

# *Evening Prayer*

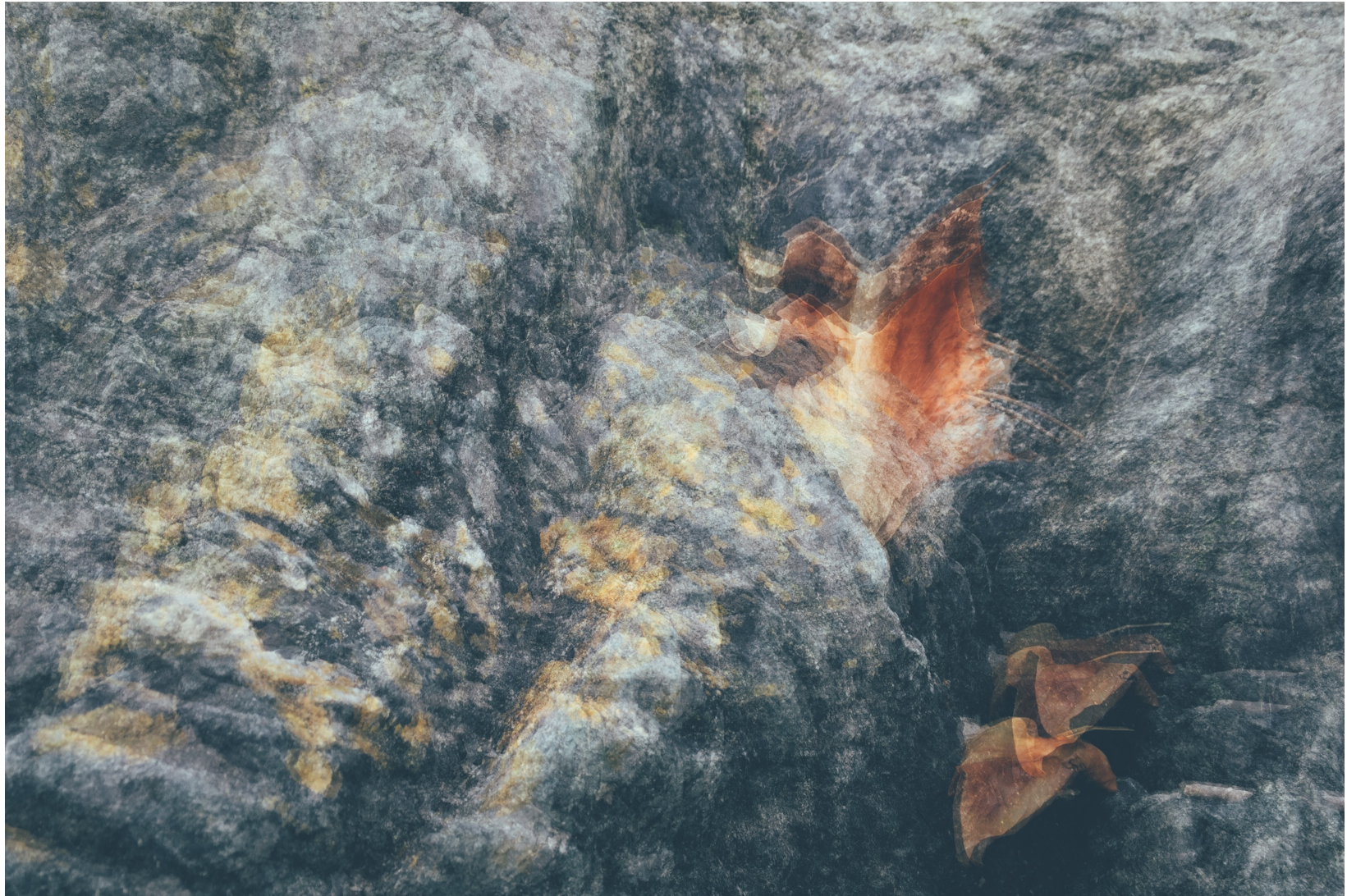
A Photo Sequence for Psalm 4

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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!





O men, how long shall my honour 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.



