

PSALMS FOR QUIET TIME

Lesson 2

Psalm 40

Back in the mid-80s, I was quite the U2 fan. (The same can be said for the mid-90s, mid-2000s, and today!) After church one Wednesday night, I remember several High School U2 aficionados coming to me as the elder statesman (I was, after all, 25!) to discuss the significance of U2 closing most every concert with the song “40.” This song was not a hit, but rather was an obscure cut off the 1983 album, “War.” (No coincidence, by the way, that the song ended the album, just as it ended the concerts!)

The topic of discussion was, “Where on earth did this title come from?” Admittedly, the song’s lyrics seem to have nothing to do with the number 40. One fellow believed it was because the song was rumored to have taken 40 minutes to write, record, mix, and play back (which, I understand to be true, although not the reason for the title.) These High School guys wanted to know if I had any “inside skinny” or other ideas.

I told them that I had not read or heard anything at all about the song or title, beyond hearing it close their concerts and knowing it as the last song on the War album. As they looked crestfallen, I then jolted them with this statement, “But I am confident I can tell you where Bono got the title for the song!”

“Where?” they asked in unison.

“This song is just the first three verses of Psalm 40,” I replied.

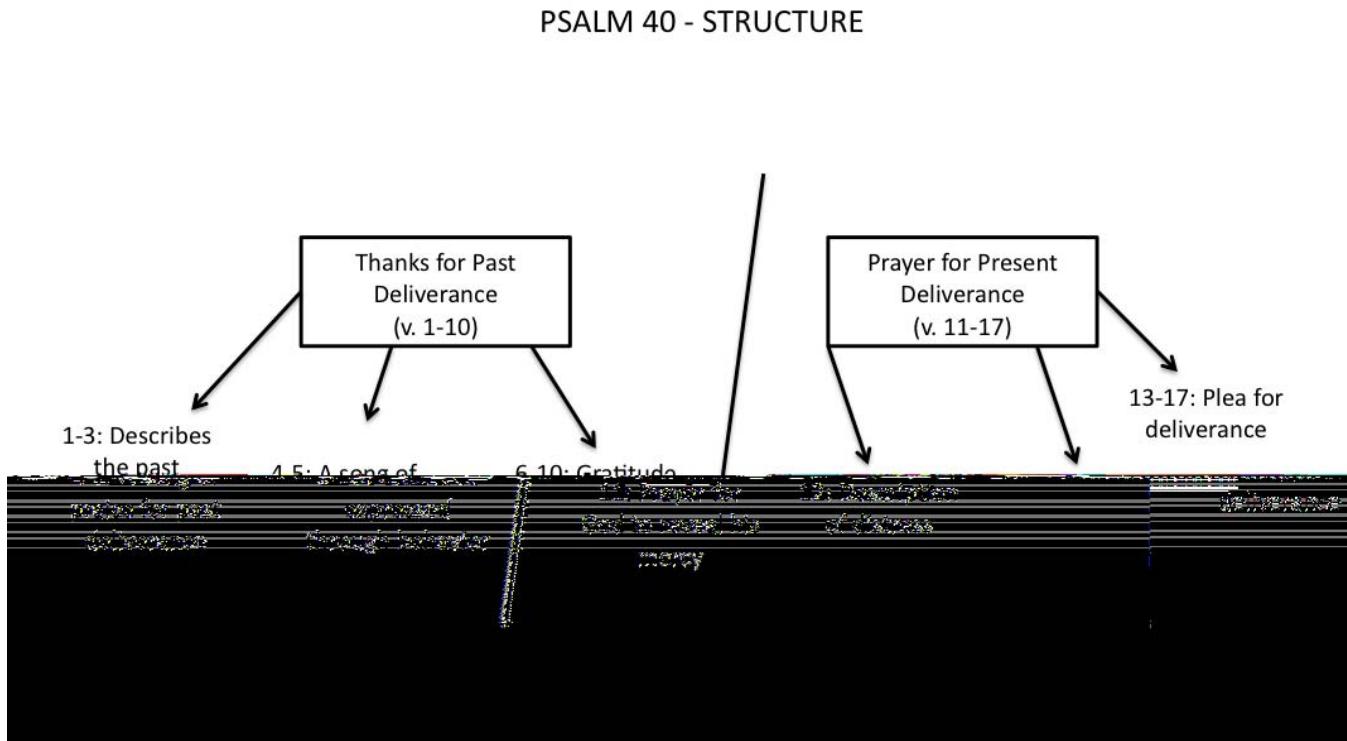
“Really?” “Yes, and what is more, I suspect that Bono uses the New American Standard Version! At least he did for this song!¹

The 40 Psalm, has been for many years, and still remains, one of my favorite places to go during quiet times with the LORD. We will unfold the Psalm in this lesson.

