

**The 7 Hardest Things You Will Ever Do**  
***Be Patient While Praying ~ John 11:1-45***

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**Introduction:** So, on a scale of 1 to 10, how much does it bother you to have to wait? Before you answer, just put yourself in a couple of these scenarios. You are at the stoplight and you have waited a couple of cycles already. You are finally the first car up, but right before the light turns green, here comes a funeral procession. Do you bow and pray for the family in their bereavement or do you slam your hand across the steering wheel? What about being in the doctor's office? Are you happy your doctor is so good that most of the rest of Lafayette wants to see him or her or do you seethe with anger that your time is more important?

These scenarios are just the trivial things of life, but what about the more important. You've been praying for a Christian mate, but nothing. You've believed God for a child, but no. You've prayed for a spouse to get right with God, but today you sit again all alone. You've heard the stories of miraculous healing for others, but your story just took a turn for the worse. One of the hardest things you will ever do is "be patient while praying." What are we to do while we wait?

There is a story in the Gospel of John that really helps us to have great perspective about these times of waiting.

**Text:** <sup>1</sup> Now a man was sick, Lazarus, from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, and it was her brother Lazarus who was sick. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent a message to Him: "Lord, the one You love is sick."

<sup>4</sup> When Jesus heard it, He said, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." <sup>5</sup> (Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus.) <sup>6</sup> So when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was. <sup>7</sup> Then after that, He said to the disciples, "Let's go to Judea again."

<sup>8</sup> "Rabbi," the disciples told Him, "just now the Jews tried to stone You, and You're going there again?"

<sup>9</sup> "Aren't there 12 hours in a day?" Jesus answered. "If anyone walks during the day, he doesn't stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> If anyone walks during the night, he does stumble, because the light is not in him." <sup>11</sup> He said this, and then He told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm on My way to wake him up."

<sup>12</sup> Then the disciples said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will get well."

<sup>13</sup> Jesus, however, was speaking about his death, but they thought He was speaking about natural sleep. <sup>14</sup> So Jesus then told them plainly, "Lazarus has died. <sup>15</sup> I'm glad for you that I wasn't there so that you may believe. But let's go to him."

<sup>16</sup> Then Thomas (called "Twin") said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go so that we may die with Him."

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem (about two miles away). <sup>19</sup> Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet Him. But Mary remained seated in the house.

<sup>21</sup> Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother wouldn't have died. <sup>22</sup> Yet even now I know that whatever You ask from God, God will give You."

<sup>23</sup> "Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her.

<sup>24</sup> Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. <sup>26</sup> Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup> "Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

<sup>28</sup> Having said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."

<sup>29</sup> As soon as she heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. <sup>30</sup> Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met Him. <sup>31</sup> The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw that Mary got up quickly and went out. So they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to cry there.

<sup>32</sup> When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and told Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!"

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, He was angry in His spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you put him?" He asked.

"Lord," they told Him, "come and see."

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, "Couldn't He who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, angry in Himself again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> "Remove the stone," Jesus said.

Martha, the dead man's sister, told Him, "Lord, he already stinks. It's been four days."

<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

<sup>41</sup> So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You heard Me. <sup>42</sup> I know that You always hear Me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so they may believe You sent Me." <sup>43</sup> After He said this, He shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" <sup>44</sup> The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him and let him go."

<sup>45</sup> Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what He did believed in Him.

The link in this story to our waiting is that Jesus, upon learning of Lazarus' illness, decides to wait. Verse 6 is the key verse here. So, what can we learn from this story? What do we do while we wait?

### **Consider what you already Know about God!**

To her credit, Martha, even in her certain disappointment in Jesus and maybe even accusatory stance towards Him, did remember some things she knew to be true. We must do the same. The list is unending, but here are a couple of things that I think might be meaningful to remember in the midst of your agonizing wait.

- God loves us.
- God is faithful.
- God is wise.
- God is powerful.
- God knows.

