

Waiting with Truth

Psalm 40

Mark Vroegop

"I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie! You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told. In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart"" (Ps. 40:1–8, ESV).

I was reading a book recently, and I almost laughed out loud with the insightfulness of a statement the author made. Here's what I read:

"You can't buy manna in bulk."¹

The short quotation is from an excellent book by Betsy Howard entitled *Seasons of Waiting: Walking by Faith When Dreams are Delayed*. Do you know what she means that you can't buy manna bulk?

It's connected to the account in Exodus 16 where the Israelites are wandering in the wilderness after their deliverance from Egypt. For forty years, the children of God wandered in the wilderness. Every day God provided just enough manna for their survival. Attempting to store up manna resulted in spoiled food. By my calculation, the Israelites went to bed fourteen thousand six hundred times waiting for God to provide food the next day.

The daily provision of waiting for manna became one of the important lessons in the wilderness. The concept made its way into the Lord's prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread. . ." (Matt. 6:11). The idea is simple and yet profound: God provides what we need on his timeline. He gives daily bread. He provides daily grace.

You can't buy manna in bulk.

¹ Betsy Childs Howard, [*Seasons of Waiting: Walking by Faith When Dreams Are Delayed*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

To be a Christian means that you live on the promises of God. The Bible tells us that God is good, that he knows what we need, and that he will provide. That's what manna represents. It's an example of God's daily provision as his people waited for him—every day—to provide.

The Meaning of Advent

In the liturgical calendar, the weeks leading up to Christmas are called Advent. The word means coming or arrival. It's a time of reflection in the church calendar on the birth of Christ, and it's a time of anticipation of Christ's second coming. One advent reminds us of another advent.

We live between these two "advents"—between the first coming and the second. So, part of the significance of this season is embracing the value of spiritual waiting. In fact, the second Sunday of Advent is particularly focused on preparation and waiting.

Through the month of December, we are going to take a short break from Isaiah to explore a theme that emerged through our series in Isaiah and one that relates to Advent. We're going to dig deeper into the theme of waiting.

I'm going to expositionally walk us through a series of texts in the Bible that help us understand both the spiritual value of waiting and how to wait. The theme of waiting has captured my attention and heart over the last few months. It's all over the Bible. Waiting is something we all know something about. And many of us—myself included—are not very good at it. Most of us just want the waiting to be over. We'd be pretty excited if we never had to wait for anything ever again.

But Betsy Howard says, "We should want to learn how to wait well so that we can go on waiting well because we will always be waiting for something in this life."² In other words, we never graduate from the school of waiting.³

Since Advent is a season of waiting, I thought it would be good to explore this further. The hope is that if you are a Christian, you'll know how to embrace this important spiritual practice and you'll be prepared for the seasons of waiting when they come. Some of you may be in an intense season of waiting right now. The holidays tend to make things harder.

And if you are not yet a Christian, I hope you'll walk with us through this series because it might surprise you to learn that what you are really waiting for is salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Today we are going to examine Psalm 40 and the connection it reveals between waiting and truth. From this text and others in the Bible, we learn that the practice of spiritual waiting involves **living on what we know to be true about God when we don't know what's true about our lives**. Or simply stated: waiting is living on biblical truth.

² Betsy Childs Howard, [*Seasons of Waiting: Walking by Faith When Dreams Are Delayed*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

³ Ibid.

The first step in learning to wait is learning to live on what you know, not what you don't know.

Psalms 40 helps us to see the past, present, and future dynamics of truth as they relate to waiting.

Past Truth (vv. 1-3)

The first verse of Psalm 40 is well known both inside and outside the church. Those of you who grew up in the 80s may have first heard this psalm not in church but in music, thanks to Bono and U2. Maybe this psalm was read at a funeral or you used it during a season of pain. The first verse sings with hope: "I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry" (v. 1)

The word wait in Psalm 40 is the same Hebrew word that we found in Isaiah 40:31—"those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." It's the word *qavah*, and it means to look forward to something or to wait for something to arrive. In other places, the word is translated as hope.

