

An Uplifting Psalm Psalm 40:1-17

How do you feel about waiting?
Does it make you uncomfortable?
Do you wonder why it's taking so long?
Do you fidget, look at your watch or phone, check your email, scroll through Facebook, check your calendar, add to the grocery list, clip your nails?
Do you text someone?
Do you think about leaving?
Do you feel it's rude and inconsiderate to have to wait? Or don't people value your time?
Do you feel ignored?
If it's an appointment, do you wonder what's keeping them, or if they walk by why they don't say something, especially if they see you?

A couple of weeks ago Robyn and I went out for dinner. It was a burger joint, but not fast food. It was also one of those places where you just seat yourself and someone will be right with. I think we had a different understanding of what that meant than the wait staff. Generally we think the term refers to someone who will be serving you, but on this particular evening it seemed to be turned around. We waited on them.

It's not that they were busy and neither was it that they didn't have enough people. There were about half a dozen workers scurrying around tending to other tables. Some even walked right by our table which was in the middle of the room making it very difficult to miss us. No one stopped to say that someone would be with us. No one seemed to notice us. It was probably around 10 minutes before Robyn asked someone hurrying by if we could get a waiter. They were like White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland's fantasy world looking at their watch exclaiming that they were late for an important date.

Our text today is **Psalm 40**, which, according to the heading, is a psalm of David given to the choir director. There is no mention about the occasion for its writing. The psalm is broken into two major sections. In **verses 1-10** there is his praise. In **verses 11-17** there is his petition. In the first section David speaks about the faithfulness of God seen in His

many mercies. But there is a shift in the second half of the passage that in spite of all God's blessings, he still felt the sting of suffering and grieved over it praying to be delivered.

Because this is a song to the choir director, it is a public acknowledgement to the congregation telling them about God's deliverance. It's meant to encourage them that if they would also look to God during their times of trouble, trusting in the Great Deliver, they too, could experience God's mercies. But he also cautions them that during this time of deliverance there was a period of patient waiting on the Lord.

In this psalm we see David go from sinking to solid ground, from slipping to standing, and from sighing to singing.

If we are going to trust God, we must hold convictions about God. These convictions are not based on something we heard, or even necessarily something we read or were taught. Conviction, while strongly influenced by hearing, reading, and teaching, is strengthened by our own personal experience. When we read through the psalms, whether authored by David, Moses, Asaph or others, their experiences are what reinforced their convictions that led to stronger faith and greater trust.

We see early on in **Psalm 40** that David wanted the audience to be encouraged by his own crucible of fire and learn to trust God as well. It serves as an important lesson for us that observation can also be a great teacher. For example:

It reminds me of the time my brother was getting the belt. Every time the whack of the belt hit my brother's seat of knowledge, he would let out a loud reply. I sat downstairs repeating to myself "I'll never be bad again, I'll never be bad again."

David invites us to take a page out of his lesson book on life and learn about God's mercies by reflecting on them and then requesting God to show His mercy to us. But where we can learn by observation, we also need to remember that our strongest conviction comes from personal experience.

If you haven't already found your way to **Psalm 40**, turn there with me to see first, David's conviction about God is certain in **verses 1-5**.

I. DAVID'S CONVICTION ABOUT GOD IS CERTAIN – vv. 1-5

Again, we don't know the occasion for David's song, but we learn right away that whatever it was, he had need to be patient in waiting for God to respond. That phrase literally reads "Waiting, I waited." The wait is going to be longer than expected.

John Phillips writes "We often can't wait any longer because the trials are closing in."

Whatever it was that David was waiting for, his conviction about God based on his trust in God made it possible for him to keep waiting. His waiting wasn't accompanied with thumb twiddling, like when is God going to show up and answer, but waiting that was based on trusting God to do His thing in His time, because His timing is perfect.

Going back in a time machine, there were some things I could wait on for a long time, like when my mom said "you just wait till your dad get's home." If he was late, I didn't mind because I knew what was coming. Or I could wait a long time to get a test back when I wasn't sure I did very well. But when it comes to some trial I am going through, as John Phillips just stated, when the pain of the trial is closing in, we want immediate relief from God. But David is telling us to wait and to wait patiently and to wait patiently for the Lord.

Notice the reason for David's conviction and why he could wait.

A. The Reason For David's Conviction About God – vv. 1-3a

David gives two reasons.

The first reason is that God heard him.

