But if you trust King Jesus, God tells you what he thinks about you. You are told:

- God is for you. If God is for you, who can be against you? (Rom. 8:32)
- God adopted you. You are a treasured, valued child of God. (Eph. 1:5)
- God hears you. (1 John 5:15)
- God acts for you (Isaiah 64:4)

When problems come, it's hard to hear God talking. It's hard to hear God talk when you've got swords stuck in you and you're on fire. But that's what you need most. One thing God is doing in your problems is teaching you to hear him talk. And teaching you to take who he is to heart. And the more your relationship with God moves from the theoretical to the practical, the more you hear God talk and take it to heart. The words of mean people hurt. That's real. But what God says about you are more real.

When problems come, David first speaks to God. He asks God to act. Then, David speaks to the people involved. David responds to the mean. He hopes they'll admit their lies and vindicate him. But David realizes what he needs most is to hear God talking. He hears it and takes it to heart. He leaves his vindication in God's hands.

So, David responds to the mean. Next, David responds to the mad.

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2. David Responds to the Mad (Ps. 4:4-5)

The mad are David's supporters. Like Abishai, David's nephew. When a guy named Shimei curses David, Abishai says, "Why should this dead dog curse my Lord the King? Let me go over and take off his head!" We can relate to Abishai. And so, David says to the mad,

Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. Selah
Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD. (Ps. 4:4-5)

The Hebrew for "be angry" is a word that means to tremble or shake with either anger or fear. The apostle Paul quotes this verse in his letter to the Ephesians, "be angry, and do not sin." There's such a thing as right anger. When mean people lie and slander, we're right to be mad. Anger is a demand for justice.

God gets angry. Things like envy, murder, strife, lies, hate, gossip, slander, rebellion, pride, disobedience to parents, and unbelief stir God anger. God hates these things.

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He's angry. The reason he's angry is because he loves. These things ruin and destroy the creation he loves so much.

So, anger itself is not wrong. The problem is that right anger quickly turns sour. Like milk left outside on a hot summer day. Right anger curdles. That's why David and Paul both say, "Be angry, and do not sin."

But how? For starters, David says, "ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent." Think it over and keep quiet. Sleep on it. How to be angry and not sin? First, Pause. Think it over and keep quiet.

How else to be angry and not sin? "**Offer right sacrifices...**" In David's day, animal sacrifices were offered regularly to God for forgiveness of sin. The animal died as a substitute for the sinner. "Offer right sacrifices" reminds the OT saints that their biggest problem is God's anger for their sin. It also reminds them that God has shown them mercy and forgiveness. It tempered their demand for justice.

R.C. Sproul tells the story of his first semester as a college professor. On the first day of class, he was clear with his students that there were three short papers. The due dates were given. No late papers will be accepted. When the first paper came due, a few students were late. They begged him to have mercy. He accepted the late papers. When the second paper came due, many students were late. They begged him to have mercy. He agreed. When the third paper came due, most of the students hadn't completed their paper. They said, I'll get it to you next week. When Dr. Sproul said that no late papers would be accepted this time. One of the students yelled out: "That's not fair!" Sproul responded, "Oh you want justice?" You were late with the previous papers. "F" for both. Doesn't anyone else want justice?

When we're wronged unjustly, it's easy to slide into self-righteous anger. We demand justice and forget we've been shown mercy. Here's the thing for us. We need to remember the sacrifice that all the animal sacrifices point toward. The sacrifice of Jesus

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on a Roman cross. It reminds us that our biggest problem is God's anger for our sin. On the cross, Jesus died as our substitute. God's anger poured out on Jesus in our place. For our forgiveness. How to be angry and not sin? Remember that your sin is so serious that it cost God the life of his beloved Son. You deserve crucifixion. So do I. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus our biggest problem is solved. God has shown us mercy and forgiveness. It tempers our demand for justice.

So, "offer right sacrifices, *and put your trust in the LORD.*" This means don't take matters into your own hands. Trust in God for vindication and justice. Trust that God does what he says. He will judge justly.

Jesus was a truly innocent man. In the greatest injustice, he was crucified on a Roman cross. But Jesus trusted God for vindication. For Jesus, that vindication only came after death. Three days after his death on a cross, God raised Jesus from the dead. Vindicating his sinless life. Vindicating his claims. Vindicating his substitutionary death on the cross for sinners. Vindicating God's justice.

