

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: The Antidote

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Scripture:

Psalm 40

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

¹ I waited patiently for the LORD;
he turned to me and heard my cry.

² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.

³ He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear the LORD
and put their trust in him.

⁴ Blessed is the one
who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods

⁵ Many, LORD my God,
are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.

None can compare with you;

were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.

⁶ Sacrifice and offering you did not desire—
but my ears you have opened—
burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.

⁷ Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—
it is written about me in the scroll.

⁸ I desire to do your will, my God;
your law is within my heart."

⁹ I proclaim your saving acts in the great assembly;
I do not seal my lips, LORD,
as you know.

¹⁰ I do not hide your righteousness in my heart;
I speak of your faithfulness and your saving help.

I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness
from the great assembly.

¹¹ Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD;
may your love and faithfulness always protect me.

¹² For troubles without number surround me;
my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.

They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails within me.

¹³ Be pleased to save me, LORD;
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

¹⁴ May all who want to take my life
be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin
be turned back in disgrace.

¹⁵ May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!"
be appalled at their own shame.

¹⁶ But may all who seek you

rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
"The LORD is great!"
17 But as for me, I am poor and needy;
may the Lord think of me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
you are my God, do not delay.

Transcript:

So glad you're here. Those of you joining us online, those of you here in the room, thank you for being here. The scripture is Psalm 40. "I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and he heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

So this summer we are doing a sermon series on the Psalms in the Bible, which are, they were the songs that people back then sang in worship. They're also prayers. We've been saying that there are nine different types of Psalms and each one shows us a different way to pray. And if we expand our prayer life from just help and thank you, which is most of our prayers, help and thank you, but if we expand our prayers to these nine different ways to pray, God becomes more real, prayer becomes more of a conversation, and we experience more of God's presence and more of God's power.

The Psalm I just read is a Psalm of thanksgiving. It's also a Psalm asking for help. Now, I just said that there's more to prayer than help and thank you, which is true. But help and thank you are one of the nine ways to pray. And this Psalm is both help and thank you. And thank you is different than praise, Psalms of praise. Praise is where we complete the sentence. "God, what's great about you is..." And thank you is where we thank God for what he's done. So praise is about who God is, his character. Thank you is thanking God for what he has done.

And being thankful is empowering. Being thankful is empowering. It gives us courage, hope, and joy. When I am thankful, I am more courageous because I believe things are going to turn out for the good. When I am thankful, I have more hope because I'm focused on what's turning out well, not badly. When I'm thankful, I have more joy because I'm focused on what's good, not what's bad. Thankfulness is the antidote to despair, worry and fear.

But what we see in this Psalm and what we see in life is that being thankful isn't always a 100% constant continuous experience every waking moment of our lives, is it? I mean, how many of

you are constantly, continuously thankful every single minute of the day? Because if you are, this sermon will be completely irrelevant to you. Just take out your phone and scroll through social media if you are always constantly permanently thankful. And while the two of you do that, the rest of us will learn from this Psalm how to have a back and forth conversation with God that leads us to empowering thankfulness, the kind that gives us courage, hope, and joy, even when things are going badly, because there's no great trick to be thankful when things are going well. That's easy. But when things are going badly, when that friend abandons you, when you lose your job, when you hear that scary diagnosis, then how do we be thankful? This Psalm shows us how.

So the very first line says, "I waited patiently for the Lord." Okay, so right off the bat we know there's something wrong, right? He's waiting. King David who wrote this Psalm, he's waiting for God to fix some problem. So that's the first six words of the Psalm, there's a problem. But then immediately, what does David do? Well, the very next line he starts thanking God because David knows that to find courage, hope, and joy in the present, thank God for what he's done in the past. Because when we do that, we remind ourselves of all the ways God has shown up, of all the things He's helped us out, of all the power that we have seen in our lives. When we thank God for what he's done, we're reminding ourselves of that which gives us hope for our present and our future.

And then David starts to list things that he's thankful for. He says, "I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry." When have you felt God has heard your cry, understands what you're going through? Maybe not right at first, but maybe in retrospect you saw that he really did hear you. Because when we feel heard, when we feel that someone understands what we're going through, that's part of what gives us courage and hope.

