

## Week 3, The Intimacy of Waiting: *“Love in the Tomb”*

**Waiting.** Could there possibly be a more despised concept in western culture? In these days of instant gratification and instant access to just about everything, waiting has become a foreign concept. Yet the exhortation to “wait on the Lord” is found throughout Scripture. Anyone who has walked with the Lord for more than about five minutes can testify to the fact that God rarely does things on our timetable!

Some things don’t develop quickly. Trust is one of those things—and intimacy requires trust. Like it or not, waiting, in all its various forms, gives us the opportunity to develop, and exercise, trust.

It also gives us the opportunity to know Him better. There are facets of His character hidden for us—just waiting to be discovered—in the waiting.

Sometimes waiting looks like long stretches of time where our lives outwardly appear to display the exact opposite of everything God has promised. Other times the wait may be relatively short in the overall scheme of things, but due to the severity of circumstances, every single moment of waiting becomes an agonizing assault against everything you believe. Times of waiting have the potential to drive us *from* God, or drive us *to* Him—it all depends on how we choose to respond as we wait.

This week, I want to focus on two potential *opportunities* we have in times of waiting:

1. The opportunity to discover Him *in* the waiting.
2. The opportunity to bless *Him* while we wait.

In our “study” section this week, we’ll look at a family that had to wait through some excruciating circumstances, but came out with much more than they ever anticipated!

### ~Study~

#### **Read John 11:1-44**

Who doesn’t love the story of Lazarus? It is such an incredible story of hope and life. At least it is when you read it with the benefit of hindsight! But for Martha and Mary—not to mention Lazarus himself—I’m sure there were many moments along the way they would have very much liked to have skipped.

This is a family who knew Jesus intimately. In fact, Mary of Bethany is the one so frequently seen in Scripture at the feet of Jesus. Martha’s personality and gifts were different than those

of her sister. Though she was not always as dialed into Jesus' heart as Mary was, she was close to Him too and Jesus loved her deeply. He was a frequent guest in their home. Given their relationship with Jesus, it is certain the entire family knew of His miracles and had no doubt seen many first-hand. However, despite their close relationship with Jesus, they were *not* insulated from personal tragedy.

One day the brother, Lazarus, became extremely ill. The sisters sent word to Jesus saying, "Lord, the one you love is sick." They knew Jesus loved them, and they believed He would come to heal Lazarus. Instead He responded in a way that to our human sensibilities seems a bit shocking.

*Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days (John 11:5-6 NIV).*

What? Yep, He stayed right where He was. For two whole days. And while He stayed away—Lazarus died.

It's hard for us to comprehend. He could have come sooner. But He stayed away for a reason that blows me away. He stayed away *because He loved them*.

*"My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."*

**-Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT**

He waited...

~Not because they did something wrong.

~Not because they didn't pray just right or believe just right.

~Not because He was mad at them.

### **He waited because He loved them.**

Then, after it seemed far too late to do any good at all, Jesus shows up. Although their manner was different, both sisters said exactly the same thing to Jesus when they saw Him. "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." How often do we say that same thing? When things don't go the way *we* think they should, we cry out, "God, where were You—why didn't You come?"

Yet sometimes He doesn't come—*because He loves us*. Sometimes He is doing something far greater than what we see on the surface. Sometimes He wants to **reveal Himself** to us in ways that wouldn't be possible apart from waiting.

There are times it may look and feel as though God is indifferent to our needs and unaware of our suffering. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, when *we* grieve, so does He. When Jesus went to the grave site with Mary and Martha, He wept right along with them—even though He knew what He was going to do! We often misunderstand His intentions, because we want relief right now. But sometimes He wants to do more than

we know to ask for. God never caused Lazarus to become sick, but when it happened, Jesus knew it was an opportunity to reveal more of Himself.

They knew Him as a man of God--but He wanted to reveal Himself as God the Man.

*"Delayed answers bring answers  
with increase. Delayed answers bring  
answers with character."*

**-Bill Johnson**

He wanted to reveal His glory.

