

Waiting in the Crucible¹



SABBATH—DECEMBER 8

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Samuel 26; Psalm 37:1–11; Romans 5:3–5; Romans 15:4, 5.

MEMORY VERSE: “But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . patience” (Galatians 5:22, NIV).

SCIENTISTS DID AN EXPERIMENT WITH FOUR-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN AND MARSHMALLOWS. Each child was told by a scientist that he or she could have a marshmallow. But if the child would wait for the scientist's return from an errand, he or she would be given two marshmallows instead of one. Some of the children stuffed the marshmallow into their mouths as soon as the scientist left. But others waited. The scientists studied the differences.

The scientists then followed these children into their teenage years. The ones who had waited turned out to be better adjusted, better students, and more sure of themselves than those who did not wait. It seemed that patience was an example of something greater, something important in the human² character.³ This is why the Lord has asked us to learn to have patience.

This week we will look at what could be behind some of the hardest crucibles. Among them is the crucible of waiting.

THIS WEEK'S LESSON UP CLOSE: Why do we sometimes have to wait so long for things? What lessons can we learn about patience while in the crucible?

1. crucible—a boiling pot for purifying metals. A crucible also represents a testing time, or time of suffering, that strengthens character, or who we are.

2. human—of, or referring to, men, women, or children.

3. character—who you are; all things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

SUNDAY—DECEMBER 9**THE GOD OF PATIENCE
(Romans 15:4, 5)**

What is found in Romans 15:4, 5 for us?

Normally, we have no patience for things that we really want but do not have yet. We are often satisfied only when we get what we want. Because we do not get what we want, we often become moody and impatient. And when we are, we almost always cannot have peace and trust in God.

Waiting is painful. In Hebrews, one of the words for “wait patiently” (Psalm 37:7, NKJV) comes from a Hebrew word that means “to be much pained,” “to shake,” “to tremble,” “to be wounded,” “to be sorrowful.” Learning to have patience is not easy. Sometimes it is a very important part of what it means to be in the crucible.

Read Psalm 27:14; Psalm 37:7; and Romans 5:3–5. What are Psalm 27:14; Psalm 37:7; and Romans 5:3–5 saying to us? What does patience lead to?

While we wait, we can watch for one of two things. We can focus on

the things for which we are waiting. Or we can focus on the One (God) who holds those things in His hands. When we wait for something, the big difference is not how long we have to wait, but what our attitude (feeling) is while we wait. If we trust the Lord and put our lives in His hands, we will surrender (give) our wills (hearts) to Him. Then we can trust that He will do what is best for us no matter how hard it is to believe it.

What things are you impatiently waiting for? How can you learn to surrender everything to God and to His timing? Pray your way into an attitude (feeling) of complete surrender to the Lord.



While we wait in the crucible, we can focus patiently on the One (God) who holds everything in His hands.

MONDAY—DECEMBER 10**IN GOD'S TIME (Romans 5:6)**

What do Romans 5:6 and Galatians 4:4 tell us about God's timing?



God answers prayers right on time. And sometimes God waits to answer our prayers so that we can learn to trust in Him.

In these verses, Paul tells us that Jesus came to die for us at exactly the right time. But Paul does not tell us why it was the right time. It is very easy to read these verses and wonder, “Why did Jesus wait for thousands of years until He came to earth to deal with sin? Did the universe not understand that sin was a very bad thing long before then?” We may ask why Jesus is waiting to come the second time also. We may also ask, “Why is the Lord waiting so long to answer my prayer?”

Think about the 70-week prophecy⁴ of Daniel 9:24-27. This is the prophecy that points to Jesus as the Messiah. (Review it if you need to.) How long was this time period? What does this tell you about learning to wait for things in God’s time? What if it takes a very long time?

There are many important spiritual (holy) reasons for why we must experience waiting times. First, waiting can refocus our attention away from “things” and back to God Himself. Second, waiting lets us develop a clearer picture of our own reasons and

desires. Third, waiting builds patience and spiritual strength. Fourth, waiting opens the door to develop (build) many spiritual strengths such as faith and trust. Fifth, waiting lets God put down other pieces in the puzzle of the bigger picture. Sixth, we may never know the reason why we have to wait. So, we learn to live by faith.

