

Waiting with Patience and Hope

Opening

Hymn “O Master, Let Me Walk with You”
(*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 818)

Text

READ ISAIAH 40:28–31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Prayer

Gracious and holy God, give us diligence to seek you, wisdom to perceive you, and patience to wait for you. Grant us, O God, a mind to meditate on you; eyes to behold you; ears to listen for your word; a heart to love you; and a life to proclaim you; through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen. (*ELW*, p. 76)

Who Wants to Wait?

In our first session we explored the importance of being persistent in prayer and were encouraged to model our prayer lives on the wonderful widow who wouldn't wince when confronting the wicked (judge, that is). In this session we look at waiting from a biblical perspective and try to discern the relationship between waiting and prayer.

I don't know about you, but waiting is not one of my strong suits. Patience is not a fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22) that has ripened yet in my faith journey. In fact, one of the reasons I enjoy Advent as much as I do is so I can practice that which does not come naturally to me—namely, waiting!

Seriously, I don't like waiting. And it's pretty hard to avoid doing so in this increasingly busy and over-crowded world. I get into the “express” line at the grocery store and wait. Fast food is not only unhealthy, but it's often served slowly. With a confirmed appointment, I wait at the doctor's office. Last summer I actually waited for more than an hour in line to view the body of a deceased co-worker and extend my condolences to her family.

I'm pretty sure you know what I'm talking about. We wait at the mechanic's, at the concert, and even in the communion line at church. Is it any wonder that when we pray we want our prayers answered in a hurry, or at least in our desired time-frame and not necessarily God's?

While waiting may be difficult for some of us, Scripture encourages waiting as one of the most important spiritual practices. Time and time again, we are urged to wait upon God.

► WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Read these passages from the Psalms and see what they have to say about waiting: Psalm 27:14; Psalm 33:20–22; Psalm 37:5–7; Psalm 38:15–16; Psalm 40:1–3; Psalm 62:1–2; Psalm 130.

Some of these psalms indicate that while we are waiting God is working. What are some of the

things God is doing while we wait? These psalms also suggest a connection between waiting, trusting, and hope. How do you understand these connections?

Waiting and Weight Loss

This subhead may have fooled you into thinking that by participating in this Bible study you might get thin. Sadly, I have no magic formula for shedding pounds. However, I do think there is a correlation between our ability to wait upon the Lord and the emotional or spiritual “weight” that we carry. One of our needs in waiting on the Lord is the need to cast our weighty burdens on God. It’s like the hymn-writer said, “We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer.”

Someone once said, “If you pray, why worry? And if you worry, why pray?” As simple as this adage sounds, it’s much harder to practice than it is to preach. Some of us carry so many burdens around that waiting on God in prayer seems like just one more thing to add to our “to do” list. We take our burdens to the Lord—and instead of leaving them with God, we take them right back again at the end of our conversation.

But if we were to truly take our weighty matters to God and then wait for God to deal with them—to help us forgive the sibling who hurt us deeply; to open up doors to a new job; to find the right continuing-care facility in which to place our beloved and aging parents—if we could earnestly turn these burdens over to God and wait for God’s response, we would indeed feel lighter, both emotionally and spiritually.

► WHAT ABOUT YOU?

What does it mean then to wait upon our God? Think of a time when you “cast your burden upon the Lord” as it says in Psalm 55:22. How did you feel when you “let go and let God”?

Waiting Takes Time

When the psalmist wrote in Psalm 130: “I wait for you, O LORD, my soul waits; in your word is my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who keep watch for the morning, more than those who keep watch for the morning,” (*ELW* Psalm 130:5–6) he was comparing waiting expectantly on the Lord to the guards who kept watch over the city at night.

The hours often seem to pass so slowly in the evening. Even though the same 60 seconds per minute are ticking by as in the daylight, somehow when the sun sets the time appears to lengthen. One thinks of nurses who work the late shift watching over their patients while the rest of the world sleeps, or of police officers who protect the city streets under the cover of darkness while the TV entertains us.

