

# In the Pits With a King

by John Piper

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*The sermon teaches us to follow the pattern of life described in Psalm 40, where we cry out to God, wait patiently for Him, and then sing a new song of praise to Him, all for the purpose of winning others to Christ.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 6:6, Psalm 30:2, Psalm 37:9, Psalm 40:1, Psalm 42:1, Psalm 56:8, Psalm 146:3, Philippians 1:28

**Topics:** "Trust In God", "Humility And Hope"

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## Description

John Piper preaches on the pattern of life presented in Psalms 40:1-3, focusing on the experience of being in the pits, crying out to God, waiting patiently, being rescued by God, receiving a new song of praise, and influencing others to trust in the Lord. The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility, hope, and genuine cries to God in times of distress, highlighting the need to trust in the Lord rather than turning to worldly solutions. Through the example of King David, the sermon encourages believers to wait intently for God's deliverance, which brings a sense of security and prompts heartfelt gratitude and praise.

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## Transcript

Psalm 40:1-3

One of the great benefits of reading the Psalms is that they present us with patterns of life that the godly go through in every age. And in doing that they encourage us that we are made of the same stuff as the saints of old and they give us guidance how to follow the pattern of godliness through to the end.

One of the patterns of life recurring in the Psalms is getting in the pits and getting out again. And my favorite statement of this pattern comes from David's experience found in Psalm 40. We are going to focus only on verses 1-3 but we will read the whole Psalm so as not to miss any insight the context might give.

I waited patiently for the Lord;

And He inclined to me, and heard my cry.

He brought me up out of the pit of destruction,

out of the miry clay;

And He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm.

And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God;

Many will see and fear,  
And will trust in the Lord.  
How blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust,  
And has not turned to the proud, nor to those who lapse into falsehood.  
Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders which Thou hast done,  
And Thy thoughts toward us;  
There is none to compare with Thee;  
If I would declare and speak of them,  
They would be too numerous to count.  
Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired;  
My ears Thou has opened;  
Burnt offering and sin offering Thou hast not required.  
Then I said, "Behold, I come;  
In the scroll of the book it is written of me;  
I delight to do Thy will, O my God;  
Thy Law is within my heart."  
I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation;  
Behold, I will not restrain my lips,  
O, Lord Thou knowest.  
I have not hidden Thy righteousness within my heart;  
I have spoken of Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation;  
I have not concealed Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth  
from the great congregation.  
Thou, O Lord, wilt not withhold Thy compassion from me;  
Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth will continually preserve me.  
For evils beyond number have surrounded me;  
My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see;

They are more numerous than the hairs of my head;

And my heart has failed me.

Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me;

Make haste, O Lord, to help me;

Let those be ashamed and humiliated together

Who seek my life to destroy it;

Let those be turned back and dishonored

Who delight in my hurt.

Let those be appalled because of their shame

Who say to me, "Aha, aha!"

Let all who seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee;

Let those who love Thy salvation say continually,

"The Lord be magnified!"

Since I am afflicted and needy,

Let the Lord be mindful of me;

Thou art my help and my deliverer;

Do not delay, O my God.

Verses 1-3 present a pattern of life at least part of which every Christian knows about first hand. My goal tonight, though, is that we all be enabled to follow the whole pattern all the way through to its exciting conclusion. David leads us through six stages of his experience and I want us to follow him closely. First, David is in a muddy pit; second, he cries to God for help; third, he waits for the Lord; fourth, God draws him out of the pit to safety; fifth, God gives David a new song to sing (probably the one we are reading); sixth, many others come to trust God when they see this pattern of life. The king's pit, the king's cry, the king's patience, the king's rescue, the king's song, and the king's influence. Here is King David, a man after God's own heart. Let us see if we can make his pattern part of our life.

First, the king is in the pits (v.2). What is this experience? What are we supposed to feel with the king when we read that it is like being caught in a desolate pit and in miry clay? I looked up this word translated "destruction" in the NASB and "horrible" in the KJV and "desolate" in the RSV. What I found was that it refers elsewhere to roaring or tumult, like stormy waves. When you consider that the usual meaning of "pit" is a well or a cistern, the image you get is striking. It is as if David had fallen into a deep, dark well and plunged not into a clean placid pool but a roaring storm like Hurricane Allen, only all dark and underground.

