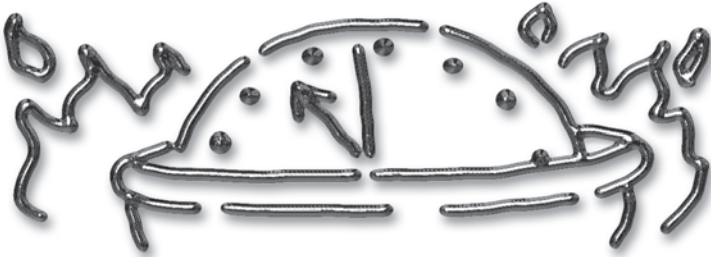


Waiting *in the Crucible*



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Samuel 26; Ps. 37:1–11; Rom. 5:3–5; 15:4, 5.*

Memory Text: “But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . patience” (*Galatians 5:22, NIV*).

Scientists did an experiment with four-year-old children and marshmallows. Each child was told by a scientist that they could have a marshmallow; however, if the child waited until the scientist returned from an errand, they would be given two. Some of the children stuffed the marshmallow into their mouths the moment the scientist left; others waited. The differences were noted.

The scientists then kept track of these children into their teenage years. The ones who had waited turned out to be better adjusted, better students, and more confident than those who didn't. It seemed that patience was indicative of something greater, something important in the human character. No wonder, then, we're told to cultivate it by the Lord.

This week we'll look at what could be behind some of the most trying of all crucibles: the crucible of waiting.

The Week at a Glance: Why do we sometimes have to wait so long for things? What lessons can we learn about patience while in the crucible?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 15.*

The God of Patience

Read Romans 15:4, 5. What is found in these verses for us?

We are normally impatient about things that we really want or have been promised but don't have yet. We are often satisfied only when we get what we are longing for. And because we rarely get what we want when we want it, it means that we are often doomed to irritation and impatience. And when we are in this state, it is almost impossible to maintain a peace and trust in God.

Waiting is painful by definition. In Hebrews, one of the words for "wait patiently" (*Ps. 37:7, NKJV*) comes from a Hebrew word that can be translated "to be much pained," "to shake," "to tremble," "to be wounded," "to be sorrowful." Learning patience is not easy; sometimes it's the very essence of what it means to be in the crucible.

Read Psalms 27:14, 37:7, and Romans 5:3–5. What are these verses saying to us? What does patience lead to?

While we wait, we can concentrate on one of two things. We can focus on the things that we are waiting for, or we can focus on the One who holds those things in His hands. What makes such a difference when we wait for something isn't so much how long we have to wait as it is our attitude while we wait. If we trust the Lord, if we have placed our lives in His hands, if we have surrendered our wills to Him, then we can trust that He will do what's best for us when it's best for us, no matter how hard it is sometimes to believe it.

What things are you desperately waiting for? How can you learn to surrender everything to God and to His timing? Pray your way into an attitude of complete surrender and submission to the Lord.

In God's Time

Read Romans 5:6 and Galatians 4:4. What do they tell us about God's timing?

In these texts, Paul tells us that Jesus came to die for us at exactly the right time. But Paul does not tell us why it was the right time. It is very easy to read these verses and wonder, *Why did Jesus wait for thousands of years until He came to the earth to deal with sin—didn't the universe understand that sin was a very bad thing long before then?* We may ask why Jesus is waiting to come the second time also. We may also ask, Why is the Lord waiting so long to answer my prayer?

Think about, for instance, the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, the prophecy that points to Jesus as the Messiah (review it if you need to). How long was this time period? What does this tell you about learning to wait for things in God's time, even if it takes what seems to us a long time?

There are many important spiritual reasons that we will experience waiting times. First, waiting can refocus our attention away from “things” and back to God Himself. Second, waiting allows us to develop a clearer picture of our own motives and desires. Third, waiting builds perseverance—spiritual stamina. Fourth, waiting opens the door to develop many spiritual strengths, such as faith and trust. Fifth, waiting allows God to put down other pieces in the puzzle of the bigger picture. Sixth, we may never know the reason we have to wait; hence, we learn to live by faith. Can you think of any other reasons for waiting?

What examples can you find in the Bible of God doing things in His own time that can help you learn to trust that He will do for you what's right in His own time, as well? (Think, for instance, about Abraham and Sarah and the promise of a son.) At the same time, ask yourself, “What might I be doing that could be delaying a prayer that could have been answered long ago?”

