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Forward

There probably isn't anything harder to do than wait, whether we are expecting something good, something bad, or an unknown.

One way we often cope with a long wait (or even a short one) is to begin helping God get his plan into action.

Sarah tried this approach. She was too old to expect to have a child of her own, so she thought God must have something else in mind.

From Sarah's limited point of view this could only be to give Abraham a son through another woman—a common practice in her day. The plan seemed harmless enough. Abraham would sleep with Sarah's maidservant, who would then give birth to a child. Sarah would take the child as her own. The plan worked beautifully—at first. But as you read about the events that followed, you will be struck by how often Sarah must have regretted the day she decided to push God's timetable ahead.

Another way we cope with a long wait is to gradually conclude that what we're waiting for is never going to happen. Sarah waited 90 years for a baby! When God told her she would finally have one of her own, she laughed, not so much from a lack of faith in what God could do, but from doubt about what he could do through her.

Does some part of your life seem to be on hold right now? Do you understand that this may be part of God's plan for you?

The Bible has more than enough clear direction to keep us busy while we're waiting for some particular part of life to move ahead.

Chapter 1



When it's hard to wait

Genesis 8:6-16

After another forty days, Noah opened the window he had made in the boat and released a raven that flew back and forth until the earth was dry.

Then he sent out a dove to see if it could find dry ground. [9] But the dove found no place to land because the water was still too high. So it returned to the boat, and Noah held out his hand and drew the dove back inside. Seven days later, Noah released the dove again. This time it did not come back.

Finally, when Noah was 601 years old, ten and a half months after the flood began, Noah lifted back the cover to look. The water was drying up.

Two more months went by, and at last the earth was dry! Then God said to Noah, "Leave the boat, all of you. This time, toward evening, the bird returned to him with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Noah now knew that the water was almost gone.

Occasionally Noah would send a bird out to test the earth and see if it was dry. But Noah didn't get out of the ark until God told him to.

He was waiting for God's timing. God knew that even though the water was gone, the earth was not dry enough for Noah and his family to venture out.

What patience Noah showed, especially after spending an entire year inside his boat! We, like Noah, must trust God to give us patience during those difficult times when we must wait.

What is worth waiting for?

Genesis 29:20-28

So Jacob spent the next seven years working to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days. Finally, the time came for him to marry her. "I have fulfilled my contract," Jacob said to Laban. "Now give me my wife so we can be married.

So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood to celebrate with Jacob at a wedding feast. That night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. And Laban gave Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.

But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! "What sort of trick is this?" Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked seven years for Rachel. What do you mean by this trickery?"

"It's not our custom to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn," Laban replied. "Wait until the bridal week is over, and you can have Rachel, too—that is, if you promise to work another seven years for me."

So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too.

People often wonder if working a long time for something they desire is worth it. Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel. After being tricked, he agreed to work seven more years for her (although he did get to marry Rachel shortly after he married Leah)!

The most important goals and desires are worth working and waiting for.

Movies and television have created the illusion that people have to wait only about an hour to solve their problems or get what they want.

Don't be trapped into thinking the same is true in real life. Patience is hardest when we need it the most, but it is the key to achieving our goals.

Psalm 27:14

Wait patiently for the Lord.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

David knew from experience what it meant to wait for the Lord. He had been anointed king at age 16, but didn't become king until he was 30.

During the interim, he was chased through the desert by jealous King Saul. David had to wait on God for the fulfillment of his promise to reign. Later, after becoming king, he was chased by his rebellious son, Absalom.

Waiting for God is not easy. Often it seems that he isn't answering our prayers or doesn't understand the urgency of our situation. That kind of thinking implies that God is not in control or is not fair. But God is worth waiting for.

Lamentations 3:24-26 calls us to hope in and wait for the Lord because often God uses waiting to refresh, renew, and teach us. Make good use of your waiting times by discovering what God may be trying to teach you in them.

Waiting is sometimes a part of God's plan.

1 Samuel 16:19-21

So Saul sent messengers to Jesse to say, "Send me your son David, the shepherd." Jesse responded by sending David to Saul, along with a young goat and a donkey loaded down with food and wine.

So David went to Saul and served him. Saul liked David very much, and David became one of Saul's armor bearers.

