

# Blessed Is the Man

A Man's Journey through the Psalms

Psalms of Praise

SAMPLE

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Praise the LORD!  
Blessed is the man  
who fears the LORD,  
who greatly delights  
in His commandments!

Psalms 112:1

S A M P L E



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Michael practiced law for over 30 years, including before the United States Supreme Court. For most of his career he was a leading federal regulatory attorney for a large telecommunications firm. A published legal author, Michael has also written a novel and a great deal of music. Now largely retired, Michael plays and runs a ten-piece Classic Rock band, "Nonstop." You can visit the band's Web site at [nonstoprock.net](http://nonstoprock.net).

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## Jeff Williams

Jeff grew up on a farm in the rural community of Winter, Wisconsin. A graduate of West Point, he retired as a colonel in the U.S. Army after twenty-seven years of service. As an astronaut, Jeff flew on the 10-day space shuttle mission STS-101 in 2000 before beginning training for the 183-day Expedition 13 in 2006. Jeff and his wife, Anna-Marie, are members of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas. They have two grown sons.



# How to Use This Book

This isn't your father's devotional.

Then again, while your father may not have read the stories found in *Blessed Is the Man*, he may have heard stories similar to them. Stories told by his father or brother or friend, real stories from real men who experienced real life relying on God's real—and amazing—grace. Stories like the ones you've heard other believers tell you, or stories you've told yourself.

*Blessed Is the Man* provides you and your Bible study group with six weeks of faith narratives written by men who have prayerfully considered biblical psalms. At the beginning of each week, you will read an assigned psalm. Five days during that week, you'll read a verse or two of that psalm, followed by the author's story. Next, you may pray a suggested prayer or choose another as you see fit. Finally, you'll answer a few brief Bible study questions that will help you consider other ways the psalm may apply to you. To get the most out of *Blessed Is the Man*, prayerfully review the psalm from time to time throughout the week. Through God's Word, the Holy Spirit will confront and challenge, but He will also comfort and console. At the end of each week, join your brothers in Christ in a group Bible study. Weekly small-group questions are reproducible. If you want to hold your group Bible study before hammering the first nail at a Habitat for Humanity project, at halftime during a televised game, or before you throw the brats on the grill, do so! You may make as many copies of these pages as you need for the guys in your group.

We are grateful that you are taking a man's journey through the Psalms in *Blessed Is the Man*. Along the way, you may be reminded of stories of faith told by your father, brother, or friend. The adventure into God's Word may even inspire you to tell a few of your own.

—The Editor

# Suggestions for Small-Group Participants

1. Before you begin, spend some time in prayer, asking God to strengthen your faith through a study of His Word. The Scriptures were written so that we might believe in Jesus Christ and have life in His name (John 20:31).

2. Take some time before the meeting to look over the session, review the psalm, and answer the questions.

3. As a courtesy to others, arrive on time.

4. Be an active participant. The leader will guide the group's discussion, not give a lecture.

5. Avoid dominating the conversation by answering every question or by giving unnecessarily long answers. On the other hand, avoid the temptation to not share at all.

6. Treat anything shared in your group as confidential until you have asked for and received permission to share it outside of the group. Treat information about others outside of your group as confidential until you have asked for and received permission to share it with group members.

7. Some participants may be new to Bible study or new to the Christian faith. Help them feel welcome and comfortable.

8. Affirm other participants when you can. If someone offers what you perceive to be a "wrong" answer, ask the Holy Spirit to guide him to seek the correct answer from God's Word.

9. Keep in mind that the questions are discussion starters. Don't be afraid to ask additional questions that relate to the topic. Don't get the group off track.

10. If you are comfortable doing so, volunteer now and then to pray at the beginning or end of the session.

## Guide to Men's Ministry

There's a mother watching her boys play in the backyard. The boys are wrestling around in the mud, fighting to see who will be at the top of the pecking order, as brothers often do. There's another mother in the same backyard who has a little girl, or you might even say a *princess*. She comments, "Don't you think those boys are going to hurt one another? How are you going to get the stains out of their clothes?" To this, the mother of the boys replies, "Boys will be boys." In this short story, it is clear that one mother understands boys and the other has no clue how boys become men.

The sad news is this: the Church in many ways has adopted the voice of the princess's mother who never raised boys. It seems men are expected to live, act, and behave in ways that make sure any remnant of their childhood has been extinguished. Men are tamed to fit the mold of what a good little boy should look like—free of danger, free of risk, and free of anything fun.

Giving men permission to be men once again is absolutely critical to the Church and to a successful men's ministry. There is enough boy left in every man that beckons to compete, have fun, risk, and live out the adventurous spirit only God can give. Yes, it is possible for all of this to happen in the Church while men still live within the will and call of God upon their lives.

## Seven Tips for Men's Ministry

### GET "REAL" LEADERS

Men desperately need leaders who are authentic, genuine, and nonjudgmental. You must choose a leader whom other men would want to hang out with and can relate to on multiple levels. This is a guy whom other guys love to hang out with because he seems so down to earth, has fun living life, and would be a leader in any environment he found himself in.



## THERA-PUKE-IC

Guys need to be in an environment that is natural, not clinical. Guys will share their struggles, challenges, and victories as long as it's not the purpose of the meeting or even the hidden agenda for their time together. When they catch wind that this is about to turn into group therapy, most guys will immediately button their lips, turn off their brains, and look for the nearest exit. When the environment is right, guys will talk. Don't force it. Please, don't force it.

## LESS IS MORE

Women are always amazed at how simple men can be at times. Most men like simplicity and are drawn to it. Whether you're planning a men's social, Bible study, retreat, or small group, it is always better to err on the side of keeping it simple. Simple doesn't mean plain or boring; it means doing a few things really, really well. When you sit down to plan activities, try structuring them around broader themes such as having fun, learning a little, and providing a good challenge or risk for men to participate in.

## TALKING IS OPTIONAL

Generally when men come together for activities, Bible studies, small groups, and/or retreats, there is going to be a time for prayer, reading, and answering some questions. There are many men who don't like to read out loud, pray out loud, or be put on the spot to answer questions out loud. Be sure to check with guys ahead of time about praying or reading. There will always be a few men who are comfortable answering questions, and these men usually pave the way for more timid guys to speak up.