As part of my job, I do some marriage counseling and never have I ever had someone say to me, "The problem I have with my spouse is they just don't give me enough unsolicited advice. If only my spouse would give me advice that I haven't asked for, I'd feel so much closer to them." Never have I ever heard anyone say that. It's always, "My spouse doesn't hear me. My spouse doesn't understand what I'm going through." When we feel someone really understands what we're going through, it gives us hope and courage, which is part of why God Himself came in the person of Jesus to live the life that we have to live so that when we go to Him, he understands us.

Have people lied about you? They lied about Him too. Have your friends hurt you? His friends hurt Him. Financial difficulties? He was poor. He suffered in every way we do so that when we go to Him, we know he gets us. That's something to be thankful for. Then David goes on and he says, "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mire and the mud." I love that image, right? Slimy pit, mud, mire. Has God ever lifted you out of some kind of slimy pit situation? Either one that wasn't your fault or maybe some slime pit that you created yourself through your own decisions. Has God ever rescued you from those things?

"He sat my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand." What are the firm places to stand that God has given you? Maybe it's your family or friends or church or your faith. "He put a new song in my mouth." When has God given you something new to thank Him for? A new friend, new opportunity, new experience. We can be thankful because God has heard our cry, lifted us out of difficult situations, gives us a firm place to stand and gives us new things to sing about. Four things to be thankful for in just three verses.

There's a scene in Shakespeare's play, Romeo and Juliet, where Romeo is crying and complaining to his mentor, a monk named Father Laurence, complaining about all the things going wrong in his life, right? He loves Juliet, but Juliet and Romeo's family, they hate each other. And then he ended up killing Juliet's cousin, which shockingly made things worse, right? Note to self, okay? If your spouse or your boyfriend or your girlfriend's family don't like you, killing their cousin will not help, okay? FYI.

So Romeo is whining and complaining about all the things going wrong in his life. And finally his mentor, Father Laurence, has had enough. And he says, "Okay, Romeo, look at it this way." I'm paraphrasing. He says, "Look at it this way, Romeo. Juliet could be dead, but she's not dead. She's alive. There art thou happy. You can be happy about that. And yeah, okay, you killed her cousin. Not so great, but it could have been worse. He could have killed you. There art thou happy. You could have been executed for killing him, but instead you've just been banished. There art thou happy. A pack of blessings is upon you and happiness is all around."

And what this shows is that Father Laurence should have taken a pastoral care course because that's a terrible response. No compassion. And shockingly, sometimes my wife will quote these lines of Shakespeare back to me. I'll be complaining about something or worried about some problem here at work and she'll say, "Well, they haven't fired you yet. There aren't thou happy." No, there are thy not happy? There are thou miserable. However, Father Laurence and my wife, they actually have a good point. There's always so to be thankful for. Life is never 100% awful.

Now it is true, we face very hard things, health crisis, loss of a loved one. I mean, look at the news. Victims of mass shootings, sometimes racially motivated, human trafficking. God never asks us to minimize the hurt, the pain, the injustice in our life. In fact, back to that slide of nine different kinds of Psalms that are nine different ways to pray, one of those ways is lament where we lament injustice, lament hardship, lament pain. And we need to lament. And thanksgiving without lament is trite because we're minimizing the pain and the hurt in the world. We need both, thanksgiving and lament. And we'll talk about lament in a few weeks.

But in this Psalm where David faces some kind of huge crisis, we don't know what it is, we don't know what his problem is, he still finds things to be thankful for. I've been with people who have lost a child or young parents who have a terminal disease and they're going to leave little kids behind. And even those people still find things to be thankful for.

One of the many things I admire about Pastor Sergio is when he prays, he always starts, "Thank you God that we have air in our lungs, food in our table, clothes in our back and friends and family in our lives." Now he grew up in the immigrant, they didn't have a lot, but he learned to be thankful. Because see, sometimes we focus on what we don't have rather than on what we do have and on what we've lost rather than on what remains. And when we are thankful even in the middle of our trials, it's empowering because we remind ourselves of how God has shown up for us in the past, which gives us confidence He'll show up again in the future. And not just for us as individuals, not just what we individually are thankful for, but also corporately, which leads to the second way to get empowering thankfulness that gives us courage, hope, and joy. And that is to realize I am part of God's bigger story.