When Saul asked David to be in his service, he obviously did not know that David had been secretly anointed king (1 Samuel 16:12). Saul's invitation presented an excellent opportunity for the young man and future king to gain firsthand information about leading a nation ("David went back and forth from Saul," 1 Samuel 17:15).

Sometimes our plans—even the ones we think God has approved—have to be put on hold indefinitely. Like David, we can use this waiting time profitably. We can choose to learn and grow in our present circumstances, whatever they may be.

Benefits of waiting on God.

Psalm 40:1-4

I waited patiently for the Lord to help me,
And he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the pit of despair,

Out of the mud and the mire.
He set my feet on solid ground
And steadied me as I walked along.

He has given me a new song to sing,
A hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see what he has done and be astounded.
They will put their trust in the Lord.

Oh, the joys of those who trust the Lord,
Who have no confidence in the proud,
Or in those who worship idols.

Waiting for God to help us is not easy, but David received four benefits from waiting: God

- (1) Lifted him out of his despair,
- (2) Set his feet on a rock,
- (3) Gave him a firm place to stand, and
- (4) Put a new song of praise in his mouth.

Often blessings cannot be received unless we go through the trial of waiting.

Chapter 2



How to wait for Christ's return.

Matthew 24:45-47

"Who is a faithful, sensible servant, to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his household and feeding his family?"

If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. I assure you, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns.

Jesus asks us to spend the time of waiting taking care of his people and doing his work here on earth, both within the church and outside it. This is the best way to prepare for Christ's return.

2 Thes. 3:6-15

And now, dear brothers and sisters, we give you this command with the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ: Stay away from any Christian who lives in idleness and doesn't follow the tradition of hard work we gave you.

For you know that you ought to follow our example. We were never lazy when we were with you. We never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. We worked hard day and night so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

It wasn't that we didn't have the right to ask you to feed us, but we wanted to give you an example to follow.

Even while we were with you, we gave you this rule: "Whoever does not work should not eat."

Yet we hear that some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and wasting time meddling in other people's business.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we appeal to such people—no, we command them: Settle down and get to work. Earn your own living. And I say to the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, never get tired of doing good.

Take note of those who refuse to obey what we say in this letter. Stay away from them so they will be ashamed. Don't think of them as enemies, but speak to them as you would to a Christian who needs to be warned.

Paul was writing here about the person who is lazy. Paul explained that when he and his companions were in Thessalonica, they worked hard, buying what they needed rather than becoming a burden to any of the believers.

The rule they followed was, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." There's a difference between leisure and laziness. Relaxation and recreation provide a necessary and much needed balance to our lives; but when it is time to work, Christians should jump right in.

We should make the most of our talent and time, doing all we can to provide for ourselves and our dependents. Rest when you should be resting, and work when you should be working.

Some people in the Thessalonian church were falsely teaching that because Christ would return any day, people should set aside their responsibilities, quit work, do no future planning, and just wait for the Lord. But their lack of activity only led them into sin.

They became a burden to the church, which was supporting them; they wasted time that could have been used for helping others; and they became “busybodies” (2 Thes. 3:11).

These church members may have thought that they were being more spiritual by not working, but Paul tells them to be responsible and get back to work. Being ready for Christ means obeying him in every area of life. Because we know that Christ is coming, we must live in such a way that our faith and our daily practice will please him when he arrives.

A “busybody” is a gossip. An idle person who doesn’t work ends up filling his or her time with less than helpful activities, like gossip. Rumors and hearsay are tantalizing, exciting to hear, and make us feel like insiders. But they tear people down.

If you often find your nose in other people’s business, you may be underemployed. Look for a task to do for Christ or for your family, and get to work.

Paul counseled the church to stop supporting financially and associating with those who persisted in their idleness.

Hunger and loneliness can be very effective ways to make the idle person become productive. Paul was not advising coldness or cruelty, but the kind of tough love that a person would show a brother or sister.

God’s love is waiting for your response. ■

Luke 15:20

"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

In the two preceding stories, the seeker actively looked for the coin and the

sheep, which could not return by themselves. In this story, the father watched and waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will of his own, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned. In the same way,

God's love is constant and patient and welcoming.

He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond, but he will not force us to come to him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses.

What you can do while waiting

Acts 1:15-26

During this time, on a day when about 120 believers were present, Peter stood up and addressed them as follows:

"Brothers, it was necessary for the Scriptures to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided the Temple police to arrest Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. Judas was one of us, chosen to share in the ministry with us."

