

# What Should We Do While We're Waiting?

A Sermon by the Rev. Malcolm G. Smith

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## Readings

*Psalm 27:1, 3-4, 11, 13-14 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)*

- 1 Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?  
Jehovah is the strength of my life; whom shall I dread? ....
- 3 Though a camp should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear;  
Though war should rise up against me, in this will I trust.
- 4 One thing have I asked from Jehovah, that will I seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life,  
To behold the pleasantness of Jehovah,  
And to visit in His temple in the morning. ....
- 11 Instruct me, O Jehovah, in Your way,  
And lead me in a path of uprightness because of my foes;....
- 13 Unless I had believed to see the goodness of Jehovah  
In the land of the living.
- 14 Wait for Jehovah; hold firm and He shall encourage your heart;  
And wait for Jehovah.

*Luke 12:35-48 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)*

<sup>35</sup> [Then Jesus said to His disciples,] "Let your loins be girded around, and your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> and you yourselves be like men waiting for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he comes and knocks, they may open to him straightaway. <sup>37</sup> Happy are those servants whom the lord, at his coming, shall find watching. Amen, I say to you, that he will gird himself and have them recline, and passing through he will minister to them. <sup>38</sup> And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, happy are those servants. <sup>39</sup> But know this, that if the householder knew at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have let his house be dug through. <sup>40</sup> And therefore you also be prepared, for at an hour that you do not think, the Son of Man is coming."

<sup>41</sup> And Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You say this parable only to us, or even to all?"

<sup>42</sup> And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and prudent steward, whom the lord shall appoint over his household, to apportion the measure of wheat in due time? <sup>43</sup> Happy is that servant whom his lord, at his coming, shall find so doing. <sup>44</sup> Truly, I say to you that he will appoint him over all his belongings. <sup>45</sup> But if that servant shall say in his heart, 'My lord delays to come,' and shall begin to strike the boy-servants and maids, and to eat and to drink and be drunken; <sup>46</sup> the lord of that servant shall come in a day that he does not expect him, and in an hour which he does not know, and will divide him in two, and will put his part with the unbelieving. <sup>47</sup> And that servant who knew his lord's will, and did not prepare, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

<sup>48</sup> But he who did not know, but did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. And everyone

to whom much has been given, from him much will be sought; and to whom they have committed much, of him they will ask all the more.”

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Human beings were created to be useful, because useful service is the containing vessel of goodness and truth.... When... a person is engaged in some pursuit or business or other useful activity, their mind is fenced around and circumscribed as though with a circle, within whose boundaries it is progressively ordered into truly human form. Then, from this vantage point, as though looking out from its house, the mind sees various impure passions lurking outside, and from the sanity of its reason within, banishes them, thus banishing as well the wild insanities of licentious lust. ....

The reverse happens in the case of people who surrender themselves to laziness and sloth. Their mind is not fenced around or set within boundaries; a person like that... lets in every sort of nonsense and foolishness which flows in from the world and from the body and those things draw the person into a love of them.

## Introduction

- One of the inescapable realities of living in this natural world with its time and space constraints is that when things happen will not always be in line with what we want.
  - To put more simply, in this world, we're just going to have to do a lot of waiting.
    - Waiting for good things to happen.
    - Waiting for difficult things to be over.
    - And also just waiting to see what happens in the future.
- When it's something clearly good that we want, it can feel particularly hard to wait.
  - I want this good thing; the Lord wants me to have it; what's the hold up?
- It's interesting that the Lord promises us things but then doesn't give them to us right away.
  - For example, He promised Abraham that his numerous descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:4).
    - But to have numerous descendants you need to have at least one child and for years they didn't have any.
    - It wasn't till 25 years later, when Abraham was 100 years old, that he and his wife Sarah finally had a son (Genesis 21:5).
      - 25 years between the promise being made and it being fulfilled.
- The Lord's Word is full of beautiful promises and visions of what will be but it's not clear when these things will happen.
  - And so we wait.
  - And the question arises: what are we meant to do while we're waiting?
  - Here are 6 suggestions.

