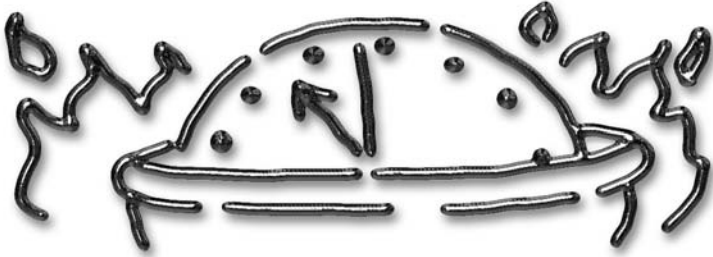


# Waiting *in the Crucible*



## 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?

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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 Hebrew, 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?

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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.**

## *I Have to Teach Tomorrow . . .*

► **Key Text:** *Galatians 5:22*

► **Teach the Class to:**

**Know:** God wants us to have good things, but He wants us to have them at the right time for our spiritual development.

**Feel:** Surrender and submission to God's timing; in other words, patience.

**Do:** Pray that God will give us the patience that doesn't come naturally and to remain open to God's timing.

► **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Waiting Times (*Rom. 15:4, 5*)

**A** Why would God make us wait for things that we seemingly should have and that we believe would be beneficial to all concerned?

**B** How is patience linked to such spiritual virtues as faith and trust?

**C** How can you know when an opportunity to fulfill, say, a longstanding desire is or is not God's will?

### II. Delighting in the Lord (*Ps. 37:4*)

**A** We often are tempted to delight in the fulfillment of our wants and desires. How does the development of patience teach us to delight in the Lord instead?

**B** What if your deepest desires turn out not to be what God feels you should have?

**C** How is the struggle for patience related to, or different from, the struggles against outside circumstances or our enemies that we've studied so far this quarter?

### III. Grant Us Patience, and Quickly (*2 Tim. 1:12*)

**A** What is the role of prayer in achieving patience?

**B** How do we overcome the fact that we may not want to be patient, that we may, in fact, not have patience for patience?

**C** Can you think of something for which you've had to wait a distressingly long time? Was it worth it? Might there have been a downside to receiving it when you wanted it?

► **Summary:** While patience is crucial in the spiritual life, it is one of the hardest virtues not only to develop but to want. But the idea that good things come to those who wait—on the Lord, specifically—is not just a cliché.

## In God's Time

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

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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?

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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?”**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate!**

**Just for Teachers:** Step 1 of the Natural Learning Cycle links the learners' experiences to the lesson. Help your class members answer the question, *Why is this lesson important to me?*

**Imagine:**

- 1 You've given yourself just enough time to drive to your appointment. Suddenly an accident ahead of you blocks all traffic lanes. There's no way around. You'll be late.
- 2 You're at the market for a carton of milk and a loaf of bread. Ahead of you in the checkout line is a shopper with two carts full—and there's no shorter line. You'll be there awhile.

This kind of waiting is surely annoying; there is another kind that is spiritually challenging:

- 3 You've prayed for 40 years for an erring child. Neither of you is getting any younger. Will you ever see this loved one come back to God?
- 4 You've asked God repeatedly to heal you of an illness—one that may kill you. Will you, you wonder, get your prayer answered in time?
- 5 You've spent a lifetime trying to defeat a bad habit or overcome a damaging character trait. You've worked at it and prayed. How long until you realize improvement?

One of the hardest virtues to cultivate is patience. In this lesson we'll teach patience as a strategy for managing life's trials.

### ► **STEP 2—Explore!**

**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle presents information learners can use to help them better understand the lesson. Help your class members answer this question, *What do I need to know from God's Word?*

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## 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?

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**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?

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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?**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED**Bible Commentary****I. The God of Patience***(Read Romans 15:4.)*

The Bible is itself a lesson in patience. In our reference to prophecies that are thousands of years old, we demonstrate that waiting (sometimes even for millennia) is a built-in part of God's plan.

**II. In God's Time**

What made the first century *just the right time* for Jesus to die (*see Rom. 5:6, NIV*)? Some explain it in terms of human history: that God had waited until humankind was especially evil, when old religions were failing, and when the Roman Empire had brought peace, transportation, education, and a *lingua franca* to speed evangelism.

