

# From Problem to Praise

by Jim Cymbala

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*God wants to lift us out of the pit, establish us on firm ground, and give us a new song, so we can share our testimony with others and bring them to faith.*

**Duration:** 29:34

**Scripture:** Psalm 40:1-4, Psalm 40:9-10, Psalm 40:16-17, Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 2:1-4

**Topics:** "Problems"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal experience of waiting patiently for the Lord and how God answered his cry for help. God lifted him out of a difficult situation and gave him a firm foundation to stand on. As a result, the speaker was filled with gratitude and praise, and he believes that many others will see and fear the Lord because of his testimony. The speaker also shares some personal anecdotes about his busy schedule and the support of his wife during his ministry.

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## Transcript

Why would God give us more if we're not using what he already gave us? We're not giving, we're not praying for anybody, we're not serving, we're not doing anything, we just want to sit in church. This is a story of so many American Christians and elsewhere, just receive and sit, receive and sit. Don't go, don't pray, don't invite, don't intercede, don't go the extra mile, but then say, God, I need more, for what? For what? There's a great truth in that.

They were equipped on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit came so they could go into all the world and preach the gospel. May God help us to do that. I want to have intense praying in a little while for people of different situations here, and we pray for ourselves and our church and everything, but let's find our faith and our impetus from Psalm 40, verses one, two, three.

This psalm is attributed to David, and he was in some kind of trouble. Psalm 40, verses one to three. I waited patiently for the Lord.

He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord, reverence him, and put their trust in him. So I want you to see the movement, the sequence of this.

Okay, so concentrate. Here's the sequence. I waited patiently for the Lord.

He turned to me and he heard my cry. What'd he do? He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire. What did he do then? He set my feet on a rock and he gave me a firm place to stand.

Then what did he do? He put a song in my mouth, a new song in my mouth. Why a new song? Because it was a new answer to prayer. A hymn of praise to our God.

What will be the result of that? Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. So I want you to see this sequence because the end of it is something we often don't think of. So let's look at it.

He said, I waited patiently for the Lord and he heard my cry. He turned to me and heard my cry. Now, that word, I patiently waited, that's the English translation.

But in the Hebrew, and now you'll know why they put I waited patiently, in the Hebrew, it's a double I waited. In fact, one translation, English translation, has I waited waited for the Lord. When it duplicated in the Hebrew, that was their way of saying very much or I patiently waited.

In other words, I didn't just wait, I patiently waited. We would use the word like I really waited. I very much waited.

But they didn't do that. They didn't use adjectives like that so much or adverbs. They put I waited waited for the Lord.

And he turned to me and he heard my cry. David's in some kind of trouble. Now he's recounting what happened.

And he said, I went to God and I cried to him. He didn't answer right away, but I waited for him. You gotta wait for God's answers, amen? Faith has to wait.

Not everything happens in three seconds. The test of faith is the waiting of it, to wait. So he says, I waited for the Lord because I cried to him and he turned to me.

So it starts with, he says, I prayed. Why did he pray? Because he was in a mess. He says, God turned to me and lifted me up out of the pit, out of the mud and the mire.

What does that speak of? He couldn't find traction. He was in some kind of trouble, maybe brought on by himself. All of us in this room have at least once in our life, more than that, we've been in trouble, but we caused the trouble.

It was our disobedience, our lack of wisdom, our running off at the mouth or whatever. So now we find ourselves in the mud and the mire and we're sinking and it's like quicksand. The more you move and the more you struggle, the more you sink.

And David said, that's the kind of mess I was in. He didn't say, give us the specifics of it, but he says, listen, you know why I cried to the Lord? Because I was in, we would say it, I was in the soup. I was in the mud and the mire.

And it was overwhelming me and in my desperation, I cried to the Lord and I held on, I waited. Because I knew he was the only one who could help me. Listen, if you're in the mud and the mire tonight, the only

one who can lift you up is Almighty God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Can we say amen to that? He lifted me up out of the mud and the mire that I found myself in. And the picture there is God's condescension to reach down to us, even though we're in a yucky place. Even though he's perfect and holy, I'm so thankful for God being that way.

He reaches down and he lifts us up. He hears our cry and he doesn't say, you know why you're in there? You're in there because you've just made a lot of bad decisions. We already got that.

