

While We Wait...

A One Week Online Devotional by Dayna Schoonmaker

This one week Bible study intends to help you reflect on your relationship with God in the midst of a waiting season. As you move through the devotionals below, you will be invited to participate in practices designed to help you engage more deeply with each day's message. Following these practices, you can read through brief passages of scripture and reflect on the accompanying questions which will help you process the daily theme as you continue to develop your life in Christ.

Devotionals

Day 1:: On Who's Authority - In the book of Job, Job suffers at the hands of Satan. God allowed and even proposed this trial, knowing that the integrity of Job could forebear the suffering he would face. Sometimes in the midst of our own suffering we wonder how a certain situation could happen and why God would allow it to happen. These questions fall within the broader category of theodicy, which is the question of why God allows evil and suffering in the world. While we may never receive complete answers to these questions during our life on earth, we do have the opportunity to respond to them as Job did, by maintaining our integrity and our faith in God's goodness.

Do you have questions about what is going on in the world and how it relates to your understanding of faith? Where are you turning to find answers? Take some time today to write out several of your questions on paper. Leave space between each question. Then use your Bible, a concordance, or an online tool like biblegateway.com to find verses that address each concern. Seeing God's word speak to your concerns can remind you that God is with you.

Scripture Reading:

"As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter, as long as my breath is in me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils, my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit. Far be it from me to say that you are right; until I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days." Job 27:2-6

Questions/Responses

1. Have you felt anger or frustration toward God in the past couple of weeks? What resulted from that experience? Did you sense God drawing nearer to you, or fear God was moving away from you?
2. God is present to help us through all things, especially those things which are too great for us to handle alone. What do you need to place in God's care today?
3. Practice relinquishing authority to God.

Day 2:: Portion Control - In a time when fear of scarcity lingers in the back of our minds, Christians are called to remember that the Lord is our portion. We may not have easy access to certain foods or household items, and hospitals may be lacking necessary medical equipment, but God's care for God's people is never in short supply. Knowledge of God's unending love and presence doesn't fix all the problems in the world, but it gives us the means to navigate them with confident hope.

Part of God's plan for provision includes inviting us to be the means of providing for others. Are there any extra supplies you have in your house that you can share with someone else who may be in need? If you know of a need in the community that you can meet (while maintaining appropriate social distancing), take the time to meet that need. Even if you don't know of a specific need or are unable to meet physical needs, you can share yourself with others. Write a letter or make a phone call offering your presence and prayers to someone. As we focus on meeting the needs of others, we become less focused on our own lack and find that God indeed is our portion.

Scripture Reading:

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.
Lamentations 3:22-26

Questions/Responses

1. It is easy to fear that there won't be enough, enough toilet paper, enough food, enough cleaning supplies, enough medical supplies, and the list goes on. Do you have any fears you need to confess to God today?
2. Lamentations reminds us that the Lord is our portion and so we must wait on the Lord. How can you work with God to transform your fears into faithful patience?
3. There is good news in the faithfulness of God because his mercies never end; they are new each day. The hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness" was penned in a time of suffering, not a time of ease. Highlight the lyrics to this hymn that provide comfort for you today.

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not,
thy compassions, they fail not; as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

Refrain: Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided--Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Refrain]

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! [Refrain]

Day 3:: The Path to Deliverance - Sometimes we are just stuck. During these times we have the opportunity to wait on the Lord to deliver us, but this type of waiting is not a passive or inactive waiting. We are to wait for the Lord while simultaneously crying out to God through our lament and prayers. This active waiting keeps our requests before the Lord. Through this active waiting we are elevated out of the worst of our condition, even before we are completely delivered from it. Our songs of lament turn into new songs, hymns of praise to our God.

Take some time to cultivate a playlist of music to help elevate your spirit today. You can do this by writing down a list of songs and singing them aloud or by putting together an actual playlist on iTunes or Spotify. If you have a hymnal at home you can even put together a list of hymns. Start with a song of lament that adequately expresses your grief or longing, then gradually build your list towards a final song that expresses triumphant praise to God. Sing through or listen to your playlist, allowing it to elevate your spirit.

Scripture Reading:

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. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him. Psalm 40:1-3

Questions/Responses

1. What have you been doing during this time of waiting? How does what you choose to do with your time impact your spiritual life?
2. What song on your playlist resonated most deeply with your spirit today? How can you use that as a starting point to move toward your triumphant song? (If your triumphant song was your starting point, continue praising God!)
3. Name three ways you've experienced God turning toward you or responding to your cries lately. If you cannot name three, spend some time crying out to the Lord. Wait expectantly for a reply.

Day 4:: Training Day - Following the daily news can lure us into believing we are receiving invaluable information. But while it does provide some useful information, it can also overwhelm and influence us in negative ways that promote fear and anxiety. There is a difference between being aware of the news to be an informed, proactive citizen and being a slave to the news cycle. We are trained and transformed by the information we take in. While there is no end to the opportunity to receive information from media outlets, there is also no end to the information available to us in God's word.

Take some time off from news feeds, whether it be in the newspaper, on the television, or online. Shut it off, allowing yourself a break from the inundation of information available 24/7. Instead, spend time focusing on memorizing a passage of scripture, or writing a new praise song, or praying and meditating on God's word.

Scripture Reading:

*Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.
1 Timothy 4:7-10*

Questions/Responses

1. How has your media intake influenced the way you feel right now?
2. In what ways can you place training in godliness above training in worldly knowledge? For instance, do you know more about the number of new COVID-19 cases or the spiritual gifts God seeks to impart?
3. Training isn't easy. It takes discipline and intentional, repetitive effort. Training is important though, because it prepares us for the future. What do you need to do to create a routine for growing in godliness, not only today, but everyday?

Day 5:: Emerging - A day is coming when we will emerge from this season of social distancing to resume our in-person relationships with one another. As we anticipate that day, it is important to consider *how* we will emerge. Will we tell stories of how hard this season was, of what we missed, of what we lacked, of how we suffered? Will we tell stories of God's goodness, of family togetherness, of maintaining and developing connections with others via digital media? Will we tell of how we reached out to those in need in God's name? Will we tell of how we shared the good news of the Gospel to those living in darkness? There is going to be a real sense of glory when we emerge from our homes back into community. What story will you have to tell?

If you do not already keep a journal, consider beginning one. Looking back over past entries can help you track the story you are writing as well as helping you to consider what story you want to tell moving forward. If you have been keeping a journal, take some time to look over past entries to see what story you've been telling. Is this the story you want to continue? While there is no need to suppress hard parts of your story—it is important to acknowledge them—it is also important to acknowledge the good parts and envision positive ways forward. If you are struggling with understanding this balance, spend some time reading through the psalms, as they exemplify this holy balance.

Scripture Reading:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:18-23

Questions/Responses

1. How are you experiencing this season of waiting for the end of social distancing? What have you found yourself comparing it to?
2. What fruit of the Spirit is being produced in your life right now (see also Gal. 5:22-23)? Do you find you are growing in kindness toward others? Perhaps your patience is deepening? How can you be intentional about growing in fruitfulness?
3. Our ultimate redemption will not come with the end of a virus, but with the resurrection of our bodies in eternal glory. Are there ways you can share the good news of this hope with others who may not have heard it?