"I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him"
(Isa. 8:17).

In Isaiah 8:17, the word for wait has the sense of patience, and the word for hope is *qavah*—which is translated as wait in other passages. Words like wait, trust, hope, and look for are all connected to the concept of waiting.

Waiting is linked to a need. Something isn't right. There's a gap. Waiting is the environment of our lives. To be human is to wait. We're not in control of everything. And that's why waiting is so uncomfortable, hard, or frustrating. Whatever causes the waiting in our lives is a direct assault on our self-sufficiency.

That's why waiting is often hard. It's not natural. And it's humbling.

But notice that David says, "I waited patiently." Do you know what the Hebrew word for patience is? It's also *qavah*—the word for waiting. Just think about that! There's no word for patience. It's just a repetition of the word "wait." Eugene Peterson paraphrases the verse this way: "I waited and waited and waited for God."

So, as we begin our deeper dive into the subject of waiting, it's important to see the connection between waiting and patience. Often, patience looks like simply embracing the season of waiting that you are in.

Now, remember, this is about past truth. David is looking backward. He's in a hard place (as we'll see in a moment), but he begins by considering the past activity of God. He considers something from the past: "I waited and waited and waited on the Lord. . ."

Can you think of a time in the past when you waited and waited and waited on the Lord? These are important moments to remember.

This is one of the reasons the book of Lamentations says that it's good to suffer when you are young:

The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth (Lam. 3:25–27).

One of the most important things you can do in waiting is to remember when you've waited before. You need to rehearse the truth of the past. Notice the reflections of the psalmist here:

- He praises God that God listened to him and was concerned for him. Other translations render this as “he bent down to me” (v. 2, New English Bible).
- God helped the psalmist when he felt deeply hopeless. He talks about a pit of destruction (i.e. ditch) or a miry bog (i.e. something challenging to walk through) (v. 2).
- Through his hardship, God provided the psalmist with sure footing and a path forward (v. 2).
- The result of God's provision was a new song of praise with widespread recognition of God's help in his life (v. 3).

Go back to that time in the past when you waited and waited and waited on the Lord? How did the Lord prove himself to be trustworthy? Can you think of a moment when you felt abandoned by God only to see—in time—that you weren't? Hold on to those moments! What did God teach you about himself? How did he help you? What did you learn about him?

You see there's not only a biblical record of God's past faithfulness, but there's also a personal track record. Now, this doesn't mean that every situation in your past makes complete sense. You may be still working through things from the past. But if you are Christian, you know you've seen the faithfulness of God.

Listen! It's not just in the Bible. That's true. But it's also true in your life. You have tasted and seen the goodness of God. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson says:

God sticks to his relationship. He establishes a personal relationship with us and stays with it. The central reality for Christians is the personal, unalterable, persevering commitment God makes to us. Perseverance is not the result of *our* determination, it is the result of God's faithfulness. We survive in the way of faith not because we have extraordinary stamina but because God is righteous, because God sticks with us. Christian discipleship is a process of paying more and more attention to God's righteousness and less and less attention to our own; finding the meaning of our lives not by probing our moods and motives and morals but by believing in God's will and purposes; making a map of the faithfulness of God, not charting the rise and fall of our enthusiasms. It is out of such a reality that we acquire perseverance.⁴

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, [*A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*](#), Commemorative Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019), 126–127.

So when you find yourself being asked to wait, here's what you say to yourself. Wait a minute! There's a lot we don't know but there are some things that we do know about God.

Present Truth (vv. 4-10)

Waiting involves not only looking back, but also embracing truth right now. It's as though David preaches particular truth to his heart.

He affirms that the place of security and safety—the place of blessing—is with the person who makes the Lord his trust. This sounds remarkably similar to the theme of Psalm 1 which began the entire psalter. This is not an isolated theme.

