



Image: Fischer Scientific

**Psalm 40:1-11**

I waited patiently for the Lord;

he inclined to me and heard my cry.

2 He drew me up from the desolate pit,  
out of the miry bog,

and set my feet upon a rock,  
making my steps secure.

3 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.

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4 Happy are those who make  
the Lord their trust,  
who do not turn to the proud,  
to those who go astray after false gods.

5 You have multiplied, O Lord my God,  
your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us;  
none can compare with you.

Were I to proclaim and tell of them,

CONCORD SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

LECTIONARY  
LESSON 3

SUNDAY,  
JANUARY 19, 2020

they would be more than can be counted.  
6 Sacrifice and offering you do not desire,  
but you have given me an open ear.  
Burnt offering and sin offering  
you have not required.  
7 Then I said, “Here I am;  
in the scroll of the book it is written of me.  
8 I delight to do your will, O my God;  
your law is within my heart.”  
9 I have told the glad news of deliverance  
in the great congregation;  
see, I have not restrained my lips,  
as you know, O Lord.  
10 I have not hidden your saving help 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.  
11 Do not, O Lord, withhold  
your mercy from me;  
let your steadfast love and your faithfulness  
keep me safe forever.

## **Background**

The Psalms contain some of the most beautiful poetry in the Bible. And there's something for everyone. Psalms of praise, hope, wonder, lament, anger, fear, joy, rage and so much more. Even though many psalms are attributed to David, like the one we are studying today, scholars have not reached consensus about authorship. Hebrew Bible scholar David Carr argues that “ancient texts could be attributed to authors for a variety of reasons -- to continue a stream of tradition associated with a given ancient figure, to gain authority through being associated with an ancient figure, etc.” While we are not sure who first put pen to paper (or whose mouth this passage came from first) it is still important to consider why David's name is significant for people who encounter this story, both then and now.

**Today's lesson will focus on the God who notices.**

**Read the scripture out loud together.**

**Discuss with a partner. What is a testimony? What is your testimony?**

**What's happening during this passage?**

The writer is giving a testimony. God has picked the writer up from “the desolate pit,” “out from the miry bog” and set the writer’s feet “upon a rock.” We get the image of someone who was once in dire straits who now has confidence and power.

*“Has he ever made a way when you didn’t have a dime, did he ever step in just right on time? Has he ever picked you up when you were down, did he ever place your feet on solid ground?”*

Then, the writer feels the need to tell about it. God is so good that other people need to know about it.

*“I said I wasn’t gonna tell nobody, but I couldn’t keep it to myself!  
What the Lord has done for me!”*

Be careful-- this passage uses the phrase “false gods.” It is true that at this time, there were all kinds of deities, gods and idols worshipped. As is today. We live in a diverse world. We also live in a world where Christian nations exact violence on people who are not Christian. There has been an increase in Islamophobic and Anti-Semitic attacks under the presidency of Trump. It is no accident that Trump’s most loyal followers consider themselves Christians. When we read the phrase “false gods,” let us consider that there are things we worship that ought not be worshipped. Money, material possessions, fame, power, European beauty standards are all false gods we worship. Let us also consider that worship in forms other than Christianity are valid expressions of faith.

**What have we inherited in our tradition from this passage?**

While this passage may not be referring to testimony service, it does provide a foundation for Christians to value the power of testimony. Testimony is not only core to Christianity. It is a cultural expression for Black people. In worship gatherings like Watch Night, people come together to reflect on the goodness of God. A reconciliation of family, a struggle with addiction that is under control, or a new job are all part of what people share. The congregation has a chance to hear what God is doing in other people’s lives. Both then and now, the congregation is made stronger by reflecting on God’s goodness together.

## **How does the author speak to God?**

There are so many moods captured in this passage. A genuine thankfulness for “how I got over.” A tug to tell the world. A concern for those who have not encountered a good God. Loyalty. At the end, we see a clear demand for continued care. With humility, the writer asks God not to “withhold your mercy from me; let your steadfast love and your faithfulness keep me safe forever.” The writer imagines that there could be a day when danger is at hand and thus, makes a demand for safety. There is evidence in our holy book of people reverencing God while still asking for what they need. It is okay to make a clear request of God in prayer. We know that God is not Santa Claus or Amazon; God is God. But prayer is a conversation. What do you need to tell God?

**What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?**



## **Connection to Today's World**

This week, Representative Ayanna Pressley (D-Massachusetts) revealed to the world that she has been struggling with alopecia. Known for her signature twists and braids among colleagues and constituents, Rep. Pressley found herself at the sink with chunks of hair. When she testified on “Impeachment Eve,” she appeared with a wig. Soon after testifying, she went to the bathroom to cry. She’d felt that she was not being transparent with the very people she sought to represent. And, as a Black woman, she knew that every choice she made would be dissected and over-analyzed as a political statement. In fact, she had already felt that people made assumptions about her when she wore twists and braids. So, she shared her story with The Root, a website dedicated to uplifting Black stories. The results were powerful. Black people (not just women) began to testify about their experience with alopecia, particularly stress-induced alopecia.

Dermatologists estimate that Black women experience alopecia at a higher rate than other racial groups. Of the decision to go public with this medical struggle, Rep. Pressley says, “I’m not just here to take space; I’m here to create space.”

**Journal:** What is your testimony?

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**Closing:** Sing “Count Your Blessings”

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Count your blessings, name them one by one;  
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;  
Count your blessings, name them one by one;  
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

You notice us and you care for us. The world is so busy and overwhelming. We are sometimes too distracted to pay attention to our own responsibilities.

We thank you for paying attention to us. When we are standing in the need of a blessing, we know that we can come to you with our most honest pleas. Help us to count our blessings and embrace a posture of gratitude, even for the things we think are just small things.

In Jesus’ name we pray,

Amen

**Works Cited**

<https://theglowup.theroot.com/exclusive-rep-ayanna-pressley-reveals-beautiful-bald-1841039847>