David said, "Blessed is the one who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside the false Gods. Many Lord my God are the wonders you have done, the things you plan for us." So at the beginning of the Psalm, David says, "He lifted me out of the slimy pit," but here he switches to us and to the plural. And in the original Hebrew, the word that he uses for proud often refers to Egypt where they worship a bunch of false gods. And so he's alluding to when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, but God delivered them to a land of their own. That's what they have to be thankful for. Corporately as a nation, and David is part of that. God is healing the world. He is setting people free from actual slavery and spiritual slavery, bringing hope to people in despair. And corporately, we get to participate in that. God invites us into his bigger story of healing the world which gets us out of ourselves, out of our own problems and into his bigger joy. There are thou happy. It is something to be thankful for.

Then David says, "I proclaim your saving acts in the Great Assembly. I do not conceal your love and your faithfulness from the Great Assembly." He says Great Assembly twice. And what he's referring to there is worship, not just individual thankfulness, but corporate thankfulness. In order to experience the kind of thankfulness that makes us brave, we need to be in worship together. Because when we come together and sing and proclaim all the things God has done for me, the things God has done for you, the things God has done for us corporately, when we combine all the things that we are thankful for, we have more things to be thankful for. A sorrow shared is cut in half. A joy shared is doubled, tripled, quadrupled.

And then David says, "Sacrifice and offerings you did not desire, but my ears you have opened." In other words, God is not interested in religious rituals. He's interested in relationship. So he opens our ears so we can hear from him, so we can have conversation with him because without conversation, there can be no relationship. Which is another thing to be thankful for. I'm in a relationship, not a religion. David says, "Sin offerings you did not require. And then I said, 'Here I am, I have come'." That's not the language of religion, that is the language of relationship. "Here I am, I have come." And notice the order of these two lines. God doesn't require a sin offering, which people used to give to slaughter an animal to pay the price for all of their sins. God doesn't require that. And that opens the door for us to come to him for relationship. And the reason God doesn't require sin offerings to atone for our sin, which hurts other people, and if God just ignores that, then he's letting in justice stand and that is not loving.

So he came Himself in the person of Jesus and died in our place to pay the price for our sins that stand between us and God so that we can have relationship with Him. God loves you so much, he'd rather die than lose you. And if that's not something to be thankful for, then I don't know what is.

So that is the first 10 verses of the Psalm. For 10 verses, David says to God, "Thank you." And then and only then he turns back to his problems and he says to God, "Help. May your love and faithfulness always protect me, for troubles without numbers surround me." And I am so glad he didn't say what his troubles are because that allows us just imagine that whatever troubles we have, he was having the same trouble. "Come quickly, Lord, to help me." God wants us to ask him for help.

But notice the ratio. David spends 10 verses thanking God and three verses asking for help, 10 to three. Is that the ratio in your prayers? 10 thank yous for every three help mes. Not always the ratio in mine. Which brings me to my last point, the way to find empowering thankfulness is to wrap your problems in thanksgiving. The Apostle Paul in the New Testament puts it this way, "Do not be anxious about anything. Anything. Even that thing you're anxious about, don't be anxious about it. But in every situation, by prayer and petition, asking for help, with thanksgiving, with thanksgiving present your request to God." And then what? You'll get everything you want?

No.

No. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Now again, we face really hard things in life. And thanksgiving without lament is trite. But in prayer, when we wrap our problems in thanksgiving, we are remembering how God helped us in the past, which gives us hope for the future. In fact, if you go again back to that slide, nine different types of Psalms, which are nine different ways of praying, you may notice there's something missing from that list. There are no "help me" prayers, there are no "help me" Psalms there. And the reason is most of the Psalms where the writer is asking for help are also simultaneously Psalms of thanksgiving like this one. The Psalm writers always wrap their "help me" prayers in prayers of thanksgiving.

I remember one time I was at a restaurant with a friend and the waiter asked if we would like to try the appetizer. And he said the appetizer was cantaloupe wrapped in beer candied bacon. Beer candied bacon. There is nothing wrong with that sentence, right? Bacon makes everything better. It's why vegetarians don't eat bacon because they know one bit, game over, right? Bacon forever. Thanksgiving is like cantaloupe wrapped in beer candied bacon. Wrap thanksgiving around your fears, wrap thanksgiving around your disappointments, wrap it around your problems, and you will be more courageous, hopeful and joyful. And that's what we see at the very end of this Psalm. At the very end of this Psalm, David starts with a problem,

thanks God, ask God for help. And then at the very end of this Psalm, we see confidence and courage.