## 1) Recognize the Value in Waiting and in Hard Times

- The early days of the Christian Church were challenging for the early Christians and so the disciples wrote letters to the people to counsel them, encourage them, and help them know what to do.
- Listen to this bit of advice from the apostle James to the people:
  - James 1:2-4 (NKJV)
    - <sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.
- Whatever trials and tribulations you're going through, count it all joy!
- It is not the Lord's will that you go through hard things but He will use whatever you're going through to further His eternal goals for you.
  - Let the Lord do His work to keep regenerating you, to keep leading you away from selfishness and evil, to keep reorienting you towards a heavenly life.
  - "Let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

- When we are stuck in a mode of just waiting and waiting for something to happen, we can be focussing too much on an imagined future when there is work to be done in the present.
  - Yes, maybe it will be great when that good thing happens or when that unpleasant thing is finally done, but there also is value in what is happening right now, even if it's not what you want to be doing.
    - *"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it"* (Psalm 118:24).
      - The Lord's hand is working in our lives today.
      - There are things to rejoice and be glad about today, if we are willing to do the work to see them.
- To recognize the value in what we're going through, we need to take time to reflect.
  - That's the next suggestion.

## 2) Take Time to Reflect

- This means taking time to think about how your life is going, noticing how you're feeling, paying attention to what's on your mind.
- It's easy to go through our days and never take time to reflect.
  - From when we wake up in the morning to when we fall asleep at night we're just going, going, going.
    - Wake up; get dressed; have breakfast; pack up your things and go to work; eat lunch at some point; get home; eat supper; do home tasks; go to bed.
      - And do it all again the next day.
  - Even in the gaps between those things we fill it with looking at our phones, or watching TV, or reading a book.
- I think the Lord knows that at least some of us would never slow down and breathe if we didn't have to wait for things.
  - The next time you're stuck somewhere waiting, embrace it, use it!
    - Stuck in traffic? Turn off the music or podcast or radio show, breathe, and think about how things are going.
    - Waiting in a line at the grocery store? Put your phone back in your pocket and think about something that you're grateful for in your life.
    - Sitting on the couch with your family after a long day? Turn off the TV and ask someone what a high point and low point were in their day.
  - Another way to take time to reflect is to write down some of what you're feeling and thinking and then you can read it back and ask the Lord for His perspective on it.

### *We Might Realize That We're Feeling Weak*

- Part of why we might not want to stop and reflect is because we don't want to feel bad.
  - If we pause, we might realize that we're really sad about something.
  - Or we might realize that we're feeling really anxious about something.
  - And we don't want to feel those things.
    - So we try to fill all the gaps in our lives so that we don't have to feel them.
- But if we do that then we have to carry those heavy things on our own.

- If we take the time to reflect and notice what we're feeling, then we can maybe find the words to tell someone else about what we feeling and they can help us to carry them.
- Or we can talk to the Lord about what we're feeling.
  - Our recitation said that "those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:30).
  - When we realize that we're feeling weak and weary and faint and we ask the Lord for help and wait on Him, then He can renew our strength and help us to run and not be weary and walk and not be faint.
  - But first we have to recognize how we're feeling.
- Let's not try to fill every gap in our lives but instead use some of those waiting times to reflect, even if it's painful.

### 3) Get Some Rest

- The next suggestion for what you might do when you're waiting is to get some rest.
  - That might be part of how the Lord can renew your strength is by giving you time to rest your mind and body.
  - Psalm 127 says,
    - It is vain for you to rise up early,  
To sit up late,  
To eat the bread of sorrows;  
For so He gives His beloved sleep. (2)
- There are times when the Lord asks us to keep working, even when we're tired, like in the parable when He says, "Happy are those servants whom the lord, at his coming, shall find watching...." even if it's the middle of the night when the lord finally comes.
- The teachings of the New Church explain what this means at a deeper level.
  - *Apocalypse Revealed* 158
    - "Be watchful"... symbolically means that [people] should have truths and live in accordance with them. To be watchful has precisely this symbolic meaning in the Word, for a person who learns truths and lives according to them is like someone who awakens from sleep and becomes alert. ....