Can you think of any other reasons for waiting?

What examples can you find in the Bible of God doing things in His own time? This can help you learn to trust that He will do for you what is right in His own time, too. (For example, think about Abraham and Sarah and the promise of a son.) At the same time, ask yourself, “What might I be doing that could be delaying (slowing down) a prayer that could have been answered long ago?”

4. prophecy—a message given about what will happen in the future.

TUESDAY—DECEMBER 11**DAVID: A LESSON IN WAITING
(1 Samuel 16:1–13)**

In 1 Samuel 16:1–13, we find the young lad David was anointed (chosen) by Samuel as king. It was a long journey from the fields of his father, Jesse, to the throne in Jerusalem. No doubt, at times David felt he was in the midst of a crucible.



David played music to quiet down King Saul's troubled spirit (1 Samuel 16).

First, David is called to play music to quiet down Saul's troubled spirit (1 Samuel 16). Later, David becomes Israel's hero as he kills Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Then there are many years during which David is running for his life. Both Saul and his son Jonathan know that David is chosen to be the next king (1 Samuel 23:17; 1 Samuel 24:20). But David is in no hurry to become king. In fact, he appears to do the opposite. One time Saul tried to kill him, and David cut a piece of cloth off the king's robe while

he was asleep. This was to show the king that David could have killed him but chose not to. This proved to the king that David was not his enemy (1 Samuel 24:5–22). Later Saul tries again to kill David, but David refuses to kill Saul when David has the chance (1 Samuel 26:7–11).

Why does David refuse to kill Saul in 1 Samuel 26:1–11? What principles (rules) does this teach us about the way God brings about His plans for our lives?

How does David's refusal in 1 Samuel 26:12–25 to kill Saul influence⁵ Saul? What does this teach us about the advantages (gains) of waiting for God?

Think about David's long road to the throne. We could perhaps summarize it in a short sentence. Do not grab what God has not yet given. God's gifts are always best received from His hand and in His time. This may require a very long time of waiting. Bean sprouts may grow in several hours, while an oak tree will take many years. But then when the strong winds come, the tree will not be uprooted.

5. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

Think how easily David could have made a good excuse for killing Saul. (“After all, did God not tell David that he would have the throne? And Saul is so evil anyway.”) But David’s actions speak of true faith in God. What can you learn from this example?

WEDNESDAY—DECEMBER 12

ELIJAH: THE PROBLEM OF RUSHING (1 Kings 18)

The challenge on top of Mount Carmel had ended (1 Kings 18). Fire had come out of heaven. All the people had admitted that God was the true God. And the false prophets had been put to death. God’s name had been cleared. You would have thought that Elijah would have been growing in spiritual (holy) strength as the day went on. But suddenly Elijah heard something that scared him so much that he wanted to die. Read the rest of the story in 1 Kings 19:1–9. The words in the last verse are scary: “And the word of the Lord came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ ” (verse 9, NIV). Clearly, Elijah’s fear caused him to run and find himself in the wrong place.

After such a powerful action by the Lord, Elijah should have been full of faith and trust. Instead, he runs in fear for his life. What lesson can we learn from his mistake?

This story shows something important. When we rush, we can very easily find ourselves in the wrong place. In Elijah’s case, it was his fear that caused him to be afraid and rush into the desert. He wished that he had never been born. But other things cause us to rush outside of God’s plan for us.



Elijah rushed off into the desert to hide from Queen Jezebel. Do not rush away in fear from God’s perfect plan.

What things caused the people to rush outside of God’s will in Genesis 16:1–3; Numbers 20:10–12; Judges 14:1–3; Matthew 20:20, 21; Luke 9:52–56; Acts 9:1?

