



SPEAK

LESSON TWO: PRAISE IN THE WAITING - JOHN 11:1-45

TAMI GLASER

Have you ever waited patiently for an answer to a prayer? Perhaps you have prayed for a relationship to be restored, a spouse or child to return to you, or for a family member to accept Christ. While you are waiting to receive your answer have you ever wondered if God heard you? Do you wonder if He is listening or if He cares about what you care about? Do you find your confidence, or your faith, shaken the longer you wait? Sometimes, I have wondered if God and I are looking at the same playbook. I have jokingly told others I would not mind having a sneak peek at God's playbook to see what He is thinking. In all honesty, waiting is hard for most people and sometimes it leads you to wonder if God is too busy or if He is listening at all. I think it would be safe to say we have all wondered this from time to time.

Scripture tells us to rest in the knowledge that the Lord hears our prayers. In fact, the psalmist wrote in Psalm 17:6, "I have called upon You, for You will answer me, O God; Incline Your ear to me, hear my speech." The Bible also tells us He answers our prayers in a way that is for our good and for His glory. Scripture reminds us that our prayers are answered in His time, not ours. God's answers may be an immediate yes, no, or not now. His answer may also come days, weeks, months, or even years later. I recall a time when God's answer to my prayer was not now. It was a 16 year long not now answer. In October of 1996, my husband was offered a fantastic opportunity in Wisconsin. We were excited about the promise of this new position, and we daydreamed what our next five years in Wisconsin would be like. We believed that God was going to move mightily in our lives and that we were being obedient to His will. We prayed, we daydreamed, we went house shopping, and we packed with excitement about what God was going to do in our lives, with a brand-new baby girl and a 6-year-old son.

A few weeks later, Wisconsin welcomed us with snowy open arms that cold November day we arrived. While the climate is harsh, the Midwesterners we met were warm-hearted and welcomed our young family. We quickly settled into life in a midwestern town, found a church, and made friends. While we were grateful for the warmth and acceptance of the Midwesterners of Wisconsin, we privately counted the days, weeks, and years we had marked in our minds until we returned home to Texas. Our plan was the position my husband accepted was a stepping-stone in his career and we planned to return to Texas in time for our newborn baby girl to begin Kindergarten and our 6-year-old son to begin Middle School. We often told anyone who asked that we were planning to stay in Wisconsin for five years before returning to our home state of Texas. Five winters in Wisconsin would be hard, but totally doable, and the stories we could tell our friends would be full-out stares and "Oh, my goodness; you are kidding?!" But God had a much different timeline for our return.

As time drew closer to the five-year line we had drawn in the sand of our minds, a catastrophic event occurred in our country on September 11, 2001. As a result, jobs in the financial market dried up and became almost non-existent. The positions that were still available were located primarily in the northeastern part of the country, which was a giant step too far east and north from where we were pointing our compass needle. The positions we were relying on in the Lone Star state just seemed

to evaporate under that hot Texas sun, and they either disappeared or were being called back to the parent companies located in the northeast. In essence, our well dried up and we had nothing left to do but wait for the rain to return. And pray for rain we did. We prayed day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. Before we knew it that newborn baby girl we had moved to Wisconsin at 6 weeks old was in kindergarten, but we kept praying for rain. We marked another milestone when our son started middle school, and we kept praying for rain. A few years later our daughter started middle school and our son graduated from high school, and we continued praying for rain.

I admit there were many times I cried out to the Lord and reminded Him we had an agreement in place, a five-year-long agreement, and we were ready to move back home - N.O.W., and yet our well remained dry. We prayed, we searched, we reexamined our lives to see if we could find any area that we needed to place under Christ, and there was no sign of a rain cloud anywhere in sight. We were perplexed. We were confused. We felt sure He had forgotten our agreement and if I am being honest, I wondered if He had forgotten us. It was unbearable for me to think God wanted us to remain in Wisconsin... forever, but then. I remember a time when I begged God to help me to change my mind, for Him to remove from me my desire to return to Texas, for Him to change me and help me to accept His will for our lives, and most importantly for Him to help me be at peace with living someplace so far from home. I asked Him to change the shallow roots I had put down in the loamy Wisconsin soil and to form them into a deep tap root to penetrate the limestone Wisconsin is known for. I asked Him to help me accept His will and to find contentment there.

Sixteen years after we moved to Wisconsin, God sent a rain cloud. An opportunity that only He could have orchestrated for us. This rain cloud had been preceded by a frightening season we had just entered. We were being tossed to and fro and we found ourselves holding onto Him and onto each other like we had never done before. Our compass needle was spinning wildly, nothing was making sense, and we once again found ourselves searching the horizon for rain.

Have you ever experienced a time when you have waited for God to answer a prayer only to encounter a period of waiting? If so, you are in good company.

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were close friends of Jesus. Many scholars believe that Jesus often visited and enjoyed a rich friendship with them. Some scholars believe Jesus have gone to their home to rest and replenish from His earthly ministry. When we read about them in John chapter 11, we are assured of the close friendship they shared with each other. But even these close friends had to wait for an answer for a harrowing event that made no sense, left them terrified, and had them searching the sky for rain. We are not told what happened to Lazarus other than he became ill and his sisters, Mary, and Martha, sent an urgent message to Jesus found in John 11:3, *"Lord, the one you love is sick."* When Jesus heard of this news He responded stating, *"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified."* John 11:5-6 gives us further insight into just how confident you could feel believing Lazarus' sickness would not take his life because it is reported, *"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."* I do not know about you, but I would probably be thinking to myself, *"Okay, we got this. It is all going to be okay, my loved one is going to get better. It's all good because, I mean, Jesus says so."* But a few verses later we read in John 11:11 that Jesus said, *"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."* The word asleep in this verse does not refer to an afternoon siesta, it means Lazarus died because verses 14 and 15 tell us, *"So then He told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'"*

Umm... wait, what!? What do you mean by "so that I may believe?"