Natural life, regarded in itself or apart from spiritual life, is really no more than a state of sleep, whereas natural life that contains spiritual life is a state of alertness. This alertness, moreover, is obtained only through truths – truths which appear in their own light and in their own clarity when a person lives in accordance with them.
- The point is that we need to be spiritually aware and awake, not that we need to never rest.
- And, even in this same parable, there is a time for the servants to rest.
  - It says that, when the lord has come, "he will gird himself and have them recline, and passing through he will minister to them."
  - The good servants do have a chance to sit down or lie down and be served by the lord.
- At a particular time when you're waiting, you can ask the Lord to help you figure out whether it's a time when you should get up to serve, or a time when you should get some rest.

## 4) Try to Not Mistreat Other People or Yourself

- The next suggestion is to try to not mistreat other people or yourself.
- In the second parable that the Lord told in our reading, He described a situation in which the lord or master of some servants was delayed in coming home and so the head servant decided to hit the boy servants and the maids and to get drunk.
- One way this might show up in our lives is if we're waiting for something in our lives and we start to get bitter and resent people who have whatever it is and we justify treating them in a cruel way.
- Another way it might show up is that, when we aren't getting we want, we can be tempted to beat up on ourselves.
  - For example, someone who is unmarried and wishing to be married might beat up on themselves because their body doesn't look how they wish it did or because they don't have some personality trait that they wish they did.
  - Or someone who's struggling to find a job might beat up on themselves, telling themselves that they should be smart enough to figure this out.
- The boy servants and maids in the parable can mean things inside your own mind – lower level thoughts and feelings which help you get things done (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2567).
  - Don't beat your servants when things are going badly – they're just trying to help.
  - They haven't done anything wrong.
  - We just need to find something productive for them to work on.
- The steward getting drunk has to do with drinking in too much of certain ideas.
  - In this case it might be daydreaming or fantasizing about what things will be like when everything goes our way.
  - A certain amount of that is fine, just like a certain amount of alcohol is fine, but too much of it can lead to foolish behavior.
  - When a person obsessed becomes with whatever it is that they don't have, their lives become imbalanced and they make poor decisions.
- Let's try hard to not mistreat other people or ourselves while we're waiting.

## 5) Find Something Useful to Do

- The next idea about what to do when you're waiting is to try to find something useful to do.
  - In the parable, if the head servant had just kept busy being useful, he wouldn't have had time to do things that he shouldn't have.
  - And, when the Lord is setting up the first parable, He says to His disciples, "Let your waist be girded, and your lamps burning..."
    - Be ready to serve.
- In English, the word "wait" can mean a couple of different things.
  - It can mean that you are waiting for someone or waiting for something to happen.

- But it also can mean that you are waiting *on* someone – like a waiter at a restaurant who is there to serve the people, waiting on them hand and foot.
- This can be a way to help you remember what to do when you're waiting.
  - If you're waiting, do some waiting on other people.
  - If you're bored, ask someone how you can help them.
- The passage in the lessons from the teachings of the New Church says that being useful makes like a fence or a boundary in our minds that helps keep some of the bad thoughts and feelings from hell away from our minds.
  - When we're being useful we don't have time for those thoughts and feelings and it's easy to see that they're "nonsense and foolishness."
  - But, when we're just lazing around for a long time, then we want something to make us feel good and then some of those bad and unhelpful thoughts and feelings seem like they might be worth a try.
- Taking an example might help these ideas make more sense.
  - We'll use the example of someone who really wants to get married but hasn't found someone yet.
- Years ago, a woman in that situation was kind enough to let me interview her about her experience and her perspective on being in that situation.
  - The first thing she said was, "Don't sell false hope. People love to tell you, 'Oh, I'm sure you'll meet someone soon!' They don't know that. That's not what the Lord promises."
  - She said that she finds it most useful to not focus on her (or anyone's) marital status but on the person themselves.
  - And, for herself, she finds it the most useful to think about how she can be most useful, not most marriageable.
  - She pointed out that there are a number of jobs that society needs people to do that are more easily served by people who don't have spouses and children needing them at home.
  - And it's much more outward looking to think about how she can be useful, rather than why she isn't married yet.
  - She pointed out that obsessing about that can actually be quite a self-centered process and as soon as you face outwards, that's where you find happiness.
  - She was not letting herself get drunk on the ideas; she was not beating herself up about it; she was looking for how she can use her current state of singleness to be useful.
- A different stage of life when a person might beat up on themselves is when they get to the point where they are not capable of being as useful as they used to be.
  - Or at least they can't be useful in as obvious ways.
  - People can think, "Yes, I know I should be useful but what am I supposed to do?"
    - "How can I actually help people? I'm just a burden."
  - The passage we read says, "By pursuit or business we mean any effort to be useful."
    - It doesn't need to be high paying or prestigious or even particularly noble seeming – it just needs to be an effort to be useful.
    - It might just be making an effort to make it easier for the people who are caring for us.