How easy it is to let such things as ambition, anger, emotion, lack of faith, and too much desire to serve the Lord cause us to rush ahead where we should not be. No one is protected from this danger. The key is to develop (build) a trusting faith in the goodness and mercy of God, who loves us and

wants what is best for us. This does not happen automatically. Faith might be a gift. But it is a gift that needs to be developed and well guarded.

THURSDAY—DECEMBER 13

LEARNING TO DELIGHT IN THE LORD (Psalm 37:4)

“Find your delight in the Lord. Then he will give you everything your heart really wants” (Psalm 37:4, NIV).

Psalm 37:4 is a wonderful promise. Imagine getting what you have always wanted. But getting the desires of our heart depends on having a heart that is delighting (joyful) in the Lord. So what does it mean to “delight in the Lord”?

Read Psalm 37:1–11. The background of verse 4 is perhaps a little surprising. David is writing about being surrounded by people who are working against God and against him. When people are working against us, we often get angry or find a “good” excuse to get even with them. But David advises something different.

In the following verses, what is David’s advice to God’s people in this situation?

verse 1 _____

verse 5 _____

verse 7 _____

verse 8 _____

Read verse 4 again and the comments you wrote down. What does it mean “to delight in the Lord?”

David says again and again, in different ways, to “trust God.” Trust Him to act. Do not get upset, because God is your God. He is working for you—even right now. You do not have to act and try to sort things out by yourself. Your Father in heaven is in charge. Trust Him. Trust Him completely.

This is what David means by “delighting in the Lord.” To delight in God means that we live in perfect trust. Nothing can upset our peace, because God is here and at work. We can praise Him. We can even smile, because no one can outwit our God! When we can learn to do this, we really will receive what our hearts want. This is because we will receive what our loving Father wants to give us. He will give what we need most at the best possible time for us and for His kingdom.

How can you learn to “delight in the Lord”? Spend some time in prayer, asking God how His guidance (leading) may become real in your life.

FRIDAY—DECEMBER 14

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Anointing of David,” pp. 637–642; “David and Goliath,” pp. 643–648; “David a Fugitive,” pp. 649–659; “The Magnanimity of

David,” pp. 660–674; “The Death of Saul,” pp. 675–682, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.⁶

God’s plan for us may require that we do a lot of waiting. And this really can feel almost the same as being in a crucible. While waiting, we can learn from and develop patience as we focus on God and trust that He is acting for us. There are many reasons for waiting. But all depend on the fulfillment of God’s plans for us and His kingdom. Much can be lost if we rush ahead of God. But much can be gained by trusting and delighting in Him.

“Every trouble is weighed and measured by the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is not beyond man’s ability to be patient through the grace [mercy] given unto him.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 12, p. 81.

“I cannot read the purpose of God in my suffering. But He knows what is best, and I will devote my soul, body, and spirit to Him as unto my faithful Creator. ‘I know the One I have believed in. I am sure he is able to take care of what I have given him. I can trust him with it until the day he returns as judge’ (2 Timothy 1:12, NIV). We need to educate and train our souls to have more faith, more love, greater patience, and a more perfect trust in our heavenly Father. If so, I know we would have more peace and happiness day by day as we pass through

the struggles of this life.

“The Lord is not pleased to have us worry ourselves out of the arms of Jesus. More is needed of the quiet waiting and watching joined together. We think we may not be in the right path. So we keep looking inside ourselves for some sign favoring or supporting the situation. But the right thinking we need is not based on feeling but on faith.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 242.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ What does it mean that every trouble is “weighed and measured” by Jesus? How can knowing this help us while we wait?
- ❷ Have people in class give personal testimonies⁷ to what patient waiting is all about. What were their fears, their joys? How did they deal with them? What did they learn? What promises did they hold to?
- ❸ What can you do as a church, or a class, to help others who are in the crucible as they wait for God’s timing for something?
- ❹ What part does prayer serve in the growth of patience? Are there others you can pray for so that the Holy Spirit will develop (build) patience in their lives?

6. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were leaders in early Bible times, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders of Israel, such as Moses; prophets are men or women sent by God to warn us what will happen in the future.

7. testimonies—the many good things we tell to others about what God has done for us.