For the psalmist, waiting for God was a more intense experience than what the night guards went through as they watched the clock in anticipation of the dawn and their release from duty. Daybreak was certain, but not without the passage of time. When we wait for the morning, like the guards of the city, we are waiting for more than simply the passing of time. We are waiting for the sun to rise and day to break, for the light to replace the darkness, for the evening chill to be replaced by the warmth of the sun.

Waiting involves an expectation of something special. Waiting means anticipation, expectation, and confident hope that something will indeed take place. Ultimately, waiting on the Lord is like waiting on the sun to rise—waiting expectantly for the Lord’s answers to human needs, just as the sun brings the warmth of the day.

I once heard the Rev. Dr. James Forbes preach an amazing sermon on Hannah, mother of Samuel. Hannah waited a very long time to conceive Samuel and was regularly ridiculed for being childless by her

rival wife, Peninnah. Nevertheless, Hannah prayed and waited, waited and prayed.

Although her story is brief, it is powerful. And the text in 1 Samuel 1:20 says that in “due time” that is, in God’s time, Hannah did become pregnant and give birth to Samuel. Forbes used Hannah’s name as an acrostic and proclaimed, that when “Human Agendas and Needs meet the Needs and Agendas of Heaven, (HANNAH) there’s going to be a bright star rising.” Hannah prayed and waited expectantly upon God and God granted her the gift of that bright and shining star among prophets, Samuel.

► WHAT ABOUT YOU?

For what have you waited and how? Share a time when you prayed fervently for something and waited for God to answer. Did you receive an answer to your prayer? Was the answer what you were expecting or something different? What was the waiting time like for you?

For Whom are We Waiting?

When I was a little girl, I used to play a trust game with my father. Dad would tell me to climb up two or three stairs and wait until he’d tell me to jump as he stood ready to catch me. Each time I did this I’d laugh with delight as Daddy said, “Jump.” I would dutifully obey and land safely within his strong, loving arms. With each successive jump my father would challenge me to go higher and higher until finally I was at the top of the landing, 12 to 13 steps above where Dad was at the base of the staircase.

After practicing this maneuver three or four times, there was absolutely no doubt in my mind that my father would catch me. Still, the height was a bit scary for a little kid. But when Dad said, “Jump,” I would jump, flying through the air down the staircase. And Dad never once dropped me; he never let me fall. Without knowing my dad and trusting him completely, I never would have had the courage to take those won-

derful leaps of faith and go flying into his arms. Our life of waiting on God in prayer is similar. When we wait on God, we are waiting for the One who knows and loves us to act for us. Our ability to wait on the Lord stems from being confident and focused on who God is and what God is doing. It’s based on trusting God’s promises, purposes, and power as revealed to us in Scripture as well as through our own individual stories of God acting in our lives and world.

God Never Grows Weary

This is what Isaiah knew when he wrote those wonderful and poetic words that were in our reading earlier. The ancient Israelites believed that God had forsaken them because of their rebelliousness. They had been driven out of their homes when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem back in 587 B.C. (Ancient Babylon is near where modern-day Iraq is.)

Now, some 40 years later, they are exiles in a foreign land, strangers and outsiders at best. And they are never allowed to forget, not even for one moment, that where they are is not their home. They are constantly reminded of the tragic truth that they are a subdued people, a conquered nation.

But these conquered people are also a covenant people. They’ve heard stories about Yahweh, about the God of their ancestors. They’ve heard about the God who took their ancestors out of slavery in Egypt and led them into the Promised Land. They’ve heard plenty about the God of Abraham and Sarah and how they wished that Yahweh would come again to rescue them and take them home!

Many of us can appreciate the sense of despair and disappointment that these exiles were feeling. Perhaps our communal situation is not as grim, but individually or as a family we may not have escaped hard times. The message in Isaiah chapters 44 to 55 is addressed specifically to people who are experiencing or have endured trying circumstances. And the thrust of the

proclamation is clear: God is coming to comfort you, wait upon the Lord!

Indeed, if God, the Creator and Preserver of all things—who never wearies of caring for God’s creatures and creation—is in control, then our chief response ought to be that of trust. We trust in God’s unfathomable love and compassion towards God’s children and wait.

