

Resources for Waiting on God Spiritual Discipline

These handouts accompany Susanne's audio for Waiting on God.

Page 1: Slides used during the audio presentation

Pages 2–3: Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting developed

Pages 4–5: Reflections with questions (good for small groups)

Pages 6–7: Quotes on Waiting on God (also titled "Reflections on Waiting")

Page 8: Waiting on God by Andrew Murray (Scripture references on waiting)

Slide 1:

Come Emmanuel (God-With-Us)

We wait for Jesus Christ to be revealed in us in a new way.

What is God birthing in you this Advent?

Slide 2:

These all look to you to give them their food in due season;

When you give to them, they gather it up;

When you open your hand, they are filled with good things.

Psalm 104:27-28

Slide 3:

Spiritual Gifts of Waiting

- Patience
- Loss of Control
- Living in the Present
- Compassion
- Gratitude
- Humility
- Trust in God

from *Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting*, by Holly Whicomb

Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting, by Holly Whitcomb

The first gift of waiting is patience.

The second gift of waiting is loss of control.

The third gift of waiting is the living in the present.

The fourth gift of waiting is compassion.

The fifth gift of waiting is gratitude.

The sixth gift of waiting is humility.

The seventh gift of waiting is trust in God.

May the God who loves us help us all learn how to wait.

The First Gift of Waiting: PATIENCE

Waiting teaches us to live life in increments, in small pieces rather than large chunks. Waiting teaches us to measure our progress slowly. Alcoholics and addicts know this more than most of us: They measure their years of recovery in single days. They know that their waiting in recovery takes place one day at a time.

Psalms 25 talks specifically about waiting on God: "You are the God of my salvation, for you I wait all day long" (25:5). It is hard to wait on God. Whether we're freeing ourselves from addiction, healing from a long illness, adopting a baby, or waiting for word to come through about a job or a house or a school, it is hard to trust the slow unfolding of God's action. God's time is different from our time. In God's time, we are often waiting for the bigger picture but must be content with each small piece. When we are waiting, we put one foot in front of the other every morning and every evening. Waiting teaches us patience.

The Second Gift of Waiting: LOSS OF CONTROL

For those of us for whom staying in control is the ultimate achievement, loss of control seems like a perverse and rotten gift indeed. The release of control, though, can be an empowering spiritual step.

Not long ago, coming back from the East Coast, I was unexpectedly caught in severe weather. As we departed, the skies looked fine, but the situation changed dramatically an hour-and-

a-half later. It was then that the pilot announced, "We're blowing Milwaukee, which is presently experiencing extremely severe weather." A half hour later the pilot declared, "It is still too dangerous to land in Milwaukee, and we are running low on fuel. We'll have to go to an alternate city to land." By this time, it was clear that everything was out of control. Connecting flights became impossible. It was uncertain whether we'd even be able to get into Milwaukee that same day.

At that point, we all gave up. When we accepted that everything was in pandemonium, life got easier. As we sat on the tarmac in Michigan, people spoke kindly to one another and passed their cell phones back and forth so everyone could call home. People began telling stories of where they were headed, of their families and jobs. We became more than silent strangers. We surrendered to forces beyond our control . . . and found each other.

The Third Gift of Waiting: LIVING IN THE PRESENT

Waiting teaches us to dwell fully where we are . When we can't control our circumstances and we can't predict the future, we have the opportunity to live in the present.

Sometimes after a huge Milwaukee blizzard, while we're waiting for the roads to be shoveled, we hear the news that schools will be closed and that everyone who can should stay home and off the highways. What a gift this news is! I can cancel my hard-nosed plans. I can go back to bed. I can write a few checks I meant to get to yesterday. I can make cookies with the kids. I can watch the movie from the video store that I rented three days ago. I can live in the present moment.

The Fourth Gift of Waiting: COMPASSION

When we are waiting for something important in our lives, we tend to seek out others who will understand our restlessness and anxieties . Think of the Advent story of Mary and her cousin Elizabeth , one young woman and one much older woman, both pregnant. They were both living in circumstances beyond their

control, expecting an unexpected child, and in their fear and excitement they reached out to one another. Their shared waiting gave them a unique understanding of what each was going through, and they could embrace each other in compassion.

We, too, know the feeling of waiting with others, in uncertainty, in crisis. Maybe you've had the experience of waiting in the family members' lounge of the hospital intensive care unit. If so, you know the feeling of desperation and intense anxiety. You know the feeling of talking to a stranger sitting next to you and asking that person who their loved one is and what they are waiting for. You know the feeling of a stranger coming up to you and saying, "I'm going down to the cafeteria. Do you want to come? Can I bring you something back?" Even with total strangers, sharing fears and insecurities while we wait offers a bridge of understanding.