1. God heard him – v. 1

This past week I have been reading in Isaiah about the account of Assyria on the doorsteps of Jerusalem threatening to attack. The commander

along with an impressive army came with a stern warning to surrender or else. He proceeded to scare them into giving up by telling those inside the city walls about how none of the other nations they had captured had been delivered by either their king or their gods so don't think for a minute that Hezekiah or the God they served could save them from the hand of Sennacherib, King of Assyria. Hezekiah was given a letter with the terms of their unconditional surrender. After reading it, we are told in **Isaiah 37** that Hezekiah tore his clothes, put on sack cloth as a sign of grief, and took the letter to the Temple where he laid it on the floor and prostrated himself before God and prayed. He ended his prayer with these words after telling God what Sennacherib was going to do: "Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that You alone, O Lord, are God." (Isaiah 37:20)

The condition by which God heard David's plea for help was that David waited patiently. Waiting patiently implies a spirit of submission and an attitude of humility. If we can't wait patiently for God, then it's not God's sovereign will we're after, it's ours. We want God to move right now. But the person who has submitted Himself to God can wait patiently on God's will.

When you are in the middle of the trial and you don't see an end to the long tunnel, can you wait on the Lord? Can you say "not my will but His will be done?"

Not only do we need to submit to God's will, I also think for God to hear us we need to be humble.

II Chronicles 7:14 'If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'

In other words, humble confession coupled with turning from sin brought a listening ear from God. To have a listening ear isn't just hearing or giving an assent that you hear what they are saying. The intent in this word as it's used here is to understand the need and do something about it.

Psalm 34:6 “This poor man cried and the Lord heard Him, and delivered him out of all his trouble.”

Psalm 34:15 “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are attentive to their cry.”

James 1:4 tells us that perseverance will finish the work God is doing in our lives. Perseverance refers to both endurance and continuation. In other words, patiently waiting. But that kind of waiting also implies expectation, expectation that God is going to act at some time and in some way to help us through our situation. Notice that I said to help us through our situation and not help us out of our situation.

According to **James 1**, the trial is meant for our good and God’s glory as we find joy and gain maturity in the waiting.

We may be crying out to God, and we may think that God isn’t listening, but rest assured that His ear is tuned to His children, to the submissive and humble. The kind of patient waiting David is referring to is what the Bible also describes as long-suffering. That doesn’t mean we are suffering a long time. Instead, it means that we may have to wait for a long time for God to answer. So it goes back to those two important ideas that our patiently waiting on the Lord must be done with a spirit of submission and an attitude of humility to God’s will.

And don’t forget what **Isaiah 40:31** says that when we **“wait on the Lord, He will renew our strength.”** That means He’ll give us the resolve to keep going. Isaiah also says that when we wait on the Lord we’ll soar like the eagles. That means instead of trusting in our own understanding we’ll have the vantage point of God who sees the beginning from the end and trust Him that He’s got a perfect plan for what we’re going through giving us the strength to keep going down His path (**Proverbs 3:5-6**).

David has every confidence that God heard him. That’s the first reason for his conviction. The second reason is God helped him.

2. God helped him – vv. 2-3a

We aren’t privy to the mess David was in, but he does give us a pretty vivid word picture of what it

felt like to him. He was stuck in the mud. If that’s ever happened to you, you know what it’s like. You have no traction, you can’t go anywhere.

In ancient days, cisterns were holes dug in the ground to collect water. When they were empty, they were just a wall of slimy mud. They made the perfect makeshift prison cell as in Jeremiah’s case.

Jeremiah 38:6 “So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king’s son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.”

If I were a betting man, I’d say there have been times each of us has felt stuck in the mud because of some trial we are going through. David says that God didn’t just hear his cry, didn’t just see his plight, He actually did something about it. God lifted him up on solid ground. Jeremiah was later rescued by men who lowered rope to pull him out where he could stand on solid ground. And that reminded me of the old hymn.

*My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Tho’ some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.*

*Lord lift me up and let me stand
By faith on heaven’s tableland;
A higher plane than I have found –
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.*

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Notice that it wasn’t by any effort on the part of the psalmist. God was the one who did the lifting. It reminds me of the world’s religions. People are in the pit of sin, and they try to scale the slimy walls through their own efforts by doing this ritual or that good deed and their efforts bring them no closer to getting out of the messy pit of sin and God says I have a way that doesn’t require you to do anything. I’ll lift you out, He says. Only through faith in Christ and what He did on the cross to die for your sin, can your footing be set on a solid rock. When we recognize it is God who pulls us up out of our mess, He also gives us a new heart and a new song, a hymn of praise. We can’t toot our own horn

because it was God who did the lifting so He deserves all the praise we can give Him. **Do you have a new song?**

I have a song I love to sing,
Since I have been redeemed,
Of my redeemer, Savior, King,
Since I have been redeemed

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David said that God pulled him out and put him on firm footing. **On what or who are you trusting today to pull you out of your pit?** David had two good reasons for his conviction about God. God had heard him, and God had helped him.

