

A Nighttime Prayer

Psalm 4:1–8

February 4, 2026

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Once again, we find ourselves meeting online. I hope you are well and staying warm. I am sorry we cannot be together at church — you are probably like me, waiting for spring to arrive.

The lesson I would like to share with you tonight is Psalm 4. With this winter weather, the icy roads, and the general anxiety of our day, it is good to be reminded to pray. And one of the most important times and places for prayer is when your head is lying on the pillow, waiting for sleep to come.

Psalm 4 is a prayer spoken at night — not at the sanctuary, not in the company of others, but on one's bed before sleep. I want to read through it first, and then walk back through it together, using it as a template for those of us who lie awake when our hearts are heavy.

Psalm 4

To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of David.

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 into 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. 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. There are many who say, "Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!" 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.

Have you ever lain in bed unable to sleep? For most of us, the answer is yes. At night, when we go to our beds, it is easy to lie awake pondering the things of the day. I know that if I feel I

have done something wrong — hurt someone, damaged a relationship — I will lie there thinking and worrying about it. Sometimes it is bad news heard during the day, and the grief keeps me awake. Sometimes it is simply stress about a situation that will not let me rest.

There are many things we gather up in our hearts during the day and carry into the night. Psalm 4 shows us how to review those things and give them to the Lord — how to close out each day with Him, releasing the worry, the stress, and the anxiety that would otherwise rob us of sleep.

1. Go to the Lord

The first thing David does is go straight to God. Notice what he prays: *“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!”* He is praying for grace and he is praying for relief. Something is keeping him awake — and rather than lying there churning, he turns immediately to the Lord. This is where we begin as well.

2. Voice Your Troubles to the Lord

The next thing David does is tell God what he is holding in his heart. *“O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?”* We do not know exactly what has happened, but we have a reasonable sense of it: David is deeply troubled by the kind of conflict that comes from slander or gossip. Perhaps he sought to do the right thing and was misunderstood, and people became angry with him. Perhaps the slander is not a misunderstanding at all but is purposefully aimed at him — designed to wound. *“You have turned my honor into shame.”*

Whatever the specifics, what David is doing is exactly what you and I need to do: give voice to what is causing our souls to churn. Maybe it is a mistake you have made, and you are worried about what others think of you. Maybe it is something said or done to you, and you keep reliving that moment over and over. Maybe — in this particular moment — it is the snow and ice causing you to fret about your house, the roads, or your job. Whatever it may be, speak it to the Lord. Name it before Him.

3. Remember and Trust the Promises of God

After voicing his trouble, David does something that we all need to learn to do: he preaches a good sermon from God's Word to his own soul. Look at what he does next in verses 3 and 4. *"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."*

The truth David reaches for is the truth of who he is in the Lord. He hangs onto the fact that the Lord hears him — that the Lord has set him apart. Maybe that is the truth you need to hear tonight: that the Lord hears you, that the Lord loves you, that the Lord is for you. Our world can be mean and cruel, but our God is not. He is for you. David takes that truth and lies in bed thinking about it, quieting his heart, letting go of the anger, and fixing his mind on what God says is true.

What promises do you need to hear tonight? What truth from God's Word do you need to take hold of and ponder in your heart?

If what is keeping you up is sin and shame, here is the truth: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

If you feel you are not worth much because of some failure, or because of how someone has treated you, here is the truth you need to hold onto: you are so loved by God that Christ died for you. *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8)

If what is keeping you up is bad news, and grief has settled over you, receive this: *"He has made everything beautiful in its time."* (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

If you are worried about our country, obsessing over the news and the politics, here is the promise you need to hear: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* (Revelation 22:13) He holds everything in His hands — even our nation.

If someone has slandered you or attacked your character, receive this: *"The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."* (Exodus 14:14)

And if what is keeping you up is a fear or worry about tomorrow, here is the word you need: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:6–7)

Whatever it is — whatever tape is replaying in your mind over and over again — this is what God's Word tells us to do: *"Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved."* (Psalm 55:22)

Receive it. Hold onto it. Ponder it as you lie awake. Instead of letting your thoughts churn endlessly with what is wrong, let your soul be nourished by what God says is true. Take His promises and apply them directly to your situation, to your heart, in that moment.

4. Give Thanks and Trust the Lord

Because of those promises, the next movement David makes is toward thanksgiving and trust. *“Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.”* The right sacrifice you and I are to offer is praise and thanksgiving, and through that doorway of thanksgiving, we put our trust in the Lord. You have meditated on the promises of God’s Word — now give Him thanks for those promises, and trust Him. Trust His love. Trust His forgiveness. Trust His sovereignty. Trust Him. And because of that trust, you can rest.

5. Rest in the Lord

“There are many who say, ‘Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!’ You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.”

The psalm began with David angry and anxious, his honor turned to shame. But now, because of God’s promises to him, there is joy. As you trust in the Lord, His face shines upon you and fills your heart with something the world cannot manufacture — a deep, settled joy that is not dependent on circumstances. And in that rest, in that joy, you can finally close your eyes.

6. Go to Sleep

“In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”

David has come to the Lord. He has shared what is upon his heart. He has taken the truth and promises of God’s Word and applied them to his soul. He has pondered them on his bed and trusted the Lord for the days ahead. And the result is rest — peace, security, and joy.

Tonight, when you lie down to sleep, use this psalm as your pattern. Come to the Lord with whatever is heavy on your heart. Voice it to Him. Then fill your mind with His promises rather than your problems. Trust Him. And rest.

The same God who heard David's nighttime prayer hears yours. The same God who gave David peace will give you peace.

Father, we thank you that you hear us when we call. Help us tonight to cast our burdens upon you, to remember your promises, and to sleep in the safety of your care. Forgive our sins, heal our wounds, and lift the light of your face upon us. Teach us to trust you with what we cannot control. You alone, O LORD, make us dwell in safety. In Jesus' name, amen.