

Waiting for God

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[0 : 00] Well, Hart told me he always liked to say nice things, and those certainly were nice things. I'm not sure how true they are, but they were very nice. So thank you, Hart. When I was growing up, and when I was a teenager, like all teenagers, I often locked, I'm not sure what I locked, but I locked something with my mother.

My mother was, in many ways, a person very unlike me. She was, in some ways, an impatient woman. She really believed in working, and she really believed in getting jobs done.

And she would do things like say, now, Jeanette, wrap this up and take it out to the garbage. And I would get out the newspaper, and I would open it up, and I would say, oh, this looks like an interesting article.

I think I should just read this first before I take this out to the garbage. And it drove her completely nuts. And she would, she always had a series of German proverbs that she would quote to me, and somehow they always seemed to be about getting jobs done and about work.

[1 : 23] And I don't know if any of you know German, but it seems like Germans like to rhyme their proverbs. And she would say things like, was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschieben nicht nach morgen.

Which means, what you can do today, don't put off till tomorrow. And another favorite one was, erst die Arbeit, dann das Spiel, nach der Reise kommt das Ziel.

which means, first the journey, or sorry, first the work, then play. After the journey, you get to the destination.

And I heard these proverbs, and I said, I really need a reply to these proverbs. And when I got to high school literature classes, I said, aha, aha, there's all this poetry, and some of it is appropriate. So, when she started reciting these proverbs to me, I would say, ah, but what is this life of full of care, we have no time to stand and stare. Or I would say, to travel hopefully is better than to arrive, and the true success is to labor.

[2 : 32] And one of my favorites was the last line from Milton's son, which said, they also serve who only stand and wait. It was her introduction to English poetry, because she didn't go to school in Canada.

But, like my mother, our culture often considers waiting a waste of time. We need to be doing things, and if we have to wait, well, those of us who are older may take a book along.

Younger people you will see on the bus, in a lineup, everywhere they're on their phone, right? You cannot waste a minute by waiting and not doing anything.

And I remember one of our friends saying, reflecting on Advent and on Lent, saying, you know, well, the world has taken over to a large extent Christmas, taken over Easter, these seasons where the Christians really celebrate.

And they made them into a very, very busy time, a time when we shop, and we eat lots of sugar, which makes us go even faster. But, he said, Lent and Advent remain ours.

[3 : 53] Nobody is going to have an Advent sale, or a Lent sale. Those seasons of reflection, and slowing down, and waiting, are still ours.

And, to introduce us, or maybe focus us, on waiting for God, I'd like to read one of the Psalms.

And this is Psalm 130. out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord. O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive, to the voice of my pleas for mercy.

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you, there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord. My soul waits, and in his word, I hope.

my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning more than watchmen for the morning O Israel hope in the Lord for with the Lord there is steadfast love and with him there is

plentiful redemption and he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities so let's bow our heads and pray O Lord our Father we thank you that you wait for us in the middle of our sin in the middle of our selfishness in the middle of our self-centeredness you wait for us to turn to you and to wait for you and we pray that you will focus our thoughts on you this morning and that we will learn a little more as we share with each other about waiting for you we pray in the name of Jesus Amen Okay as Harv said in his introduction this is probably going to be a shorter talk than usual because when Alexandra asked me to speak on this topic

[5 : 56] I said well I'll think about it and I thought you know what do I possibly have to say on this topic I'm sure that there are lots of people who know far more about waiting for God than I do and I really want to leave time for you to share those things so at the end we'll have quite a long time for comments, discussions I won't say questions because I don't feel like I can answer your questions but a time of sharing how you feel about waiting for God and maybe what it's meant in your life and the first thing I'd like to say about waiting is that waiting is an appropriate response when we think about who we are and who God is as Harv was saying we were standing around here a few minutes ago saying is it waiting for God?

is it waiting on God? and Joe said waiting on God is what you do when you're a servant he said yeah that's right that is what we do when we're a servant when we look at this psalm we see that the writer is calling out from the depths he's way down in the pit somewhere and we don't know why he is there we don't know if it's because he's sick if it's because enemies are giving him a hard time we do know that he feels the need for God to help him we need saving and God is our savior and really we need to wait for him to save us God is the forgiving God the psalm says he's a God of steadfast love who keeps his promises and we need to wait for him but not only are we sinful we need to wait for him because we're creatures and he's the creator he's the one who made us he is infinite and eternal and all-knowing and we are really really limited and we see this in the story of Job where Job goes on for almost the whole book he and his friends questioning what God is doing and at the very end of the book