Waiting together in uncertainty creates compassion.

The Fifth Gift of Waiting: GRATITUDE

I hate waiting in line at the grocery store—but sometimes I see my full cart and am grateful I can afford this food. When I think of the people whom this food will feed, I am grateful for my family and the companionship at our table.

Waiting can give us unexpected moments to be grateful for everything that is peaceful or lovely or running smoothly, the small things we may not have noticed before. Waiting can inspire us to look around carefully and to observe what's there. Yes, we are waiting. But look at all these people who are offering help. Yes, we are waiting. But aren't we lucky we're going through this now rather than ten years ago?

Waiting teaches us to appreciate those pieces of our lives that have gracefully fallen into place. Waiting teaches us gratitude.

The Sixth Gift of Waiting: HUMILITY

Sometimes we wait because we can't do anything else. We recognize that we are powerless. That powerlessness can be a spiritual

opening. In our vulnerability, we can realize that forces a... powers far greater than ourselves have taken over. It is during those times of waiting that we learn humility.

Have you ever sat at the bedside of a loved one who was dying? Waiting is inevitable. It is a time of realizing you can't fix anything. You can't change anything. All you can do is quiet down and be a faithful presence. Waiting then becomes a holy and sanctified act. Waiting becomes grace-filled.

The Seventh Gift of Waiting: TRUST IN GOD

When we can't control things and when we can't predict the future, we begin to live in trust.

How many cancer survivors do you know who actually talk about their disease with gratitude? Some of them speak appreciatively of their illness because it rearranged their lives. Because it taught them the richness of not knowing. Because it instilled in them the ability to trust. Survivors who have waited out the course of a disease know firsthand what it means to loosen their grasp and to develop trust in God.

This may well be the greatest gift of waiting. Trust in God takes us beyond self-reliance into new depths of faith. Trust in God invites us to let go of our fears, to open our hearts in prayer, and to trust in the boundless love and care that God has for us.

REFLECTIONS

"What to Do in the Darkness"

Go slowly
Consent to it
But don't wallow in it
Know it as a place of germination
And growth
Remember the light
Take an outstretched hand if you find one
Exercise unused senses
Find the path by walking it
Practice trust
Watch for dawn

- Marilyn Chandler McEntyre

How does this speak to your experience of waiting?

We have to fight them daily, like fleas, those many small worries about the morrow, for they sap our energies. We make mental provisions for the days to come, and everything turns out differently, quite differently. Sufficient unto the day. The things that have to be done must be done, and for the rest we must not allow ourselves to become infested with thousands of petty fears and worries, so many motions of no confidence in God....Ultimately we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others....

- Etty Hillesum, a reflection on Matt. 6:34, "do not worry about tomorrow." as Hitler was taking over her native Holland and oppressing her fellow Jews. She chose to live a nonanxious and generous life, appreciating beauty and friendships, living in the present.

How does this speak to your experience of trying to live in the present?

Are you a habitual "waiter?" How much of your life do you spend waiting? What I call "small-scale waiting" is waiting in line at the post office, in a traffic jam, at the airport, or waiting for someone to arrive, to finish work, and so on. "Large-scale waiting" is waiting for the next vacation, for a better job, for the children to grow up, for a truly meaningful relationship, for success, to make money, to be important, to become enlightened. It is not uncommon for people to spend their whole life waiting to start living.

- Eckhart Tolle

How does this speak to your experience of living in the present?

British author and spiritual director Margaret Silf tells of visiting a dying friend and his wife over a period of nine months. She recalls being lifted and inspired by this couple's attention to small things:

My friend would invariably say, "Let's tell Margaret about the things that have been really good during this week." And I would sit and listen as they recounted a story of someone who had visited and brought them a piece of news or a new insight or perspective on the world, or maybe one of them had been reading something that moved him or her.

Nearly every week I left with a book they had lent me or a poem or an article they had photocopied for me to read. Perhaps they would have received a letter. Or maybe a new flower had come out in the garden. Or they had spotted a visiting bird. Often the good thing of that week was a flash of memory that one of them had experienced or a dream that had left them feeling calm or at peace or simply an act of kindness – a neighbor had called, a son or daughter had phoned, the nurse had been gentle, the mailman had told a joke....

How does this speak to you about being grateful for the small things in your life?