When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Imagine how upset and confused his sisters must have been. Jesus was their close friend. Some scholars believe they were aware of Jesus' healing of the sick which is why they may have sent word to Him about Lazarus' condition. In response, Jesus told them Lazarus' sickness would not take his life. Additionally, He did not rush back to their house which happened to be only about two miles from where He was staying in Jerusalem. Then Lazarus dies and Jesus says He is glad He missed that event and does not come to His dear friends, Mary and Martha, until four days after Lazarus had been laid to rest. To say they experienced a drought could be an understatement. I wonder if they scanned the horizon looking for a rain cloud only to find none in sight, but a storm was on the way.

When Mary and Martha learned Jesus had arrived, Martha was the only sister who came to greet Him. Scripture does not explain why Mary does not come. I imagine that Mary was too upset and so consumed in her grief that she chose not to come out of the house to meet Him. Have you ever been that upset? I have. I have been so overtaken with grief at times that I could not sleep, eat, get out of my bed, or stop crying. If I had been there I probably would have looked Mary in the eyes and told her, "I get you." But look at Martha's response. Instead of remaining inside, she wastes no time letting Jesus know that she believed if He had been there her brother would not have died. Do you think she came to Him with tears in her eyes, running down her cheeks? Do you envision her voice was a little hard sounding when she spoke or so soft it was barely audible? Were her words spoken between sobs or deep sighs? Regardless of how she delivered her remark, Jesus has a curious response that is recorded in verse 12, "Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'" Martha misunderstands and thinks He is talking about the resurrection that will come on the last day, but that is not what Jesus is referring to. Jesus tells her in verse 25-26, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Just as Jesus asked Martha if she believed, do you believe His promise? Do you believe that accepting Jesus will lead to eternal life? If you are struggling with this, do not sit one more day in your uncertainty. Humble yourself right now and ask Him to help you with whatever obstacle is in your path that is barring you from running into His arms and accepting His gift of eternal life. He will uncover the root and lead you to faith and eternal life.

It was customary during this period in Israel for people to come to the house to provide care to the family. It is recorded that there were many who had stopped by to comfort Lazarus' sisters and consequently became witnesses to a miracle. After Mary composed herself, she came out to meet with Jesus and many of the mourners went with her. When she reached Him, Mary fell at His feet and told him she believed if He had been there her brother would not have died. Jesus notices she and her fellow mourners were weeping and scripture records that He was deeply troubled in His Spirit. He asks where they laid Lazarus and then the shortest sentence in the bible is written in John 11:35, "Jesus wept." Jesus loves us so much that He allowed Himself to feel the paralyzing sadness that we feel when we lose someone we love. He allowed this feeling to come over Him even though He knew He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. Jesus wept. Do you realize that when you go through something He is right there experiencing it with you? When you are dealing with a situation that causes the tears to fall, Jesus is holding you in His arms and comforting you. He is for you, not against you. Allow Him to wipe away your tears, accept His comfort, and permit the Holy Spirit's leading in the situation you are in.

Jesus asks where they laid Lazarus, walks to the grave, and asks the stone to be rolled away. Martha reminds Him that there will be a bad odor, but Jesus says in John 11:40, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" Next, Jesus gave thanks to God publicly so that the people who were about to witness this miracle would come to believe that He was sent from God. Then Jesus called in a loud voice for Lazarus to come out and for them to remove his grave clothes. What an amazing miracle, what an incredible family reunion that must have been, and think of how many of the mourners came to faith after witnessing this miracle that was dependent upon waiting for an answer to prayer. Hallelujah!

YOUR TURN:

What prayers have you lifted to the Lord that you are waiting patiently for an answer to?

Look up the word patience or forbearance in a trusted dictionary or in the back of your bible and write the definition in the space below.

Be honest with yourself and think why it is difficult for you to be patient. Is it that you want an immediate answer? Are you eager to check that box off in your mind? Are you testing God to see if He really hears your prayer and cares about you? Is it some other reason?

Many writers in the bible have had seasons of patient waiting. Remember that in Romans 8:28 He promises, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." And Proverbs 3:5-6 promises us that if we, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." God tells us when we are going through times requiring patience in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God." Jeremiah 29:11 records, "For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." In other words, we are called to pray, wait, and trust God. He will see us through whatever circumstance we are in.

Reread John chapter 11. Explain in your own words what was happening in this situation.
What were Mary and Martha's expectations of Jesus?

What action did Jesus take?

How do you think they felt about this? What evidence did you read?

What was the purpose of Jesus' actions regarding Lazarus' illness and subsequent death?

If you had been a bystander or friend trying to comfort the sisters, what would your reaction be after witnessing this miracle?

Read the following passages and note who is involved, the situation they are dealing with, and the action they took.

Genesis 29:20

1 Samuel 1:1-28

1 Samuel 13:8-14

Psalm 37:7-9

Luke 15:11-24

Hebrews 11:13-16