

This is Why We Pray!

Psalm 40

Studies in the Psalms #42

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P RAYER. It's how we talk to our loving God. And just like the key to a healthy relationship is communication, we talk to God in prayer. And just like in all relationships it's easy to neglect communication, so we forget to pray, we pray without meaning, or we pray in a perfunctory way. I pray that in the past few months you've grown in your prayer life as we've read, preached, and sought to apply the Psalms.

And one of the situations the Psalms help us in is spiritual struggle. We seen in several Psalms that sometimes the world of unbelief assaults us as behind them is that struggle between the seed of the serpent battling the seed of the woman as Genesis 3:15 promised. At other times our fellow believers assault us. And more recently in Psalms 37-39 it's been our own sins that have led us to experience the discipline of the Lord in our bodies and consciences. So what are we to do? Pray. But what if God doesn't answer? Turn back to Psalm 37 for a moment. Look at verse 7: "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him." Look at verse 34: "Wait for the LORD and keep his way." Turn to Psalm 38:15: "But for you, O LORD do I wait; it is

you, O Lord my God, who will answer.” Then look at 39:7: “And now, O LORD, for what do I wait? My hope is in you!” The pain of persecution is hard. The pain of broken relationships with brothers and sisters is harder. The pain our sins cause us is even harder. But what is hardest is having to wait in silence for the God who has promised to hear, to answer. Amen?

But then we hear: “I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry.” This is why we pray!

Celebration (vv. 1–3)

And when he answers, we praise him in *celebration*. We wait for his deliverance; then we celebrate in triumph! In Psalm 37 the struggle was seeing the wicked prosper but the righteous struggle, when God has promised to complete opposite. We’ve prayed and prayed together, haven’t we, for this very thing for so many of us: jobs, fuller employment, tangible success to provide for our families. In Psalm 38 the struggle was literal sickness as a result of some sin. In Psalm 39 the struggle was a conscience that knew life was coming to an end and just wanting to experience God’s smile one more time.

Look at how David describes his deliverance from all this: **He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog** (“the mire of

mire”¹), **and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure** (v. 2). Go walk along the bank of Buena Vista Lagoon, get your foot stuck in the mud, then try to pull it out and get filthy, get worn out, and get frustrated...but God delivers! He puts us on hard, dry, level ground to walk securely.

For some of us, this deliverance is going to come in the form of a doctor who gets out meds right—at least for now—or in the form of a temporary victory over temptation because we hung out with some friends instead or in the form of feeling at peace with God once again because I came to church instead of sleeping in as I felt depressed. This is no less deliverance, brothers and sisters, than if God himself parted the Red Sea! Celebrate! **He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God** (v. 3) after David muzzled his mouth in 39:1. Sing out! Celebrate! As I’ve mentioned before a **new song** in the Old Testament is not merely a fresh song but a fight song after experiencing a particular struggle and particular victory. What is your victory today? Sing about it! When you do others **will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD** (v. 4) too.

¹ Motyer, 105 n2.

Dedication (vv. 4–10)

Notice how the celebration of verses 1–3 leads to *dedication* in verses 4–10. Children, have you heard of the word dedication before? I think you have. Maybe you’ve heard your parents say, “You have to dedicate yourself to this so you get better at it.” What does that mean? It means you have to commit yourself to practicing piano or else you won’t be able to play piano well, or think of any other example.

When the Lord shows us his delivering power in answer to our prayer we dedicate ourselves to him. And this is *personal* in verses 4–8. **Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust** in contrast to **the proud...who go astray after a lie!** (v. 4) Then he recounts it all again: **You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you!** Then comes the dedication: **I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told** (v. 5). Verses 6–8 are especially important: **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.** This imagery is “my ears you have dug out for me” as the word translated “open” here (*karah*) is used of digging wells (Gen. 26:25)

and graves (Gen. 50:5).² The point is that this is deep, not superficial. His contrast is not to say that God didn't want sacrifices, as he says in the Law that the smoke made a pleasing aroma to him (Lev. 1:9), but that in this case the Lord's deliverance was so wonderful that sacrifices wouldn't suffice.³ Something more, something more personal was needed. And so he says in verses 7–8: **Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart"** ("within my intestines"). That's personal dedication! To do the will of God from the heart.

And this personal dedication to the Lord from the heart spills over—how can it not? **I have told the glad news of deliverance⁴ in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. I 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.** In our service of Sunday evening prayer we take time to offer prayer requests, but also share praise for what the Lord has done for us. Declare it out! But

² The LXX/Hebrews 10 says "a body" because ears are part of the whole; Jesus not listens but he obeys from the heart.

³ Motyer, 106 n6.

⁴ "Righteousness" because it was a revelation of his very nature. Motyer, 107 n13.

you can also do this when you show up or after or all day!

And remember the reason you can personally and publically dedicate yourself to God is because Jesus Christ did this once and for all on your behalf. In Hebrews 10 verses 6–8 of our Psalm are quoted as applying to Jesus' one great offering of himself to God. I came not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me (John 5:30). He prayed, "Not my will but yours be done" (Mark 14:36). He became obedient to the point of death on the cross (Phil. 2:8). And by his one act of obedience on the cross, we are delivered from our sins (Rom. 5). One writer said it like this: "Christ speaks throughout [Psalm 40], so exclusively indeed, that the believer must here take up the words not as his own experience...but as the experience of the Captain of Salvation, in fighting that battle which has ended in everlasting triumph."⁵ Celebrate your Savior today! Dedicate your life to him!

Anticipation (vv. 11–17)

But there's one last thing, and I'll keep it short. The feeling of verses 1–10 is joy, but then verses 11–17 feels like a downer as they lament more struggles. It's like the best man who gave a toast at a wedding and said, "Congratulations guys, but don't forget that 50% of marriages end in divorce."

⁵ Bonar, 134.

What's going on? While David is ecstatic that God has delivered him, he confesses his continual need of the Lord in *anticipation* of needing him to deliver again in the future.

So he declares **as for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me**—this is the word for passionate love (*rachamim*)—**your steadfast love**—that's the word for marriage commitment (*hesed*)—**and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!** David is saying, "I have not restrained my lips as I just said in verse 9, so don't restrain your mercy to me." Why would he pray this? Look at verse 12: **For 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.** Just because the Lord has delivered us once doesn't mean our enemies in the world, in our own hearts, and in the spiritual realm won't come back. That's why he prays: **Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me!** (v. 13) While the Lord has already delivered us from sin's guilt, sin's ongoing corruption still affects us until the day we die or the Lord returns. So cry out for his continual help in anticipation that you'll need it!

He ends by contrasting his enemies in verses 14–15 with us: **But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your**

salvation say continually, “Great is the LORD!” 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! (vv. 16–17)

Have you been talking to God this way recently because you’re really struggling, maybe with someone who’s tempting you or testing you, maybe with your own internal sins, maybe because you’re feeling the weight of the Father’s heavy hand of discipline? Are you still waiting for his answer? Jesus knows how you feel. He too, cried out, he too felt abandoned, but he too was delivered from the grave so that you might have hope in this life and the life to come. Keep waiting for his answer of deliverance, because this is why we pray!