(Judas bought a field with the money he received for his treachery, and falling there, he burst open, spilling out his intestines. The news of his death spread rapidly among all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means "Field of Blood.")

Peter continued, "This was predicted in the book of Psalms, where it says, and 'let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' And again, 'Let his position be given to someone else.'

"So now we must choose another man to take Judas's place. It must be someone who has been with us all the time that we were with the Lord Jesus from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us into heaven. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection."

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they all prayed for the right man to be chosen. "O Lord," they said, "you know every heart.

Show us which of these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas the traitor in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and in this way Matthias was chosen and became an apostle with the other eleven.

This was the first church business meeting. The small group of 11 had already grown to more than 120. The main order of business was to appoint a new disciple, or apostle, as the 12 were now called. While the apostles waited, they were doing what they could—praying, seeking God’s guidance, and getting organized.

Waiting for God to work does not mean sitting around doing nothing. We must do what we can, while we can, as long as we don’t run ahead of God.

How could someone who had been with Jesus daily betray him? Judas received the same calling and teaching as everyone else. But he chose to reject Christ’s warning as well as his offers of mercy. Judas hardened his heart and joined in the plot with Jesus’ enemies to put him to death.

Judas remained unrepentant to the end, and he finally committed suicide. Although Jesus predicted this would happen, it was Judas’s choice. Those privileged to be *close* to the truth are not necessarily *committed* to the truth.

Matthew says that Judas hanged himself (Matthew 27:5);

There were many who consistently followed Jesus throughout his ministry on earth. The 12 disciples were his inner circle, but others shared the disciples’ deep love for and commitment to Jesus.

The apostles had to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot. They outlined specific criteria for making the choice. When the “finalists” had been chosen, the apostles prayed, asking God to guide the selection process.

This gives us a good example of how to proceed when we are making important decisions. Set up criteria consistent with the Bible, examine the alternatives, and pray for wisdom and guidance to reach a wise decision.

The disciples became *apostles*. *Disciple* means follower or learner, and *apostle* means messenger or missionary. These men now had the special assignment of spreading the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Waiting for God's timing.

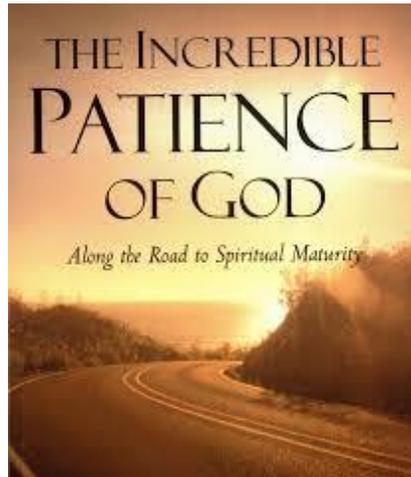
2 Peter 3:8-9

But you must not forget, dear friends, that a day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day.

The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.

Just as God rescued Lot from Sodom, so he is able to rescue us from the temptations and trials we face in a wicked world. Lot was not sinless, but he put his trust in God and was spared when Sodom was destroyed.

Chapter 3



God's patience toward us.

Genesis 6:3

Then the Lord said, "My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal flesh. In the future, they will live no more than 120 years."

“His days will be a hundred and twenty years” means that God was allowing the people of Noah’s day 120 years to change their sinful ways. God shows his great patience with us as well. He is giving us time to quit living our way and begin living his way, the way he shows us in his Word.

While 120 years seems like a long time, eventually the time ran out and the flood waters swept across the earth. Your time also may be running out. Turn to God to forgive your sins. You can’t see the stopwatch of God’s patience, and there is no bargaining for additional time.

Genesis 19:24

Then the Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the heavens on Sodom and Gomorrah.

In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, we see two facets of God’s character:

his great patience (agreeing to spare a wicked city for ten good people) and his fierce anger (destroying both cities).

As we grow spiritually, we should find ourselves developing a deeper respect for God because of his anger toward sin, and also a deeper love for God because of his patience when we sin.

Lot's wife turned back to look at the smoldering city of Sodom. Clinging to the past, she was unwilling to turn completely away. Are you looking back longingly at sin while trying to move forward with God? You can't make progress with God as long as you are holding on to pieces of your old life. Jesus said it this way in Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters."

