

Purpose in the Pause

A Canaanite woman . . . [cried] out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!” . . . Jesus did not answer a word (Matthew 15:22-23).

Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Song: “Trusting Jesus”

I submitted a workshop proposal to teach women how to create a culture of encouragement in their churches. I assumed the conference director would be as enthusiastic as I was and answer within a few days. But weeks passed without a reply, so I assumed the answer was no. Then an email popped up—she had said yes!

The Canaanite woman’s plea was urgent. Her daughter was suffering, and as a mother, she suffered too. She came to Jesus, knowing He was her only hope for healing. But Jesus didn’t answer her right away. As He remained silent, the disciples assumed He was irritated (maybe because *they* were), and they suggested that Jesus send her away.

When God doesn’t answer our prayers right away, it’s easy for us to interpret the silence with our own assumptions—thoughts like *Jesus doesn’t care* or *God can’t help with this situation* or *His answer must be no*. Though we may not know why God waits, we can be confident that His timing is right and that He is working to show us more about ourselves and about Him.

Father, I know You are good. I’ll wait trustfully, even as I cry out to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 6–12. **Rebecca Stuhlmiller** helps people take practical steps to grow deeper in their love for Jesus and wider in loving service to Him. She and her husband, Jeff, live in Federal Way, Washington.

No Price Too High

Jesus answered [the man], “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor. . . . Then come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

Scripture: Matthew 19:13-22

Song: “I Will Say ‘Yes’ to Jesus”

In the classic musical film *Oliver!*, characters Nancy, Bet, and Oliver challenge one another’s devotion in the song “I’d Do Anything.” Would they fight the meanest man in town? Yes! Travel to the ends of the earth? Yes! Look silly by wearing a flower or painting their faces blue? Yes! Nothing seemed too much to ask, but in the end, would they really do *anything* for their friends?

A man came to Jesus, confident he had done what was needed to get into Heaven, but then Jesus told him to go a step further. To be complete and mature, the man needed to give up his worldly wealth and give it away to the poor. Because the man was rich, he found Jesus’ challenge too much to ask. Money was where the man found security and identity, and he was unwilling to lay it down to make Jesus his first priority.

I have hope that this man changed his mind later when he realized that holding on to his wealth was too costly in comparison to the deep satisfaction that comes from following Jesus wholeheartedly. Even when we’re followers of Christ, sometimes God asks us to give up something important to us, and we have a choice to make. Will we say yes to His request?

Father, I want to say yes to You and always have You be my first priority. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Consider the Source

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).

Scripture: Proverbs 1:7-16

Song: “The Fear of the Lord”

At conferences for writers, industry professionals teach people how to publish their works. And to the groans and laughter of attendees, they also share stories about what *not* to do:

“Please don’t ignore our writer’s guidelines.”

“Please don’t say God told you I’d publish your book.”

“Please, oh please, don’t follow me into the restroom and slip your manuscript under the stall door. Yes, it happens!”

Year after year the experts give this kind of instruction—because year after year people ignore what they say. Aspiring writers may assume they know better than the ones providing direction, or they may believe their situation is unique. But wise attendees choose to listen instead of deciding for themselves what’s right, and these most often experience the joy of seeing their writing get published.

The wise king Solomon tells us that the starting place for true wisdom is respecting God as the ultimate authority—as the one who has complete knowledge and understanding. When we trust God as the source of all truth, it follows that we’ll seek Him through prayer and study of His Word. In these ways, we will reap the benefits and blessings of wisdom.

Father, out of reverence for You, I will listen and not disregard what You say. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Make a Note of It

Be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live (Deuteronomy 4:9).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:7-14

Song: “Remember to Remember”

My dad created scrapbooks for each of his children. On the pages he affixed our class pictures, report cards, Sunday school certificates, awards, and newspaper clippings. Then he wrote a short caption next to each item. The treasured album now helps me remember important moments I might have otherwise forgotten.

God told the Israelites to make a record of all He had done for them. When they moved into their new land, they would need to remember their God and who He called them to be. Moses emphasized the people’s need to be intentional in recalling what God had done—and then to pass this history on to their children and grandchildren. Otherwise their memories would fade, and generations to come would forget about God.