## KEEP THE SPIRIT OF COMPETITION ALIVE

Not all men played sports, but most men have competed as boys in some area or another. Men, by and large, enjoy competition and friendly wagers. Some men like playing golf against one another, while others enjoy seeing who smokes the best brisket. Either way you slice it, men always enjoy themselves when they can compete in a nonthreatening way, in a way that will never leave them feeling foolish in front of one another.

## MEETINGS SHOULD NEVER BE MEETINGS

From time to time, there will be a need to plan various activities for men. The worst thing you can do is form a committee or a board. There will always be natural leaders who will need to do some planning for men's ministry, but have the meeting at a place men enjoy, like an athletic event, a pub, or even on a golf course while playing a round. No one, especially men, needs to add more "official" meetings to his schedule. Make it informal and fun while you orchestrate real business.

## A MINISTRY NEEDS MORE THAN ONE DOOR

How accessible is your ministry? The fastest-growing churches always have multiple entry points for folks to get involved and be connected to their church. Men's ministry is no different. While there is a tremendous brotherhood among men, there are also a wide range of things that men like and don't like. Some men like camping and the great outdoors. Other men would prefer manual labor around the church. Some might even like more intellectually oriented activities. No matter what, you need to ensure that your men's ministry has many different attractions that respect different interests, gifts, abilities, and skills. There are venues for all men to come together, and there are activities that will only attract certain men. Keep all these nuances in mind.

# SAMPLE

## Three Steps to Launching a Men's Ministry in *Your* Church

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Pick a place that will work for launching your first men's ministry event. A tailgate setting would be an absolutely prime site. Other options are at a lake, the rustic outdoors, or even a barn of sorts. Whatever you choose as your site, it should be a place where guys can get excited and loud and not feel closed in.

## MEN EAT MEAT AND LOTS OF IT

Once you've got the location nailed down, it's time to think about the meat you are going to serve. Depending on what area of the country you live in, your choices and preferences will vary. One example is having a spread of wild-game dishes. This usually takes place in areas where men enjoy hunting. If you have chosen a tailgate at some sporting event, cook up a bunch of bratwurst, brisket, and/or ribs. Warning: it's tough to cook a great steak when you're doing it in large numbers. Men are picky

with their steaks, so be careful if this is your choice. Don't forget to bring beverages that your men would enjoy as well. (Okay, you can throw on some veggie burgers too.)

## IT'S TIME TO LAUNCH—THE DAY IS HERE

Okay, you've chosen a great site. You've got the volunteers you need to cook the meat at the site. Now it's time to plan how you are going to effectively brainstorm what your men's ministry might look like. This is not a time to be critical of ideas. This is a time to really listen to what men are saying.

What kinds of activities do they want to be involved with?

What kinds of adventures are they looking for?

What contribution do they want their men's ministry to make to the kingdom of God externally and to their church internally?

Make this fun. For example, to get things started, you could have some balloons attached to a big piece of plywood and have various ideas written on slips of paper inside the balloons. Have one of the men use the BB gun you provided to shoot one of the balloons and see what idea is inside and talk about it. This exercise can be a lot of fun, but please be safe with it. Once you have some good ideas about the direction the men would like to go, pick another time and location to meet again and flesh out more of the details and planning. Ask for any volunteers who want to help with this next phase. Once this next phase is finished, you should be able to get to work—but don't forget to keep on listening to the men in your church.

## Introduction

It was the standard Sunday morning routine when I was a growing up. Arriving at church early—even earlier when there was fresh snow that had to be shoveled off the long stretches of concrete sidewalk—my two younger brothers and I would wait for 9:00 with all the enthusiasm of a man anticipating the first light of dawn and, with it, a place before the firing squad. Delaying the inevitable well past what might be deemed acceptable, we would finally shuffle in at the last possible moment and take our spots in the front pews of the church—left side. And then she would appear. Sometimes from behind the organ, where she had been looking over the morning's hymns or the choir's number (always a well-worn favorite of somebody's that hadn't been heard for as long as a full year), sometimes coming down the center aisle, coffee in hand (even later than we had hoped to be), she would make her entrance. Then, with arms flailing wildly but purposefully, and with faultless, eternal enthusiasm, Mrs. G. would direct the gathered Sunday School students in the first obligatory "praise chorus" that marked the official beginning of another Sunday morning of praising God. I did not enjoy it. The Sunday School lesson was fine, and I had no quarrel with the worship service that followed; but this corporate praise, led by this woman, consisting largely of mindless ditties with insipid tunes, was intolerable. My brothers, my friends, and I were ruthless and relentless in our cynical and disparaging attitude. But she was equal to our challenge; she made us sing—and being a PK and well aware of the price of public disobedience, I had no option. I sang:

"Allelu, allelu, allelu, alleluia! Praise ye the Lord!"

You know how it went. Standing up. Sitting down. Singing it louder so that the grown-ups gathered in the "overflow room" for Bible class could hear us, we belted out our praises to God. In spite of us, Mrs. G. taught all of us—taught *me*—how to praise God.

She won.

Of course, I did not realize it at the time. Actually, I probably didn't fully realize it until just a few days ago, as the task of working through this study and thinking about the praise of God jogged my memory and took me back to those Sunday mornings so long ago. The discomfort, the embarrassment, and even the less-than-exemplary attitude have all faded into insignificance. Now, the memory makes me smile. And now I recognize that during those agonizingly long Sunday School open-

ings a valuable habit was being imprinted on me and formed into my very being. I learned on those Sunday mornings that a man praises God not because he feels like it, but because he must. Yes, I am quite serious about this: praise has next to nothing to do with feelings and just about everything to do with being a creature, who recognizes a creature's obligation to praise his Creator. This is the lesson I learned on those Sunday mornings because no matter how I felt inside, my mouth would form the words and I would sing God's praise. Mrs. G. made sure of it. Without realizing it, I learned then that you praise God not because you feel like it, but because you're supposed to—and that's a very good lesson to learn.