Then alongside that picture is the image of mire and mud. The two don't seem to go together. But don't forget these are images that are supposed to make us feel what David was feeling. They are not photographs. It helped me to get a picture of this mud by reading what King Zedekiah did to Jeremiah when he wanted to get rid of him. It says in Jeremiah 38:6, "So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malcia, the King's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mire and Jeremiah sank in the mire." There is one other time David wrote about an experience similar to the one here in Psalm 40, and there, too, he combined the images of mud and flood. Psalm 69:1-2 says, "Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my soul. I have sunk in deep mire and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters and a flood overflows me."

So perhaps what we are to imagine is falling into a well and sinking deep in the sludge at the bottom and going deeper every time we try to lift a foot and then all of a sudden there is roaring water coming from somewhere and it rushes around us in the dark. And then comes the sense of helplessness and desperation, and all of a sudden air, just air, is worth a million dollars, worth more than all the cars in Michigan and all the cabins in Minnesota. Helplessness, desperation, apparent hopelessness, the breaking point for the overworked businessman, the outer limits of exasperation for the mother of three constantly crying children, the impossible expectations of too many classes in school, the grinding stress of a lingering illness, the imminent attack of a powerful enemy. It is good that we don't know what the experience was. It makes it easier to see ourselves in the pits with the king. Anything that causes a sense of helplessness and desperation and threatens to ruin life or take it away - that is the king's pit.

Now the king's cry (v.1): "I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined to me and heard my cry." One of the reasons God loved David so much was because he cried so much. Psalm 6:6, "I am weary with my mourning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping." Psalm 56:8, "Put my tears in thy bottle; are they not in thy book?" Indeed they are, because, "blessed are they that mourn." It is a beautiful thing when a broken man genuinely cries out to God. Not like the jock who gets a cramp while swimming but struggles to get to shore unassisted lest he appear to be weak, but like the little child who wanders too far out in the turf and starts to get taken by the undertow and cries out immediately, "Daddy! Daddy!" God loves to answer childlike prayers.

But make sure the cry is to God and for God, not to man. Notice the inference David draws in verse 4: "Blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust, and has not turned to the proud." Some are willing to say they need help but will seek it anywhere but from the Lord. But God is very displeased with such behavior. A good example is king Asa. God punished him for relying on Syria as an ally instead of relying on God. But Asa refused to learn his lesson and at the end of his life, it says in 2 Chronicles 16:12, "In the 39th year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but sought help from physicians." The point here is not that doctors are bad, but that it is bad to make a doctor your God . . . to think that with him alone is healing. Whatever benefit comes through physicians comes from the Lord and therefore His help is to be sought. Psalm 118:8,9: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man; it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to take trust in princes." Or as one of my favorite passages puts it: "Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is the Lord his God!" (Psalm 146:3-5). Therefore, when you are in the pit, you do not just cry out to anybody, you cry to God.

And then - and then is a very important part of the pattern - you wait. Verse 1: "I waited patiently for the Lord." Or more literally, I waited intently for the Lord. The reason this is so important for us to hear is that it

guards us from unbelief when God's help seems long in coming. We can draw no deadlines for God. He hastens or he delays as he sees fit.

He knows the time for joy and truly

Will send it when He sees it meet,

When He has tried and purged thee duly

And found thee free from all deceit.

Waiting for the Lord is a great part of the Christian Life. There are at least two essential elements in the way we should wait with the king: humility and hope. Look back at Psalm 37:9, "Evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land." Then in verse 11 the same promise is repeated, but in the place of those who wait it is the meek or the humble: "But the humble will inherit the land, and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity." Those who wait are the humble.

Have you ever been in a large waiting room at a doctor's office when the doctor is late returning from a call and the patients are stacked up? Who are the ones who get feisty with the receptionist and grumble to everybody? Not the meek, not the humble. Humble people can wait. They are not so presumptuous about their rights. So it is in waiting for God. We simply show how badly we need the chastisement of His delay when we do not wait patiently.