David: An Object Lesson in Waiting

In 1 Samuel 16:1–13, we see the young lad David anointed by Samuel as king. However, it was a long journey from the fields of his father, Jesse, to the throne in Jerusalem. No doubt, at times he felt in the midst of a crucible.

First, the lad is called to play music to soothe Saul’s troubled spirit (*1 Samuel 16*). Later, he becomes Israel’s hero as he kills Goliath (*1 Samuel 17*). Then there are many years during which David is running for his life. Both Saul and his son Jonathan know that David is destined to be the next king (*1 Sam. 23:17, 24:20*). But David does nothing to advance his God-given destiny. In fact, he appears to do the opposite. Even when Saul tries to kill him and David snips a piece of cloth off the king’s robe, he wished he had never done such a thing (*1 Sam. 24:5–7*). Again when Saul is trying to kill David, David refuses to kill Saul when the opportunity arises (*1 Sam. 26:7–11*).

Read 1 Samuel 26:1–11. Why does David refuse to kill Saul? What principles does this teach us about the way God brings about His plans for our lives?

Now read 1 Samuel 26:12–25. How does David’s refusal to kill Saul affect Saul? What does this teach us about the advantages of waiting for God?

Looking at the whole of David’s road to the throne, we could perhaps summarize it in a short sentence—don’t grab what God has not yet given. God’s gifts are always best received from His hand and in His time. This may require a very long time of waiting. Bean sprouts may literally grow up within hours, while an oak tree will take many years. But then when the strong winds come, the tree will not be uprooted.

Think how easily David could have justified killing Saul. (“After all, wasn’t I told I’d have the throne? And Saul is so evil anyway.”) Yet, his actions speak of true faith in God. What might you be able to draw from this example for yourself in whatever you might be waiting for?

Elijah: The Problem of Rushing

The showdown on top of Mount Carmel had ended (*1 Kings 18*). Fire had come out of heaven, all the people had acknowledged the true God, and the false prophets had been put to death. God had been vindicated. You would have thought that Elijah would have been growing in spiritual strength as the day went on, but suddenly he heard something that terrified him so much that he wanted to die. Read the rest of the story in *1 Kings 19:1–9*. The last words in the text are worrisome: “And the word of the Lord came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (*vs. 9, NIV*). Evidently, Elijah’s fear caused him to run and find himself in the wrong place.

After such a powerful intervention by the Lord, Elijah should have been full of faith and trust; instead, he runs in fear for his life. What lesson can we learn from this bad example?

This story illustrates something important: When we rush, we can very easily find ourselves in the wrong place. In Elijah’s case, it was his fear that caused him to be overwhelmed and rush into the desert, wishing that he had never been born. But there are other things that cause us to rush outside of God’s plan for us.

Read the following texts. What things caused the characters depicted here to rush outside of God’s will? *Gen. 16:1–3; Num. 20:10–12; Judg. 14:1–3; Matt. 20:20, 21; Luke 9:52–56; Acts 9:1.*

How easy to let such things as ambition, anger, passion, lack of faith, and a supposed “zeal” for the Lord cause us to rush ahead to where we shouldn’t be. No one is immune to this danger. The key is to cultivate a trusting faith in the goodness and mercy of God, who we know loves us and wants what’s best for us. This doesn’t happen automatically. Faith might be a gift, but it’s a gift that needs to be cultivated, nurtured, and jealously guarded.

Learning to Delight in the Lord

“**Delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart**” (*Ps. 37:4, NRSV*).

Psalm 37:4 is a wonderful promise. Imagine getting what you have always wanted. But getting the desires of our hearts hinges on having a heart that is delighting in the Lord. So what does it mean to “delight in the Lord”?

Read Psalm 37:1–11. The context for verse 4 is perhaps a little surprising. David is writing about being surrounded by people who are working against God and against him. When people are working against us, the natural response is often to get angry or to set out to justify ourselves. But David advises something different.

In the following verses, what is David’s counsel to God’s people in this situation?

vs. 1

vs. 5

vs. 7

vs. 8

Read verse 4 again. In the context of the verses you have just made comments on, what does it mean “to delight in the Lord”?