God *will* come. Faithfulness is an immutable facet of His character. But He doesn't always show up on our timetable. At times He waits precisely *because* He loves us. He comes when it brings Him the greatest glory—and *us* the greatest good. Sometimes that means He'll come after our ideas of how He should answer have died and lie rotting in the grave. But the Author of Life is *never* limited—not even by death. Often, the longer He waits, the more staggering, amazing, marvelous and miraculous His ultimate answer will be.

That was certainly the case in Bethany.

After Lazarus had been in the grave four whole days, Jesus spoke three simple words that turned tragedy into triumph, "Lazarus, come forth." And Lazarus did—grave clothes and all! What was dead—made alive. What was lost—restored. There was no flash, no thunder, no trumpet blast, just three simple words. God spoke, and it was.

That can happen for us too. Even after we resign ourselves to the loss of our dreams. Even after we begin to settle for less than what we once believed possible—convinced that God has denied our prayers. But then, after it seems far too late, Jesus shows up. He speaks. Suddenly tragedy is turned into triumph, and hope is resurrected—eternally. Because when something has died and then rises again.

### **It lives forever.**

And *that* was the point. Jesus wanted to give them a much greater revelation of Himself. They knew Him as a healer. They knew Him as a friend and a comforter. But He wanted them to know Him at a much deeper level. Really, I think He wanted them to know Him as God. He wanted them to know Him as the One who has power over the grave. He wanted them to *know* Him—really know Him—as the Resurrection and the Life.

But to know Him as the one who resurrects:

~Hopes that have died

~Dreams that have died

~Purpose that has died

*Something needs to actually die.*

*"...Hope that is seen is no hope at all.  
Who hopes for what they already  
have? But if we hope for what we do  
not yet have, we wait  
for it patiently."*

**- Romans 8:24-25**

He can't reveal Himself as the One who does the impossible, unless the situation really is **impossible**.

~Not difficult

~Not challenging

~Not unlikely

But completely, unequivocally, undeniably—*impossible*.

There are so many stories throughout Scripture that bear witness to this truth. Abraham was 75 when God promised him a son. He was the ripe-old age of a 100 when Isaac was born. Talk about impossible! Abraham tried to take things into his own hands at one point when God didn't seem to be moving fast enough (can you say "Ishmael"?), but Abraham's very human solution was *not* God's plan and God still did what *He* promised—in His timing.

How about David? Against all odds, was anointed as Israel's next king when he was just a youngster. It must have seemed surreal. But it certainly wasn't an easy or quick path to the throne, especially when David was forced to live a life on the run from his jealous, demented predecessor, Saul. At one point David even pretended he was mad—behaving more like a crazed wild-animal than a king—to avoid danger (see 1 Samuel 21:12-14). Yet David *still* became king, just as God said.

Then there was Joseph. He was a teenager when God gave him dreams of greatness. Yet life wasn't looking so great for Joseph when he was sold into slavery by his own brothers. To make matters worse, he was then falsely accused by his master's wife and unceremoniously tossed in prison to rot—all because he acted *righteously*.

But God was with Joseph—even in prison. And many years later, *in a single day*, Joseph was placed in a prominent position of authority—second only to Pharaoh—in the most powerful nation in the world.

God is with you too. Even in the waiting.

There is a point in each of these stories. They waited. And waited. And then waited some more... *but God did what He said*. He was faithful to His promises.

In fact, He was faithful *even when they didn't wait perfectly*. He was faithful because that's who He is. And because it's who He is—He'll be faithful to you too.

~Do things seem impossible right now?

~Does it look as though God has forgotten you?

~Are some of your dreams dead and buried and stinking up the tomb?

Good. Because the One who "waits because He loves you," knows *exactly* what it's like to inhabit a tomb. But Love also has this sneaky habit of finding a way when there is no way.

*"Take courage my heart  
Stay steadfast my soul  
He's in the waiting  
Hold onto your hope  
As your triumph unfolds  
He's never failing"*

**-Kristene Dimarco**  
(from the song, *Take Courage*)

Love can never stay buried. Just ask the early disciples. They thought all was lost. At least they did on Friday.