Job says or God comes to Job and says you don't know anything you don't know a thing you have no perspective whatsoever on what is going on and Job says you're right I'll shut up and that really is what we need to do when we come to God we need to wait for him to tell us what's going on because we really most of the time have very little idea I never really thought of the lion the witch and the wardrobe as an advent book but I have discovered this year it is and last week people were asking for suggestions for advent reading and I would suggest if you haven't read this book you should look at it and if you have read it maybe you want to read it again because the whole book is about waiting for God and in the story four children walk into the land of Narnia and that land is under the spell of the great white of the white witch she has put a spell on the land so that it's always winter and never Christmas so you can't imagine anything much worse than that always winter never Christmas and the four children enter the land and at this point they're in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver who have sort of discovered them and are hiding them from the white witch who is their enemy and they're talking about Aslan who is the Christ figure in these stories and this is what happens

Mr. Beaver says now that Aslan is on the move oh yes tell us about Aslan said several voices at once for once again that strange feeling like the first signs of spring like good news had come over them who is Aslan asked Susan Aslan said Mr. Beaver why don't you know he's the king he's the lord of the whole wood but not often here you understand never in my time or my father's time but the word has reached us that he has come back he is in Narnia at this moment he'll settle the white queen all right she won't turn him into stone too said Edmund because this is what she does with her enemies she turns him to stone lord love you son of Adam what a simple thing to say answered Mr. Beaver with a great laugh turn him into stone if she can stand on her two feet and look him in the face it'll be the most she can do and more than I expect of her no no he'll put all to rights as it says isn't an old rhyme in these parts wrong will be right when Aslan comes in sight at the sound of his roar sorrows will be no more when he bears his teeth winter meets its death and when he shakes its mane we shall have spring again you'll understand when you see him but shall we see him asked Susan my daughter of Eve that's what I brought you here for

I'm to lead you where you shall meet him said Mr. Beaver is he a man asked Lucy Aslan a man said Mr. Beaver sternly certainly not I tell you he is the king of the wood and the son of the emperor beyond Lucy don't you know who is the king of beasts Aslan is a lion the great lion ooh said Susan I

thought he was a man is he quite safe I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion that you will dearie and no mistake said Mrs. Beaver if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking they're either braver than most or else just silly then he isn't safe said Lucy safe said Mr. Beaver don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you who said anything about safe of course he isn't safe but he's good he's the king I tell you I'm longing to see him said Peter even if I do feel frightened when it comes to the point and that's really what it means to wait for God to long to see him even though we don't really know what we might see we have an idea but we don't fully know and the second thing

[12 : 51] I'd like to say about waiting is that waiting is to hope and expect that God will act I don't know a lot of Spanish I know a little bit but they tell me that in Spanish there is a word *aspero* and it means to wait to hope to expect all those things and in Hebrew also sometimes the same word can be translated wait for the Lord hope in the Lord waiting and hoping are very closely connected and we are to wait we know that Israel waited for Jesus to come and the church has been waiting ever since a long time now longer than they expected for Jesus to return and Paul says in Romans 8 the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God for the creation was subjected to futility not willingly but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the liberty of the freedom of the glory of the sons of God for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now and not only the creation but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies for in this hope we were saved now hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for what he sees but if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience and it seems kind of contradictory to talk about waiting with eager longing on one hand and patience on the other how do we wait with both eager longing and with patience when we think of our children especially if we've been around small children we know that they have lots of eager longing they're all waiting for Christmas right now with eager longing but not with a lot of patience and we are to wait with both with eager longing and with patience so maybe with eager longing waiting because we're still waiting for God to come back and establish his kingdom in its fullness and its consummation but patience because the kingdom is already here and we can already see the kingdom of God at work