¹ Bono: “I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined and heard my cry; He brought me up out of the pit; Out of the miry clay He set my feet upon a rock; And made my footsteps firm; Many will see; Many will see and fear; I will sing, sing a new song; I will sing, sing a new song.” NASV: “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. 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.”

PSALM 40 – STRUCTURE

We could map out the structure of the Psalm as follows:



This Psalm can easily be divided into two sections. The first section (verses 1-10) proclaim thanks to God for his past deliverance from time of distress. The second section (verses 11-17) seeks God's deliverance from a current crisis/time of distress.

As is apparent from the above chart, each of the two sections can be further subdivided.

These observations come from time taken over the years both translating the Psalm and from studying the Psalm. If this is your first time to spend time with it, then you might not see this structure from the first casual reading. The structure helps, however, because it teaches a lesson itself.

In this Psalm's structure, we see an approach for seeking God's mercy and deliverance in times of distress. It is important that we not fail to see that the Psalmist spends time recounting God's deliverance in the past, and praising God for that deliverance, before invoking his aid for the current crisis!

We are often a “cut to the chase” kind of people, even to our own detriment. I am chief among those who tries to “get to the bottom line” as quickly as possible.

One of my legal mentors was fond of the phrase, “Net, net.” He wanted not just the “net” or bottom line, but he wanted the bottom line of the bottom line. He would insist on the “Net, net.”

Yet, the Psalmist does not start this Psalm with, ‘God help me now please!’ He begins with recounting God’s help in the past, and praising him for it. Of course, that is not the way all Psalms begin. One need only go several Psalms forward to 43 to read the Psalm beginning with the “net, net:”

Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! (Ps. 43:1)

Each approach may have its time and place. As this class is centered on Psalm 40, we note the importance of remembering God’s faithful deliverance in the past, as one seeks his help in the present.

Our digesting of the Psalm will follow the breakdown of the structure above. As this lesson is meant to be a glimpse into my own personal quiet time (in hopes it offers some guidance and encouragement for you to use in yours), I will personalize much of this as we go through it.

PSALM 40:1-10 – THANKS FOR PAST DELIVERANCE

1-3: Description of past deliverance

The Psalm begins:

1I waited patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry.
2He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
 out of the miry bog,
 and set my feet upon a rock,
 making my steps secure.
3He put a new song in my mouth,
 a song of praise to our God.
 Many will see and fear,
 and put their trust in the LORD.

“I waited patiently for the LORD,” for Yhwh. At some time in the past, the Psalmist waited for God’s help. If we were studying this in the Hebrew, then we would be very impressed by the way the Psalmist writes of “waiting.” There is some interesting Hebrew in the way the Psalmist says, “I waited.” The Psalmist uses the word for “wait” (*qwh*) twice. In other words, the Psalmist did not just wait; he waited intensely. The translators try to capture it with a “manner adverb”

like the ESV's, "patiently."² The Psalmist is certainly drawing attention to "I waited," which has a certain irony in light of the Psalm's ending!

As I read that, I think about the difference between God's timing and my own. When I seek God's deliverance, I tend to want it immediately. Furthermore, when it does not come immediately, my visceral reaction is not to wait patiently. It is to look for the quickest short cut to help God deliver me! Yet there is something peaceful about the idea of knowing God will deliver, in God's good timing.

As we noted in our first Psalm lesson (Psalm 139), the Psalmist invokes the unspeakable name of God, Yhwh, as he writes. This is God's personal name he gave to Moses with his personal pledge to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt's bondage. Personal God, the Deliverer, is whom the Psalmist waits for!

The waiting was not in vain, for Yhwh "inclined" and "heard my cry." The Hebrew has the image of God turning his ear and listening. God is not deaf. He does not ignore his people when they call. He turns his attention and listens. Then, as he sees fit, he acts!

"He drew me up from the pit of destruction." We need the Hebrew imagery here. The pit of "destruction" is a pit of "rushing noise." It is like the noise of a rushing river, or of pounding waves of the ocean. It is also the rushing noise of the destructive forces like winds. The experience was of God taking the Psalmist from a place of insecurity, of rushing destruction that was real, to the senses (audible in the Psalm's language) and rescuing him.

The Psalmist adds a second image to his predicament. He was not only stuck in a pit of noisy/rushing destruction, but also in a "miry" or "deep" bog. This is a picture of sinking in quicksand. It is where struggle as you might, you seem to go deeper and deeper into trouble. It is being in a place where there seems no way out. Personal effort will not bring successful deliverance.