**But then Sunday came.**

Sunday is coming for you too. In the meantime, know this:

*He's in the waiting.*

### **Questions for digging deeper:**

1. Read Psalm 27:14, Psalm 130:5-6, Galatians 5:5, James 1:2-4. What do these verses teach you about waiting on the Lord?
2. Read John 11: 21-27 and John 11:32-35. Why do you think Jesus responded differently to Martha and Mary although they said basically the same thing? What do they teach you about His compassion and knowledge of each of us?
3. Read Isaiah 40:31 in several different versions (if possible, look at the NKJV, the NIV, and the NLT). What do you notice about the different ways the verse is translated? From these different translations, what additional things can you learn about God's purposes for us "in the waiting"?
4. John 11:14-15, and John 11:40 provide powerful keys to the story of Lazarus. With these verses in mind, can you think of an instance from your own life where God didn't show up in your timing, but the ultimate outcome ended up being much more fruitful and glorious than it would have been if God had merely done what was originally asked?

## ~Stir~

*"Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not grow faint." -Isaiah 40:31 NASB*

It's funny how a particular passage of scripture can speak to you deeply through the years, but then one day you hear it as if you've never heard it before. You see it like you've never seen it before.

**You understand it like you've never understood it before.**

This happened to me recently with the story of Lazarus. I've long cherished the hope contained in this story. God has spoken to me deeply through many different parts of the story, at many different points in life. I've even written about it and taught on it—starting years ago.

But reading it again recently took my breath away. Not only did it fill me, once again, with abounding hope, but it also filled me with something else:

**Gratitude.**

It filled me with gratitude for the *privilege* of waiting.

Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying, but He *didn't*. It certainly isn't because He wasn't invited into the situation—He absolutely was. He heard the cries of Mary and Martha and He fully intended to answer—*just not when and how they thought He would*. He planned to answer in a different and more astounding way. It was a timing issue. We've probably all heard teaching along these lines. Maybe we even believe it.

*And let us not grow weary of  
doing good, for in due  
season we will reap, if we  
do not give up.*  
**-Galatians 6:9**

But for me, this was different. I didn't just "see" it this time. I *knew* it at a whole new level. I knew it at a whole new level, because, well, I've known waiting at a whole new level.

I've seen an awful lot of hopes and dreams crash and burn in my lifetime—particularly over the last decade. It seems there have been so many that not only do I not have time to recount them, I don't have the *heart* recount them. It has been such a long and ongoing process, that I finally got to the point where I pretty much gave up on *ever* resuscitating many of my lost dreams. I buried Lazarus and moved on.

Well, that was the plan anyway. It worked for a moment or two.

It worked until my heart was stirred again with reality of resurrection life. It worked until I understood—*really understood* **that to experience resurrection, you need to first experience death.**

If you want to understand that *all* things are possible with God, you need to actually be faced with the impossible. If something is just sick (or broken, or rearranged, or shelved, or delayed, or whatever) it could ... possibly ... potentially ... conceivably ... get better naturally.

But when something is *dead*, well, when something is dead—there is nothing—that’s right *nothing*—you can do.

You can’t try a little harder. You can’t come up with a list of steps to success. You can’t make your own reality. You can’t say or pray just the right words. You can’t conjure up just the right amount of faith that will obligate God to move.

You can’t *do* anything.

**But He *can*.**

And *that* is the point. The point is that sometimes—because He loves us—He waits. He waits so we can believe.

**Really believe.**

*“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).*

*Biblically, waiting is not just something we have to do until we get what we want. Waiting is part of the process of becoming what God wants us to be.*

**-John Ortberg**

He did tell me that. And I’m beginning to see His glory *even in the waiting*. It’s been a long process. I wouldn’t have chosen this path, but I also don’t regret it.

Some years ago, I served with a large global missions organization. Twice a year we would have candidates for field service come into our office for training. As part of their training the candidates learned to publicly give their testimony. One day in chapel, I was

listening to the testimony of a remarkable young woman. She was recounting the amazing things God had done in her life in a very short period of time. Many of those blessings were the very same things I had been praying about for many years without any sign of breakthrough or movement. I was so excited for her—God used those things to reveal more of Himself to her and she was literally glowing with joy and gratitude—but I also had a familiar ache in my own heart where those desires remained unfulfilled.

I told the Lord I was so happy for her, but I longed for a similar testimony of breakthrough in my own life. Jesus told me I *did* have a testimony—I *had a testimony of perseverance*.