Feelings are tremendously over-rated, of course. A man's feelings can drive him into shameful, faithless actions. A man's feelings can corrupt his judgment. A man's feelings can endorse the most foolhardy choices. Of course, it's not that feelings are somehow evil or harmful. Feelings can also be beneficial and occasionally may actually lead to right action or help reinforce right thinking . . . "gut feelings" and that sort of thing. It's just that feelings are not particularly reliable. Feelings do not provide a legitimate foundation for thinking or acting . . . or praising God. That's the real point that I learned from Mrs. G. One does not wait for his feelings to be right before he does right. A Christian does not restrict his praise of God only to those times when he feels like praising God. Yes, it's great to have feelings that support your actions, and it is certainly easier to do the right thing when you feel like doing the right thing. But, having those right feelings doesn't necessarily make the right actions any better or even more meaningful. For whatever reason, we associate the praise of God with happy, exuberant feelings, or at the very least with just a little enthusiasm—"Sing it like you mean it!" Praise of God, though, cannot become dependent on feelings, nor is it enhanced by the presence or the absence of one feeling or another. Feelings are feelings and praise of God is praise of God; and the two are quite independent of one another.

Of course, this lesson on what makes praise count as good praise puts those often-maligned liturgical alleluias in quite a different light as well. It may seem a bit incongruous to call it "praise" when a congregation of worshipers reads a scripted litany that concludes with a triple alleluia. Admittedly, the dispassionate and disinterested monotone that typically issues from the congregation with diminishing volume—"Alleluia . . . alleluia . . . alleluia . . ."—may not sound the way we think praise should sound, but perhaps the problem is not with the congregation or the litany, but with our assumptions about what praise is supposed to be.

When it comes to exploring more fully what it means to praise God, it is quite fitting and wise, albeit painfully predictable, that we turn to the Psalms. We expect

the Psalms to be filled with insights into how one should praise God. The Psalms even supply concrete, ready-made prayers of praise waiting to be pressed anew into service. And the psalms considered in this volume do not disappoint. Praise is the central theme. These psalms reflect on the practice of praise, they demonstrate praise, and they encourage praise.

In the pages that follow, you will delve into a study that, if successful, will lead you to rethink some of the things you have assumed about what it means to praise God. But it will probably do much more than that. Guided by stories of personal discovery as told by men not unlike yourself, you will discover and reaffirm truths that impact much more than your understanding and practice of praise. In fact, you may be surprised at how much a study on “psalms of praise” is able to teach you about ordinary, regular life—the life you live from Sunday afternoon through Saturday night. The men who penned the devotions that make up this volume have much to teach you about many things. You will learn about the challenge of handling success, the bold face of Christian courage in the corporate boardroom, the danger of pride and self-confidence when God blesses you with success, the responsibility of shaping a meaningful legacy for your heirs, the power of a father to form a son, the reality of living life on the edge of the pit of death and despair, the wonder of yielding to God’s work in creating and saving you. This study is about more than learning how to sing a praise chorus. It is about more than getting your feelings right. It is about discovering what it means to be a man of God who lives his life as praise to his Creator.

Certainly, the best studies are those that do more than impart information or generate insights. The best studies change those who are studying so that they become different—and yes, *better*—people. You will read the stories of men who have been changed by what they learned; but until what you learn changes you, this study has fallen short. In other words, the goal is that you do more than merely read. The goal is that you do more than merely read and reflect. The goal is that you do more than merely read, reflect, and discuss. The goal is that you do more than merely read, reflect, discuss, and pray. The goal is that you read, reflect, discuss, pray . . . and *change*. This happens when what you study—God’s Word—enters into your thinking and reshapes your entire worldview. This happens when what you study becomes what you are. Such transformation of your thinking and your being may occur in a sudden burst—a piercing conviction, a re-creating confession, a renewed life. Or, as in my case through a childhood of routine Sunday School openings, it may be a deliberate and methodical renewal of the person that, when complete, is no less dramatic for its slower pace. However it happens, it happens: God makes the change.

The first volume of this series began with my exhortation: “Read the Psalms.” While that is still good counsel, I’ve concluded that it is altogether inadequate. One can read without undergoing transformation. One can read without the words entering the thinking and the being of the person. Simply skimming the Psalms will not accomplish the goal of a changed life. What is needed is an appropriation of the truth of the Psalms that happens when the words, the wisdom, the laments, the hope, the prayers, the praise of the Psalms become those of the present reader. What is needed is that the words enter into and become part of *you*. Do more than read, reflect, discuss, and pray. Alone, and with a group of friends, encounter the Psalms, enter the Psalms, and engage the Psalms, because in them, God is encountering, entering, and engaging you.

S A M P L E

# Week One

## Psalm 40

<sup>1</sup> I waited patiently for the LORD;  
He inclined to me and heard my cry.

<sup>2</sup> He drew me up from the pit of destruction,  
out of the miry bog,  
and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.

<sup>3</sup> He 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.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed is the man who makes  
the LORD his trust,  
who does not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after a lie!

<sup>5</sup> You 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Then I said, "Behold, I have come;  
in the scroll of the book it is written of me:

<sup>8</sup> I delight to do Your will, O my God;  
Your law is within my heart."

<sup>9</sup> I have told the glad news of deliverance  
in the great congregation;



behold, I have not restrained my lips,  
as You know, O LORD.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> As for You, O LORD, You will not restrain  
Your mercy from me;  
Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness will  
ever preserve me!

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!  
O LORD, make haste to help me!

<sup>14</sup> 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!

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

<sup>16</sup> But may all who seek You  
rejoice and be glad in You;  
may those who love Your salvation  
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

<sup>17</sup> 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!

## Week One Monday

Joe Hanson

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### Psalm 40:1-3

I waited patiently for the LORD; He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He 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.

## Out of the Pit

I've put a guy or two into a slimy pit. One of them was even a four-star admiral wearing his dress blue uniform, medals and all. You'd think they would have resisted, or at least voiced an objection, but nobody made a peep. They were dead as door-nails. Being dead is the primary qualification for being the guest of honor at a Navy funeral. Every time I ever served on a funeral detail or honor guard, whether there was a big brass band or just a sobbing young widow with a crying baby, the program always ended by putting someone into the slimy pit. As far as I know, they're all still in there, waiting patiently.

