

Introduction: We were reminded recently that the LORD is always busy in times of quiet, (and even, I might add, in times of disappointed silence) preparing us for the rigors of future acts of faith. As we grow older, we learn that it is of the essence of faith to wait on the LORD. For example, we looked at the quiet spirit of trust in Isaiah 26:3, where a focus on the LORD results in an increased experience of His peace, as we “wait” upon Him (Isa 26:7-8). Such waiting on God is especially tied to His ongoing revelation of who He is in our lives, so that we learn to apply our knowledge of His character into our most difficult struggles and trials. Yes, to be sure – as we look back at some of our most memorable times of affliction and disappointment, we appreciate with thankfulness the lessons God taught *us about ourselves* at such times. *But most of all, it is what we learn of Him and His character that is to stick with us.* Times of silence, waiting, preparation and even difficulty are God’s theater to reveal Himself to us! May we learn this lesson and may this week’s notes help us in this important, growing realization that *it is not the particular kind of trouble in which we find ourselves that matters – but the character of the God who reveals Himself to us in those trials!*

Monday: read Genesis 15:1-6 & 17:1-7. We often learn from the lives of believers that the LORD reveals Himself most clearly precisely in those times when *they* might be tempted to ask, “What on earth are you doing?” Despite appearances to the contrary, it is when the clouds are obscuring His face that we, like they, are to renew our confidence that God is up to something in our lives.

For example, years had passed for Abram with no birth of the covenant heir of promise (Genesis 15:1-6). But the LORD gave Abram justifying faith so that He could believe that one day, His descendants by faith would be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5-6).

Alas, many more years passed, so that in Genesis 16, Abram gave up waiting for the LORD’s promised child, instead producing a carnal substitute when he was eighty-six years old – see Genesis 16:15-16. Thirteen years after this disaster, God finally appears to Abram to announce in Genesis 17:16 that his barren wife Sarah will indeed have the child first promised years before. What a lot of waiting! But you see, such waiting by faith is endurable and to be expected in the Christian life – Why? Because the LORD is sufficient to be our reward and the source of our joy – *even when He has not yet given us all we desire and hope for!*

Meditate and Pray: Sing about God being your portion, using hymn # 676:

1 Day by day and with each passing
moment,
strength I find to meet my trials here;
trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
gives unto each day what he deems best—
lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
mingling toil with peace and rest.

2 Every day, the Lord himself is near me
with a special mercy for each hour;
all my cares he fain would bear, and cheer
me,
he whose name is Counselor and Pow’r.
The protection of his child and treasure
is a charge that on himself he laid:
“As your days, your strength shall be in
measure,”
this the pledge to me he made.

3 Help me then in every tribulation
so to trust your promises, O Lord,
that I lose not faith's sweet consolation
offered me within your holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
e'er to take, as from a father's hand,
one by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
till I reach the promised land.

Tuesday: read Ruth 1:1-22. Naomi, alas, is a believer full of contradictions, as are God's people generally in these "days of the Judges" (Ruth 1:1). For example, Naomi confesses that she has returned to Bethlehem "empty" in Ruth 1:21, even though Ruth is standing at her side! Naomi's life was connected in Ruth to one whose faith was vibrant and whose usefulness in God's plan will be critical! Just look again at Ruth 1:16-18. Has there ever been a stronger determination by faith to follow the LORD than expressed in Ruth's words? Yet Naomi underestimates the blessing of the seed of faith in Ruth. In her own eyes, her life is "empty" and Ruth seems at times to be a non-factor in her mother-in-law's estimate of her life.

In just the same way, the women of Bethlehem mention only Naomi – no notice is taken of the Moabitess at all – even though by the end of the book we shall see that the whole purpose of the book of Ruth is to highlight that the Child of Promise, great David's greater Son, will come into this world, humanly speaking, through Ruth!

Meditate and Pray: How easily we neglect the great things which God *is* doing in this world – all because we are not content with what He is doing in our lives. We fail to notice the light of Christ shining through a lowly person like Ruth – instead focusing on the bitter testimony of folks like Naomi.

Wednesday: read Ruth 1:16-17. We cannot move on in the book of Ruth until we savor something more of the beautiful profession of faith which Ruth utters to Naomi. These two verses are probably the most famous verses in the whole book. Look at how Paul Miller, in his book on Ruth, entitled, A Loving Life, formats these two verses:

*For where you go I will go,
And where you lodge I will lodge.*

*Your people shall be my people,
And your God my God.*

*Where you die I will die,
And there will I be buried.*

The classic Hebrew form of parallelism cannot be missed here. This pattern not only gives a poetic beauty and emphasis to Ruth's words, but also makes clear that *Ruth herself* is a firm believer in Jehovah. She insists that, *even after Naomi dies*, she will stay in communion with the God of Israel, and will not return to Moab's idols, like her sister-in-law Orpah did in Ruth 1:15.