Nehemiah 9:16-21

But our ancestors were a proud and stubborn lot, and they refused to obey your commands.

"They refused to listen and did not remember the miracles you had done for them. Instead, they rebelled and appointed a leader to take them back to their slavery in Egypt! But you are a God of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to become angry, and full of unfailing love and mercy.

You did not abandon them, even though they made an idol shaped like a calf and said, "This is your god who brought you out of Egypt!" They sinned and committed terrible blasphemies. But in your great mercy you did not abandon them to die in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud still led them forward by day, and the pillar of fire showed them the way through the night.

You sent your good Spirit to instruct them, and you did not stop giving them bread from heaven or water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the wilderness. They lacked nothing in all that time. Their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell!

Patience in waiting for God's timing.

John 11:5-7

Although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days and did not go to them. Finally after two days, he said to his disciples, "Let's go to Judea again."

Jesus loved this family and often stayed with them. He knew their pain but did not respond immediately. His delay had a specific purpose.

God's timing, especially his delays, may make us think he is not answering or is not answering the way we want. But he will meet all our needs according to his perfect schedule and purpose (Phil. 4:19). Patiently await his timing.

Patience is the key to achieving many goals.

People sometimes wonder if working a long time for something they desire is worth it. Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel. After being tricked, he agreed to work seven more years for her (although he did get to marry Rachel shortly after he married Leah)! The most important goals and desires are worth working and waiting for. Movies and television have created the illusion that people have to wait only about an hour to solve their problems or get what they want.

Don't be trapped into thinking the same is true in real life. Patience is hardest when we need it the most, but it is the key to achieving our goals.

Chapter 4



Difficult to persist in patience

Genesis 30:22-24

Then God remembered Rachel's plight and answered her prayers by giving her a child. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. "God has removed my shame," she said. And she named him Joseph, for she said, "May the Lord give me yet another son."

God answered Rachel's prayers and gave her a child of her own. In the meantime, however, she had given her maidservant to Jacob.

Trusting God when nothing seems to happen is difficult. But it is harder still to live with the consequences of taking matters into our own hands. Resist the temptation to think God has forgotten you. Have patience and courage to wait for God to act.

Problems can exercise our patience.

Exodus 5:22-23

So Moses went back to the Lord and protested, "Why have you mistreated your own people like this, Lord? Why did you send me?"

Since I gave Pharaoh your message, he has been even more brutal to your people. You have not even begun to rescue them!"

Pharaoh had just increased the Hebrews' workload, and Moses protested that God had not rescued his people. Moses expected faster results and fewer problems. When God is at work, suffering, setbacks, and hardship may still occur.

In James 1:2-4, we are encouraged to be happy when difficulties come our way. Problems develop our patience and character by teaching us to

- (1) Trust God to do what is best for us,
- (2) Look for ways to honor God in our present situation,
- (3) Remember that God will not abandon us, and
- (4) Watch for God's plan for us.

Don't mistake God's patience as approval for your sin.

Joshua 23:12-16

"But if you turn away from him and intermarry with the survivors of these nations remaining among you, then know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive them out from your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a pain in your side and a thorn in your eyes, and you will be wiped out from this good land the Lord your God has given you.

"Soon I will die, going the way of all the earth. Deep in your hearts you know that every promise of the Lord your God has come true. Not a single one has failed!

But as surely as the Lord your God has given you the good things he promised, he will also bring disaster on you if you disobey him. He will completely wipe you out from this good land he has given you.

If you break the covenant of the Lord your God by worshiping and serving other gods, his anger will burn against you, and you will quickly be wiped out from the good land he has given you."

Romans 2:4

Don't you realize how kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Or don't you care? Can't you see how kind he has been in giving you time to turn from your sin?

In his kindness, God holds back his judgment, giving people time to repent. It is easy to mistake God's patience for approval of the wrong way we are living.

Self-evaluation is difficult, and it is even more difficult to expose our conduct to God and let him tell us where we need to change. But as Christians we must pray constantly that God will point out our sins, so that he can heal them.

Unfortunately, we are more likely to be amazed at God's patience with others than humbled at his patience with us.

God uses delays to test our patience

1 Samuel 13:11-12

But Samuel said, "What is this you have done?"

Saul replied, "I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn't arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle.

So I said, 'The Philistines are ready to march against us, and I haven't even asked for the Lord's help!' So I felt obliged to offer the burnt offering myself before you came."