Psalm 40 talks about getting out of the pit. If I were in a slimy pit, you can be sure I'd have dirt under my fingernails before I gave up trying. I'd figure out something. I'd be resourceful. I'd check my pockets for makeshift escape tools. I'd make a plan. And I'd holler my head off. Unless, of course, I were dead, because I'm nothing if not resourceful.

So what does this have to do with the "I waited patiently" guy in the psalm? It means he was a goner and he knew it. It means that waiting was the only thing he was capable of doing. His patience is not remarkable, it's inevitable. There's no way he can get out of the pit on his own. He can't even assist with a rescue. God does it all. The guy in the pit isn't thrown a rope or given a hand. No one pokes a branch at him to grab or offers a piece of encouraging advice. He is simply lifted out.

It reminds me of watching a friend who was working down in a slimy pit one day, laying sewer pipe in the rain. Without warning, in an instant, the muddy walls of the trench sagged and then collapsed around him. Wet clay packed him in up to

his chin. He was as good as dead if left to his own devices. He didn't scream or yell. He turned his head and simply looked up at his partner who leaped off his backhoe, right into the pit. Digging furiously and carefully with bare hands, he uncovered my friend, dragged him free, and got him back up on solid ground again.

That's God's specialty—getting right down into the pit. Although my first inclination is to think that Psalm 40 is about me, I haven't gone to Bible study all these years just for the weak decaf and doughnuts. So I know that, as usual, the psalm is pointing toward Jesus. He takes my pit and gives me His rock to stand on. The slimy pit is more than just a bad day at the office. It's hell down there. But that's God for you. He lifts me out, sets me straight, and takes my place. My contribution is nothing, zip.

I remember when my kids were very young, they'd sometimes make a big mess—break something, spill something, get something all mixed up. And then, half out of guilt, hoping to escape punishment—or maybe from naive self-confidence—they'd try to help with the cleanup. Often their efforts were useless, in the way, and sometimes they made things worse.

Feeling useless, being helpless, doesn't come easily to me or most guys I know. In fact, it's un-American. We prefer Yankee ingenuity and self-starters who get ahead on their own. Often I work with managers and executives who come from various countries in Asia to work in the U.S. office of their American employers. A tough part of their transition is adjusting to our do-it-yourself culture. It's difficult for them to accept our self-service attitude or understand why do-it-yourselfers are admired. But that same attitude makes it easy for me to forget that I haven't contributed anything to my own rescue or to talk about it objectively, after the fact.

Even my own prayers and songs are pretty self-centered, and the harder I try to improve them, the worse they get. But this psalm reminds me not to worry about it. God takes them all and gives me a "new song" and a "song of praise." Remember Jonah? He's a favorite of mine. Talk about being in a slimy pit! Dead as a mackerel, Jonah wastes no energy working on his escape. He spends his whale time singing a song that he only could have gotten from God. "You brought up my life from the pit," he says (Jonah 2:6). "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (v. 9). As I've grown older, I've learned to love the liturgy more and more because I realize it relieves me of finding the right things to say and sing. Instead, we give up our ideas and use the words God has given us for worship. Sitting in church, I might as well be inside a whale or on the edge of the pit, singing my head off.

Even back on terra firma, however, everybody has a bad day at the office—and much worse. These days, when someone says "I'm in the hole," we know they're talk-

ing about pay dirt, finances, being underground financially. “I’m in over my head” means “I feel overwhelmed.” Some folks say “I’m down in the dumps.” Maybe that’s not a slimy pit, but a situation that challenges or threatens or wears us down. Each Sunday our Prayer of the Church names members who need help—Wayne, Larry, Janet, Thomas, Lorraine, and more. Psalm 40 is for these pits as well as the big one. It doesn’t promise to fill up my bank account or cure Ted’s illness or make Ed’s job less stressful. But it assures me that I don’t need to go through any of those things alone. If Jesus is willing to take our spot in the pit—if God “did not spare His own Son . . . will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32).

Advent had just begun when I started thinking about Psalm 40. The “waiting patiently” part seemed poignant and seasonal. I thought about hope and faith and how important they are when someone goes through a period of trouble or hardship. Then Baby Jesus came and went, and soon it was Lent. I realized how much further the psalm had to take me and that Someone suffered hell on the cross in my place. But Jesus wasn’t left in His pit, the cold and darkened tomb. “God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death” (Acts 2:24), and the stone was rolled away from the pit on Easter. That’s the rock He sets our feet on, and it’s the Easter rock that makes the new song worth singing. It’s the reason to “see and fear and put their trust in the LORD” (Psalm 40:3).

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I realized how much further the psalm had to take me and that Someone suffered hell on the cross in my place. But Jesus wasn’t left in His pit, the cold and darkened tomb. “God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death” (Acts 2:24).

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, sometimes I find myself stuck in a slimy pit, a pit of my own choosing. Thank You for sending Jesus, who rescued me from the ultimate pit of sin, Satan, and death. Grant that through my humble praise, others might put their trust in You. I ask this through Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

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Monday

## DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalms 40:1-3

1. What sort of slimy pits have been causing you trouble recently?
2. Why is it good to remember that the *definitive* slimy pit that traps us is the grave?
3. Why is patient waiting the one absolute prerequisite for Christian discipleship?
4. What excuses might a person offer to shield himself from having to learn the humble art of patient waiting?
5. What tangible difference will God's promised work of rescuing make in your life today?

## Week One Tuesday

### Psalm 40:4-5

Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie! You 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.

## Trust in the Lord

Blessed is the wide receiver with six catches and two touchdowns. Blessed is the power forward with the triple double in game 7 of the playoffs. Blessed is the MVP. Blessed is the southpaw with the complete-game shutout.

Everybody feels blessed these days. It makes me cringe. The game is over and the sideline reporter, Sally Jean, nabs the hero of the winning team for a quick interview. "Well, Darren, they couldn't find a way to stop you in the final period today." "I feel blessed," says Darren.