Reflections on Waiting

To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So is to trust that something will happen to us that is far beyond our own imaginings. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life, trusting that God molds us according to God's love and not according to our fear. —Henri Nouwen

...Waiting as a disciple of Jesus is not an empty waiting....We are always waiting, but it is waiting in the conviction that we have already seen God's footsteps. It is waiting with a promise in our hearts that makes already present what we are waiting for. How do we wait for God? We wait with patience. But patience does not mean passivity. Waiting patiently is not like waiting for the bus to come, the rain to stop or the sun to rise. It is an active waiting in which we live the present moment to the full in order to find there the signs of the One we are waiting for. The word patience comes from the Latin verb *patior* which means "to suffer." Waiting patiently is suffering through the present moment, tasting it to the full and letting the seeds sown in the ground on which we stand grow into strong plants. Waiting patiently always means paying attention to what is happening right before our eyes and seeing there the first rays of God's glorious coming. —Nouwen

May my life be landscaped with righteousness,
an Eden of obedience to you,
lush and full of fruit.

Help me to wait well, Lord,
And to live well.

May it be the best waiting I ever do,
hopeful, patient, and full of joy.

And may it be the best living I ever do,
purposeful, peaceful, and pure.

—Eugene Peterson in a commentary on II Peter in *The Message*

Dr. Seuss in *Oh, the Places You'll Go* dedicates a two page spread to the dreaded "Waiting Place:"

...for people just waiting.

Waiting for a train to go

Or a bus to come, or the plane to go

Or the mail to come, or the rain to go

Or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow

Or waiting around for a Yes or No

Or waiting for their hair to grow

Everyone is just waiting .

From *The Circle of Life*, by Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr:

“When I refuse to wait with the mystery of the unknown, when I struggle to keep control rather than to let life evolve, wrap me (as) in the darkening days of autumn and encourage me to wait patiently for clarity and vision as I live with uncertainty and insecurity.” (pg 175-6)

“Blessed are you autumn,
season of surrender,
you teach us the wisdom of letting go
as you draw us into new ways of living.
Blessed are you autumn
season of unpredictability.
You inspire us to be flexible
to learn from our shifting moods.
Blessed are you autumn,
feast of thanksgiving,
you change our hearts into fountains of gratitude
as we receive your gracious gifts.” (pg 183)

“It is in the art of letting go that you truly come to life. Like all great art, this surrender is the work of a lifetime. It requires diligent, faithful practice crowned with trust... I understand your longing for permanence. It challenges me, too, when the leaves first begin to fall from the trees. There is a strong pull in all of life for security and stability. It is not easy to be strongly invested in life and yet remain unattached to it....Held in infinitely compassionate hands, you are being led into the territory of unknowing. Surrender! Trust that grace is carrying you.” (Autumn Speaks, pg 33-4)

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Waiting on God

Andrew Murray

"WAIT THOU ONLY UPON GOD"

*My soul, wait thou only upon God.—Psalm 62:5.
A God . . . who worketh for him that waiteth for
him.—Isaiah 64:4 (A.S.V.).*

WAIT ONLY UPON GOD"; my soul, be still,
And let thy God unfold His perfect will,
Thou fain would'st follow Him throughout this year,
Thou fain with listening heart His voice would'st hear,
Thou fain would'st be a passive instrument
Possessed by God, and ever Spirit-sent
Upon His service sweet—then be thou still,
For only thus can He in thee fulfill
His heart's desire. Oh, hinder not His hand
From fashioning the vessel He hath planned.
"Be silent unto God," and thou shalt know
The quiet, holy calm He doth bestow
On those who wait on Him; so shalt thou bear
His presence, and His life and light e'en where
The night is darkest, and thine earthly days
Shall show His love, and sound His glorious praise.
And He will work with hand unfettered, free,
His high and holy purposes through thee.
First on thee must that hand of power be turned,
Till in His love's strong fire thy dross is burned,
And thou come forth a vessel for thy Lord,
So frail and empty, yet, since He hath poured
Into thine emptiness His life, His love,
Henceforth through thee the power of God shall move
And He will work for thee. Stand still and see
The victories thy God will gain for thee;
So silent, yet so irresistible,
Thy God shall do the thing impossible.
Oh, question not henceforth what thou canst do;
Thou canst do *nothing*. But He will carry through
The work where human energy had failed
Where all thy best endeavors had availed
Thee nothing. Then, my soul, wait and be still;
Thy God shall work for thee His perfect will.
If thou wilt take no less, *His best* shall be
Thy portion now and through eternity.

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