



At some time in our lives, each of us have experienced what that guy was going through in the video we just saw. We can go through life as if we're locked inside a mental garage of our own making; a garage piled high with mementos of past grievances. We go to bed at night and lay awake rehearsing in our own minds the hurts and wounds others have inflicted upon us.

No one put it better than Frederick Buechner: "Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back -- in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you."

We all know how true that is. But what we don't always know is what to do with our anger and frustration. How do we work through it? Do we just shove it down and deny it's there? Do we kick our dog when we get home from work? Do we fantasize about ways we can get revenge?

We've been looking closely at a few songs or prayers found at the beginning of what we call the Book of Psalms. Some have called this Israel's song book or even prayer book and that's because it was often used in the corporate worship of God's people. It's a collection of poems designed to help us understand how to relate to God amidst all the realities of life. We all struggle at some level to know how to articulate our hearts to God. The Book of Psalms is like an ancient GPS system that guides us along the twists and turns of life; the hard, uphill climbs as well as the easier downhill sections; the bumpy roads and the smooth ones; at times we feel like we're lost, but in all of this the psalms are instructing us in how to relate to God.

Scholars have categorized the Psalms into several distinct types. One of those types is called "Lament." Last week we looked at Psalm 3. Today we're in Psalm 4. These two psalms, along with Psalms 5, 6 and 7 are all psalms of lament. Each of these psalms is attributed to King David. If you know anything about David's story you know he had a lot to lament over. Many of us do as well, but I don't think most of us really know how to articulate those laments to God. Today as we look at Psalm 4 we hear him lamenting over the actions of other people who have done him wrong. He's dealing not only with his own anger but with theirs.

In doing so, he schools us how to work through feelings of resentment, bitterness and frustration in the presence of God.

**Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.**

Give me relief from my distress;

have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

How long will you people turn my glory into shame?

How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself;

the Lord hears when I call to him.

Tremble and do not sin;

when you are on your beds,

search your hearts and be silent.

Offer the sacrifices of the righteous

and trust in the Lord.

Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?"

Let the light of your face shine on us.

Fill my heart with joy

when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will lie down and sleep,

for you alone, Lord,

make me dwell in safety (Psalm 4).

I'd like to examine this Psalm by looking at three things as it pertains to the writer. I'd like us to look at the situation he faced, the medicine he took, and the prescription he gave.

The Situation He Faced

First, let's look at the situation he faced. If you were here last week you may remember there was what's called a superscription at the start of Psalm 3, which told us it was written, "*When David fled from his son Absalom.*" We don't have the same kind of heading over Psalm 4. We're simply told it was for the director of music, it was to be sung with stringed instruments, and it was written by David. But when we look at the actual content of the psalm it seems quite likely the situation David faced was similar to the one he wrote about in Psalm 3. Many scholars believe Psalm 3 and 4 belong together and that this psalm was written at some time when David was in exile—forced away from his home and loved ones by his son Absalom.

Whatever the situation was, David was in great distress. He prays in verse 1, *"Give me relief from my distress."* That word he uses for "distress" means he feels hemmed in; he's in a tight place; he feels cornered. Life is closing in on him and he begs God for relief. We've all felt like that at times, haven't we? It's like life closes in on you, you feel there's no way out; no escape.

If we look a little closer we can see what made him feel that way. He says in verse 2, *"How long will you people turn my glory into shame?"* It's very clear that his reputation is being attacked by malicious slanders and lies. The issue really isn't physical danger; it's his reputation rather than his person that's being attacked. By the way, that word "people" is really a word that points to not just ordinary people but important people of standing. That makes it even harder. Most of us can endure a little criticism if it comes from people we don't care that much about or just aren't that important, but when it comes from someone of influence, someone others will listen to, that doesn't go down easy.

Along with that, these people seem to be encouraging David to look elsewhere for help than the Lord. In verse 6 he says, *"Many, Lord, are asking, 'Who will bring us prosperity?'"* Another translation says, "Who will show us some good?" The question on the table is, where does good come from? Who gives it? Who do we turn to when we need help? David believes those things come from God, but his critics say he ought to start looking somewhere else. Picture David fleeing from Jerusalem. That night his men are pitching their tents and David, exhausted and frustrated, overhears some of them plotting revenge against Absalom. David wants to trust in God, but they want him to take matters into his own hands.

All of this could very well keep a man up at night. Twice in this psalm he talks about what happens when we lay on our beds at night. How many of us have not had this experience: we lay down and our mind begins to race. Why did she say that? What did he really mean by that? That was rude and unfair. I should have stood up to her! Even if you do fall asleep for a bit you wake up with the same questions on your mind.