"Blessed" sounds out of place when I hear it from a guy with a number on his shirt and a towel around his neck. I squirm a little when the interview begins that way. I can't tell if Darren is saying that he's grateful for God's gift of speed, or if he is trying to sound modest about his accomplishments, or if he's happy to be a winner. Maybe it's just a sophisticated way to say, "I'm lucky."

Sally Jean never follows up. Maybe she's uncomfortable too. The exchange shifts to what his coach said to him or what his strategy was or the statistics themselves. Blessed are the winners. Losers never feel blessed. Does that sound right? I realize I have a lot more to learn and understand about being blessed. Or is it "blest"? Usually by this time, I hit the mute button or surf to a game on another channel.

Here in Psalm 40, the guy from the pit tells us who is blessed. It's the "man who makes the LORD his trust" (v. 4). He's talking about himself, of course. When he was in the pit, he did nothing—nothing but wait patiently for the One he trusted. He trusted Someone on whom he could rely. He trusted Someone who could save him. His blessing was God's act of salvation. God raised Jesus from the dead. And because

He takes my place in the pit, I can trust Him to raise me too.

Blessing often gets mixed up with good luck. But like trust, it's a gift.

Apparently, then, being blessed is not about winning or losing—it's about trusting. In fact, the psalm doesn't say that blessing is a feeling, but rather something that we become. That's a relief. If being blessed depended on how I felt, I'd miss out pretty frequently. God's blessing depends on Him, not me.

Trust is rare these days, and loss of trust is more of a daily occurrence than encountering a blessed athlete. Trust, which I formerly took for granted, is fading away. My friends feel the same way I do about elected politicians who turn out to be corrupt and completely self-serving; leaders of blue-chip companies who fleece their investors and abuse the people who work for them; pastors and priests who take advantage of the office to hurt the very people who need their help; investment advisers who don't tell the truth—at least, not the *whole* truth; and athletes and celebrities who get their "blessings" from a needle. It's hard to trust anyone anymore.

The psalmist teaches me that I have a choice about whom I trust: "the Lord," or egotists and liars. When a choice is either God first or someone else, things boil down to First Commandment stuff. It's about idolatry. The word *idolatry* hasn't crept out of its old-fashioned church context into popular vocabulary the way *blessing* has.

Too bad. I could frequently use a reminder about the biggest idol of them all. When I'm in a jam, the Little Red Hen in me often looks to myself first for help. My natural tendency when I'm in deep trouble is to trust myself. The psalmist sets things up simply for me. It's an either/or choice—the Lord or "other." He says it's either faith or idolatry. Making the wrong choice is its own reward—no blessing.

After being rescued from the pit, a new man emerges, so he changes his tune and sings a new song. Jesus, who teaches us this new song, first teaches us how to trust God. Especially in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26, John 17), the evening before He entered the pit, He laid out His choices: trust His human feelings (specifically His fear of what His Passion would entail) or trust His Father. Then He chose to trust God's plan, not only for Himself, but also for me. In that same prayer, He also entrusts His disciples and all believers to God and asks that God not only raise them up to where He is going, but that His Father will give them the joy He knows.

Verses 4 and 5 of Psalm 40 are the prelude of the new song. They make two comparisons. First, we hear that God can be trusted and that the blessings follow from Him. This choice is compared with the consequence of trusting anyone else and therefore going astray. When we go astray instead of being blessed, we are likely

to wind up back in the pit or at least get our feet muddy. The lyrics also compare God’s deeds and thoughts to my capacity to fathom them all. In both comparisons, I come up short on my own.

Verse 5 of the psalm makes me think it was written especially for Americans—especially sports fans like me. Is there a country in the world that likes making lists more than we do? We always want to count things, rank things, and add them up. A “top ten” list is irresistible, and a “top hundred” is even better. Even the best sports-trivia nuts I know don’t know it all, but that doesn’t keep them from going on and on. The guy in the psalm can’t resist making a list either, even though he admits it will be inadequate. That’s the magnitude of God’s blessing, and that’s the magnitude of its effect on him.

Proud people trust themselves, sing the same old song about themselves, and discover sooner or later that do-it-yourself blessings are illusions that lead them astray. The man who is otherwise hopeless but trusts God discovers that God does it all, including giving him something new and limitless to sing about. To top it all off, He gives us Jesus, who shows us the perfect example of trust that He likewise gives us by His grace.

# SAMPLE

After being rescued from the pit, a new man emerges, so he changes his tune and sings a new song. Jesus, who teaches us this new song, first teaches us how to trust God.

*Prayer: Lord God, I confess my own pride in my accomplishments. For the sake of Jesus, please forgive me, strengthen my trust in You, and help me to focus on Your wondrous deeds that You accomplish through me and through others by Your grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*



Tuesday

## DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalms 40:4-5

1. What's a favorite "Top Ten" or "Top Hundred" that you like to monitor from time to time?

2. Suppose you started to follow through on David's plan and began to list the wonders that God has done specifically on your own behalf. What would you include in your Top Ten?

3. Why is it a good idea actually to sit down and recount the wonders God has done for you?

4. In what situations do you find it most difficult to put your trust in the Lord?

5. In what sense is it right that one has only two choices: either trust in God, or trust in proud liars?

## Week One Wednesday

### Psalm 40:6–11

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. 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." I have told the glad news of deliverance 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. As for You, O LORD, You will not restrain Your mercy from me; Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness will ever preserve me!

SAMPLE

## Listen to Him

Imagine a pig all laid out on a stretcher with a handle at each corner so it can be carried easily. There's a piece of fruit in the pig's mouth, and pineapples, oranges, and an apple or two around the carcass. Bowls of rice, cups of rice wine, and sticks of burning incense are arranged on the little platform as well. After a parade through the streets with horns and gongs attracting spectators, the magnificent sacrifice winds up at the temple at the idol's feet. I've seen it many times in my travels in Asia, especially in smaller towns and communities. I can assure you that the idols never smile, say thanks, or show any appreciation for all the fuss. That's divine gratitude for you.