Henry Nouwen captures this thought in one of his essays well actually it was a talk and he says this about waiting waiting as we see it in the people of the first pages of the gospel is waiting with a sense of promise Zachariah your wife Elizabeth is to bear you a son Mary listen you are to conceive and bear a son people who wait have received a promise that allows them to wait they have received something that is a work in them like a seed that has started to grow this is very important we can only really wait if what we are waiting for has already begun for us so waiting is never a movement from nothing to something it is always a movement from something to something more and I think that is very true before the children in the Narnia stories were in Narnia and heard about Aslan they were not waiting for him they knew nothing about him but it is because we already know something of God and we already see him at work that we can wait to see more and waiting then is an active thing it is not something that we just fold our hands and sit back and do because we are bored waiting is active we look to see God at work and if we really look we will see a lot of God at work one of the ways that

I have sort of tried to symbolize this during the Advent season is in our house when we get the Christmas decorations out we don't do what a lot of my friends do which is go down get up those three boxes of Christmas decorations put them all up and say now we are ready for Christmas we sort of do it more slowly and hopefully try and capture some of that sense that waiting is a movement so the first week of Advent the wreaths go up the Advent wreath is on the table the wreaths are on the door the second week the nativity scene will come out but the mangers or the stable sits there but the only things in it are the animals and Mary and Joseph are probably across the room and the shepherds may even be in another room and the wise men are way at the other end of the house and during

Advent season those things move closer and maybe the third week some of the other decorations will go on the wall and the Christmas tree doesn't actually go up until the last week of Advent and it stays up until the 6th of January which is Epiphany and that's when the wise men actually get to the manger Advent is a time when we wait for God to come but we also recognize he is already on the move he is already coming and the third thing I wanted to say about waiting is waiting and I I take

this term from Henry now waiting is open ended we were having a discussion as I said earlier is it waiting for God is it waiting on God waiting on God I think is more open ended than when we say waiting for God when we wait for something we usually have in mind what it is that we're waiting for if we're waiting on

God anything can happen and I remember one of our girls when they were quite young five or six came up to me one day and they said you know anything is possible some things aren't very likely but they're possible because you never know what God is going to do I said wow I can't argue with that I can't argue with that we don't know often when we pray God says bring your problems bring your concerns to us to me and we do we bring him our problems we bring him our concerns but very often we also bring him our solutions right we say this is the problem God and if you just did this it would all be okay but scripture tells us God is always at work for our good even when we have no idea what's going on God is at work for good in our lives because of his steadfast love for us if earthly fathers know how to give good gifts to their children he said

[20 : 29] Jesus said surely God knows how to give even better gifts to those who ask him if we ask for bread he is not going to give us a stone he may give us something even better than bread or it may be a very special bread and we see this in Mary in the story of the angel coming to Mary the angel comes to him and says Mary you're going to have a baby and Mary's response is not she doesn't freak out she doesn't say no no no this is not going to work she says let it be to me according to your word she has no idea what she's letting herself in for and I'm sure there were times when she was very surprised and said wow you know if I had known maybe

I would have thought twice but she accepts what God has for her and one of the one 19th century writer called Andrew Murray from South Africa talks about this he was a pastor and a writer of several hundred books most of them very short but a lot of them on prayer and he has one that's called waiting on God and from the introduction I'd like to read just a little bit he says let us expect great things of our God is he not willing to put things right in his own divine way has the life of God's people reached the utmost limit of what God is willing to do for them surely not we want to wait on him to put away our experiences however blessed they have been our conceptions of truth however sound and scriptural we think they seem our plans however needful and suitable they appear and give

God time and place to show us what he could do what he will do God has new developments new resources he can do new things let us enlarge our hearts and not limit him for all of us I think there have probably been times when we chose to wait on God but probably also times when we feel we have to wait on God because every once in a while God brings us to the end of the limits of our knowledge of our imagination of our capabilities and really all we can do is wait to see what happens because we say I can't really do much about this for me one of those times came about the time we got married because at the time Harv has said that

I have been a teacher and that's true I have I have done quite a lot of teaching but at the time I was preparing to be a Bible translator with Bible translators and I had not only thought about doing this I had spent about five years preparing to do this I had taken their training and applied and been accepted and then it suddenly looked as if I was not going to do this and I said now what do I do because one of the things Harv asked me one of the things people ask when they meet you is what kind of work do you do and I asked that question myself and we often been asked that question and I said now what kind of work am I going to do well the first few years that we were married I would say in about the first six years we moved four times three of them were long distance moves we had three children so