In life and death, the Spirit of God has claimed Ruth's allegiance as one set apart for a life of faith and a secure death as a forgiven and saved sinner. Moreover, Naomi shows that she recognizes Ruth's real faith – by differentiating between Orpah and *her gods* compared to Ruth and *her faith* in the one true God in Ruth 1:15.

Meditate and Pray: Sing about the whole-hearted commitment, which is always a hall-mark of the Spirit's regenerating work in sinners – making them whole-hearted followers of Christ, using the following hymn # 565:

1 All for Jesus! All for Jesus!

All my being's ransomed pow'rs:

all my thoughts and words and doings,

all my days and all my hours.

2 Let my hands perform his bidding,

let my feet run in his ways;

let my eyes see Jesus only,

let my lips speak forth his praise.

3 Worldlings prize their gems of beauty,

cling to gilded toys of dust,

boast of wealth and fame and pleasure;

only Jesus will I trust.

4 Since my eyes were fixed on Jesus,

I've lost sight of all beside;

so enchained my spirit's vision,

looking at the Crucified.

5 O what wonder! how amazing!

Jesus, glorious King of kings,

deigns to call me his beloved,

lets me rest beneath His wings.

Thurs/Fri: read Ruth 1:19-22 & Exodus 6:2-9. If the LORD made Abraham learn to trust in His character through a long wait for the son of promise, Naomi learned of God's character after she had lost her two sons and her husband. As she says to her neighbors and relatives upon returning to her home in Bethlehem after tragic years spent in Moab, *Don't call me "pleasant" anymore (the root meaning of the name Naomi), but call me "Mara" which means bitter.* Why? Because, as she says emphatically in Ruth 1:21, *Full I went to Moab, but EMPTY the LORD brought me back ... the Almighty has brought calamity on me. Why, then, call me Naomi?*

Harsh language, isn't it? But note especially that she uses a name for God which highlights His great power: "Almighty," that is, the God whose mighty will and deeds cannot be resisted. This name is used in the Old Testament over forty times, with the majority of those uses in the book of Job, where, for example, Job comments on the mystery of God's harsh providences:

"For the arrows of the **Almighty** are in me; my spirit drinks their poison; the terrors of God are arrayed against me." (Job 6:4)

(Also, in Job, even those who desire no saving knowledge of God, still confess He is Almighty):

"What is the **Almighty**, that we should serve him?"

And what profit do we get if we pray to him?" (Job 21:15)

But, now, look at how Job longs for access to this Almighty, awesome God, in Job 13:3:

“But I would speak to the **Almighty**,
and I desire to argue my case with God.”

How wonderful, that the believing soul in Job, longs for intimate communion with *the very same God whom he acknowledges to be responsible for his suffering!* This is surely a test of the true believer – that they will continue crying out to God for help, even when His providence appears to be frowning upon them.

Meditate and Pray: Here is the hymn that speaks about our trust in the LORD, even when our lives are bitter (# 128):

1 God moves in a mysterious way
his wonders to perform;
he plants his footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.

2 Deep in unfathomable mines
of never-failing skill
he treasures up his bright designs,
and works his sovereign will.

3 Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds ye so much dread
are big with mercy, and shall break
in blessings on your head.

4 Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
but trust him for his grace;
behind a frowning providence
he hides a smiling face.

5 His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding ev'ry hour;
the bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flow'r.

6 Blind unbelief is sure to err,
and scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
and he will make it plain.

Sat/Sun: read Ruth 1:22 & Deuteronomy 30:1-11. As Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem, the writer of chapter one wants us to understand that this is a *spiritual* return and not just geographical. About twelve times the precious verb, “to return” is used. It refers often throughout Scripture to the grace of repentance by which God’s people return to Him after their errant years of sin. For example, Moses promises His people that, even in the midst of exile to a foreign land, if they will turn (our same verb from Ruth 1) to the LORD with all their hearts and souls, He will forgive, restore and even rejoice over them!

Meditate and Pray: What a God we have, a pardoning God, who does not have to be prodded to draw near to us with fresh offers of grace! Sing about this grace in hymn #

1 Great God of wonders! all thy ways
are matchless, godlike and divine;
but the fair glories of thy grace
more godlike and unrivaled shine,
more godlike and unrivaled shine.

Refrain:

**Who is a pard'ning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
Or who has grace so rich and free?**

2 In wonder lost, with trembling joy
we take the pardon of our God;
pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
a pardon bought with Jesus' blood,
a pardon bought with Jesus' blood.
[Refrain]