Trying to make God happy can be a full-time job. People have spent a lot of time at it, whether they live in an Asian village or in a high-rise Western condo. Sometimes they do it to get on God's good side in order to get blessings. Or they do it to make up and compensate for doing things they know have displeased Him. It's the ultimate application of the do-it-yourself mentality, and it's the ultimate waste of time. But the man who took my place in the pit in Psalm 40 is up to something different. He's singing about all that God has done to make *him* happy.

He understands that empty rituals don't impress God. He knows "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). Being in the pit is an impossible situation because anything I might do, and any sacrifice I might come up with, would be futile. On the other hand, God's Law required sacrifices—in fact, lots of them. Old Testament priests made sacrifices over and over again, every day through the centuries. The Law also said that sacrifices must be perfect or they were not acceptable. "You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it" (Leviticus 22:20–21).

The contradiction is a tough one for me to crack. The new song celebrates the good news that my sacrifices are not good enough; in fact, they're not any good at all! God resolves the dilemma, and this is the key to the rest of the song. God accepted imperfect sacrifices if they were made trusting His mercy, not trying to impress Him. Sacrifices were made looking forward in faith to the perfect sacrifice that God, who does it all, would provide on the cross. Jesus Himself is the only perfect sacrifice.

Remember verse 4 of the psalm: "Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust." Blessing follows from trust in God's sacrifice, not our own efforts.

Trust is not only rare; God knows we can't come up with it on our own. So besides giving us Jesus' perfect example, He goes further and gives us the gift of faith. The blessed man says that God has thought of everything and has "given [him] an open ear" (Psalm 40:6). My open ears please God rather than my sacrifices because through them I learn to trust Him. God speaks His Word through my open ears, and the Holy Spirit uses that Word to create faith. Now, instead of trying to satisfy God with my sacrifices and offerings apart from faith, I can please Him by trusting His Son who lived a perfect life for me and suffered for me on the cross until God raised Him from the pit of death. There is absolutely nothing left for me to do to receive His blessing. Now, through faith, my sacrifices and offerings please Him, not in order to receive, but as an expression of gratefulness.

The new song is about Jesus. The new song tells us that He is the one who fulfills God's promise. "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do Your will, O my God" (Psalm 40:7–8). The new song is sung about Him "in the great congregation." Everyone everywhere will know that God is the only Savior. The ones with mere rituals and good works and sacrifices are the ones whom verse 4 called the "proud" who go astray.

When "the great congregation" hears the new song, something else happens. Back in verse 3 it says that "many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD."

Even though the new song can't completely recount everything that God has done for me, it's important for others in a pit to hear it so they will trust God too. John's Gospel says that Jesus did much more than is recorded, but those things that were recorded were "written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

Ears are not just for hearing, but for learning. Isaiah says, "Morning by morning He awakens; He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught" (Isaiah 50:4). Even though there is nothing left that I must do, there is plenty for me to learn. Jesus made this point to the Pharisees when He recited this psalm to them in Matthew 9. He said, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (v. 13). My trust is renewed and becomes stronger as I hear His Word.

My trust becomes stronger as I hear the new song over again because I have more to learn, not only about what He has done for me, but about the mercy that He shows to those who "are sick." Verse 11 of the Psalm says that God does "not restrain [His] mercy" from me, nor from anyone who trusts Him. I confess that I often judge other people by the quality of their sacrifices and rituals rather than by the wonderful things that God has done for them.

God says He loves mercy more than sacrifice. He sent Jesus to show us His mercy and give us His eternal blessing. What pleases Him? Not mere sacrifices, rituals, or even good works. He says plainly in Matthew 17:5, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." God is pleased with His Son, and He is pleased with us when we listen to His Son with God-given faith. That faith infuses the sacrifice of our lives, our worship, and our good works so that they are truly pleasing to God. The blessed man trusts Jesus and listens to Him.

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My open ears please God rather than my sacrifices because through them I learn to trust Him. God speaks His Word through my open ears, and the Holy Spirit uses that Word to create faith.

*Prayer: Blessed Holy Spirit, forgive me for blocking my ears to Your Word about Christ through poor church attendance and infrequent Bible study and devotion. By Your grace, open my ears once more so that I might serve God by faith and my neighbor by love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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S A M P L E

Wednesday

## DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalms 40:6–11

1. What's the biggest sacrifice you can recall making for another person?
2. What kind of sacrifices or offerings does God expect you to make?
3. Who is the "I" that is the subject of these verses?
4. What responsibility to his fellow creatures does the psalmist acknowledge?
5. It is fairly obvious how God's loving kindness preserves you, but how does God's truth also preserve you?

Psalm 40:12–16

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. Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me! 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! Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!" But may all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; may those who love Your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!"

## One All-time Hit Song

Tunes can take over. Especially tunes without words. A bit of music will start running through my head and I lose control of it. I can't get the tune out of my head once it starts. It's as if it's programmed in my brain on a continuous loop. Sometimes it's a melody I enjoy. Sometimes it's only a jingle from a TV commercial. If I can recall the words that go with the notes, that usually stops the distraction. When I can't come up with the lyrics, the music gets old very quickly, and my efforts to find the words are frustrating.

It seems as if verses 12–16 of Psalm 40 are the lyrics to the "new song" that the man from the pit is singing. This is the guy who "waited patiently" in verse 1. He couldn't have come up with these words on his own. The song not only tells us that he's in deep trouble, but that he can't even fathom how bad his situation is—surrounded and outpaced, according to verse 12: "For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me." The words also suggest that he is already singing this anthem while he is still in the pit, waiting for God to rescue him.

During the Vietnam War, I remember hearing about prisoners who spent time in their cells singing. I don't recall that they composed any songs of their own, however. They sang the songs they were given—songs they learned in Sunday School and church, maybe songs their moms had taught them. Singing can make time pass

more easily. Like the man in the pit, all they could do was wait patiently.

No atheists in foxholes, they say. Apparently what takes place in the pits, however, is battlefield negotiations with God: "If You get me out of this, God, I'm gonna clean up my act. You can count on it." Or "I hope You remember that I've been pretty good, Lord, and that You'll help me to survive this." Maybe best of all are the stories about hopeless cases that vow to go to seminary (or at least attend church every Sunday) in exchange for God's rescue.