What, then, is the result of David's conviction about God?

B. The Result of David's Conviction About God – vv. 3b-5

First, we see David's witness about God to others.

1. David's witness about God to others – vv. 3b-4

I think the words of Jesus are fitting here:

Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before others, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

David is saying that his experience had become a testimony to others – to both the saved and the unsaved. The result is that they will trust the Lord. Everyone could see what had happened to him and how God had shown His mercies.

When others see how you are responding to what you're going through, does it cause them to trust God or turn from God? David says that the person who learns to trust God will be blessed or happy. He'll have a joyful spirit and you may be the reason he has that joy as he or she sees you trust God showing them that it is possible to trust Him in their life experiences as well. So, let's be a witness to others.

Out of his conviction about God, David experienced another result that is seen in **verse 5** where we see David's worship of God before others.

2. David's worship of God before others – v. 5

John Phillips makes this remark about worship:

"Worship is simply sitting quietly in the presence of God and seeking to recall before Him all the countless things we have received at His loving hand starting with the gift of His Son, and then marveling at what a wonderful God He is. Worship should always result in a fresh surrender to the Lord. This is the natural response of thankfulness – devotion results in direction."

And isn't that what Paul said in Romans 12:1? Like David, Paul says that in view of all that God has done for us and in the mercy He has shown us, our spiritual act of worship is to surrender to Him. So, essentially, David is saying in **verse 5** that we are to count our blessings and at the end of the day they would be more than we can count, too many to declare.

"Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders You have done. The things You planned for us no one can recount to You; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare."

New Living Translation **"O Lord my God, You have performed many wonders for us. Your plans for us are too numerous to list. You have no equal. If I tried to recite all Your wonderful deeds, I would never come to the end of them."**

The Message says that when I start thinking about all that God has done for me, I run out of words.

When we get to heaven, our worship will never end as we recount all that God has done for us. **So what about our worship before others right now? Do they hear us giving God praise for all He has done for us? When was the last time you counted your blessings?**

David had two compelling reasons for his conviction about God along with two compelling results for his conviction about God.

God heard him.

God helped him.

They resulted in his witness about God to others and his worship of God before others.

Do people see that kind of witness in us?

Let's move on to **verses 6-8** and see that David's consecration to God is clear.

II. DAVID'S CONSECRATION TO GOD IS CLEAR – vv. 6-8

Wherever there is conviction there will also be consecration. Consecration is the act of making or declaring something sacred. The Bible refers to consecration as separating oneself from things that aren't clean, things that would contaminate our relationship with God. It carries the idea of sanctification, holiness and purity.

For a number of years I worked in a cleanroom. What we manufactured required that the room be clean from particulates so it had a special filtration system and we had to wear gowns over our street clothes. What we made may have only been pieces of plastic and metal, but they were used in open heart surgery. The components were double bagged and placed in a pass-through window. The window was then shut. Someone on the inside would open their window and take the components from the outer bag but still kept in the inner bag. Before the assembled product was sent back out, it was put in a bag and sealed. Before it was boxed someone would inspect each bag for any particulate like a hair or fuzz. The boxed product was then sent to a sterilizer to kill any potential contaminants. You might say that it was consecrated or set apart then for a particular use.

A good example of consecration is found in **Joshua 3**. The nation of Israel was about to finally enter the Promised Land. Joshua said that before they could enter the land the whole nation needed to consecrate themselves to God. In other words, set themselves apart as His people, to be different from the people they were about to displace who were in the land. **Joshua 3:5** **“Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.’”**

It's clear from what the Bible teaches that if we belong to God, we are to be a holy people, separated from the world.

II Corinthians 6:17 **“Therefore come out from them and be separate says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.”**

Paul puts it another way in his letter to the Romans where he admonishes us not to be molded like the world, doing the same things it does that offend God. He says it's possible by renewing our minds through

God's Word and offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him (**Rom. 12:1-2**). Consecration means that our lives are committed to God. Each day we are to strive to live in the character of Christ. Be set apart for God. In **verses 6-7** we see the truth realized in David's life.