How many say amen? What we need is not someone judging us, analyzing the problem, we need someone lifting us up. And God said, when you call, I will answer. I will, one more time, can we just say aloud amen? I will lift you up.

Out of the mud, I will lift you up out of the mud and the mire. Carol and I were thinking about a song that we heard a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot of years ago. When he reached down his hand for me, I was lost and undone without God or his son, but he reached down his hand for me.

He doesn't stay up high and say, you've made a mess of this thing. He doesn't judge us. I'm glad that God didn't send Jesus to be a judge.

He sent him to be a savior, amen? And he delivers, he rescues. If you're here tonight and you're in the mud and the mire, don't even analyze how you got there. Someone did it to you.

Someone pushed you in. Someone hurt you when you were younger and now you've just, out of your anger and bitterness and resentment and unforgiveness, you're making a mess. You're in the mud and the mire.

Don't analyze how you got there. Just call to God, call to Jesus today and say, God, you specialize in lifting people up out of the mud and the mire, out of bad situations. How many, since we've been Christians, God's reached down and lifted us up? Lift your hand up.

He's reached down and lifted us up. He didn't say, you should have known better. You're a Christian.

I mean, a little of that goes a long way. When you're in trouble, you want someone to help you, not judge you. David says, oh, listen, I waited for the Lord after I cried to him and you know what he did? He lifted me up.

God will lift you today. If you're down in depression, down in your nerves, down in your emotions, down in whatever, he will lift you up. He will help you.

I was talking with somebody today because they're affected by the travel that we had to Nicaragua because of the time change here. And then we left the next day after we sprung ahead with our clock. And then it was a two hour difference in Managua.

So it just threw everybody's off. And then I had to get up in the morning and speak in the pastor's conferences. They could rest.

And then at night, concerts, and I preach at the end. And then we came back and we went through a fire drill in the Miami airport with getting through customs and passport control and all of that. There were lines everywhere.

And I was thinking back and I said to someone, you feel tired now? I said, you know, God is so good because I'm thinking back before we came in this building. We were in 290 Flappish Avenue. Any of you were ever in 290 Flappish Avenue? Lift your hand.

So a lot of you were. A lot of you were not. I was writing books.

I was traveling. I was trying to help people. And I would travel many times.

I don't think so wisely. Didn't balance it. Oh, come on, Jim.

Would you do me a favor? Come please to this conference. Do this, do that. So I was doing it and then I would come home sometimes on Saturday night, later than I should have from the plane and delays and all that.

And on Sunday, waiting for me was nine, 12, three, and six. How many remember those bad old days? Each service two hour long. And my wife didn't like that I traveled that much.

She always would say, you're gonna kill yourself. What are you going? Say no and all of that. So when you get in late and she's already sleeping and you know you gotta get up early and be ready for four services.

And I didn't want her to wake up and yell at me. So I would like try to get in that bed without anybody noticing me. And I'd lay down in bed and I think she's sleeping and then I would just hear her say, it's late, you know that, right? Yes honey, yes, whatever.

So anyway, forgive the self reference here. They had around the corner from the church, they got an apartment up on the fourth floor of this brownstone. And we rented it for several reasons.

But on Sunday, I said I can't go to my office. The only way I can pull this off is to go someplace where nobody can see me. I can change my shirt if I need to or whatever.

So I would go after the nine at five to 11, 11 they'd walk me around the corner up four flights. They had a recliner, leather recliner. I would recline back in it.

And I'd say, okay, three more to go, praise God. And then at the 12 noon service, then they would take me there at two o'clock up the floors, floors come down. Former police officer was in the church then and he would be my guide to walk with me, pick me up, bring me back.

And then the three o'clock. And after the three o'clock, I go up there at five, one more service at six. The choir only sang in two.

We had other music or whatever. And you know sometimes I would sit in the recliner and I would just start to cry. I would be so tired.

My nerves from preaching, from traveling, whatever. I'm not saying I was right to do it. You know, you need wisdom, amen? But it was what it was.

And I would say, God, please lift me. Please lift me up. I can't go down those stairs again.

I can't go in. I can't give out again. I can't.