From this predicament, God rescued. God came in and lifted the Psalmist from the bog, from the pit of destruction, and set him high up on a firm foundation. He "set my feet upon a rock, and made my steps secure." True and total rescue from the LORD!

The rescue did not stop with removing the Psalmist from the distress and putting him securely in a safe place. The LORD also put a new song of praise in the heart

² Special thanks on understanding this Hebrew construction to Scott Callaham, son of one of our class members, published Hebrew scholar, and Chaplain in our military. Scott has authored a soon to be published book that includes this construction as an example of a "paronomastic infinitive construction."

and on the mouth of the Psalmist. He brought true joy! He turned mourning into dancing!

The song was one of praise to “our God.” We see here the usage of “God” rather than the personal name Yhwh. The saving hand was that of capital G God! The Psalmist adds a Hebrew suffix to “God” making it “our God.” Here, for the first time in this Psalm, the Psalmist takes the attention off of his own circumstances and includes the reader! For the God who brought this rescue was not the God of the Psalmist only. This is *our* God who rescues!

As we see this shift from the personal to the corporate, the Psalmist makes the point that “Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.” Yes, as we consider the saving hand of God in the lives of others, and as we hear them sing of his faithfulness, we too put our trust in the LORD.

As I study this Psalm, I can’t help but wonder if the Psalmist had a clue that his adversity, God’s rescue, and the new song of praise, would not only move his contemporaries to trust in the LORD, but would move us thousands of years later? Who knows how God will use your patience in waiting for his deliverance, and then use the deliverance itself, not only in your life and mine, but also in the lives of countless others!

4-5: A song of praise for past deliverance

The Psalm continues:

4Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust,
 who does not turn to the proud,
 to those who go astray after a lie!
5You have multiplied, O LORD my God,
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;
 none can compare with you!
 I will proclaim and tell of them,
yet they are more than can be told.

“Blessed,” literally here, “Happy” (*ashrei*) is the man who puts his trust in the LORD. The result is not misery, nor even sadness. But, happiness awaits the one who trusts in LORD. This is in contrast to those who seek his or her help elsewhere.

The “proud” and “those who go astray after a lie” have good indicators in the Hebrew as those who speak either of false idols or of those who ascribe to false

idols.³ For us, those idols are generally not clay shaped figurines. Instead, our idols seem to be other things we worship over and against the things of God.

We should be clear here. Most everyone remembers the parable of God sending two boats and a helicopter to rescue a drowning man. Rather than take any of the three, the man drowns while “waiting on the Lord” for his rescue. God does powerful works through others. God does expect us to move out in faith knowing that he will guide us and hem us in both before and behind, yet there are times where we are tempted to find our solution through the ways of man in contravention to God. That is what this Psalmist speaks of here -- solutions that are no more than a lie.

In contrast to such unhappy pursuits, the one who trusts in the LORD will find that God not only does good by his people, but he also multiplies his wonderful deeds and concerns for us. The word translated “multiplied” (*rabot*) means not only “many” but also “great.” Yhwh is the real God and is the one who does these many and great things for us.

The deeds are wonderful indeed, as is the fact that God’s thoughts are “toward us” or “over us.” I always draw great encouragement over knowing confidently that God is thinking of me, and what is going on in my life. Hopefully, this is not some narcissistic tendency for me to place myself in the center of the universe. Rather, it is a recognition that even though I am this small, small collection of atoms on some dirt clod in some far flung corner of the galaxy that itself is a small part of an undefined universe, God thinks about me and comes to my rescue.

In this sense, I join the Psalmist in saying that even though I will proclaim and tell of God’s goodness and his thoughts toward me, I cannot begin to tell the fullness of the truth.

6-10: Gratitude expressed through behavior

The Psalm continues:

- 6 In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted,
but you have given me an open ear.
- Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.
- 7 Then I said, "Behold, I have come;
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:
- 8 I delight to do your will, O my God;
your law is within my heart."

³ The Hebrew for “go astray after a lie” is *satey kazav*. It literally references “those who stray to lies,” but the words in this context can reference those who worship idols, or even the idols themselves. The NIV translates this section as “those who turn aside to false gods.”

9I have told the glad news of deliverance
in the great congregation;
behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD.
10I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart;
I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation;
I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness
from the great congregation.

The Psalmist not only expresses his happiness, but he also responds to God's deliverance in faithful obedience. God is not looking for the Psalmist to go kill a dove over this deliverance. The Psalmist expresses desire both to follow God's instructions in the Torah (law) and to tell everyone he meets of the great redemptive arm of the LORD.