Secondly, those who wait patiently hope in God. Psalm 39:7, "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in Thee." Psalm 130:5, "I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in His word do I hope." The soul of one who waits for God is not listless. It is not like a weather vane pointing this way, then that. But it is like a hungry animal straining toward his food, longing for his food. "As a deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:1,2). Those who wait like David, strain toward the moment when God will come and they hope in Him. When will He come? At the right time. That is all we can know. And that is enough.

When He comes He will lift us out of the pit. Verse two: "He brought me up out of the pit of tumult, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock making my steps firm." There is a world of difference between quicksand and rock. God moves us, when He comes, from a sense of desperation to a sense of security. In the pit we had not forgotten God but our sense of His presence and comfort was not as lively as when He rescues us. In fact, the essence of the rescue is the restoration of that strong feeling of God's nearness and help.

For David, the rescue may have been the healing of some disease as well. This was the case in Psalm 30:2, "O Lord, my God, I cried to Thee for help, and Thou didst heal me." Or it may have been deliverance from his enemies as in Psalm 69, "Save me, O God ... those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; those who would destroy me are powerful." Or it may have been deliverance from the oppressive guilt of sin he had committed as in Psalm 51:

"Be gracious to me, O God, ... wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."

God can deliver from every sort of pit and mire and will deliver His servants from any plight that would destroy their faith. And when He does we will sing. Verse 3: "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." People who never sing, at least in their heart, are people who do not cherish anything

very deeply, or feel intense gratitude for anything. They are the sort of people who take all life for granted. They never soar with a sense of joy in their heart.

All of us gravitate to that condition because of our fallen nature. And one of the ways God keeps us awake is by letting us hit the pits, leaving us there a while and then bringing us out into the fresh air of His grace again. Do you know of any other way to get someone to love air besides letting them almost be suffocated and breathe again?

I was swimming at the bottom of a pool one time, about nine feet down and I got my finger caught in the drain cover. In a matter of seconds air was almost all I cared about. I was good for about thirty more seconds and I cried out to God and He loosed my finger and set me upon the concrete deck and put a new song in my mouth, a hymn to air, precious air, sweet air, priceless air, and to God.

That is the kind of love God wants from us for Himself. And if He must He will get it by hiding Himself for a season until we crave Him like a drowning boy craves air. And when He shows Himself again and we come up gasping into His presence, we will sing like never before. All the old songs will be new. And if they are not adequate we will write our own.

The church ought not merely sing the songs of yesterday's saints. There ought to be new songs and they ought to come from you, because God has put them in your mouth. Let all the poets of Bethlehem Baptist Church come forth. Let us make a book. We will call it Patterns of Praise. Somebody start the collection!

Who knows how many people might see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. That is the end of verse three and the final step in the pattern of life described in these three verses. Isn't it tremendous that whenever God gives us deliverance from the pit and puts a new song in our mouth, His aim is not only our benefit but also the benefit of others through us? Let us never view our own song as the stopping place of God's mercies. God aims for us to sing others into the Kingdom. How does this happen?

They see, fear and put their trust in God. What do they see? They see a person who, contrary to human nature, was humble in distress and who never lost hope and banked on God and who when he was delivered gave God the glory. They see something real, genuine, authentic, something that rings true in the human heart. And as the conviction starts to build in the unbeliever that there is truth and reality in the life of the godly, he begins to fear, fear the implications of his own unbelief. If God is that real and can be depended on to help those who hope in Him, then probably those who disregard Him and pin their hopes on all sorts of other things, are in trouble (cf. Phil.1:28). And by the grace of God many will make the final move and put their trust in the Lord. The music of the rescued saints is a tremendous means of evangelism.

What a surprise! The whole story turns out to be a lesson in personal evangelism. How shall we win others to Christ? When you are in the pits with the king, cry out to the Lord like a helpless child; then humbly and hopefully wait patiently for the Lord; and when He comes in His own time, and makes you secure, then sing a new song to His grace so people can see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

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