

# UNSTUCK



**T**he Bible acknowledges that there are times in our lives when we simply feel stuck. Particularly in the Psalms, we read prayers and songs from the middle of hard times. Without God, we would certainly be stuck. But with God, there is good news. We can look to Him with honest cries of lament and hope to get unstuck by His good grace and power. This four-week walk through Psalm 40 assures us that God carries us through stuck times.

Nobody likes to admit guilt. If we took a poll and I asked: "Is something wrong with the world that needs fixing?" I think I'd get 100 percent. Don't you think? But if I asked you, "Hey, you're part of the world. Is there something wrong in you that needs fixing?" What do you think? In 1986, *People* magazine ran a sin survey, the Sindex. What's the worst sin and are you a sinner? The poll ranked murder, child abuse and spying against one's country up at the top as worst, but the list gets a little funny. It ranked parking in a handicapped spot above adultery or illegally videotaping someone. Cutting in line was worse than cheating on your wife. Overall, people didn't see themselves as sinners, admitting to only 4.64 sins per month. I hope today we can be a little more honest, a little more aware of our sins. There's something wrong in the world that needs fixing and it runs right through my heart.

It's jarring to read a man writing like this passage about his life. "My sins have overtaken me." "I'm in too deep." That's not something you hear in public. We are in a private journal now; this is something you'd only say alone, or only to God—but I hope you can say it. I hope you can admit it. Sin is at work in the world, and sin is at work in me. A friend told me recently he bumped into Philip Yancey (a famous Christian author). When he says "bumped into" he means crashed into and almost knocked him down. Come around the corner and 'Bang!' Damage done. To Phil Yancey. Oops. Whose fault is it when we crash into one another? Phil's fault, I'm sure. Or the corner's fault. It's the corner's fault for obscuring my vision. Maybe. Maybe it's something wrong with the other person. Maybe it's the system or the world out there. Maybe there's something in me. Can we admit it? When it comes to recognizing our own faults, we are islands of ignorance on a sea of unknowing. No one likes to admit it. I heard a story of a recovering alcoholic on NPR. It had some good points about the ups and downs of addiction recovery, but I was discouraged to hear the woman quit her program because she said, "There was a prayer we had to pray admitting our wrong. It just made me feel bad." Is it unhealthy to take a hard look at our own sin, to admit where our faults are hurting ourselves, hurting our world, hurting those around us? I think it's "unhealthy" to ignore it or to believe we can manage it, to believe we can save ourselves from it. There is something wrong in the world that needs fixing, something wrong in me that needs fixing, and no, I can't fix it myself. I don't need a coach; I don't need a teacher; I don't need a hand—I need a Savior.

We are walking verse by verse through Psalm 40 under

this theme *Unstuck*. God knows life includes hard things. We get into stuck places, and the Bible addresses that—it even gives us language to cry out to God about what's wrong, what's broken, what hurts. We know as we lift up that theme we are touching on deep-seated emotional issues we don't want to throw spiritual whitewash over, so we have had insight from our Consortium of Christian Counselors with a number in the bulletin to call if you are feeling stuck. I can tell you they have been receiving calls. People are calling and getting help with depression and anxiety, drug and alcohol addiction, abusive relationships, grief and job losses. We are so grateful for these healthy steps freeing our church where we are stuck! We've seen that when we are stuck, Psalm 40 calls us to cry out to a God Who hears, to get with people, and today we see, when we are stuck it may be time to meet our Savior.

"Do not withhold your mercy from me, Lord; may your love and faithfulness always protect me" (Psalm 40:11). We pray for God's mercy, but even when we are pushed into hard places in life we trust that God is constant in love and faithfulness. Remember, you might not feel it but you need to know it: God is good, faithful, saving, loving and true. Even when it feels like the mercy is drained and the protection isn't coming, trust in what you know even when your feelings won't verify it. This is the gift of God's self-revelation in Scripture. God has told us and shown us who He is even when life circumstances or experiences make a different claim. God is good. He is love. He is faithfulness.