Most of us have seen the movie, *Forrest Gump*. In one scene, Forrest and his childhood friend Jenny are walking down an old gravel road shaded by hardwood trees. Jenny carries her sandals, and the walk seems pleasant until they happen upon an abandoned, weather-worn house. The sight is horrifying to Jenny. It's her childhood home, a place where Jenny had been abused by her alcoholic father. Forrest sees the pain etched on Jenny's face as she walks ahead of him toward the old abandoned house. Suddenly, Jenny throws her shoes at the house and then begins picking up rocks and furiously throwing them against the house. Years of pent up anger are unleashed. When nothing is left to throw at the house, Jenny falls to the ground crying. Forrest sits down in the muddy driveway beside her, and says, "Sometimes,

I guess, there just aren't enough rocks." I think that's how David felt and that's how we often feel. The question is, what do we do with that?

The Medicine He Took

This leads us to the next thing we see in this psalm and that's the medicine he took. How did David react to all of this?

He cried out to God

First, he simply he cried out to God. In verse 1 there are no less than four cries in staccato fashion: *"Answer me...give me relief...have mercy on me...hear my prayer."* This is the cry of a desperate man. This is the cry of one who isn't afraid to barge into the presence of God just as he is. He's not worried about using the right words. He's not trying to clean his act up so God will listen to him. He runs to God like a three-year-old running to his daddy after a bully has pushed him to the ground on the playground. He knows he'll find arms open wide. Do you have that kind of freedom in prayer? Is he the first place you run when you're being attacked or gossiped about? Speaking about all the lament psalms like this one, one writer says, "They show that the experience of anguish and puzzlement in this life isn't a sign of deficient faith. It's not something to be outgrown...but rather it's intrinsic to the life of faith." I love what Hebrews encourages us to do. It says, *"We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help"* (Hebrews 4:15-16 *The Message*). That's what David is doing and that's what we're encouraged to do.

He sees through their delusions and lies

But the medicine he took didn't stop there. He also sees through the delusions and lies of his adversaries. Look at the second half of verse 2, *"How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?"* What a great question. That's the question we ought to be asking our own culture; a culture which tells us that it's all about me; a culture that tells us to take matters into our own hands; a culture which tells us to be true to ourselves rather than be true to God; a culture which tells us that saving dolphins is more important than saving unborn children; a culture which tells us that our sexuality is not a God-given gift to be reserved and protected within the life long covenant of marriage, but rather something more akin to a happy meal at McDonalds (if you're hungry, grab it and go); a culture which tell us to buy more and get more and do more and be more. *"How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?"*

In David's case, the delusions most likely had to do with their insistence he take matters into his own hands. The mention of false gods might even be an indication they were saying to him, "Listen, David, where has all this talk of trusting God really gotten you? Look at you—running like a scared rabbit away

from your own son. Maybe you've got it wrong, David. This whole faith thing doesn't seem to be working for you." But David sees through it, "***How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?***" If you're going to make it through these times of desperate need, you're going to have to through the delusions and the lies of the world that often times seem to make so much sense. The enemy is crafty.

He finds joy in God alone

The third dose of medicine he took was to find joy in God alone. Again, in verses 6–7 he turns to the Lord and says, "***Many, Lord, are asking, 'Who will bring us prosperity?' Let the light of your face shine on us. Fill my heart with joy when their new grain and wine abound.***" Now he answers the question. Who will bring us some good? God will. He recalls an ancient blessing from Moses in the book of Numbers, "***The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace***" (Numbers 6:24–26). When the Lord's face shines upon you, you have all you need. Where does good come from? It comes from the light of God's face shining upon us. It doesn't come by taking matters into our own hands; it doesn't come by seeking help elsewhere; it comes from him. And when we have him, we have joy. "***Fill my heart with joy when their new grain and wine abound.***" So this joy isn't in my circumstances. My cupboards might be empty, but I can have joy in God. I can have this joy even when my greatest critics seem to be getting blessed more than I.

The Prescription He Gave

Finally, let's look at the prescription he gave. One of the unique aspects of this psalm is how David actually addresses those people who are the problem. He addresses his critics; those important men trying to get him to take matters into his own hands; those encouraging him to seek help elsewhere than God. I'm not sure if he actually spoke these words to them. Remember, this is a prayer first written by David and later used by all Israel in corporate worship. But I think we can imagine a scenario where these words addressed to his enemies might actually help him work through his own anger and frustration in the presence of God. His words to them were really part of his own therapy. Haven't you done that? You're working through something in the presence of God and suddenly you find yourself voicing truth not just to yourself but to others?

Question your assumptions

The first thing he says to his adversaries is question your assumptions. Again, in verse 2 he asks them, "***How long will you love delusions?***" And then he states in verse 3 the first of several commands, "***Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.***" So he says to them, "You think that just because I'm going through a hard time God has abandoned me or even worse there's no god at all.

That's a lie! Here's what you need to know: the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself."