You don't have to be in a foxhole—or in a pit of destruction—to behave this way. Lesser dilemmas sometimes make me engage in the same type of bargaining. Lost car keys? "God, if You do this, I'll do that." Somebody sick? In an airplane in a thunderstorm? You know how it goes. In America, we are leashed to "cause and effect" reasoning. I like to believe that I can affect my destiny by what I do. It's almost scientific! Even when I can't control a situation, sometimes I try to control God. The psalmist has no such illusions. He waits patiently. He's singing while he waits, but not his own song. He brings nothing to the situation. On his own, he knows he's a goner. "My heart fails me," he says. I think I already mentioned that he is dead.

What's he singing about? What's the song he was given? First of all, he has a math problem. He has so many sins that he can't count them all. "Evils have encompassed me beyond number," he sings in verse 12. The song leaves no doubt that the singer has no way out. Surrounded and overtaken, he says. No loopholes. He can sing about it because he knows that when it comes to sins, God doesn't count, either. The singer is blessed because he is forgiven. It reminds me of God's promise in this regard: "If You, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Psalm 130:3). The worse things are for him, the greater the blessing he has received.

The song goes on. "I can't see a thing," he sings. "I'm blinded by my sins. It's like having my hair in my eyes." It's an interesting way of thinking of things. Sin blinds us. What is it that he can't see? His own predicament? A way to escape? At this point, he can't see his God, his Savior. After Adam and Eve's sin had overtaken them in the garden, they hid themselves from God. How can anyone come to God on his own if he can't see Him? God always comes to sinners, not the other way around. This passage also makes me think of Jesus, who took my place on the cross. When He was covered with my sins, He also could not see His Father. He could only ask, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Having recited the man's hopeless sinful condition, the lyrics of the new song proclaim the refrain in verse 13. "Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me!" The blessing is in the promise. The promise does not depend on me—and that's why it's dependable. The song goes, "Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver



me!" God doesn't save me reluctantly. He hasn't been talked into it. He doesn't owe it to me because of anything I've done. He isn't giving to me as advance compensation for something I've promised to do.

God always does what pleases Him. God Himself is happy to save me. That explains why He always makes the first move. When I feel blessed, I'm really sharing in the happiness that He feels by keeping His promise and restoring me to life again.

The lyrics continue and point at those who persecute the singer. They mock him because of his plight, and perhaps even more because of his faith. He's in the hole, singing his lungs out, and they don't get it, so they laugh. They're Noah's neighbors hooting at him for climbing into his dark boat. They're the folks who look at me and wonder how someone as imperfect as I am can expect anything at all from God. The singer and I have the last "Aha!" because we can always expect God to do what He pleases. What kind of blessing would it be and what kind of song would it be if they came without some laughter?

This is what the second refrain in verse 16 is all about. It says that blessing and happiness are sharing God's happiness. God takes my pit and gives me His rock to stand on. He takes my situation without a future and gives me a promise that when people see what He is planning for me, they will know how great He is. And He takes my wordless jingles and gives me words and music to the number one all-time hit song that goes on and on and on.

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God doesn't save me reluctantly. He hasn't been talked into it. He doesn't owe it to me because of anything I've done. He isn't giving to me as advance compensation for something I've promised to do. God always does what pleases Him.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, sometimes it seems my sins surround me and won't let me out of the pit of guilt and despair. During those times, rescue me, cleanse me of unrighteousness, and lift me up with Your strong hands that still bear the marks of Calvary. I ask this in Your name. Amen.*

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# Thursday

## DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalm 40:12–16

1. Recall a time when your sins caught up with you.
2. How does Satan use the size and number of your sins to keep you from seeing clearly?
3. What is the relationship between verses 12 and 13?
4. Is God ever *not* pleased to rescue His desperate servant? Does He ever tire of the task? How does God's disposition of mercy and grace affect your living today?
5. Throughout this section, David is explicit in his desire for God to act speedily. Why might God make you wait for Him to step in with His work of deliverance?

Psalm 40:17

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!

## Come, Lord Jesus

Did you ever hear of the “Olympic Beatitudes”? What about Beijing 2008? I didn’t go to the games, but shortly before they began, I saw the beatitudes plastered around the stadiums and arenas in the northern district of the city. It wasn’t necessary to visit the structures in Beijing, however, to see Beibei, Jingjing, Huanhuan, Yingying, and Nini. Wherever I traveled in China, I saw images of these official mascots of the Olympic Games on billboards, TV ads, key rings, chopsticks, and stuffed toys. They were much more than promotions for the 2008 Olympics, however. They were symbols of the “Five Blessings” in traditional Chinese culture. These blessings are received by practicing the same virtues that lead to gold medals—hard work, fair and goodwill. Oh, and lots of luck.

As I read the last verse of Psalm 40—“I am poor and needy”—the blessings of Jesus, the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, come to my mind. “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” Jesus says (v. 3). Blessings are for losers. Jesus explains what the singer in Psalm 40 is talking about. He does not mention possessions. He is not out to condemn large bank accounts, season tickets to the White Sox, or riding lawn mowers. He doesn’t suggest that there is virtue in being down and out. It’s not what we have but who we are that matters. The “poor and needy” guy is a loser.

Jesus hangs out with losers. This includes folks with money. He was criticized because “many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and His disciples” (Matthew 9:10). They had money, but they were still poor and needy.

They had broken all the rules. They had made enemies of everyone. Some of them were regarded as traitors. Their blessing is in His promise. It has nothing to do with prosperity, happiness, passion, health, and good luck, the traditional Chinese “beatitudes.” He says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:13).

Some of my non-Christian friends criticize Jesus for hanging out with the wrong sort of people. He doesn't live up to their expectations when it comes to whom He lets into the Church and, down the road, into heaven. It's as if He doesn't have any standards. These friends like to point out all the hypocrites that belong to the Church. They're quick to point out people who don't follow the rules God has laid out. Losers don't deserve blessings. It's not fair. What use is it to be a good Christian if some church members are losers? But that's God for you. Jesus says, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13).