David is repeating again and again, in different ways, “Trust God.” Trust Him to act. Don’t get upset, because God is your God, and He is working for you—even right now. You don’t have to charge in and try to sort things out by yourself. Your Father in heaven is in charge. Trust Him. Trust Him completely.

It is in this context that David writes about delighting in the Lord. To delight in God means that we live in a state of perfect trust. Nothing can ruffle our peace, because God is here and at work. We can praise Him, we can even smile, because no one can outwit our God! When we can learn to do this, we really will receive what our hearts long for, because we will receive what our loving Father wants to give us, at the time that most benefits us and His kingdom.

How can you learn to “delight in the Lord”? Spend some time in prayer, seeking God’s guidance in how this may become a reality in your life.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Anointing of David,” pp. 637–642; “David and Goliath,” pp. 643–648; “David a Fugitive,” pp. 649–659; “The Magnanimity of David,” pp. 660–674; “The Death of Saul,” pp. 675–682, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

God’s plan for us may require that we do a lot of waiting, and this really can feel like a crucible. Learning patience during this time can be developed as we focus on the person of God and trust that He is acting for us. There are many reasons for waiting, but all are concerned with the fulfillment of God’s plans for us and His kingdom. Much can be lost if we rush ahead of God, but much can be gained by maintaining an attitude of trust and delight in Him.

“Every trial is weighed and measured by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is not beyond man’s ability to endure through the grace given unto him.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 12, p. 81.

“I cannot read the purpose of God in my affliction, but He knows what is best, and I will commit my soul, body, and spirit to Him as unto my faithful Creator. ‘For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day’ (2 Tim. 1:12). If we educated and trained our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, and a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father, I know we would have more peace and happiness day by day as we pass through the conflicts of this life.

“The Lord is not pleased to have us fret and worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. More is needed of the quiet waiting and watching combined. We think unless we have feeling that we are not in the right track, and we keep looking within for some sign befitting the occasion; but the reckoning is not of feeling but of faith.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 242.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does it mean that every trial is “weighed and measured” by Jesus? How can knowing this help us while we wait?
- 2 Have people in class give personal testimonies to what patient waiting is all about. What were their fears, their joys? How did they cope? What did they learn? What promises did they cling to?
- 3 What can you do as a church, or a class, to help others who are in the crucible as they await God’s timing for something?
- 4 What is the role of prayer in the development of patience? Are there others you can pray for so the Spirit will develop patience in their lives?

Mickey's Mission

by HOMER TRECARTIN

My wife and I were visiting a small country church in rural Virginia, U.S.A. The little church looked sleepy, but we soon learned that it was alive and active in mission.

Mickey greeted us at the door with a memorable phrase, "If ya really want ta find somethin', ya will!" Seeing our interest in his statement, he continued. "Some folk think Ah was vaccinated with a phonograph needle, but really, Ah just want ta find people Ah can tell 'bout Jesus," Mickey said in his country drawl. "Even out here in the country, if ya want ta find people ta tell 'bout Jesus, just look for 'em. They're all around ya. Why, a few days ago Ah met a man who had read the book 'bout Desmond T. Doss, and now he wants ta find the book so his girl can read it. Ah went home and ordered one fer him and sent it direct ta his house. Later Ah'll go see him with other literature."

Mickey related that two days earlier he had met an Amish man. When Mickey started talking to the man about Jesus, the man said he didn't have time to talk. Mickey's smile dimmed as he said softly, "I reckon I won't ever have no time ta talk 'bout Jesus."

The man stopped working, looked at Mickey, and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't really mean that. It's just, well, somethin's been botherin me lately."

"What's that?" Mickey asked, the sparkle returning to his eyes as he relived the story.

"Well, someone gave me a book on the Ten Commandments," the man said, "and I've been reading it. But I just don't know what to think. Do you think I will be lost if I don't keep Saturday as the Sabbath?"

Mickey rubbed his chin and answered slowly, "I reckon I'm not the judge of those things. But I do remember Jesus said once, 'If ya love Me, keep My commandments.'"

The service was about to start, but just as I stood to join the elders on the platform, Mickey whispered, "I'm a goin' back ta see him this week."

Later I learned that Mickey has a barrel half full of arrowheads at his house. When people ask where he found them all, he smiles and tells them, "Same way Ah find people to tell 'bout Jesus. Ah look for 'em wherever Ah is! If ya really want ta find somethin', ya will!"

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