David says, "May all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. May those who say to me Aha, aha..." You have people in your life that do that, right? Like, "Oh, you blew it. You screwed up. I knew you would. I told you so. Aha, aha, aha." Well, may those people be appalled at their own shame. "Yeah." First, it sounds sort of like David is trying to call down God's wrath on these people. But then he says, "May those who long for your saving help always say, 'The Lord is great.' You are my help. You are my deliverer. You are my God. Do not delay." So again, he sounds like he's going back to asking for help like he did at the beginning of the Psalm, but now it's in a different way. He asked God for help. Thanks God for 10 verses. And then here by the end of the Psalm, goes back to asking God for help, but this time in confident expectation that God is great, that God is his deliverer and that God will help.

See, this Psalm is a back and forth dialogue with God where David starts asking for help, spends a bunch of time thanking God, then goes back to asking for help. But after all of that thanksgiving, now he's asking in confident expectation that God is going to show up. And what this shows is that thanksgiving isn't just like flipping a switch. "I pray one prayer. Poof. I'm thankful forever, always, and always." Because life isn't like that. It's a process. I'm thankful and then I'm not. And then I'm thankful and then I'm not. This Psalm condenses down into 17 verses a process that might have taken 17 years. It's not always instant. It takes time. It's a back and forth dialogue with God where David wraps his problems with thanksgiving and emerges more confident, courageous, and hopeful.

So the action step this week is super simple. In prayer, wrap your problems in thanksgiving. Ask God for help, whatever help you need, but make sure that you thank him. And I believe if you do that every day, you're going to feel at least a little more courage, hope and joy.

I heard a man named Richard talk about how right after his wife had their second child, his company eliminated their job. Never a good time to lose your job, but they also had some medical expenses and some other debts so this was super scary. And on top of that, Richard and his wife were alienated from some of their family members because of some misunderstandings. And on top of all of that, the youth ministry that they had started in their church had failed. So in every direction that Richard looked, he saw failure, rejection, uncertainty. He was angry, he was worried.

One day he was just kind of pouring all of this out with his pastor, just kind of venting his fear, venting his anger and he said, "I don't know why all this is happening. Why isn't God helping? I don't understand. I've given him my life. Where is he? Why isn't he showing up?" And then he threw his hands in the air in frustration and he said, "I don't know. Sometimes I just say to my wife, 'Well, at least we still have each other and kids we love, but that's about all we've got'." And he meant it as an accusation against God, like, "You've taken everything except this."

But right after the hoards were out of his mouth, "All we have is each other and kids we love," he thought, "Wait. That. That sounds better." And then he thought about all the things that he and his wife had gone through, all the ways that God had shown up for them in the past. And then he got this kind of embarrassed grin on his face and he said, "I guess I have more things to be thankful for than I thought. And I guess I just need to wait on God because he's always helped me in the past, and so he's probably going to help me now and I just need to wait on him."

And then he felt this surge of confidence and hope not just to deal with what he had to deal with, not just survive, not just get by, but courage to hope, courage and hope to do bigger things, to look for a job that maybe was a better fit than the one he had, to go back to those relatives from whom they were estranged and keep working for reconciliation and healing in those relationships. Courage to try another way of doing youth ministry in his church and not just giving up. Now that feeling wasn't permanent. I mean, as the days and weeks went on, worry and fear came back and he'd pray some thanksgiving and then he'd feel thankful and then worry and fear, and then thankful, right? It wasn't instant. It was a process. Losing your job, family estrangement, failure at an important ministry all at the same time, that's a lot. But it was his unintentional prayer of thanksgiving, the prayer he didn't actually mean to pray, that started a process of wrapping his problems in thanksgiving, which over time gave him more courage, hope, and joy.

So this week, don't pretend your problems aren't real, because they are. Don't deny the feelings of anger or worry because they're there. But wrap your problems in thanksgiving, and the wholeness of God and the power of God and the hope of God will make you brave.

So Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you make us brave. Thank you for all the ways you have shown up in our lives. Thank you for the good people you have put in our lives. Thank you for the provision that you have put in our lives. Thank you that you love us when we don't deserve it. Thank you that when we run away from you, you follow us. Thank you that you take everything the enemy meant for harm and you turn it to good. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And help us to be more thankful and make us brave. In your name, Lord. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- In Psalm 40, what is King David thankful to God for that you are also thankful to God for?
- How can you "wrap thanksgiving around your problems" this week?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.