Listen to how the good news unfolds beginning with the powerful preposition “but.” Even youth and young people who seem to have boundless energy get tired and fall exhausted, says the writer. ‘But’ hold on, there’s good news coming; ‘but’ wait just a little longer, something’s about to happen—‘but’ are you ready for the Lord to act? “But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

First, there is a general promise, “. . . those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.” As we wait for God we are promised new strength to do whatever is needed. This includes emotional, moral, and spiritual strength—and undoubtedly physical strength too, since our bodies are often affected by our spiritual condition.

And the evangelist’s promise gets even more specific than just the renewal of our strength. We are promised that we will “mount up on wings like eagles,” that even in the midst of difficulty we will be able to rise above our problems and wait on God’s solutions. Thus, we become part of the solution by allowing God to keep our anxiety in check.

In addition to soaring like eagles though, we are assured that we will run and not get weary and walk and not faint. No matter how long the course, we can stay on it because God is with us. No matter how long the journey, we keep on keeping on because God goes with us.

► WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Have you or someone you know ever experienced the truth of Isaiah 40:29 and felt God’s power when you were exhausted or God’s strength when you felt powerless? Think about the questions in Isaiah 40:28, “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” How will people know about God unless we share our stories?

Prayer as Patient Waiting

From the psalmists to the prophets to our Savior, Jesus himself, the posture of prayerful waiting upon God comes with deep and abiding benefits. Whether our form of prayer is quiet devotion and Scripture reading, walking along the beach or through the woods, or gathering together with others in meditation and song, it is important that we learn to wait upon God. For God empowers us to face everything we need to be and do with renewed emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual strength when we lean into God’s presence through waiting. May it be so with you.

Closing

Many of our most beloved hymns and songs are taken from passages in Scripture. As a closing, read responsively Psalm 91 and sing together the popular hymn “On Eagle’s’ Wings” by Father Michael Joncas whose hymn is an adaptation of this psalm (*ELW* 787). Pray for those who wait: for the birth of children or the peaceful death of loved ones; for family members to return from war or for new-found meaning to life. And remember to pray for yourself with patience and hope.

Coming Next Session

Next session we will learn some about the power of prayer to change us and our circumstances, perhaps in surprising ways. 🌿

Waiting with Patience and Hope

Welcome to our second Bible study session in which we will re-discover for some and learn anew for the others, the importance of waiting with patience and hope as we pray continuously. How did the first session go? As you prepare for this session, take some time in prayer and reflection to think about what happened during your first gathering. What did you learn about the women who attended? Are there any seasoned prayer warriors among you? If so, how might you enlist their aid as you learn about praying with patience and hope?

What did you discover during the brief feedback session? Taking notes during this time will be useful as you seek to make this Bible study opportunity as rich and relevant to this particular group as possible.

Be prepared as well to welcome any newcomers who might join your group for this session and think about ways to include them.

Praying the Psalms for a Week

The Psalm verses chosen for this session speak wonderfully about waiting on God. As you await God's wisdom to be revealed for you and your group, daily pray one of the following verses: Psalm 27:14; Psalm 33:20–22; Psalm 37:5–7; Psalm 38:15–16; Psalm 40:1–3; Psalm 62:1–2; Psalm 130. Read the passage aloud, focus on any special phrases or images that come to you, and then offer the group and its needs to God in prayer.

It Works If You Work It

When the first session was drawing to a close we suggested that you do a short evaluation of your

time together. Before you do the closing devotion of this session, it would be good to gather some feedback too.

Ask one or two of the following questions to get the ball rolling: What, if anything, in the session surprised you? Disturbed you? Challenged you? How might your prayer life change as a result of this session? What would be helpful for you as we conclude the Bible study next session?

Closing

The closing hymn “On Eagles’ Wings” is a sacred song composed by Father Michael Joncas, a Roman Catholic priest. It was written in 1979 after Vatican Council II when the Catholic Church began using vernacular hymns at Mass. Its words are based on both Psalm 91 and Isaiah 40:31.

“On Eagle’s Wings” is a very popular hymn throughout the Christian church and was used at many of the funerals of those who died in the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

As you prepare to end this session (even if you’re not leading the closing yourself) you might share this history of the song and invite participants to reflect on what they were doing 40 years ago when this song was written and how much the world has changed in these four decades. How does God continue to raise us up today? 🌸

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