So, David opens his heart now. "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" (Psalm 40:12). Yes, there are troubles without number around me, but I don't just blame everyone else, there are troubles within me. My own sins have overtaken me. I can't see because of them. Some have described it as being deafened by the clanging of your own chains. This is not a small problem. Not a minor issue. David is able to say in all honesty, "I am totally swamped and beyond my own capacity completely. I don't need a helpful brochure or 'five tips to escaping sin' on a Buzzfeed post. I'm in trouble." So to verse 13: "Be pleased to save me, Lord; come quickly, Lord, to help me" (Psalm 40:13). "Lord, it is entirely up to you." Do you see that? "I can't do or say anything to make you move. But if you are pleased, if you have any inclination to help, then please, please, come quick and save me. I need your saving help. Don't wait. I'm not sure how long my heart can



take it. Please. Save me, Lord."

This isn't always what we say to the Lord. Some think it's unhealthy—I can't imagine anything more right but to come to a solid and clear recognition of the state that I'm in, and appeal for help from the only one who can possibly intervene. But it's not always how we respond to an overture from the Lord. Sometimes we say, "No need—I'm good. No need. I'm good." I think that's the most popular response to Jesus as Savior. I've got it. I'll figure it out. I'll Google it. I'm good. Well, to quote from Anselm of Canterbury, if that's where you are "you have not yet grasped the gravity of sin." Sin isn't just a few mistakes and missteps here and there. Sin is a force dragging you down, confusing and twisting your life from the inside, dominating and crushing your life from the outside. Sin is individual guilt within and also an alien power at work in the world. It separates you from God, it separates you from who you are meant to be, and it separates you from eternal life. "No need. I'm good. I'm fine, I'm fine." All the while, the tendrils of sin grow up all around, choking life.

Sometimes our reply is, "Lord, get away." This was the reply of Isaiah when he found himself in the presence of God. This was the response of Peter when he was in his boat listening to Jesus teach for the first time, "Lord, get away from me, I am a sinful man." If your first response to the awareness of the presence of God is to try to push Him away, you're in good company. It's a frightening thing to come into the arms of the loving God.

Or we may say, "Lord, help me." This can be a healthy prayer and a good response. God wants to know our needs. God promises to respond to us with help. He is our strong helper and redeemer, our refuge and strength. But sometimes we pray this prayer asking God to bless our agenda instead of giving ourselves over to His purposes. "Lord, this is my goal, this is my end, this is my agenda—now help me. Help me do what I want to do." It reveals that what we really want is our own success, not the presence and intimacy of a relationship with Jesus. I don't want Jesus, I want what Jesus can do for me.

Similar to this would be response number four: "Lord, give me." Jesus himself taught us to pray this prayer, didn't he? "Give us today our daily bread." When we are in need, when we are in stuck places, we want to cry out to God as our resource—God who provides. Give me what I need to get through this, Lord. But look at how Jesus phrases it: "Give us today our daily bread." I'd like bread for tomorrow. I'd like bread enough actually for the

full run. "Lord, I'd like to have enough bread, enough of everything I need to know that I and my family will go all the way to the end and enough to spare. That's what I'd like." Well, now that sounds again like a prayer to push God away. "I don't actually want to depend on You, God. I don't actually want to come to You again tomorrow. I want You to give me what I need to make it on my own, independent of Your help and providence, from here to the end of the road." "No. I'll give you daily bread," says the Lord. "Tomorrow it will be My hand again from which you feed. Do you love Me? Do you trust Me? I will be with you." Some of us do have more than daily bread, don't we? Well, let me challenge you with this idea. It could be that God has given you more than daily bread, extra over and above, so that you may know the joy of sharing that surplus with someone else and representing the love and providence of God to a neighbor in need. I'm not saying we don't keep savings, plan for the future, provide for our family—the Bible talks about all those things, but you may just have a little extra beyond that. If that's so, let me push just a bit harder, then the longer you hold onto that surplus using it as defense against dependence on God, the further it separates you. "Lord, give me," we pray. He does. We walk away.