- And it's useful to think of ourselves as stewards in that regard.
  - A steward's job is to look after what his master gives him.
  - Our job is to do the best with what we've been given by our Master in this current season of our lives, our job is not to worry about what we haven't been given.
- Depending on who you are and what stage of life you're at, you may find it harder to find the space to reflect because you're so swamped with useful things to do, or you may find it harder to find something useful to do.
  - Whatever stage you're at, it will probably be useful to you to work on the last suggestion: ask for trust and hope in the Lord.

## 6) Ask for Trust and Hope in the Lord

- Sometimes none of the options for what we might do while we're waiting sound any good.
  - Everything feels hard and it feels like everything will always be hard.
- It can be especially hard when we're feeling anxious and unsure of what's going to happen and like lots of things are out of our control.
  - We're powerless.
  - All we can do is wait.
  - All we can do is imagine all the bad things that have happened or the bad things that will happen.
- In those times, try asking the Lord for some trust in Him.
  - Ask the Lord for some confidence that He will get us through it – some hope that we will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living (Psalm 27:13).
  - And to grow in that trust and that hope requires regular prayer about it.
    - Prayer for the ability to accept things the way they are.
    - Prayer for the ability to be present now rather than wishing we were in the past or the future.
    - Prayer for the Lord to give us true hope.
  - If you remember, the woman I was talking to about dealing with waiting to be married said, "Don't sell false hope."
    - And so I asked her, "What is real hope?"
    - And she said, "Real hope is to know that the Lord is always looking after you, no matter what, whether single or married, the Lord has a plan for you."
    - And specifically in reference to getting married she said, "I still have the seed of hope that I'm going to get married but the Lord doesn't promise that I will definitely be married in this life but He does promise that I will definitely be married after death so that's what I put my hope in."
- It takes a lot of prayer and reflection to be able to say that with a smile.
  - Prayer is how we learn to hand things over to the Lord and become OK with having to wait for things that we really, really want now.
  - It is hard but it is possible.



- We can come to trust that the Lord will give us this day our daily bread – He will give us what we need to get through today – and we can trust that tomorrow He will give us in that day what we need to get through that day.

## Recap

- To wrap up, let's go back over the 6 suggestions for things to do while you're waiting.
  - 1) Recognize the value in waiting
  - 2) Take time to reflect
  - 3) Get some rest
  - 4) Try to not mistreat other people or yourself
  - 5) Find something useful to do
  - 6) And ask for trust and hope in the Lord
- These are just some suggestions.
  - I'm interested in what works for you when you're having a hard time waiting.
  - Let's talk with each other about that after the service today.

## Conclusion

- Having to wait can be hard and we can feel pretty frustrated, anxious, and desperate but when we find something productive to do with the time, we don't have to feel anxious; we don't feel desperate; instead we feel at peace about it.
  - And that can make all the difference.
- As it says in the Psalms, "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You" (Psalm 39:7).
- *Amen.*

If you would like to talk more about this topic, get in touch with Malcolm at [malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org](mailto:malcolm.smith@brynathynchurch.org).