A more thorough explanation of *just the right time* is that God chooses to act at times best for *His* purposes—whether or not we understand His reasons. Remember that the right time for His second coming is not when it is convenient to us (*Matt. 24:50*), but when God chooses (*Matt. 24:36*), and whether we're ready or not (*1 Thess. 5:2*).

**III. David: An Object Lesson in Waiting***(Review the main points of 1 Samuel 25:1–25.)*

This story speaks not only to David's patience but to a willingness to partner with God to become king without resorting to assassination. "David models a willingness to receive the kingdom on God's terms by refusing violence as a means to power and trusting that God will open other options for dealing with Saul." But this can occur "only when we give up our own attempts to force the future and instead choose partnership with God, who constantly gives us our future as a gift and bids us receive it rather than grasp it."—*The New Interpreter's Bible*, volume II, pp. 1176, 1177.

**IV. Elijah: The Problem of Rushing***(Read 1 Kings 19:1–9.)*

**Consider This:** Can you think of reasons that Elijah, after experiencing a

## 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?

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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.*

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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 Cycle CONTINUED

miraculous victory, was so thoroughly intimidated by a muttered threat?

One cause may be implied in what Elijah did in the desert. He rested and ate. The long, stressful hours on Mount Carmel appear to have reduced Elijah to a state of mental, physical, and spiritual exhaustion. We don't need to deprive ourselves while we wait. Elijah's *breakdown* might have been prevented had he taken care to preserve his own strength and trusted God to vindicate Himself—which is what God always does anyway.

### V. Learning to Delight in the Lord

(Read Psalm 37:1–11.)

Compare this passage with Jesus in John 14:1–3 and Paul in Romans 8:18, 28–31. These are all good expressions of how explicitly trusting God's promises for a good future supplies courage to live in the present. If you really believe that God is going to make all things right in the end, you can endure suffering, uncertainty, and injustice now.

## ► STEP 3—Practice!


**Just for Teachers:** This step of the Natural Learning Cycle will assist you in helping your class members find the answer to the following question: **How can I practice the information I just learned?**

### Class Activity:

Supply paper and pencils for this exercise. (Assure the class ahead of time that you will not ask them to reveal personal information unless they feel comfortable doing so.)

- 1 Write down one important thing that you've been praying and waiting for.
- 2 How long have you been waiting?
- 3 Can you think of anyone in the Bible who waited for something similar?
- 4 What lessons is God teaching you by letting you wait?

After giving class members time to write, lead a discussion, with special focus on question 4.

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## 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

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vs. 5

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vs. 7

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vs. 8

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**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.**

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED**Here Are Some Suggested Lessons From Waiting:**

- God’s sense of time is different from ours: Psalm 27:14; Psalm 90:4; Matthew 24:36, 44; Romans 5:6.
- Trusting God’s future for us: John 14:1–3, Romans 8:28.
- Character growth: Romans 5:3–5.
- Justice belongs to God: Psalm 37:7.
- We will have to wait for some things until eternal life: Revelation 21:4.

**► STEP 4—Apply!**

**Just for Teachers:** In this fourth and final step of the Natural Learning Cycle, you will want to encourage class members to make a life response to the lesson. Help them answer this question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I have learned from this lesson?

“Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God is activity under command; readiness for any new command that may come; the ability to do nothing until the command is given. . . .

“Waiting for God means that I adjust my life to Him rather than to circumstances, and that I set my hope on Him rather than on the wit and the cleverness of men. . . .

“This is not lack of power to do anything. Waiting for God needs strength rather than weakness. It is power to do nothing. It is the strength that holds strength in check. It is the strength that prevents the blundering activity which is entirely false and will make true activity impossible when the definite command comes. . . .

“For those who thus wait, God works. . . . When the call comes, it is almost invariably to something new and surprising and startling. . . . Waiting is far more difficult than working. . . . Waiting requires strength. It demands the absolute surrender of the life to God, the confession that we are at the end of our own understanding of things, the confession that we really do not see our way and do not know the way.”—G. Campbell Morgan, *The Westminster Pulpit*, vol. IX, pp. 320–333.

**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?