I *still* have a testimony of perseverance—and at this point it is a much longer one! Although, thankfully, I have seen breakthrough and even miracles in a couple of those long sought after situations, in most of them, I am still waiting. The temptation is to believe I have done something wrong and that is why I haven’t seen the answer. I choose instead to believe Him.

**I choose to believe I will see the glory of God.**

Not only will I see Him in the answer, I will see Him in ways I never could have if He answered when I first started asking. In fact, I already have. That has been the greatest beauty and blessing of the waiting, *knowing Him in ways I would not have otherwise known Him*. In the waiting I've come to know Him as:

~The bridegroom who faithfully and patiently waits for His bride and as the Father who enduringly aches for His children to come home

~The One who is infinitely patient and kind *with me*.

~As Immanuel, the One who daily takes my hand and walks with me regardless of what the day may hold.

~As the One who meets me in my weakness and Whose grace is completely and wholly sufficient in *every* season.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Someone once told me if you learn to blossom in the desert, you can blossom anywhere. That is what waiting has taught me. Waiting has taught me that absolutely *everything* I need is found in Him.

### **I wouldn't trade that for anything.**

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). There is a special blessing reserved for those who choose to persevere in faith though they've not yet seen the answers to their prayers. Faith always pleases God, but enduring faith *blesses Him* more than we can ever fathom. What a priceless privilege it is to know that when we wait in a place of trust and faith, it moves His heart so deeply!

Although I eagerly await the day His promises will come to pass (and they will), far more compelling than seeing the reality of God's promises fulfilled, is the promise of seeing *Him*. I believe one of the most profound verses in all of Scripture on the concept of endurance is a very simple one: "*He (Moses) endured as seeing him who is invisible*" (Heb. 11:27). As amazing as the promises are, the promises are not the reward—*Jesus is the reward*. And He is *in* the waiting with us—longing to be discovered in new and wonderful ways.

The tomb will open. Hope will rise. Faith will become sight. And when the promise is fulfilled, God will reveal Himself to be more than you ever could have hoped or imagined.

But He also reveals Himself *in* the waiting.

### **Questions for personal pondering:**

1. Think of some of the areas where you've been waiting for God to move. Take some time and list some of the ways you've experienced God's faithfulness *in* the waiting.



2. Read Hebrews 10:35-36. What do these verses reveal to you about the link between confidence and endurance?
  
3. Think of a situation in your life where it has been particularly difficult to wait. Ask the Lord who He wants to reveal Himself to be in these specific circumstances.

### ~Start~

I hope some of the information in this week's lesson has been helpful and has also engaged your heart. Since these lessons are intended to be interactive between you and the Lord, the following simple suggestions are provided to help enhance your connection with His heart:

What if? While we are waiting, there are often areas where our hearts become worried or anxious. Typically, these worries are brought about by imagining a "what if?" outcome that excludes God's faithfulness. Take a piece of paper and divide it into two vertical columns. On one side identify some of your "what if's"—the worst-case scenarios that may be consciously or subconsciously disturbing your peace. Ask the Lord to reveal the specific scriptural promises that counter your fears. List those on the opposite side of the paper. Meditate on these promises and speak them over yourself regularly. Ask the Lord to hide them in your heart and make them real to you. In the days ahead, each time you find yourself drifting into to a place of worry or fear, remind yourself of His specific promises.

Who are you to me? In question #3 above, you asked the Lord who He specifically wanted to reveal Himself to be in your most difficult place of waiting. During your time with the Lord over the next week (or for as long as you feel led), ask the Lord to expand on what that facet of His character means *to you in your specific situation*. It will be helpful to search the Bible for specific instances where He revealed that attribute of His character. I find it helpful to journal my thoughts as I often receive revelation as I write (as opposed to "hearing" something and then recording it).

Crafted prayer: To end the week, once again make a brief list of the things that stood out from this week's lesson. Turn those points (whether they are things you are thankful for, areas where you want to see change, places where you need to be more open to His Spirit, etc.) into a written prayer that specifically expresses your heart and desire. Consider praying this prayer frequently in the days ahead to keep it fresh in your heart.