And every time he lifted me up, how many have ever been, listen, how many have ever been in a ditch of some kind and he lifted you out of that ditch? I'm sorry for the self-reference, but I just thought, I've been thinking of that today, how he lifted me because some of the people said, how did you travel and then do those four services? We were so naive. We were looking for a new building and we thought it would take a year to get it. Took six years to move into this.

And I had said at the beginning, no, let's go to four services because people are being turned away. That was a nice theater and we've started other churches, but we're turning people away and children. Let's go, but I can do it for a year.

I'm strong. I'm agile, hostile, and mobile. I'm gonna do this.

And I was a bowl of jello. On Sundays, I was just like, but you know what? He lifted me. I'm telling you, that means a lot to me today because I didn't want to fail you.

I wanted to preach. I wanted to tell people about Jesus. I wanted to pray.

Sometimes it would really get scary after one day, four services. I remember a woman came to me and she said, pastor, tears in her eyes. She said, I gotta tell you something.

I'm gonna see if any of you have been this tired. She started telling me her problem and my mind turned off and I couldn't understand one word she was saying. I was so fatigued and my heart started to beat.

I'm remembering it now because my heart started beating. I thought, oh my goodness, I can't concentrate on what she's saying. What's wrong with my mind? Oh God, help me.

And I stopped her and I said, sister, listen, I got someone who you can talk to. They'll pray with you. I just can't do it.

And many times the enemy would whisper in my ear, you'll collapse before you ever find a new church. I'll bury you before you ever get that new building. But praise God, I'm here.

Amen. He lifted me. He lifted me.

Come on, let's give him praise. He lifts us. Notice, he just doesn't rescue us.

Notice, he establishes us. He put me on a rock. He established my feet on firm ground.

Because if he lifts you up only to fall back in, what kind of life is that? You're always in the muck and the mire. You're always in the mud. You're always saying, God, lift me, lift me, deliver me, deliver me.

Okay, yeah, but he wants to deliver us and put us on a rock. He wants to put us on the rock Christ Jesus, amen? And on firm ground so we know where we're going. We know who we are.

We can trust in the Lord. So notice what David said. He didn't just deliver me after I prayed.

He didn't just lift me up. He set my feet on firm ground. I've learned this, and this is very strange.

A lot of people want to be delivered, but they don't want to be established on firm ground. They still want to have their way. No, you do.

You find this out. You pray with them. Oh, help me in my life's falling apart.

Okay, well, listen, let's talk afterward. We'll pray. Because God wants you to live a different way.

No, I don't want to hear about that. No, I don't want to hear about that. I don't want to hear about the Bible.

I just, you know, I want him to pull me out of the muck and the mire. I want to get out of this pit. I know, but whoever he gets out of the pit, he wants to put your feet on solid ground.

So if you're here today, and he has lifted you, but you're finding inability to get traction and stand on spiritual rock, firm ground, so you can move, so you can move. You know, they just played a basketball game? They canceled an NBA basketball game. Very strange.

It happened about a week or 10 days ago out on the West Coast. I saw it. I said, how could a game be canceled like that? What? Because it's indoors.

They canceled the game because there was some kind of condensation, a pipe broke or something. And did you know what? The floor was so slippery that when they went up for warmups, everybody was slipping. They had to cancel a basketball game with 18,000 people there because there was no firm footing.

And you can't play basketball. You can't play defense. You can't shift.

You can't move. You can't fake. You can't move.

If all your, oh, you like that? I got a bunch of that, yeah. You can't do that if you're slipping or sliding. You're slipping or sliding.

This is what God wants you to know. I'll put your feet on firm ground. You don't have to be slipping, sliding, falling in the muck and the mire.

Some people, their testimony is for 10 years, he's been pulling me on the muck and the mire and the pit, and then I keep falling in. But praise God, he keeps delivering me. But then I fall back in, and then he delivers me.

How many believe God has something better for all of us? Say aloud, amen. Amen. All right, so listen.

But not only that, the psalmist says, after he established me on firm ground, he put a new song in my mouth. He just didn't put me on the firm ground, grumpy and depressed and sad. He put a song in me.

He helped me to lift my spirit so I could celebrate what he had done. And now I can sing. I was in the muck and the mire.

I was in the pit. He lifted me up, and you know what he did? He put my feet on the firm ground, and you know what else he did? He put a song in my heart. He gave me joy, unspeakable and full of glory.