I was busy and I said I I said I'm going to get a little older I thought well maybe I will maybe I'll look around and see what can I do I have a fair bit of training but it doesn't really seem like there's a big market for it so I looked around and the first thing that came up was when our youngest daughter was in preschool we were in a very small church and the only staff person was the pastor and so he said if somebody wanted to come into the office a couple of hours we can do some work that would be really helpful and it was before the age of computers really computers were just starting to come in I said well I can type you know I can type the bulletin I can do that so when Laura was in preschool I went and worked in the church and it turned out to be much more interesting than [25 : 47] I thought it would be because one of the things that the church was doing was that they had a small food bank and people would come in and there would be food in the church and they could come in once a month or so and get food and it was really one of my first experiences of

working with people who were as our youngest child went into school full time I said well maybe I should look for something more so I looked around and I did take the course in teaching ESL at Vancouver Community College but then I looked around and I said you know if you're going to teach ESL professionally most of these jobs are in the evening or at least you have to start in the evening do I want a job that is mostly evenings no I don't that is not going to work at all if

I'm going to do something I want to do it when everybody else is out of the house so about that time the church that we were in became the home for King Christ Ministries and one of the things they do is teach ESL classes so I said and not only did they teach ESL classes but they specifically targeted their classes for refugee claimants who were not eligible for government sponsored ESL programs and who didn't have the money to pay for their own private ESL programs so although anybody could come there were always a lot of refugee claimants in the class and that was a great experience and so by this time I was thinking well you know maybe the thing to do is just to sit back and see what turns up because God always sends something one of the other things that turned up was as I was sitting in that church office somebody came by and said we're interested in starting an open door program we're looking at your church as a possible home for this and open mums where they could come one morning a week bring their kids there would be a program for the kids the mums could either get some very rare time to themselves and go off and do errands or they could sort of hang around with the other mums and socialize and then there was a lunch and an optional Bible study I said well you know that would be really interesting I could do that so I went to the meeting of the staff they turned out to choose a different church for the home for that program but I went to the meeting and they said well what we really need is somebody to work in the kitchen and I said well you know I don't have a lot of experience in cooking for people but most of the time that I was an open door I spent working in the kitchen it wasn't I wasn't cooking for a huge group it was maybe 20 adults and a dozen kids or so but it was really great experience because people would come wandering in another kitchen and you would be able to have a chance to talk to them it was great there was one time when I sort of felt at loose ends and I said I looked around I said I don't really see anything here maybe I have to look a little harder so

I went on the internet and I looked under volunteer positions and I found something at family services which was just down the street from where we live it was a counseling service and I was able to work as an intake worker there for several years basically talking to the people who phoned up and said I need counseling and help guide them through the form that they had to fill out to do that and one of the things that I never thought I would do that I have ended up doing is working in neighborhood advocacy for the last seven and a half years or so Joe and I and Larry and Chinchin have been active in our neighborhood working sometimes against the city occasionally with the city to see what planning would look like in our neighborhood and I never thought I would be on the steps of city hall waving a flyer around and making speeches but it did actually happen I never thought that I would be developing a fairly good relationship with one of the city planners but that has happened too so you just never know what is going to happen as we wait for God we wait as individuals we wait as a group and we have been asked to wait on God especially now as we think about what is going to happen to St.

[30 : 49] John's congregation in relation to a building and we wait together with the whole creation we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells and I'd like to close this part of the of my talk with just reading a passage from Isaiah and my other suggestion for Advent reading is if you haven't looked at the prophet Isaiah lately Isaiah is the prophet of Advent if you really want to know what it means to wait for God read Isaiah and this is what Isaiah says when he's thinking about what is going to happen when God finally comes in glory to establish himself and his kingdom on earth and he's talking about the great banquet feast the messianic banquet he he says on on this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food a feast of well aged wine of rich food full of marrow aged wine well refined and he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples the veil that is spread over all nations he will swallow up death forever and the

Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken it will be said on that day behold this is our God we have waited for him that he might save us this is the Lord we have waited for him let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation Amen Thanks