Both of these responses make sense to me and they challenge me. It makes sense that God is not looking for me to "pay back" his deliverance. I cannot turn around and give God something in payment, be it a dove, a lamb, or even a good meal.⁴

⁴ There is a change in this section in the translation of the Hebrew into Greek by the pre-first century Jewish scholars who produced the Septuagint. They have translated the phrase, "You have given me an open ear" as "You have prepared for me a body." The writer of Hebrews seized this phrase in the Septuagint applying verses 6-8 to Christ in Hebrews 10:5-7. In his commentary on Hebrews, Edward Fudge explains,

Jesus did God's will in a human body. Jesus begins: "Sacrifice and offering you have not desired . . ." The Law of Moses provided many kinds of sacrifices, but not one of them ranked first on the wish-list of things God wanted from his people. God's first choice was for his people to live each day in perfect fellowship with him, in a life that fully matched God's desires for human beings. Throughout Israel's history, God said this time and time again (Deuteronomy 10:12-13; 1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 51:16-17; Micah 6:6-8; Jeremiah 7:21-23). But only a human being with a human body could give God such loving human obedience. And so the Son of God continues: "Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—in the scroll of the book it is written of me—to do your will, O God.'"

Jesus mentions two subjects here, our author points out. First he refers to the animal sacrifices of the levitical priesthood. Then he speaks about his own coming to do the will of God. So, our author concludes, Jesus took away the first thing he spoke about, animal sacrifices, to establish the second thing he mentioned -- his personal human commitment to do everything that God desired.

Jesus was true to his word. Every "today" that he lived, he fully embodied God's will by doing exactly what God desired. We can visualize God's performed wishes (or "will") as a present from Jesus, contained in the gift-wrapping of his own human body. Jesus gave that present to the Father by offering his body on the cross.

God was thoroughly pleased with Jesus' present, which was exactly what he had always wanted. Because Jesus had given God his first choice, the gift of a faithful

What is important is that I give God my humble obedience. That I live with God as Lord, not only when I am in trouble, but when I am out of trouble!

It also makes sense that I would tell the world of God's faithfulness and steadfast love. Everyone I know, and everyone I meet, will have stormy times and times of despair. There is not one soul on planet earth that would not benefit from making the LORD their God. Every person alive today would be transformed by letting God direct his or her life.

I am reminded of a friend of one of my family members who came to church recently. Although not a Christian, this friend was and is impressed by my relatives' concerns for him. He recently said, "I have never understood how some Christians could really believe they have a life changing, and eternity changing relationship with the Creator and not share it. I figured either they don't really believe it, or they must not care too much for me!"

Why would we ever want to conceal God's love and work in our lives?

We come now to the second section of the Psalm where the Psalmist seeks help for his current distress.

PSALM 40:11-17 – PRAYER FOR CURRENT DELIVERANCE

11: Prayer to reveal mercy

This section begins:

**11As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me;
your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!**

and loving life in unbroken fellowship with God, there would never be the need again of that second choice—that remedial business involving slaughtered animals and ceremonial blood (7:27; 9:12; 6:4; 9:7, 26-28; 10:2 and 12:26-27). And, because this sacrifice/offering represented a human life perfectly in accord with God's wishes, God forgave his people's sins forever and promised never to remember them again (also fulfilling God's promises concerning the new covenant/basis of relationship discussed in 8:6-13).

Our author therefore boldly announces that by this will (God's wishes), we have been "sanctified" (made holy) and "perfected" forever (10:10, 14). These are priestly terms taken from the consecration of Aaron and his sons. By the offering of Jesus' body we also have been consecrated as priests, to bring offerings of praise and good works (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Fudge, Edward, *Hebrews: Ancient Encouragement for Believers Today* (Leafwood Publishers 2009).

The English Standard Version has cast this passage into a proclamation of confidence in how God will proceed. That is a good read of the Hebrew; however, the Psalm contains a bit more than the translators can put into a simple English sentence. This verse can also read as a request or prayer: “You, O LORD, withhold not your mercies from me.” Similarly, the next line can be translated, “May your steadfast love and your faithfulness always preserve me.”

The Psalmist knows that God has always been faithful. Toward that end, the Psalmist has not restrained (*ekla*) his lips from praising the LORD. In the same way, he prays that God will not restrain (*tikla*) his mercies from helping the Psalmist.

The “steadfast love and faithfulness” of the LORD are traits that God himself revealed to Moses. When the LORD passed before Moses on Sinai, the LORD proclaimed himself, “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6). It is to this trait the Psalmist appeals.