It is difficult to trust God when you feel your resources slipping away. When Saul felt that time was running out, he became impatient with God's timing. In thinking that the ritual was all he needed, he substituted the ritual for faith in God.

When faced with a difficult decision, don't allow impatience to drive you to disobey God. When you know what God wants, follow his plan regardless of the consequences. God often uses delays to test our obedience and patience.

Saul had plenty of excuses for his disobedience. But Samuel zeroed in on the real issue: "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you." Like Saul, we often gloss over our mistakes and sins, trying to justify and spiritualize our actions because of our "special" circumstances.

Our excuses, however, are nothing more than disobedience. God knows our true motives. He forgives, restores, and blesses only when we are honest about our sins. By trying to hide his sins behind excuses, Saul lost his kingship (1 Samuel 13:14).

Patience of David in becoming king.

2 Samuel 5:4-5

David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in all.

He had reigned over Judah from Hebron for seven years and six months, and from Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

This was the third time David was anointed king. First he was privately anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13).

Then he was made king over the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 2:4).

Finally he was crowned king over all Israel. As an outlaw, life had looked bleak, but God's promise to make him king over all Israel was now being fulfilled. Although the kingdom would be divided again in less than 75 years, David's dynasty would reign over Judah, the southern kingdom, for over 400 years.

David did not become king over all Israel until he was 37 years old, although he had been promised the kingdom many years earlier (1 Samuel 16:13).

During those years, David had to wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's promise. If you feel pressured to achieve instant results and success, remember David's patience. Just as his time of waiting prepared him for his important task, a waiting period may help prepare you by strengthening your character.

Judah had exhausted God's patience

Isaiah 6:9-13

And he said, "Yes, go. But tell my people this: 'You will hear my words, but you will not understand. You will see what I do, but you will not perceive its meaning.'

Harden the hearts of these people. Close their ears, and shut their eyes. That way, they will not see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn to me for healing."

Then I said, "Lord, how long must I do this?"

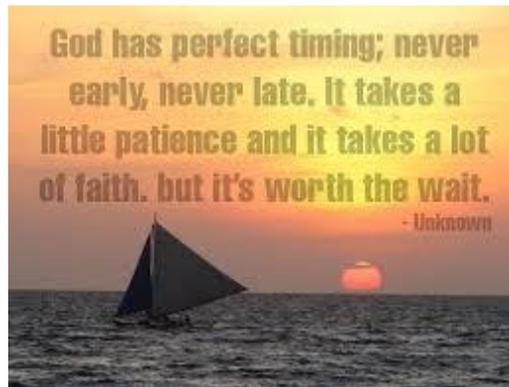
And he replied, "Until their cities are destroyed, with no one left in them.

Until their houses are deserted and the whole country is an utter wasteland.

Do not stop until the Lord has sent everyone away to distant lands and the entire land of Israel lies deserted.

Even if only a tenth—a remnant—survive, it will be invaded again and burned. Israel will remain a stump, like a tree that is cut down, but the stump will be a holy seed that will grow again."

Chapter 5



Patience in waiting for God's rewards.

Esther 6:10-13

"Excellent!" the king said to Haman. "Hurry and get the robe and my horse, and do just as you have said for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the gate of the palace. Do not fail to carry out everything you have suggested."

So Haman took the robe and put it on Mordecai, placed him on the king's own horse, and led him through the city square, shouting, "This is what happens to those the king wishes to honor!"

Afterward Mordecai returned to the palace gate, but Haman hurried home dejected and completely humiliated.

When Haman told his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends what had happened, they said, "Since Mordecai—this man who has humiliated you—is a Jew, you will never succeed in your plans against him. It will be fatal to continue to oppose him."

Mordecai had exposed a plot to assassinate Xerxes—thus he had saved the king's life (Esther 2:21-23).

Although his good deed was recorded in the history books, Mordecai had gone unrewarded. But God was saving Mordecai's reward for the right time.

Just as Haman was about to hang Mordecai unjustly, the king was ready to give the reward. Although God promises to reward our good deeds, we sometimes feel our “payoff” is too far away. Be patient. God steps in when it will do the most good.

When God’s patience gives way to anger.