Jesus spends His time showing mercy. The singer in Psalm 40 qualifies for God's mercy because he's poor and needy. He has absolutely no redeeming qualities of his own. We already know he's rotten to the core and surrounded and overtaken by evil (Psalm 40:12). God lifts him out of the pit and Jesus takes his place in the hole. The losers in the pews at my church and I receive the same blessing because we know we are poor and needy and all we can do is depend on God to show us His mercy.

Being poor and needy qualifies me for mercy, but how do I know that's the condition I'm in? Like the psalmist, I can't see or measure how bad things are. We're both blind as bats. No one wants to be blind, especially about himself. However, what people usually talk about is not their blindness but their blind spots—obstructions to their vision here and there. No one is ready to say they are completely in the dark. They believe all they need is a little help—not a rescue. Folks feel that if they have a good self-analysis, then they will know what to do and how to adapt in order to get ahead, compete effectively, and solve their problems. They spend a lot of time taking personal inventories or paying someone to do it for them. The results never say "bankrupt," however, much less "dead as a doornail." I enjoy looking at all the self-help books on the shelves at my favorite bookstores and wondering why so many are needed. If they're not enough, apparently there's free advice to be had as well, from experts such as Oprah and Dr. Phil, although I haven't watched them on TV myself (really!). Even if they would tell me I have nothing at all worth saving, their remedies would never be enough.

The psalmist shows me the way to the sight and insight I need. It's a gift. The psalmist is given a "new song," and the lyrics describe his plight. He understands that his only hope is to wait patiently for God to save him. Similarly, the psalm points us toward Jesus, who goes around giving sight to the blind so that we can see how much we need Him.

God gives me His Word. Like the new song, it points me to Jesus who shows me what God is like, and who promises to make a trade with me—my poorness and shortcomings in exchange for His rich blessing and mercy. The only yardstick for

how poor I am is by comparison with God Himself and how rich He is. The blessing is that He's willing to give it all away to those who trust Him. Jesus says, "All that the Father has is Mine; therefore I said that He will take what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:15). Why should He do this? Back in verse 13, the song says it is because it pleases Him. We know that "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Trusting God is linked to being poor and needy, and it is the reason He blesses us.

The song promises that in spite of my own lack of awareness of myself and of God, He is aware of me. The "Lord takes thought of me," it promises (v. 17). God not only does everything; He thinks of everything. And He always acts first. I'm reminded of this during the Lord's Supper at church. Members who are blind or otherwise unable to come to the altar wait patiently in their pews. The pastors bring the Sacrament to those members where they sit. What a picture of the ultimate blessing—not good luck, not good health or any of the other Olympic Beatitudes. God takes our cheap blessings that we try to achieve by hard work and behaving ourselves, and especially by winning, and He gives us a blessing we can really sing about. The blessing is Jesus Himself who comes to me when I cannot come to Him. Come, Lord Jesus!

S A M P L E

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God takes our cheap blessings that we try to achieve by hard work and behaving ourselves, and especially by winning, and He gives us a blessing we can really sing about.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, You call the poor in spirit "blessed." Take the poverty of my sins and restore me to the full status of being Your brother, a son of Your heavenly Father, and the riches of His mercy and grace. I ask this in Your name. Amen.*

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Friday

## DAILY STUDY QUESTIONS

Psalms 40:17

1. What are some virtues or blessings that you have been trying to add to your life lately?
2. According to the psalm's final verse, what is the one essential criterion for God to give His blessing?
3. How does a person go about becoming afflicted and needy (a loser!) so that he will be in the right place to receive God's gift?
4. David calls God his "deliverer." From what does God deliver David? From what does He deliver you?
5. How does this final verse provide a shining example of a faith that does not waver or doubt?

## Week One

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### Psalm 40

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The 40th psalm is a beautiful psalm of prayer in which Christ Himself laments His sufferings and calls for rescue from death. It clearly prophesies that He alone does God's will and fulfills the Law, and that this is written about Him in the book of Moses. Christ dissolves and abolishes the old Law of sacrifices and its holiness by which God's will was not fulfilled. God alone does everything for us; nothing is done by our work or sacrifices. He therefore promises and establishes the New Testament in which the justification of the believers will be preached in the great congregation, that is, in the entire world, and not the justification by sacrifices or our works. For works and sacrifices make only arrogant and false saints whose hope is not in God or in His grace, but in their lies and false holiness.

—Martin Luther

## GROUP BIBLE STUDY

(Questions and answers on pp. 181–184.)

1. Think of a time when you had no choice but to wait patiently. What were the circumstances, and how did you handle the situation?
2. “Patient waiting” seems to be the definition of *good disciple*. Why might Christians have a hard time coming to terms with the requirement that they learn and even embrace such patient waiting?
3. In Monday’s devotion, the author confessed an increasing appreciation for the liturgy: “I realize it relieves me of finding the right things to say and sing. Instead, we give up our ideas and use the words God has given us for worship.” What do you think about this idea? How can it be possible that the liturgy is a “new song”?
4. In verse 4, David asserts God’s blessing for the man who “makes the LORD his trust.” If faith is something the Holy Spirit must create in each of us (Ephesians 2:8–9), what does David mean by making man the one who does the choosing?
5. What does David mean in verse 6 when he asserts, “In sacrifice and offering You have not delighted. . . . Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required,” when, in fact, God had specifically required such sacrifices from His people? Is there a proper place for ritual or sacrifices in the lives of Christians?



6. How does this psalm undergo a sort of metamorphosis from being simply praise to being stunningly messianic? Point out all the parts of the psalm that receive new meaning or significance when read in the context of Christ's life and mission.

7. What is the relationship between sin and seeing (v. 12)? What implications might this truth have for society as well as for families and individuals?

8. What's the difference between seeking God and loving His salvation (v. 16)?

9. How are we able to read (much less pray!) verses 14 and 15 without cringing at words that sound embarrassingly self-serving and, well, . . . vengeful?

10. The last verse of the psalm captures the central theme of the entire psalm. What is the cause-and-effect relationship that seems to be at work in this verse? Why is the first part of this relationship so rarely heard or accepted?