

## “Waiting and Waiting”

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Psalm 40

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Read the psalm by clicking [here](#).

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There is waiting. Then there is *wait—ing!* How do you wait?

Those who are fans of the rock group U2, as I am, we know this psalm. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of fans, most with little knowledge of the Bible, have ended U2 concerts with psalm 40 on their lips.<sup>1</sup>

*I waited patiently for the Lord.  
He reclined and heard my cry.  
He brought me up out of the pit  
Out of the mire and clay.*

*And I will sing, sing a new song.  
I will sing, sing a new song.*

*How long to sing this song?  
How long to sing this song?  
How long, how long, how long  
How long, to sing this song?*

U2 added in that part, the “how long” part. It’s not in psalm 40. They added on this insistent cry to God. *How long, how long, how long, how long, will I be waiting, Lord God, until you lift me from this bog, this pit, and set me safe and sound? How long?*

This impatient cry doesn’t really fit the psalms beginning: “*I waited patiently for the Lord.*” Patiently waiting . . . that’s how I learned it. Maybe that’s how you know it. I picture sitting quietly, calmly, peacefully, waiting for God to do what is needed whenever God thinks it right. After all, God knows best. So I do best to trust God, and wait. Patiently.

II

So I was surprised! I never knew, until this week, that the “patiently” word is not in the psalm. It makes no mention of patience at all. Just waiting. Lots of waiting.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40\\_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_(song)) “40” is often used to end U2 concerts.

What it says, literally, is this: “*Waiting I waited for the Lord.*” It’s just the word “waited” repeated twice. In the Hebrew language, repeating a word intensifies its meaning. It’s like if we said, during that scorching heat at the start of July, not just “It’s hot out!” but “It’s *hot hot* out!” Doubling a word multiplies its power.

So the psalm writer was “waiting and waiting.” That could mean “waiting patiently” as in the psalmist was really good at waiting.<sup>2</sup> But it could just as easily have a sense of impatient waiting: “I waited and waited for the Lord!” That’s what it feels like to me: waiting that’s intense, waiting that’s hard, waiting that’s long.

To me, that feels real.

### III

After all, this waiting happened when the psalm-writer was in a pit. Maybe not literally, but that’s how it felt. A desolate pit. A pit of destruction. A miry bog. A mucky mess. Whatever the real situation was --- it could have been health, could have been hardship, some sort of persecution, a campaign of harassment, interpersonal conflict, personal sin --- whatever it was, it was terrible.

For me personally, it sounds a bit like when my mental illness, depression, has hold of me. Stuck in stinky mud, unable to move, looking up from the bottom of the hole, seeing the sky and freedom, yet so far away and out of reach. That sounds about right, a good description of what’s wrong.

If you can wait patiently in the midst of something like that, you are blessed. I can’t. I am desperate to get out of it. I pull myself out of the sucking ooze, but I slip in further. I claw at the dirty and rocky sides, but only pull more down on me. I am not patient. I am desperate.

Still, I have to wait. I know things that help, practices that change the “space” I’m in. Medication helps. So does therapy. But none of that works like magic. It’s not flipping a switch. Waiting, I wait. I wait and wait and wait.

Whatever your pit is, whatever swamp you get stuck in. . . . It might be like mine, or quite different. . . . You might be good at waiting patiently. But maybe not. However good you are at waiting, you still have to wait. Waiting, you wait. You wait and wait and wait.

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<sup>2</sup> Translating this as “patiently” dates at least as far back as the Authorized (or King James) Version early in the 17th century. It has been maintained by many subsequent translations. I’m not saying that this translation is incorrect, though I think it is less obvious than other meanings.

#### IV

Psalm 40 splits into 3 parts.

The first remembers and tells about things that already happened: the waiting and waiting for God, then God rescuing, then the writer praising, and people hearing of it and putting their trust in God too. The one whom God rescued from the pit now tells of what has happened, gives witness to what God has done, and through this evangelism --- this telling of God news --- many have been blessed.

But there is one more who needs to be blessed by the telling.

The middle part speaks to God directly. The writer tells God about how they've been telling everyone everything that God has done and is doing (as much as they can). The theme of witnessing, testifying, evangelizing continues. They've been telling the good news, and they're going to keep on telling.

Which is good, because there is one more who needs to hear.

Because in the last part of the psalm, things have turned bad again. Evil is surrounding, sins are overtaking, and hearts are failing. Foes are laughing, mocking, and stealing life.

So it's the psalm-singer who needs to hear it again.

Psalm 40 is about reminding ourselves. When we are in the middle of hardship, we need to be reminded, to remind ourselves, of another time when we were stuck in a pit, mired in a bog. We need to remember another time when waiting, we waited. Remember then, how God acted, rescued, and saved.

We ourselves who need to be evangelized. We need to be reminded --- to remind ourselves --- of God's good news.

#### V

Waiting, we wait for God, because we know what God has done before.

We might be waiting patiently, calm and unhurried. Okay. Just make sure it is God for whom we are waiting.

We might be waiting impatiently, frantic and desperate. Okay. Just make sure it is God for whom we are waiting.

I noticed in this psalm that it is not the quality of our waiting that's key. The "waiting I waited" line is just in the first sentence. After that, the focus isn't on our waiting. It's not the manner of our waiting that matters.

It is the One for whom we wait. The rest of the psalm focuses on what God has done, and what we hope and trust God will do, for we who wait, no matter how we are waiting.

However I waited . . . it was God who drew me up, who set my feet, and taught me to sing.

However I wait . . . it's God whose wondrous deeds cannot be counted, whose rescues cannot be contained, whose faithfulness and salvation brings out my praise, and whose steadfast love cannot be kept secret.

However I wait, it is God for whom I wait.

What I find I need to do, is get my focus off myself, and focus on God. I get caught up asking, "Am I patient enough? Is my faith strong enough?" What matters most, though, is that God is more than faithful enough, God is more than trustworthy enough, God is more than good enough, and holy enough, and powerful enough, and persistent enough . . . and, yes, even patient enough.

*Waiting, I waited for the Lord. God leaned close and heard my cry, and lifted me up.*

Praise be to God!