12: A description of distress

This section continues:

12For evils have encompassed me beyond number;
my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.

“For evils have encompassed me beyond number.” “Encompassed,” a great way to translate the Hebrew (*ef'fu*). It means, “surrounded” or “covered.” The poor Psalmist was not concerned about something bad around the corner; he was fully submerged in troubles! The troubles themselves merit the term, “innumerable evils.” There was too much for the Psalmist to even break out and identify.

The problems run so deep that they have overtaken him⁵ and blinded him. They outnumber the hairs on his head, and make his heart terrified.

I must admit that many times I have approached this Psalm in solitude before the Lord when I am not in a place of distress. The Psalm is not wasted, however, because I always know someone who is going through difficulties. It is a wonderful way to pray for others in distress. Taking this Psalm and appropriating

⁵ The Psalmist writes of his “iniquities” overtaking him. Our temptation is to think of this as sin. That is not really what the Psalmist means, however. “Iniquities” can reference a physical malady as well as the problems themselves. See the discussion at Hakham, Amos, *The Bible Psalms with the Jerusalem Commentary* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook 2003), Vol. 1 at 318.

parts of it to those in my life that are hurting, is a personal way to privately help those in pain. It is even more apparent as we consider the prayer/plea for God's hand to work in the next few verses.

13-17: Plea for deliverance

The Psalm concludes:

13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!
LORD, make haste to help me!

14 Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether□
who seek to snatch away my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!

15 Let those be appalled because of their shame
who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

16 But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"□

17 As for me, I am poor and needy, but the LORD takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!

This is my favorite part of the Psalm!!! Remember the Psalmist who started out with “I waited patiently...?” Now he says, “Hurry up and help!” This makes this Psalm so real to me.

“Be pleased O LORD to deliver me! LORD, **make haste** to help me!” Isn’t it reassuring to know that in the Holy Psalms, God has preserved us the heart and words of one who knows the right thing to do is to wait patiently, yet is in a personal hurry to get out of distress immediately!

The Psalmist prays that God’s will might be the shame and disappointment of those seeking his ruin. He wants their plans to fail, their efforts to bring dishonor upon them, and their delight in his misery to end. He wants them to experience a bit of the distress they are inflicting on him.

In contrast to this fate he wishes on the evildoers, he prays again for God not to tarry in delivering him and anyone else who calls on the name of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

This Psalm always appeals to me on many levels. It is a Psalm that speaks of physical problems – poverty, physical distress, and physical enemies. It is also a Psalm that speaks on a spiritual level. It cries out for humility, an obedient heart, a

thankful spirit, and a devoted mind. It forcefully reminds of the faithfulness of God and confidently seeks God's future help.

This is a wonderful Psalm for personal study, both to enrich our own prayer times, and to provide us a reference point for praying for others. I cannot read it without thinking of the times God's faithfulness has rescued me. I also cannot read it without wondering how it fits into the life of U2! (and YOU TOO!)

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *"I waited patiently for the LORD"* (Ps. 40:1).

Truth be told, I am not too sure I have ever waited patiently on the LORD. I would like to, but I am not too sure I have or will anytime soon. That said, I would readily concede that I ought to! For surely God's timing is the right timing. I know there are lessons he teaches in times of distress that cannot be learned elsewhere. I know that as the refiner uses fire to melt away impurities, God is at work in purifying my heart and life in times of heat and distress. So, I will hurry up and try to be more patient!

2. *"I have not hidden your deliverance"* (Ps. 40:9).

I am going to learn this lesson from the Psalmist. LORD, may I not shrink from telling people of your steadfast love and the difference it has made in my life. How dare I keep that quiet!

3. *"Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!"* (1 Cor. 15:49).

My deliverer is coming. I know it, and you can know it too. It matters not how deep your misery and how loud your destruction. There is a deliverer, and he will come to those who call him. It may not be in your timing, but he is most assuredly coming. I strongly recommend anyone who is in need of encouragement on this, go to iTunes (or wherever you buy your music) and get "My Deliverer" by Rich Mullins (I prefer the full version done by artists after Rich died as opposed to the demo version by Rich himself). Listen to it and absorb it. Make it your own song.

My Deliverer is coming - my Deliverer is standing by
I will never doubt His promise though I doubt my heart, I doubt my
eyes My Deliverer is coming - my Deliverer is standing by
My Deliverer is coming - my Deliverer is standing by
My Deliverer is coming - my Deliverer is standing by
He will never break His promise
though the stars should break faith with the sky
My Deliverer is coming - my Deliverer is standing by.