I'm not sour, I'm not negative. I'm not mean-spirited. When people greet me, I'm not all complex and afraid they don't like me.

He took all that away from me. He put a song in my heart. I'm praising God.

You like me? Praise God. You don't like me? Praise God anyhow, because God loves me, and I'm gonna praise him. You get it? How many get it? Say amen.

Amen. So if you're here today, and you've lost your song, God wants to give you a song. See, the same God that lifts out of the pit is the same God who can put us on solid ground so you don't go up and down like a yo-yo.

But the same God who puts us on firm ground, he's the one who puts a song in our heart. Notice what it says. He didn't say I started singing.

He said God put a new song in my heart. What's the new song? For the new answer to the prayer. We should always be having a new song or testimony because of the last thing God did.

We're always thanking him for the cross. We're always thanking him for a calvary. But we should be having a testimony, all of us.

Like, this is what God did for me this week, this month. You can't believe how he came through. But that's not the end.

He put a new song in my heart. Song of praise, a song of joy. If you're here today and you're all squeezed in, we're gonna lay hands on you that God gives you joy.

The fruit of the Spirit is joy. The first word after love, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, joy. A sour Christian, a Christian with no joy, is a contradiction.

It's an oxymoron. You cannot be a Christian who's healthy and not have joy. You just have to be happy.

Just have to be happy in the Lord. We have so much to thank him for, amen? Many will see and be in awe of God and put their trust in him. So listen to me.

David sang, I was in the muck and the mire, I was in the pit. But I cried to him and I waited. I held on, I waited, waited.

I double waited. And you know what he did? He lifted me up. He did it.

I couldn't lift myself because there was no traction. He lifted me up. But he not only delivered me, he put my feet on solid ground.

Now I can move. Now I got traction. And you know what else he did? He put a song in my heart.

So that I'm not only firm, I'm happy and firm. I'm full of joy and firm. Why? Not for David.

God never does anything for us just for us. Listen, many will see and hear and put their trust in him. When they see what God did for me, many will look and see and hear my song of praise and will put their trust in God.

Can we put our hands together and say amen to that? Whatever God does for you, whatever God does for me tonight, listen, whatever he's going to do for you tonight, it's not just to get you out of the jam, out of the pit. It's to get you out of the firm ground with a testimony in your mouth and a song in your heart. Why? So somebody else can hear it.

It doesn't end with us. God is always looking for others. Who can he touch through my life and what he's done for me? I say this for the glory of God.

But there's this pastor from Michigan we're going to pray for him. He flew all the way here because he read a book by Mark Batterson. And in Mark Batterson's book, he has a section which I did not know until he told me about me.

Referring to my daughter being away from the Lord and how we cried to the Lord. And then about our Tuesday night prayer meeting. In this man's book, which I think he sells a lot of books, he's mentioning how we gather here and pray.

So he came all the way from Michigan. Where are you, brother? You're out there somewhere, aren't you? Yes, right there. So he came, wait, all the way here to talk to me.

I'm nobody. I assure you I'm nobody. But you know why he came.

Because I'm like David. This poor man cried and the Lord heard him. And he delivered me out of the pit of despair, despondency.

My wife talking about ending her life at the same time that my girl's away. And he put my feet on the firm ground. And then he put a song in my heart.

And then let me write about it in a book. Many will hear and want to put their trust in the Lord. Come on, can we say amen to that? Through every test, God wants to give us a testimony that we can share with someone else.

So I want to say this to you. I'm willing to pray for anybody here. But I want it only on these conditions.

We pastors and deacons will pray for you, lay hands on you. But if you're in the pit, I'm praying he'll lift you out. If he's lifted you out but you can't get firm ground and you're rocking and rolling through life, going up and down, I'm gonna pray he puts you on firm ground.

If he's put you on firm ground but you have no joy, you somehow lost your joy, I will pray that God will lift you up and give you a song in your heart. We're only gonna pray if you tell us that when God answers, you're gonna tell somebody else what he's done in your life. Because just to let it end with you cuts God's plan off before it should end.

God does nothing for Jim Cymbala just for Jim Cymbala, nothing. He does what I need, he helps Carol, myself, he helps this church, why? So that we can tell others God is faithful, God is good. Come on, is God awesome, is God wonderful? Oh yes, walking in Argentina needing \$6 million, I cried to the Lord, I walked for hours.

