

Waiting in the Crucible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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. It is no wonder, then, that the Lord tells us to cultivate it.

This week, we'll look at what could be behind some of the most trying of all crucibles: the crucibles 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, September 10.

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 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 Psalm 27:14, Psalm 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 but 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 verses, 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, as well. We also may 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 why 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 developing 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 the answer to a prayer that could have been answered long ago?”

David: An Object Lesson in Waiting

In 1 Samuel 16:1–13, we see 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 he was 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, 1 Sam. 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 wishes 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 about how easily David could have justified killing Saul. (After all, David was told he’d have the throne, and Saul was so evil anyway.) Yet, his actions speak of true faith in God. What conclusion might you be able to draw from this example for yourself in light of 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 had 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?’” (*1 Kings 19:9, NIV*). Evidently, Elijah’s fear caused him to run and find himself in the wrong place.

After such a powerful intervention by the Lord on Mount Carmel, Elijah should have been full of faith and trust; instead, he ran 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 it is to let such things as ambition, anger, passion, lack of faith, or 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 Take Delight in the Lord

“Take 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 hearts that take delight in the Lord. So, what does it mean to “take delight in the LORD”?

Read Psalm 37:1–11. The context for Psalm 37:4 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?

Ps. 37:1 _____

Ps. 37:5 _____

Ps. 37:7 _____

Ps. 37:8 _____

Read Psalm 37:4 again. In the context of the verses you have just made comments on, what does it mean to “take 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 taking delight in the Lord. To take 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 “take delight in the LORD”? Spend some time in prayer, seeking God’s guidance as to how this may become a reality in your life.

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Anointing of David,” pp. 637–642, 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 happen 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. We can lose much if we rush ahead of God, but we can gain much by maintaining an attitude of trust and delight in Him.

The Lord weighs and measures every trial.

“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 Jesus “weighs and measures” every trial? How can knowing this help us while we wait?
- 2 Ask people in class to give personal testimonies as 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 that the Spirit will develop patience in their lives?

Part 11: The Final Attack

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Two weeks before Father's baptism, he inexplicably grew angry after guests left the house following a small-group Bible study in Manaus, Brazil, on Friday evening. He announced that he would sleep in the living room.

The night was darker than usual. Electricity went out in the neighborhood, leaving the houses and streets in pitch blackness.

About 1:00 A.M., Junior woke up to the sound of a voice shrieking that Father was not going to be baptized.

Junior was scared and didn't know what to do. He stayed in his room to see what would happen.

The voice screamed again, saying that Father was not going to be baptized. Junior waited.

He heard someone enter his room.

"Please, Son, pray with me," Father said. "The enemy is attacking again."

Another voice spoke. "What are you doing?" It was Mother. When she heard the screams from the living room, she had sunk onto her knees and began to pray. Now she invited Father and Junior to join her in pleading for Jesus to chase away the evil spirits.

After some minutes of prayer, Mother suggested that they step outside the house where they would be able to see one another in the dim moonlight.

Outside, Father said he was thirsty. Junior volunteered to go back in and fetch a glass of water. In the kitchen, he spotted a mysterious dark spot on the floor. Calling for Mother, he pointed at the spot and asked, "What's that?" Mother looked closely at the floor. "That's hair!" she said.

Back outside, Junior and Mother took a closer look at Father. Big tufts of hair were missing from his head. It looked as if someone had taken a pair of scissors and chopped off his hair haphazardly.

Father put his hands to the top of his head and winced.

"I'll have to shave my head," he said. "I don't care if I'm bald."

When the sun rose on Sabbath morning, Father felt terribly tired. He was unusually weak after the nighttime attack by evil spirits, as if he had received a severe beating. He decided to pray at home instead of going to church.

After Mother and Junior left, he prayed, "Jesus, don't let them take over my body. Please be close to me. I don't want to be possessed anymore."

Opening his Bible, he read in Psalms 37:5, "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (*NKJV*).

Father understood that Jesus was telling him not to be afraid. Jesus would guide him to his baptism. Sure enough, evil spirits never possessed Father again after that Friday night. But he could still hear them.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.

Key Text: *Galatians 5:22*

Study Focus: *1 Samuel 26; Ps. 37:1–11; Rom. 5:3–5; Rom. 15:4, 5.*

Part I: Overview

Hope and meekness, as essential tools for overcoming crucibles, are both defined by waiting. However, the concept of biblical waiting is not only about waiting but also waiting with patience. This patience is not a political stratagem but is part of the fruit of the Spirit. God’s people wait patiently in the crucible, because God Himself is patient. God is patient because He is loving in character and because He also chooses the best moment to intervene. But that best moment is calculated by God to offer as much time as possible for the salvation of as many people as possible. Again, waiting is possible only when we trust the One for whom we are waiting.

Lesson Themes: This week’s lesson highlights two major themes.

1. We understand that patient waiting is part of the fruit of the Spirit and is crucial in our overcoming crucibles.
2. Waiting patiently becomes possible when we know and trust the person we are waiting for.

Part II: Commentary

The Patience of God

One biblical expression that describes God’s patience is “slow to anger” (*Neh. 9:16, 17; see also Exod. 34:6, Num. 14:18, Ps. 103:8, Jon. 4:2, Nah. 1:3*). Notice that most of these texts place the expression “slow to anger” in the context of other divine descriptions, such as God is “abundant in lovingkindness,” “compassionate and gracious,” “merciful.” In addition, the Bible presents God as “putting up” with people (*Gen. 18:17–33; Num. 14:27; Deut. 8:2; Neh. 9:30, 31; Ps. 78:38; Isa. 42:14; Ezek. 20:17; Acts 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:20*). At the same time, it is emphasized that God is “abounding in goodness and truth” (*Exod. 34:6, NKJV*) and is the Author of “wondrous deeds” (*Neh. 9:17, NASB*). At the same time, He “by no means clears the guilty” (*Num. 14:18, NKJV; see also Nah. 1:3, 1 Pet. 3:20*).