Henry Nouwen, deceased since 1996, was a prolific author on spiritual issues, particularly on the subject of abiding in Christ, likened faith in God to the trapeze artists. Nouwen said that in the art of trapeze there are the flyers and the catchers. The flyers at some point, in total trust, must let go and fly through the air. That's obvious. Here is what might not be obvious. Nouwen said, "The flyers must never try to catch the catchers, but must wait in absolute trust to be caught." Likewise, we cannot catch God; we must, in total surrender, allow ourselves to be caught by Him.

### **Continue to Seek God!**

- Knock—Some get to a point in which they might give up on God. We must continue to ask.
- Evaluate Life—Am I the reason?  
The Bible tells us that we can be the reason our prayers are unanswered.

(1) 1 Peter 3:7 Unharmonious Relationship

*Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives with understanding of their weaker nature yet showing them honor as co-heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

(2) Isaiah 59:2 Known Sin

*But your iniquities have built barriers  
between you and your God,  
and your sins have made Him hide [His] face from you  
so that He does not listen.*

(3) James 4:3 Asking with Wrong Motives

*You ask and don't receive because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend it on your desires  
for pleasure.*

(4) Matthew 6:12 Unforgiving Spirit

*And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.*

(5) James 1:6-7 Unbelief

*But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and  
tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.*

**Conclude that God will do something Greater!**

Remember the beginning of this story. <sup>4</sup> *When Jesus heard it, He said, "This sickness will not end in  
death but is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."*

I've always believed that Jesus waited for one simple reason. By this time in His ministry, people already knew that He could heal the sick. What they did not yet know was that He also could bring the dead back to life.

- Bring more Glory to Himself.
- Bring us Closer to Him.
- Benefit Others.

One of the best known stories about waiting in the Bible is Abraham waiting to be a father. At 75, God appeared and said to him, "Abraham, I'm going to make you into a great nation." After he had lived in the land 10 years, Abraham said, "God, I still don't have an heir." Not until Abraham was 99 years old did the promise come to pass. Possibly, as many as 24 years, Abraham waited. But, God was right on time. Then, some 400 years pass between the last Old Testament prophet and the coming of Jesus.

In closing, let us be reminded to make sure that God is not waiting on us. Charles Simeon was a pastor in the Church of England from 1782 to 1836 at Trinity Church in Cambridge. He was appointed to his church by a bishop against the will of the people. They opposed him not because he was a bad preacher but because he was an evangelical -- he believed the Bible and called for conversion and holiness and world missions.

For 12 years the people refused to let him give the afternoon Sunday sermon. And during that time they boycotted the Sunday morning service and locked their pews so that no one could sit in them. He preached to people in the aisles for 12 years! How did he last?

In this state of things I saw no remedy but faith and patience (Note the linking of faith and patience!). The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was this, "The servant of the Lord must not strive." (Note: The weapon in the fight for faith and patience was the Word!) It was painful indeed to see the church, with the exception of the aisles, almost forsaken; but I thought that if God would only give a double blessing to the congregation that did attend, there would on the whole be as much good done as if the congregation were doubled and the blessing limited to only half the amount. This comforted me many, many times, when without such a reflection, I should have sunk under my burden. (Charles Simeon, by H.C.G. Moule, p. 39)

Where did he get the assurance that if he followed the way of patience there would be a blessing on his work that would make up for frustrations of having all the pews locked? He got it, no doubt, from texts like Isaiah 30:18, "Blessed are all those wait for the Lord." The word conquered unbelief and belief conquered impatience.

Fifty four years later he was dying. It was October, 1836. On October 21 those by his bed heard him say these words slowly and with long pauses:

Infinite wisdom has arranged the whole with infinite love; and infinite power enables me--to rest upon that love. I am in a dear Father's hands--all is secure. When I look to Him, I see nothing but faithfulness--and immutability--and truth; and I have the sweetest peace--I cannot have more peace. (Charles Simeon, p. 172) (All taken from sermon on the web by John Piper, Piper's Notes)