David gets to the root, to the depth of his soul's need. This is where it resolves: Lord, save me! "I am in dire straits, Lord. I need more than a change of situation. I need to be saved. Personally, within myself. I need you to save me." Peter, who asked Jesus to get away from him the first time they were in a boat together, came to this same point of utter dependence on Jesus at a later time in another boat. Seeing Jesus walking toward him on the water, Peter asked Jesus to command him to come to him on the surface of the water. You can read about it in Matthew 14, as Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on the water, eyes on Jesus. "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" (Matthew 14:30). This is the prayer we need. There is great intimacy in it, great vulnerability. There is nothing in it that says, "Lord, I just need You to change this situation and then we can go our separate ways. I just need You to give me what I need, then we can head out and I won't bother You again." No. It's directly to Jesus. Save me. Are you ready to pray "save me" to Jesus? "My sins are too much. My troubles have overtaken me. I can't see. I can't hear. Lord, save me. Unless you come to my aid, I am lost." We pray from a place of humility and need, like a kitten in a tree, like a child stuck in a well, like a drowning man, like a desperate woman: "Lord, unless You are pleased to come quickly to my aid, I have nothing within me to win this

fight. I don't need a coach; I don't need a trainer. I don't need a teacher or a friend—I need a Savior today.” I need a Savior, Jesus. Jesus is a Savior.

Before I close and give us all an opportunity to pray to Jesus together for His saving help, tomorrow is Memorial Day. Memorial Day is a time to remember those who gave their lives for our freedoms as a nation. We remember their sacrifice with gratitude. But I want to remember another today, Kendrick Castillo. This is the young man who, when two students opened fire on his classroom in Highlands Ranch STEM School earlier this month, felt not a hint of hesitancy in his spirit, but rose from his desk and rushed the shooters, putting a stop to their plans to kill others. He gave his life. It's so noble we almost don't even say it was a life lost—it was a life spent for others. Of course it is tragic. Of course we wish we had him right here again to clap him on the back and say, “Well done! Now, son, what can I do for you?” But we don't. We have a life spent to remember with gratitude. Why does it move us so deeply? It's love. It's bravery. It is courage to drive against evil in the moment. But I think it moves us also because it reminds us of another Who gave His life, not just for His friends, not just for a class or school full of students. Jesus gave His life to put an end to evil and death. Jesus died for all of us to rescue us from sin. Jesus won the day when He gave His life on the cross and rose again from the dead, proving the surety of the final consummation of His victory one day. We see Jesus in Kendrick.

So, are you ready to pray “Save me?” Whatever stuck place you are in, it ultimately isn't the situation you need changed, it's your heart you need changed, it's the eternal purpose and destiny of your soul you need changed. It is a Savior you need, and Jesus has proven He is that Savior. I want to ask today that we all pray together, following me in one voice. For many of you this may be a continuing conversation you are already in with Jesus, but for some in this room this may be the moment to begin a talk with Jesus that's open and honest and true. Not, “I need You to give me what I need to get out of this, or to walk away from You, God” but “I'm undone. I need You, Jesus. I need You. Unless You come and save me, I am lost.” So let's pray together: Lord my God, I recognize today my need for You, unless You rescue me I am lost, forgive me my sins, save me from the power of sin, thank You for Your death on the cross, and Your resurrection life. I love and follow You, my Lord and my Savior. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**STUDY GUIDE**  
**UNSTUCK • “Save Me, Lord”**  
**Psalm 40:11-13**

**UP:** **Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word**

Read aloud the passage for the week: Psalm 40:11-13.

- 1) Reread verse 11. Has there ever been a time when you felt like God was withholding His mercy from you? How did you feel or react? How did you make it through that season?
- 2) Has there ever been a time when you felt like God's love and faithfulness protected you? How did you feel or react? When are you the most aware of God's love?
- 3) Reread verses 12-13. David is overwhelmed by trouble. There seems to be no way out of his situation and he seems to be losing hope, but in the midst of this he calls out to the Lord for help. What is your first instinct when you are in a frustrating or challenging situation?
- 4) What do these verses have to say about how we become “unstuck” in life?
- 5) In what ways has God “saved” or “helped” you?

**OUT:** **Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)**

Many of the stories you just wrote down are testimonies of God's work. In verse 10 of this psalm, David says that he will not keep quiet in the community of faith about God's work in his life. How can you follow suit and find ways to share these stories?

**IN:** **Connect with Each Other**

Is there someone in your life who is “stuck” right now? Is there someone who is overwhelmed by trouble? Pray that the Lord would save them and would be faithful to His promises in the midst of their struggle.