- *“Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long” (Ps. 25:4–5).*
- *“I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!” (Ps. 2:13–14).*

David is pushing us toward staking our confidence in God and not in the typical places we look to for deliverance: to those who act like gods and to false gods. The tension of waiting can tempt us to place our trust in those who promise great things or those things that promise relief.

Verse 5 only reinforces this present truth. No one and nothing compares to God. Trusting in him is the safest decision that we can possibly make.

Andrew Murray says: “Let us therefore cultivate the habit of waiting on God, not only for what we think we need, but for all His grace and power are ready to do for us.”⁵

The result is that David can live on the truth of God's will. He's not trying to manipulate God. He's merely expressing the kind of obedience that reflects his deep commitment to the truth of who God is.

The phrase “you have given me an open ear” (v. 6) is similar to what we find in Isaiah 50 regarding the suffering servant (Jesus).

“The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting. But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up” (Isa. 50:5–9).

⁵ Andrew Murray, [*Waiting on God! Daily Messages for a Month*](#) (New York; Chicago; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 68.

The psalmist concludes by affirming the value of rehearsing the character of God with the people of God. Again, Eugene Peterson's paraphrase is so helpful here:

I didn't keep the news of your ways
a secret, didn't keep it to myself.
I told it all, how dependable you are, how thorough.
I didn't hold back pieces of love and truth
For myself alone. I told it all,
let the congregation know the whole story.⁶

Those who are waiting upon the Lord need the truth of the Word pressed into their souls. Whether it's from your own Bible reading, a sermon, a song, a testimony, the Lord's Supper, or an encouragement from a friend; we need to be reminded about the truth.

"This is the blessedness of waiting upon God, that it takes our eyes and thoughts away from ourselves, even our needs and desires, and occupies us with our God."⁷

Future Truth (vv. 11-17)

We get a sense of why this psalm is written toward the end. The circumstances behind Psalm 40 are not apparent. But it's pretty clear that David is in a spot where he's looking for and hoping in future deliverance.

David looks to the future with expectant hope (v. 11) He believes that God is not going to restrain his mercy and that steadfast love and faithfulness will preserve him to the end. David stares the uncertainty of the future in the face with the hope of what he knows God is like. Take note here that David is not asking God for something. He's stating something that he knows to be true.

In verse 12, we get a hint at what's going on. David is facing evils that are encircling him. And his own sinfulness is overwhelming. It may be that the challenges in his life were entirely or partly his fault. Oh man, that's a different kind of waiting. It's one thing when you are entirely the innocent victim of unfairness or evil treatment. But more often than not, it's not that clear.

Whatever it was, David needed the Lord's help. In verses 13-15, he appeals to God for his deliverance and help. He asks for God to intervene with those who desire to hurt him, with those who want to shame him, and with those who want to gloat over his failure.

⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, [*The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Ps 40:9–10.

⁷ Andrew Murray, [*Waiting on God! Daily Messages for a Month*](#) (New York; Chicago; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 54–55.

Can you think of a time when you thought: “God, they want to hurt me. They want to embarrass me. They want to cheer at my downfall!” What can you do in that situation? You feel powerless. In truth, you are powerless—humanly speaking. But it doesn’t mean that you have no options.

Don’t confuse having no power with having no options. You have an option! It’s waiting for the Lord.

He disappoints your hopes. He brings down your confidence. He makes you fear and tremble, as all your strength fails, and you feel utterly weary and helpless. And all the while He is spreading His strong wings for you to rest your weakness on, and offering His everlasting Creator-strength to work in you. And all He asks is that you should sink down in your weariness and wait on Him; and allow Him in His Jehovah-strength to carry as you ride upon the wings of His Omnipotence.⁸

And so, our text ends with the tension still high. On the one hand, he is rejoicing and trusting. But on the other hand, there’s a sense of urgency (vv. 16-17).

It expresses the essence of waiting:

You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!” (Ps. 40:17)

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⁸ Andrew Murray, [*Waiting on God! Daily Messages for a Month*](#) (New York; Chicago; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell, 1896), 103–104.