I haven’t made simple scrapbooks for my own kids. I was waiting till I had time to decorate them with fancy stickers and follow a theme. Sometimes we make keeping track overcomplicated like that, but we don’t need to design an elaborate system for remembering. Now I keep track of God’s work in my life by simply writing things down in a calendar notebook so I have something I can easily refer to and tell others about.

Father, help us keep a record of the wondrous things You’ve done for us, as a reminder to ourselves and for future generations! In Jesus’ name, amen.

Speaking in the Lord's Service

The LORD said to [Jeremiah], . . . “You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you” (Jeremiah 1:7).

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:1-10

Song: “Take My Life, and Let It Be”

I dreaded giving Sunday-morning announcements. While I was comfortable speaking in formal settings when I had time to prayerfully study and prepare, this rattling off a list of informational items was nerve-racking. Finally, I asked God to show me how to make those five minutes up front not so difficult. “Lord, help me!” I implored.

After that prayer my thoughts began to be attuned to what I was actually doing and saying. And I realized that as I welcomed visitors and people who were praying about whether to make our church their new home, as I shared opportunities for people to get involved and experience the joy of using their gifts to serve, I was helping set the tone for the worship service. My voice drew people into the sanctuary and, in that sense, toward the Lord.

When Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, his role was to serve as God's mouthpiece. His only requirement was to be a willing vessel to speak God's message. When God provides opportunities for us to speak in service to Him—whether in formal or informal settings—we can consider it an honor. May we always be willing to respond gladly to Him.

Father, thank You for the opportunities You provide for me to speak in service to You. It isn't always easy, but I'll rely on You for the help I need. In Jesus' name, amen.

Watch Out for “Mission Creep”

“It is written,” [Jesus] said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers’” (Matthew 21:13).

Scripture: Matthew 21:12-17

Song: “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations”

The invasion of kudzu started innocently enough. In the late nineteenth century, seeds were imported from Japan, and although intended for use as an ornamental vine, kudzu was marketed as shade for porches and courtyards in the southern US. But with the vine’s ability to grow up to a foot per day, it becomes a noxious weed when left unattended. Over the years different methods had been used unsuccessfully to try controlling kudzu. (It turns out that unleashing a few hungry goats on it can destroy about an acre a day, clearing the way for native vegetation.)

Money changers and merchandisers were using the temple in Jerusalem to further their own agendas. Jesus demolished what they’d set up, restoring the temple to its original purpose. The people rejoiced, but the teachers and leaders protested, so Jesus backed up His actions by telling them to remember what the Scriptures say.

While a creeping vine can be a costly nuisance, a creeping mission can be spiritually disastrous. The Father’s original mission for the church (Matthew 28:18-20) can become quietly sidelined by personal preferences, pet projects, or even noble causes. Programs and events have their place, but not if they fail to fulfill our scriptural mandate to make disciples.

Father, we want to remember what You desire the church to be. Help us stay in Your Word so we can stay on mission. In Jesus’ name, amen.

In Means “Out,” Up Means “Down”

The disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” [Jesus] called a little child to him (Matthew 18:1-2).

Scripture: Matthew 18:1-9; Mark 10:15

Song: “Humble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord”

Have you ever played the Opposites game? Young children giggle with glee when they’re told to yell as loud as they can, but of course they’re expected to whisper. They’re challenged to wiggle around like a puppy but actually should stay as still as a statue. The game is a great way to pass time on a long road trip with kids in the car.

As the disciples anticipated Jesus’ answer to their question about who is greatest in God’s kingdom, I wonder if they were leaning in, jockeying for position, trying to elbow out those standing next to them, each one hoping to hear his name called. Jesus certainly must have blown their hopes and expectations out of the water when He did the opposite of what they expected: He called a child into their midst.

Jesus’ definition of *greatness* unhinges all our human presumptions about what it means to be great. Instead of looking for importance, power, and prestige, we are called by God to be child-like—which demonstrates that He values the posture of our hearts rather than any of our strengths, abilities, or accomplishments. What is esteemed by the world is often the opposite of what God values.

Father, thank You that we don’t need to look to the world and its values to define *greatness*, because we can look to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.