A. The Truth Realized In David's Life – vv. 6-7

David first saw the truth concerning ritual.

1. The truth concerning ritual

Rituals don't consecrate a person, commitment does, saying no to following the world and yes to following the will of God. I am reminded of David's confession **Psalms 51**. In that Psalm he said the same thing. **“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.” (verse 16)**

Amos had the same observation in **5:21-24** as did **Micah** in **6:6-8** and **Isaiah** in **1:10-17**. Each of them is saying that it's easy to give the outward perception of being religious by going through all the motions by sacrificing animals, going to the temple, even praying and they were condemned for their outward observances thinking it's what brought them favor with God. It's something Jesus condemned about the Pharisees. “Hey, look at me.” They let everyone know when they were fasting, when they were putting their offering in the collection box, when they did an act of kindness. I wouldn't put it past them to pinch their sacrifice so it would make a noise causing everyone to turn and notice what they were doing.

Cold hearts that only go through the motions don't impress God at all when done with the wrong motivation. Now, don't get me wrong, because when done in the right spirit, with a right heart, God sees them as an act of worship. Reading our Bible, praying, giving tithes, going to church can be just as ritualistic if we don't do them for the right reasons. So don't show up at church just so people can notice you or so you can get a shiny pin for attendance. Don't commit to a year-long Bible reading plan or a memorization program just so you get your name on a plaque. All those accolades will soon fade, and those awards will end up in some shoe box in the attic.

David says that rituals are meaningless without the

right motivation as we see in part of **verse 6 and 8**.

2. The truth concerning reality – v. 6b, 8

David tells us what God desires as part of our consecration to Him. Now, I think we can all agree that David doesn't mean if we want to be consecrated to God that we should all go out and get our ears pierced. Yet there was an understanding in that era of what that meant.

The word pierced literally means to dig. Some believe this is referring to the Old Testament practice that if a person was a slave and wanted to remain in service to his master, the master would take the servant to the nearest doorpost, grab a hammer and an awl and pierce the ear. It was a symbol of commitment. That may be David's intent here as a way of saying that he would remain committed/consecrated to God all his days as a faithful servant devoted to his Master.

But there is also another idea for the word pierce, something I think the Amplified Bible makes clear. **“Sacrifice and offering You do not desire, nor have You delight in them; You have given me the capacity to hear and obey [Your law, a more valuable service than] burnt offerings and sin offerings [which] You do not require...I delight to do Your will, O my God; yes, Your law is within my heart.”**

The word 'pierced' can also mean to open. In other words, David is saying that what God desires is an open heart to God's law by which we in turn respond with obedience. David says the same thing in **Psalm 51:17** **“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”** meaning He won't hate or turn away from such a heart response of obedience to His Word.

God doesn't want sacrifices, He wants surrender, He wants obedience, He wants commitment and consecration. He wants us to be doers of His Word, not just hearers only. That was a hard lesson Saul was unwilling to accept.

I Samuel 15:22 **“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”**

Are we letting our ear be pierced by the Word of God? Are we willing to consecrate or dedicate ourselves to obey His Word?

There is one final thought I want to leave you with and that is also found in **verse 8**. Now we aren't going to finish this psalm, so take time this week to read it. In it you will see David's confession about God is consistent (**vv. 9-10**); his contrition before God is concise (**vv. 11-13**); and his consolation about God is compelling (**vv. 15-17**). You will see from David's experience that God is merciful and magnificent. He is worthy to be praised and He welcomes our pleas.

Let me close with the truth reproduced in David's life.

B. The Truth Reproduced In David's Life – v. 8

Your translation may have the word 'delight' or 'desire.' It's a word we looked at before.

Tony Evans writes **“Many people want personal guidance directly from the Lord, yet they skip the guidance available in His revealed Word, in His instruction. You cannot be led in God's personal will for your life if you neglect His revealed will in Scripture.”**

The psalmist sums it up nicely in **119:105** **“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”** Or, as I like to say: *“It guards my steps and guides my path.”*

David had a singular purpose, a focused aim, an intentional pursuit, something that he delighted in doing, something that brought him joy, peace and satisfaction. His delight was doing the will of God. It wasn't a duty.

It wasn't drudgery.

It wasn't something he regretted.

My prayer is that we might have that same delight in doing God's will, not because we have to but because we want to, because we love the Lord and His Word as the psalmist said **“Oh, how I love Your law! I meditate on it day and night.” (Psalm 119:97)**

Does your conviction about God compel you to be consecrated to God?