Psalm 74:1-2

O God, why have you rejected us forever?
Why is your anger so intense against the sheep of your own pasture?
Remember that we are the people you chose in ancient times,
the tribe you redeemed as your own special possession!
And remember Jerusalem, your home here on earth.

God’s anger against Israel had grown hot during the many years of their sin and idolatry. His patience endured for generations, but at last it was set aside for judgment.

If you fall into sin and quickly seek God’s forgiveness, his mercy may come quickly and his anger may leave quickly. If you persist in sinning against him, don’t be surprised when his patience runs out.

Patience in waiting for evil to be eliminated.

Habakkuk 2:3

But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.

Evil and injustice seem to have the upper hand in the world. Like Habakkuk,

Christians often feel angry and discouraged as they see what goes on. Habakkuk complained vigorously to God about the situation.

God's answer to Habakkuk is the same answer he would give us, "Be patient! I will work out my plans in my perfect timing." It isn't easy to be patient, but it helps to remember that God hates sin even more than we do. Punishment of sin will certainly come.

As God told Habakkuk, "Wait for it." To trust God fully means to trust him even when we don't understand why events occur as they do.

God is waiting for us to turn to him.

Luke 15:20

"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

In the two preceding stories, the seeker actively looked for the coin and the sheep, which could not return by themselves.

In this story, the father watched and waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will of his own, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned. In the same way, God's love is constant and patient and welcoming.

He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond, but he will not force us to come to him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses.

Patience that God will keep his promises.

Romans 8:24-25

Now that we are saved, we eagerly look forward to this freedom. For if you already have something, you don't need to hope for it.

But if we look forward to something we don't have yet, we must wait patiently and confidently.

It is natural for children to trust their parents, even though parents sometimes fail to keep their promises. Our heavenly Father, however, never makes promises he won't keep.

Nevertheless, his plan may take more time than we expect. Rather than acting like impatient children as we wait for God's will to unfold, we should place our confidence in God's goodness and wisdom.

In Romans, Paul presents the idea that salvation is past, present, and future. It is past because we *were* saved the moment we believed in Jesus Christ as Savior (Romans 3:21-26; Romans 5:1-11; Romans 6:1-11, 22-23); our new life (eternal life) begins at that moment.

But at the same time, we have not fully received all the benefits and blessings of salvation that will be ours when Christ's new kingdom is completely established.

That's our future salvation. While we can be confident of our salvation, we still look ahead with hope and trust toward that complete change of body and personality that lies beyond this life, when we will be like Christ (1 John 3:2).

Patience, a key to enduring suffering.

2 Thes. 1:4

We proudly tell God's other churches about your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering.

The keys to surviving persecution and trials are perseverance and faith. When we are faced with crushing troubles, we can have faith that God is using our trials for our good and for his glory.

Knowing that God is fair and just will give us patience in our suffering because we know that he has not forgotten us. In God's perfect timing, he will relieve our suffering and punish those who persecute us. Can you trust God's timing?

Paul had been persecuted during his first visit to Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-9). No doubt those who had responded to his message and had become Christians were continuing to be persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he said that Christ's return would bring deliverance from persecution and judgment on the persecutors.

But this caused the people to expect Christ's return right away to rescue and vindicate them. So Paul had to point out that while waiting for God's kingdom, believers could and should learn perseverance and faith from their suffering.

As we live for Christ, we will experience troubles because we are trying to be God's people in a perverse world. Some people say that troubles are the result of sin or lack of faith, but Paul teaches that they may be a part of God's plan for believers.

Our problems can help us look upward and forward, instead of inward (Mark 13:35-36; Phil. 3:13-14); they can build strong character (Romans 5:3-4); and they can provide us with opportunities to comfort others who also are struggling (2 Cor. 1:3-5).

Our troubles may be an indication that you are taking a stand for Christ.

There are two dimensions of the relief mentioned by Paul.

We can gain relief in knowing that our sufferings are strengthening us, making us ready for Christ's kingdom.

We can also gain relief in the fact that one day everyone will stand before God; at that time, wrongs will be righted, judgment will be pronounced, and evil will be terminated.

The “everlasting destruction” that Paul describes is the lake of fire (see Rev. 20:14)—the place of eternal separation from God. Those people who are separated from God in eternity no longer have any hope for salvation.

References:

Holy Bible: New Living Bible translation.

Additional comments and charts are taken from:

***Life Application Study Bible.* Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print**