

God's Waiting Room

An Opportunity to Test-Drive Your Faith

By Jennifer Kennedy Dean

In the praying life, God schedules waiting periods. Count on it. But waiting on God can be the most difficult, perhaps confusing part of the prayer process.



It is during the waiting times that many people drop out of the school of prayer. Not receiving their answers as they expected, many conclude that prayer doesn't work—at least not for them.

While the waiting time is the most difficult part of the process, it is also the most important. Waiting gives God the opportunity to redefine our desires and align our purpose and vision with His. What appears from the earth-perspective to be a delay on God's part is really the time when God is working in the spiritual realm, beyond our senses. "Faith is being . . . certain of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1). During the waiting time, we are operating by faith.

Putting Faith to the Test

Prayer has an immediate impact. The instant a thought is turned toward God, no matter how unformed or inarticulate the thought, it creates a stir in the heavenly realms. Unless we understand what is happening in the spiritual realm, we may think that prayer is having no effect.

What does Scripture tell us God is doing when it looks to us like He's delaying? Do you believe that God has a good and productive purpose for building waiting periods into your life? Recall James 1:2–4: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

When God brings waiting periods into your life it is for only one reason: so that you can test-drive your faith.

If I were planning to buy a car, I could research my purchase and decide what car I wanted—what make and model, what color, what add-on features. I could know everything about the car I want except how it handles. Not until I get behind the wheel and drive it for myself will I know the feel of the car. I won't make my final purchase until I've handled the car myself—until I've test-driven it.

It's the same way with your faith. You can study faith. You can memorize verses about faith. You can learn slick, pithy definitions about faith. But until you have the opportunity to test-drive your own faith, you will never know how it handles.

Proving Our Faith

James says that God "tests" our faith. Does that mean He puts it to the test so that He can see how much faith you have? Or does He put it to the test so that you can see how faith operates? The word test really means to prove. God knows

everything about you and everything that's in your heart. In fact, He knows it better than you do. He doesn't have to devise a test that will tell Him about your faith. He is proving your faith to you!

When God allows you to test-drive your faith over and over again, you learn how to operate in faith with confidence. You become a mature and seasoned faith-walker. The person with mature faith is steady and tenacious. He has what James calls perseverance, the ability to go the distance.

What is it that you are waiting for? What is your proving ground right now? Do you believe that God has the power to change your circumstances and end your wait right now? Do you believe that God loves you and wants only your highest good and deepest happiness?

1. If God has the power to change your circumstances right now
2. If God loves you and wants your highest good
3. If the circumstances are still in place
4. Then what is your conclusion, based on truth?

Accept the circumstances as they are and embrace what God is doing to move things to His best conclusion. He does not submit to us His detailed plan for how He is going to do His will. Sometimes during the waiting period it will look as though God has lost control of events and everything is headed in the wrong direction.

But God is right now orchestrating answers to your prayers. We can learn more of God's ways from the life of Joseph.

Remembering Joseph's Example

Joseph's story begins in Genesis 37 and continues through the first chapter of Exodus. What was God's will for him? God showed Joseph His plan in a series of dreams. Joseph came to

understand that he was destined to be a ruler, one to whom even his father and brothers would bow.

The next we hear of Joseph, he is at the bottom of a well, listening to his brothers plot his death and begging for his life (Gen. 42:21). He is sold into slavery, taken as a slave to a foreign land, and thrown into prison after being falsely accused. It does not appear that God is bringing about His will. It appears that God has lost control of Joseph's life because of the choices of evil men.

Actually, God is working out His plan for Joseph so that He can work out His plan for Israel—so that He can work out His plan for humanity.

For God's perspective on the situation, look at Psalm 105. What is God's will for Israel, the nation? Summed up, it is this: "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit" (v. 11).

When Israel first reached Canaan, they were "but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it, they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another" (Ps. 105:12–13). What did God need to do in order to bring His will about? He needed to give Israel a place to grow, prosper, learn skills, and reproduce safely. He needed to put them under the protection of a larger, more advanced civilization for a time. He needed them in Egypt.

How did He do it? "He sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave" (Ps. 105:17). It looked as if Joseph's evil brothers had sent him to Egypt. But God said that it was He who sent Joseph to Egypt. Joseph explained it to his brothers like this: "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen. 45:7–8).

How did God get Israel out of Canaan into Egypt? "He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of

food” (Ps. 105:16). He brought famine on the land, but first He prepared their deliverance. What appeared to be a disaster and a tragedy drove them to God’s provision.

God allowed Joseph to be put in a position from which God could display His power in just the way that would give Joseph the most credibility with the pharaoh. “They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the Lord proved him true. The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free. He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom” (Ps. 105:18–22).

Did God bring about exactly what He had promised Joseph He would do? Yes, to the last detail. Did God do it as Joseph expected Him to? No, far from it.

Israel moved into Egypt under the protection of Joseph, whom God had put in place. In Egypt, the tiny nation of Israel grew to become a large nation. “Then Israel entered Egypt. . . . The Lord made his people very fruitful” (Ps. 105:23–24).

Exodus 1 tells us that the nation of Israel grew so large and so strong that it frightened the pharaoh. As a result, he ordered slave masters to deal with the people harshly and oppress them with forced labor.

What was the next step in God’s plan for His people? He wanted to toughen them up—physically, mentally, and spiritually—and get them ready to take the land He had promised from their enemies. So what did He do? “The Lord made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes, whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants” (Ps. 105:24–25, italics added).

Do you see? It appeared that the Israelites became victims to the whim of the new pharaoh. The truth is that God was engineering Israel’s next step toward possessing the promise.

What looked like a setback was really a step forward. He had grown the nation of Israel in number. Now He wanted to grow them in character. When they were ready, He would drive them out of Egypt, the land to which they had become accustomed, and propel them into the Land of the Promise.

Seeking God's Way, Not Ours

How God does His will is up to Him. We cannot control God or tell Him how to accomplish His plan. He will do His will in His way.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? (Rom. 11:33–34).

When you treat prayer as if you have the right to tell God how to do His work, you will be disappointed. God does not take instructions. When you realize that God's ways are not your ways, that His ways are superior to your ways, you will not be thrown off balance when circumstances seem to be leading away from God's will rather than toward it.

Nothing happens by chance with God. His timing is an astounding thing. He is a micromanager who is working out all the details of His plan. When He calls on you to wait, it is because He is doing what is necessary for the best outcome. Allow Him to test-drive your faith.

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