And now I was just in Nicaragua all these years later, 18 years later after he gave us that money, the church, the money, \$6 million in 10 minutes. That's not bad. That's better than a hedge fund.

That's better than the stock market. Because we'd invest anything but prayer. So my travail, our praying, our crying to God, our saying to God, God, you gotta deliver us, we need \$6 million.

\$6 million. And I told those pastors from Nicaragua, and they were hugging me and crying, and they're trying to believe God for \$5,000. Oh, Pastor Jim, pray for us.

Because if he could give you \$6 million, he can give us \$5,000. I know he can. You see, it's never for us.

It's for us so that we can sing a new song, have a new testimony. How many wanna have a new testimony, a new song of a new thing that God does in our lives that we need? Amen. I feel like praying tonight.

Can we give God one last hand clap of praise? Close your eyes with me. I'm not gonna ask you to identify where you're at, but I just want you to make it up here. First category.

Pastor, I'm right now in a pit. I'm in the muck and mire. And listen, don't be embarrassed.

David said he was in one. Trust me, David was a better man than all of us. But he found himself in the muck and the mire.

You want God to deliver you and lift you up. You want him to lean over and pick you up. Maybe you're out of the pit, but you haven't been set yet on firm ground.

You haven't got your walk solid with the Lord. You wanna learn now how to really follow Jesus and trust him. The same God who lifts you up will set you on firm ground.

Maybe you're on firm ground, but enemy's taking your joy from you, just attacking you to get depressed and negative and full of unbelief. God will help you. He will help you.

He'll put a new song. He'll put a new song, why? So that others can hear what you say, hear your song, see the joy that's in you. And they'll put their trust in the Lord.

Anybody here today that wants us to lay hands on you and pray for you, put our hands on your shoulder because you need the same God who helped David, you need him in one of these areas. Come on, just come out of your seat. Walk up right to the front, stand.

Just stand, you don't have to kneel, just stand right here. Anybody, come right up out of the balcony. Pastor, I need God to intervene.

Pick me up, I'm in this mess. Or pastor, I need solid ground. No, pastor, I need him to give me a new song.

I need a new testimony. I need a fresh answer from God. I want to be an influence for Jesus.

Just come out of your seat. Lord, we thank you that you lift us up out of the pit, the muck and the mire. Not only when you saved us, but David was a man after God's own heart, and Lord, we hear his testimony.

One way or another, he ended up in a bad place, but you lifted him up in mercy and grace. Thank you for lifting us up. All these folks gonna go home tonight, they have been lifted up by the strong arm of the Lord, the God of salvation.

We thank you that you're able to also put us on a rock, put our feet in a firm place so that we can walk with you, we can grow, we can function as a Christian. We can be an example to others. We can grow in maturity.

We don't have to be falling in the pit every other day. We thank you for the song you put in our heart tonight, the joy. We give you our garments of sadness, and we take your garments of praise, and we put them on today, Lord.

And as we leave tonight, Lord, we pray you will give us opportunities to sing, to talk, to share, to overflow to someone else. Even this week, God, me, all of us here, we can tell someone about Jesus and give them David's testimony. I waited, waited for the Lord, and he turned to me and heard my cry.

He lifted me up out of the pit, out of the muck and the mire. He put a new song in my heart. He put my feet in a rock so that I could walk with joy before him in the land of the living.

We thank you, Lord, for your goodness, and we give you praise. We give you praise. We give you praise, and we give you praise.

Come on, no matter how you feel, give him praise. Give him praise. Thank you.

Now, Lord, we pray that you will anoint all the barrels and get them safely to where they have to go. What we're praying is that you will bless the contents of each barrel, and that it would be used to help someone somewhere, and that it would open their hearts somehow to the good news of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the missions department and for all the people who have brought something today, Lord.

I thank you for every gift. Mark it down, Lord, even as you did for Cornelius. Mark it down.

Let it be on everyone's record before you, Lord, that we reached out to bless someone in your name. Get us home safely. Bless us and make us a blessing.

We pray your smile will be upon us all night long and tomorrow when we wake up. For we pray it in Jesus' name, and everyone said amen. Turn and give somebody a hug.

Give someone a handshake.

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