**SUMMER IN THE PSALMS SERIES - Psalm 40 “When Life is the Pits!” (Lloyd Ashworth)**

Have you heard the expression – “Life is just the Pits”! If you find yourself down in a pit, then you are in good company. Many of the characters of the Bible had a pit experience. And today I want to show you how you can get out of a pit and even more importantly what you should then do afterwards. The pit was a common term used in the Old Testament. It described a place where you don’t want to be! Where the walls are high and you cannot escape, a place where God seems to be absent and your options are cut off. A pit is a place where you have either fallen, or someone else has put you. The truth is, that from time to time many of us feel like we have been pushed or fallen into a pit.

**Psalm 7:15** says having *dug a pit for someone else you fall into it yourself*.

Or it could be that you have chosen to go down into a pit like Benaiah did in **2 Samuel 23** and there he killed a lion on a snowy day! Job spoke of his life being in a pit **Job 33:22**. Jeremiah complained to God that others had dug a pit for him. And of course, most of us will know the most famous pit story of all, where Joseph’s brothers threw him into a pit because of their jealousy, but later pulled him out and sold him off as a slave to trader from Egypt. Interestingly, the New Testament has just a few comments on the ‘pit’ and they are all spoken about by Jesus. **Matthew 15:14** He spoke about the Pharisees as the *blind leading the blind* into a pit. And in **Luke 6** of a blind man falling into a pit. You see you don’t purposely find a pit – and say to yourself – You know I must go and get into that! **Revelation 9:1-2** speaks of a bottomless pit from which mayhem is unleashed upon the world by an angel of darkness called Apollyon. Wherever you find the pit in the Bible, it’s not a good thing!

**Psalm 40** describes David’s pit experience. Can I remind you that these Psalms are like reading ‘over the shoulder’ of someone else’s experiences. It’s like someone else’s story of Gods dealings in their lives. These remind us that what happens to us in life is not unusual. It’s all been experienced before.

**Psalm 40 – key verses 1-3**

***V1 I waited patiently for the Lord and he turned to me and heard my cry!***

**REPLIED** He turned to me and heard my cry.

This is not easy to do. Especially when we feel God is not listening to us. We often say it but it bears repeating that Gods timing is never late.

Like many of you, I’ve known times in my life when God has not shown up…. Weeks, months, even years when I have experienced the silence of God. Then out of the blue for no particular reason – everything changes. I’ve had to learn to wait ‘on’ the Lord and ‘for’ the Lord! – not ‘on the Lloyd!’

***V2 He lifted me out of the pit of despair.***

**RESCUED** He lifted me out of the pit of despair – there are different kinds of pits. You know when you’re in a pit, and you need lifting out, You cannot get out yourself! Here’s the thing, for many people they don’t want to admit they need help, someone else to lift them, Least of all God! I’m not sure why it is that we try almost every other thing before we ask God. I guess we are born with this – I can do it – mentality, as though it’s some kind of badge of maturity to be able to conquer and manage our own lives. But friends, one of the main keys is to admit - you cannot do it.

***He set my feet on solid ground***

**RESTORED** firmness to my feet and stability to my life. I was sinking and going under and he reached down and lifted me up. I was unstable and unable to help myself (alcoholic) he caught me. My life started to sink. I was going down, I knew it. My foot slipped on what I thought was solid ground and I fell.

***And steadied me as I walked along***

**RECOVERED** my equilibrium. My balance got going again. You see here is why many people fall into pits, they become imbalanced by pursuing things that God never intended for them. These things become obsessions, and their lives become imbalanced and they crash….financially, relationally, spiritually. They become walled up by what has so captured their lives, and one day they realise this and need lifting out, to a new place.

***V3 He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God***

**REPLACED** my self-talk about ‘me’ with praise and singing.

My life now looks up instead of in all the time, it’s not all about me!

I’ve discovered a new release of praise from my life because I’m not in the pit anymore, the pit has become part of my story but it is ‘redeemed’.

***Many will see what he has done and be amazed, they will put their trust in the Lord.***

My life now **REFLECTS** something different.

My experiences are now a blessing to others and they are amazed by what God has done.

You see most of us think that a pit experience is reserved for really bad people, people who need a special fixing up, people who have not learned life lessons well. But God says….well you know there is nothing left for me now but to give you the pit treatment! Most people God uses and blesses have been into the pit….that’s where we learn stuff.

 *We learn we cannot get out on our own. We learn how fallible and weak we really are.*

*We learn that God is not at our beckon call….wait... it's not all about us! We learn that God brings the best out in our lives through pit experiences. We learn what stability feels like after sinking and slippery footholds. We learn to mirror and reflect what God has done in our lives! And most importantly we learn to climb out of our pits!*

Do you think Gods rescue doesn’t require anything from you? I’ve got news for you. Because most times what God gives us is a ladder and then asks us to climb out. Its where we learn to take steps towards freedom by climbing out.

From verse 4 onwards David speaks of what he has learned from his pit experience.

1. **MY THINKING HAS CHANGED**

How different you are to other gods! All you ask is that we come to you…. Is that so hard? And realise we cannot get out on our own, that we need to ask for help. We cannot impress you with offerings or sacrifices. Other gods demand payment and they are never bought off. Every day they must be appeased. *Your instructions are written on our hearts, V8 inside me.*

1. **MY SPEAKING HAS CHANGED**

I just want to speak it out. To tell others about what you have done.This rescue experience is not just for him, it’s for others to also find.

V9-10 *I’ve not kept this hidden in my heart.* For many of us, we either stay in the pit and dwell there and never get out with a story to be told! The stories of God dealing in your life are not for you they are for others. This is how people find real faith, they hear stories from real people! Many many people never get out of their pits, they prefer to stay in them, getting cynical and bitter, and feeling everybody’s against them.

1. **MY LIFE PLAN HAS CHANGED**

Now, this is the key to the whole Psalm in my view. Having experienced this rescue. It equips you for the future! This rescue has prepared him to face future challenges. I learn how to use the ladders God gives and some of the rungs on the ladder have unusual names….

**V12** There is **the rung of** **troubles.** When I am *surrounded!*

***James 1:2-4*** *says count it all joy when you meet trials and troubles!*

There is **the rung of** **personal sin & failure** – When I am *suffocated by my failures,* it also feels like a pit! I know what to do! Climb up and over it.

B*ecause there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus!!!*

There are **the rungs of my** **enemies** – when he is *shamed* *and humiliated* – Aha we’ve got him now they shout! Those who have sought to bring you down, discredit you, shame you. When I am surrounded, suffocated or shamed – I know what to do and I know where to go!...who to go to!God lift me up, rescue me, do not delay! Have you wondered about whether you hold onto God or He holds onto you? Do you climb out of your pit or does God lift you out? The answer is **BOTH.**

This Psalm is circular – it ends up where it starts.

I call to you Lord and you lifted me, this is my story.

I reflect on who you are and why you are so different.

I tell people of your greatness.

I prepare myself for more challenges, troubles, and obstacles so I can experience your rescue again and again!

Then again, I will call on you.

When you look back over your life at times you have been in the pit. Do you now find yourself thinking differently, speaking differently, and living life differently because of what you learned in the pit? Psalm 40, it’s a good one when life is the pits, it need not be, you can climb out with Gods help.