My wife and I have on occasion bought furniture from a consignment store. On one occasion we went in there and found a piece we really liked but we needed to go back home and take measurements to see if it would fit. So we told the lady helping us to set that piece apart and put our name on it because we'd be back to buy it. In other words, if anyone comes in your store, that furniture is set apart for me, so hands off! David says, don't you know God has set apart not just me but all those he calls his own, and when God sets you apart that means hands off? You belong to him. Do you know that? Do you know he's set you apart for himself? Can you say that to your enemies, "Hey man, go ahead and say what you want, the Lord God of the universe has set me apart for himself. He's put his name on me. I belong to him."

Examine your heart

The second prescription he gives them is to examine their heart. Look what he says in verse 4, "***Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds search your hearts and be silent.***" That word "tremble" can also have the idea of being angry. The KJV says, "Be angry and do not sin." The NRSV says, "When you are disturbed do not sin." The NLT says, "Don't sin by letting your anger control you." The idea seems to be, "You can tremble with anger and rage, but don't sin by doing anything. When you lay on your bed at night, search your own heart so you don't do anything stupid."

I can't help but think that David might be thinking of his son, Absalom. Remember how he nursed a grudge against his brother Amnon for quite a long time until he finally came up with a little plan and killed him. He had every reason to be angry at his brother, but he sinned in his anger. Anger itself isn't sin; it's what we do with our anger. We sin in our anger when we're angry for no good cause. We sin in our anger when it's unreasonable and in no proportion to the offense. We sin in our anger when we quickly fly off the handle and allow no time for explanation. We sin in our anger when we hang onto it and won't let it go and it settles into malice and hatred. That's why in Ephesians Paul quotes this verse and says, "***In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold***" (Eph 4:26–27). Instead of sinning in your anger, lie on your bed and search your heart. What do you think about when you lay on your bed at night? What do you fill your mind with? Your bed can be a place where evil plans are hatched; where you scheme and plot over how you'll get that person back, what you'll say next time that happens, or it can be a place where you search your own heart for evil and where you cast all your cares upon God and reaffirm your trust in him as your shield and guide.

Years ago before I was married I was with my parents on vacation at a lake. I heard my dad say some things to my mom I felt were

out of line. I could see how hurt my mom was and I was angry at my dad. I didn't say anything but for a couple of days; I let just that anger fester. I laid awake at night thinking how I could hurt my dad as badly as he hurt my mom. There was a weird kind of enjoyment in that. Then one morning I was out fishing in a boat in the middle of the lake with my dad. We were casting big treble hooked lures into the water and my dad warned me to be careful when I reared back to cast because I was getting just a little too close to him. Sure enough, the next time I cast I hooked a big one—my dad. He screamed as I hooked him in the back of the head. He wasn't happy. He told me to get the pliers and pull the hook out, and when I did his flesh began to tear and he began to wince from the pain. At that point, my knees buckled and I gave up any thought of ever being a doctor or a dentist like he was and I took him to the hospital. On the way there, the Lord reminded me that I got exactly what I wanted—I'd hurt my dad. But what I also learned was that my dad was a weak, frail human being and not a monster. It was a hard lesson; one I've never forgotten. ***"Be angry and do not sin. When you are on your beds search your hearts and be silent."*** In other words, work it through in the presence of God.

Get right with God

The last part of the prescription David gives to his adversaries is simply to get right with God. He says in verse 5, ***"Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord."*** Under the old covenant, sacrifices were offered as a way of atoning for sin, but also as a way of giving God thanks and praise. All of that is in play here. What he's really doing is admonishing these people to get right with God. Stop your delusions, stop your plans for revenge and trust God. What's important to see is for us to get right with God we must be intentional about it. We'll have to step forward and offer the sacrifices of the righteous. In Romans 12:1–2a Paul says, ***"...in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world,***

but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." So instead of thinking how you can repay evil for evil, offer yourself up to God. "God, I give you my life. God, I'll do whatever you want in this situation. God, I'll trust you. God, I thank you and praise you for your mercy to me. Thank you that I belong to you."

What's the end result? The result is you can lay your head down and get a good night's sleep. Look at the end of this psalm. ***"In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety."*** This man who started out in such distress, anxiety and frustration has worked it through in the presence of God and now he can get a good night's sleep. The garage has been cleaned out. Nothing has really changed as far as his circumstances go, but he has changed and his heart is at peace. He's trusting God.

You know, when you go to sleep you're really putting your life in God's hands. It's an act of dependence and an act of trust. You are no longer in control. Have you ever gone to sleep on an airplane? Of course you have. But when you do that you sort of give up control, don't you? Last weekend I was on a plane and I heard a guy behind me snoring like a locomotive. I felt bad for the guy. You go to sleep on a plane and you never know what might happen. Your mouth might hang open about a foot and you might have a little spit running down your chin and then you might even start to snore. That's because you've let go of control.

David says, "If you want to get a good night's sleep when you're in the midst of distress, when you lay in bed at night, work out your anger and frustration in the presence of God. Cry out to God. Examine your own heart. See through the delusions and lies of the world. Find your joy in God. Offer right sacrifices."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.