The resurrection of Jesus is a preview of future resurrection for every human. For those who trust Jesus, it will be a resurrection of vindication. All their sin was justly punished on Jesus on the cross. But for those who do not trust Jesus, it will be a resurrection of violence. God's justice – his righteous anger – will be experienced in full. Every human being will experience God's perfect justice.

When problems come it's easy to get mad. Sometimes it's right to be mad. But David reminds the mad. Be angry and do not sin. Don't forget your biggest problem has been solved. God has shown you mercy. Entrust your vindication to God. He will do what is right.

David responds to the mean. He responds to the mad. Finally, he responds to the sad.

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3. David Responds to the Sad (Ps. 4:6-7)

Some of David's supporters are mad; some are sad. Discouraged. Weary. They wonder when they'll catch a break. When will anything good happen?

There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? (Ps. 4:6a)

Others have pointed out that their attitude is *prevalent* and *persistent*. It's a *prevalent* attitude in that there are "many" who are sad. It's a *persistent* attitude in that the verb means that they "keep on saying." When will things return to normal? When will problems stop?

Notice how David prays:

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" (Ps. 4:6b)

David includes himself in this prayer. Make your face shine on *us* afresh! Problems are hard. Problems are discouraging. Problems are exhausting. David knows that what he and his friends need most is to know God is with them.

What is the greatest and highest blessing in the Bible? It's not health and wealth. It's not comfort and ease. It's not spouse and family. It's God's presence. That's what was lost in Genesis 3. God's presence. It cost Jesus his life to bring us back to God – into his presence. God's presence is the highest and greatest blessing. And that's what David prays for!

The more our relationship moves from the theoretical to the practical, the more God's presence feels like the greatest blessing. David's relationship with God is practical. So he feels the blessing of God's presence. That's how he can honestly say to Yahweh,

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You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and wine abound. (Ps. 4:7)

When grain and wine abound things are going great. Who doesn't enjoy life when things are going great? But David can say he has "more joy in his heart than they have..." David's circumstances haven't changed, but his experience of his circumstances has changed. Because God is with him.

My favorite movie scene of all time is probably from *The Prince of Egypt*. It's the scene of Moses at the burning bush. God tells Moses to go to Egypt. Moses gives a ton of excuses. God's promise is "I will be with you." And then God says to Moses, "I will show you, my wonders!" and the bush explodes in a kaleidoscope of colors and Moses' eyes go wide with wonder. When Moses gets a glimpse of what God is like, there's wonder and joy.

As David Powlison says, "What you need most is to hear God talking and to experience him purposefully at work. When you hear, take to heart, and know that he is with you, everything changes, even when nothing has changed in your situation."

And that's what God is doing in your problems. In the struggle, he's teaching you to hear him talk and experience him at work.

Again to quote Powlison, "You need to feel the weight and significance of what he's about. He never lies. He never disappoints (though he wisely sets about to disappoint our false hopes, that we might be freed of our illusions). Though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need fear no evil. He is with you. Goodness and mercy will follow you. That *is* what he is doing."

That's what he's doing in your problems. That's what he was doing in David's problems.

4. David Finds Rest (Ps. 4:8)

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That's how David can say with all honesty,

In peace I will both lie down and sleep;
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Ps. 4:8)

David takes to heart the weight and significance of what God is about. Psalm 4 begins with problems and ends with peace. God is with him. So, David experiences peace. Rest. The last word of the Psalm means "unafraid."

King David was loved by God. But David's life included problems. Lots of them. Psalm 4 shows us what God is doing in problems. God is teaching David to find peace in his problems. And that's what he's doing in your problems. He's growing you up to be like Jesus.

Peter says,

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Peter 2:21-23)

[Conclusion]

In Psalm 4, David experiences problems. People problems. But David experiences peace in his problems. He moves from distress to peace. He does this by turning to God. First, he speaks to God. He asks for help. Then he responds to the others involved. To the mean, he rejects their words and receives God's words. To the mad, he reminds them of the need for God's mercy. To the sad, he prays for the light of God's

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presence. Psalm 4 is a song that captures how God uses problems in our lives to grow us more like Jesus. So that more and more we experience peace in our problems.