

Title: "Cultivating the Upward Dimension"

Text: Psalm 40

We are continuing in our series of sermons called "Living Faith in 3D."

- We are exploring just how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is.
- And using that "dimensional language," we are exploring how we can cultivate a life of faith in all its dimensions:
  - in our upward relationship with God,
  - our inward relationship with our own soul,
  - and our outward relationship with others and with the world.

Having painted that "big picture" of a multi-dimensional life of faith over the past few weeks,

- and having focused last week on how easy it is for us as broken human beings to fall back into a one dimensional or two dimensional faith life,
- we want to now turn to the practicalities of cultivating a "living faith in 3D."

How do we do that?

- So this week we will focus on cultivating the upward dimension of our lives,
- and then the next two Sundays we will focus on cultivating the inward and outward dimensions of our lives.

But for today, turn with me to Psalm 40.

- The Psalms are right smack in the middle of your Bibles, and there are 150 of them.
- We are going to read Psalm number 40, which is on page of the pew Bible.

And to draw you into the Psalm a little bit, I'd like you to read it responsively with me.

- I will read the odd numbered verses, and you read the even numbered verses.
- We'll go back and forth through this prayer of King David which we call Psalm 40.

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So my friends, if you want to know in very practical terms what cultivating the upward dimension of life looks like,  
-it looks like this Psalm we just read together!

And not just this psalm, but all 150 of them!

The Book of Psalms right in the middle of the Bible is a multi-dimensional tapestry of songs and prayers,  
-which are the voices of humans over the course of hundreds of years cultivating an upward relationship of living faith with God.

All the rest of the Bible we say is “God’s word to us.”  
-But the psalms are faithful people’s words back to God.  
-They are the prayers of real people.  
-This Psalm 40 was one of the prayers of King David, of which there are a great many in the Psalms.  
-But Psalm 90 says that it was a prayer of Moses, and there are 10 prayers from a man named Asaph.  
-And there are at least 12 songs and prayers from the sons of Korah.

Some of the psalms are prayers of praise and thanksgiving, and some are prayers of pain and suffering.  
-Some psalms prayerfully praise the glory of who God is, and some prayerfully struggle with the experience of being human.  
-Some psalms are prayers of confession, others are called “imprecatory psalms,” and they are prayers for justice, begging God to beat up on the bad guys of the world.

The Psalms encompass the entire range of human experience and yet do so with a constant, upward look to God.  
-That is what cultivating the upward dimension of living faith in 3D looks like.

And Psalm 40 is a perfect example.  
-It is King David opening his life “upwardly” to God.  
-And the reason there are so many psalms of David is because this “opening up of his life to God” was a normal part of David’s life.

-From a very young age, cultivating the upward dimension of his life was simply the way David lived his life.

And thankfully he was a poet and a writer, and he kept a journal and wrote his prayers down.

-Of all the people we meet in the Bible, it is only really David who gives us a window into his interior life.

-It is these written prayers of David that show us what it looks like to actually cultivate relationship with God.

And this particular prayer of David's begins with the experience of waiting.

"I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and 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."

Wow. Talk about getting "down and dirty."

-So where was David while he was waiting patiently for the LORD?

-He was in a slimy pit, wallowing in the muck and mire of life.

-That's what God pulled him out of when He came to his rescue.

-But while David was patiently waiting, that's what his life situation felt like: like he was stuck in a slimy pit.

Have you ever felt like your life was stuck in the mud?

-Well, the good news for David was that God eventually got him out of it in some way,

-but it wasn't immediate.

-There was this period of waiting....waiting on the Lord.

How many of you like the experience of waiting? Me either.

-How many of you are good at "patiently waiting?" Me either.

And when we feel like we are stuck in the muck of life,

-we naturally do not want to wait patiently, we want to get out.

-We want to do something to get ourselves out.

-We want someone else to come help us get unstuck.

-We want to figure out a plan for dealing with our situation.

-We want to fix the problem, and the sooner the better.

And that is only natural, but the solutions we most often seek are very 2 dimensional.

-We try to save ourselves by our own wits and ingenuity.

-Or if we get desperate we may ask another person for help with our problem.

-But we often only turn to God and pray as a last resort.

What David displays for us is a reversal of that pattern.

-Throughout the psalms, as in this one, David shows us that from a young age he had somehow learned to turn to God first and not last.

-He had learned to include the upward dimension of life in every equation as he tried to figure out solutions to his problems.

-And he practiced again and again, constantly opening up his life situations to God and ask for upward help.

-And he practices waiting.

And look how he does this here in Psalm 40.

-When we begin the psalm, we are actually listening to David remind himself of a past situation of muck and mire that God had gotten him out of.

-It's all past tense: "I waited upon the Lord and He turned to me and heard my cry.

-This was some previous experience of God's saving help David is recounting.

But by verse 11 in the psalm we discover that David is reminding himself of God's past faithfulness to him,

-because he currently finds himself again in the muck and mire.

"Don't withhold your mercy from me now, O Lord,... because troubles without number surround me.