Thus, clearly God’s patience is not to be confused with indifference, powerlessness, or undecidedness. Neither is God’s patience a facade for calculating the best time for revenge. Rather, God is patient because

He abounds in love for us and wants to save as many as possible. Paul asks us rhetorically: “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (*Rom. 2:4, NKJV; see also Rom. 9:22–24*). Peter also declares that “the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (*2 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*) because “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (*see in the larger context of 2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV*).

Our Patience

The biblical explanation of God’s patience will help all Christians, and especially us as Seventh-day Adventists, to understand the delay of the second coming of Jesus. In addition, it will help us evaluate and grow our own patience. A brief, noncomprehensive biblical study on patience produces several points:

1. The Bible teaches that patience is an integral part of Christian life and comes from God. God clothes us with patience, together with mercy, humility, and meekness, because “Christ is all and in all” (*Col. 3:11, NKJV*), and because God has “elected” us (*see Col. 3:12*). Jesus works in us His patience (*1 Tim. 1:16*). We are patient because of the “calling” that God extended to us (*Eph. 4:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:2*). Christian patience is part of the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit (*Gal. 5:22*). It comes in a package with other Christian virtues, such as love, hope, and meekness (*Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:1, 2; 2 Tim. 4:2*). Love is patient (*1 Cor. 13:4*), and our hope enables us to wait with patience (*Rom. 8:25*). We are strengthened through patience with joy (*Col. 1:11*), and patience produces character (*Rom. 5:3, 4; James 1:3, 4*).
2. Patience is a key characteristic of the end-time remnant of God: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (*Rev. 14:12, NKJV; see also Rev. 13:10*). The remnant understand that they must be patient until the coming of the Lord in the same way that a farmer is patient until the harvest is ready (*James 5:7, 8; see also Luke 8:15, Heb. 6:12, Heb. 10:36, Rev. 14:14–20*). We take courage from God’s injunction to Habakkuk that even if, at times, certain end-time prophecies may appear to be far from their final fulfillment, we must persevere in our waiting: “The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (*Hab. 2:3, NKJV*). God calls us to “be still, and know that I am God” (*Ps. 46:10*). David insists that a believer must learn to “wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!” (*Ps. 27:14, NKJV*).

3. In the meantime, an entire cloud of witnesses in patience cheers us on the way: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Heb. 12:1, 2, NKJV*). Among the great examples of patience are Abraham (*Heb. 6:15*) and the prophets and Job, who prove “that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (*James 5:11, NKJV*). Jeremiah decided to wait on the Lord, no matter what: “I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him’ ” (*Lam. 3:24, NIV*), because “the LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him” (*Lam. 3:25, NKJV*).

Paul explains that the examples we have in the Scriptures are appointed to help us develop our endurance and give us hope (*Rom. 15:4, 5*). Numerous other men and women of faith, both during and after the New Testament times, patiently endured tribulation and courageously bore God’s name and cause: “And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary” (*Rev. 2:3, NKJV; see also Rom. 12:12, 2 Tim. 2:24, 2 Thess. 1:4, Rev 1:9, Rev. 2:19, Rev. 3:10*). Of course, Jesus is our greatest Example of patience and meekness in suffering: “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (*1 Pet. 2:21–23, NKJV*).

4. Yes, there are practical aspects of patience for this life: its opposite, impatience, ruins our present lives, and makes us fools (*Prov. 14:29; Prov. 15:18; Prov. 16:32; Prov. 25:15; Eccles. 7:8, 9*). But patience is that virtue that God gives us in the crucible of tribulation that helps us overcome and secure eternal life. In His teachings about tribulation in the world, Jesus instructs us: “ ‘By your patience possess your souls’ ” (*Luke 21:19, NKJV*). The apostle Paul declares that God will give “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality” (*Rom. 2:7, NKJV*). Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises us: “But those who wait on 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” (*Isa. 40:31, NKJV; see also Ps. 37:7–9, Ps. 40:1*).

Patience Is Trusting

Ian lay in the hospital with cancer. It was a hard winter, with extremely low temperatures. One morning, when the nurse entered his room to check on him, Ian told the nurse that his wife, Anastasia, would come to visit him that day. The nurse replied: “I do not think so, it is minus 30 degrees outside!” The man retorted: “I know my wife, and I trust her. She is special! When she promises something, she will fulfill that promise no matter what!” One hour later, Anastasia walked into Ian’s hospital room. Later that day, the nurse told Ian: “I seriously doubted your wife would come. But now I know she is indeed special!” Our waiting is determined by our knowledge of, and trust in, the person we are waiting for. If we know God and trust Him, our waiting will not lead us to despair, but rather to a patient, and active, waiting.

Part III: Life Application

- 1. Our patience manifests itself—and, indeed, we sorely need it—in various aspects of life: family, business, health, spirituality, et cetera. However, our genuine patience will always be rooted in the fruit of the Spirit. Write down an evaluation of your patience in various areas of your life. What have you discovered? In which areas of your life can it be improved? How can you make that happen, with God’s help?**

- 2. Impatience is considered a characteristic of immaturity. Children generally find waiting difficult; mature people are able to wait more easily. The mature have been enabled by experience and by trust to wait patiently. Evaluate your spiritual maturity. How do you plan to continue growing in your patience?**

Notes