## A Note on the Sequence

The day draws to a close, but I am not yet ready to relinquish control. To submit to sleep is to admit that the day is done, that not all its wrongs can be righted, that my plans to accomplish everything have failed, and that its tensions remain unresolved. *Even though it is decreed in our bodies that we return to sleep, it is not easy. We want to stay in control. We want to oversee the operation. Evening prayer is a deliberate act of spirit that cultivates willingly what our bodies force on us finally.* Psalm 4 is an evening prayer. It has taught me to process the events of the day in light God's action and to offer my involvement as a sacrifice for him to transform. It does not ignore the day's frustrations, but places its peace in the trust of our Lord.

Eugene Peterson's book *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* contains a chapter on this psalm and its companion morning prayer, Psalm 5. (Quotes from this chapter are in italics.) I read it while visiting Victoria, British Columbia early this summer, sitting on a grassy bluff overlooking the ocean. It left such an impact that over the rest of the summer, I read it aloud to three separate friends. I had opportunities to turn that psalm into prayer at the close of many confounding days. During the summer, I was also at work on a series of abstract photographs, taken on that same trip. The images were multiple exposure photographs, carefully selected for their continuity in colour and edited to maintain a consistency in texture and tone. I struggled to find a unifying narrative for this sequence, until realizing their parallel with this psalm.

The images prominently feature a passionate orange (like the ambitious discontent of my heart), in contrast with a cool, collected solidity of blues, greens, and granite (like the overarching presence of God.) Psalm 4 acknowledges both of these characteristics, teaching the first to know its place in the second. *This evening prayer is a symmetrical beauty, arranging two sets of contrasts on either side of a centre that uses six verbs to restore the rhythms of grace in us.*

The psalm and the sequence opens with a *clamorous beginning*, much like my heart upon entering prayer. The image - a confused flurry of fiery grass and grey sea rock - is a violent discord of both the orange and the grey themes. Similarly, the psalm's opening paragraph is a confusion of David's feelings over both his emotions and his knowledge of his Lord. In contrast, the final image - a bleached arbutus log caught in the rock of an ocean cliff - reflects the *quiet conclusion* of the psalm's final paragraph. The photo captures the peace, security, and steadfastness of that ending verse, like the flexible driftwood resting in the permanence of the rock.



Next we have our first contrast (Image 2), *between those who pursue futility and those who realize providence. Some people...fill the day with a desperate and anxious grasp for that which is not. Others discover God's providential motions in themselves and others.* This image is chaotic, reflecting the vanity of those described in the verse. But nestled amongst the solid rock is a bright orange leaf, like the psalm's imagery of "the LORD setting apart the godly for himself."

The second contrast (Image 6), *is between those who are perpetually asking God for what they do not have and those who are overwhelmed before God with what he has already given.* The image, in continuity with Image 2, also contains bright orange contrasted by its surroundings. But this photo - an arbutus tree growing on a mossy rock - includes both the sense of urgency of the verse, along with its upward focused joy.

Then we arrive at the centre of the psalm and my sequence. *Six paired verbs move us from self-assertion in which we push our vain wills on the people and circumstances around us - acting as if we are in charge of the universe - to a believing obedience that acts as if God is in charge and that submits to becoming the kind of person that God is in charge of.* Here I offer three images, one for each pair of verbs. Two contain the calm colour theme and the centre image describes this theme's intersection with the orange.

The first - gnarly, spiked trees on a solid bank - reflects both the honest frustration we are told to express over the imperfections of our day, and also the boundaries that are to be placed on our anger. The second image - sunset-lit grasses like wildfire amongst dark, rocky hills - is a picture of the volatile self finding his proper place in silence, *recognizing the person that God is gathering into salvation.* The third - a bird-like kite dancing against soft clouds and a bank of grasses - is like the sacrifice of our days, offered to God to do with what he will. Christ's forgiveness will transform them. The Spirit's sanctification will redeem these offerings. *You have had all day, now let God have all night. A sinful life is offered up, a holy life is received back.*

For years, my photography style has been driven by clean, carefully composed images. I see my craft as catching glimpses of the designs that the Great Artist has placed all around us. But recently, as I've found myself drawn more and more to the multiple exposure technique, I've struggled to reconcile its chaotic nature with the clarity of the gospel. By working through this project, I've recognized that this abstract style captures the tension of a life lived between the reality of the gospel and the confusion of our hearts, a tension that the Psalms acknowledges so well.