-Be pleased, O Lord, to save me;

O, Lord come quickly to help me.

-May all those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion.

-May those who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace."

You see, King David is having a "terrible, awful, no good, very bad day."

- He's stuck in the mud of life again right now.
- So what does he do?
- He calls on God for help.

And as he waits, he reminds himself of this other time when he was stuck in the mud and God turned to him and heard his cry.

- You see, he has a history with God that he is turning to and recalling to mind.
- He even remembers the times when he had shared that experience of God's saving help as a testimony in the great assembly.
- That is, he had stood up at a worship service one day and recounted the story of how God had turned to him at a low point of his life and pulled him out of the muck and mire and placed his feet on a rock.

But you see, on this particular day when David is in anguish about his present circumstance,

- he is telling that testimony again, but this time to himself!
- Because now he needs God to come and help him again.-

And he even asks God to hurry up about it!

- "Come quickly," he says in verse .
- "Do not delay" are the very last words of the psalm.

You see, he isn't any more comfortable waiting upon the Lord than we are.

- It's just that he has learned to practice waiting.
- He has learned not to instantly try to save himself.
- He has learned not to put his trust in his own ingenuity.
- He has learned not to rely so completely on the help of others.
- He has learned to seek God's help and guidance first, and to rely on it, and wait for it, and ask for it.

That is what cultivating the upward dimension of a 3D life looks like.

And it was David's experience that when he did this, he constantly received God's multi-dimensional help.

- That 3<sup>rd</sup> dimension of the upward life constantly flowed down into and through the interior and exterior dimensions of his life and transformed his situations.

That's how David learned to trust in the help of God, and to rely on the upward dimension of life more and more.

Now let me share a few points from this Psalm that can help us to cultivate the upward dimension of our own lives.

1. First is, I want you to notice that this practice of "waiting on the Lord," is active and not passive.

The word waiting sounds passive, but as we see here quite clearly, David is actively calling on God for help.

-He is actively tapping into the resources of his own soul:

-He is using his will to actually choose to slow down, and pray, and entrust his situation to God.

-He is also using his will to hold back from immediately lashing out at the people who are currently opposing him.

-He is also using his mind to recall God's faithfulness in past situations.

-And he is confessing his emotions to God, and expressing how he is feeling.

-He even goes so far as to tell God that he wishes God would smash his opponents and cause them the kind of shame and disgrace they are making him endure.

You see, waiting on God for David involves actively opening his whole soul up to God!

-And he writes this stuff down, and journals it prayerfully, and as he does this, he is actively processing his thoughts, and his choices, and his emotions in God's presence.

That process is what made David a "man after God's own heart."

-His relationship with God didn't just come out of the blue.

-No, he cultivated it.

-And in this psalm, we are watching how he cultivated it.

-And it's an active process of opening one's life to God.

And usually we are only compelled to do this when we find ourselves stuck in the mud.

-When life is going along great for us, we may give thanks to God but we don't feel compelled to wait on Him, or rely

on Him or trust in his saving help.

But when life gets full of muck and mire for us, that's when cultivating a relationship with God becomes a vital concern for us.

-It is part of why God allows these times in our lives.

-Why he doesn't just show up to instantly bail us out of our problems.

-God actually sees our times of waiting in the muck and the mire as some of the most fruitful times of our lives.

The muck and the mire are like fertilizer for growing the fruits of the spirit in our lives.

So waiting on the Lord isn't about doing nothing on our part.

-It's about actively cultivating the upward dimension of our lives as we learn to trust in God, and not in ourselves.

-But guess what? As you can see pretty clearly here,

cultivating the upward dimension of our lives is also  
-integrally connected to cultivating the inward dimension of our lives,

-and ultimately bears rich and ripe fruit in our outward ability to deal in a healthier and more loving way with the people and the world around us.

So in summary, the active work that we are doing as we wait upon the Lord involves:

-slowing down to pray and reflect on God's work in our lives;

-reading God's word like we are doing right now to give us guidance and wisdom.

-As we read his word and pray, we are also listening for ways in which God might be speaking to us personally,

-applying his word to the very situation of our life that we are facing.

-We also have to go about our days and live our lives in these times of waiting.

-We have jobs to go to, laundry and groceries, kids to take to soccer games, places to be, people to meet.

-Waiting on God means that even as we go about those normal functions of life,

-we pay attention for signs of God's presence with us.

-We actually look for Him to show up,  
or as David says here:

-we look for signs that God has “turned to us and has heard our prayer.”

And finally, waiting on God means also rejoicing in whatever signs of his presence we may discover,  
-giving him thanks for being with us, and for pulling us out of the muck and mire whenever he does.

-And we can rejoice and thank Him personally and privately in prayer.  
-We can also share our testimony here in the great assembly on a Sunday morning so that others may rejoice and give thanks with us.

This is all what cultivating the upward dimension of a life lived in relationship with God looks like.

-Take Psalm 40 home with you this week, and ask King David to teach you to be a person after God’s own heart, too.

Let’s pray.