

Waiting or Fretting?

This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place” (Jeremiah 29:10).

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:8-14

Song: “Wait on the Lord”

I love persimmons. The sweet, juicy fruit grew on wild trees near my childhood home, ripening in early autumn. The soft succulence was better than candy. I was so eager to enjoy the fruit that I sometimes sampled persimmons before they were ready. An unripe persimmon is bitter and very sour. My mouth still puckers when I recall my efforts to hurry the harvest.

Years later, I’m still not good at waiting, especially in my impatient prayer life. God’s promise to Jeremiah reminds me to temper my anxious spirit. God’s Word to the Jews heading into exile is a long-term assurance. Their promised homecoming wouldn’t be fulfilled for 70 years! Many of the believers who received that prophecy died long before it came true.

God operates on His own timetable. The seasons of nature and the seasons of life unfold on God’s schedule, not ours. God provides harvests, fulfills promises, establishes justice, and answers prayers, but we cannot hurry God’s pace. God will not be rushed, so we must learn to wait on the Lord. If our choice is to live either by faith or frustration, let’s choose faith!

Father, give me faith that You will always do what is right, and You will do it at the right time. In Jesus’ name, amen.

February 12–18. **Michael Brewer** lives in Kentucky, where he spoils his granddaughters, preaches frequently, and teaches college courses in Christian theology.

A Friend in High Places

All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:16-17).

Scripture: Colossians 1:13-20

Song: “Let All Things Now Living”

My thoughts whirled as the Christian astronomer lectured on the size of the universe. Our sun is one star among hundreds of billions in the Milky Way galaxy, stars separated by trillions of miles. There are billions of other galaxies beyond our Milky Way, and those numbers only reflect what our telescopes can see. In short, God’s creation is immense beyond human comprehension.

Even more staggering than these scientific calculations is the spiritual truth revealed in today’s reading. Those numberless galaxies were created through Christ and for Christ. In God’s Son, the whole universe is held together! The binding force of the creation is not gravity, but grace. From the lowliest sparrow to the most far-flung galaxy, Christ rules over all. My mind boggles and my heart throbs with praise at the inexpressible greatness of my Savior.

Yes, He is my Savior and the Redeemer of all who accept His grace. The one who shepherds the constellations is our Good Shepherd. The one who calls the stars by name has called us to be His children. The Son of God holds the universe in His nail-scarred, almighty hands. Those hands also hold each one who calls on His name. How could we be any safer or our salvation more secure?

Father, I thank You that no power in heaven or on earth can snatch me from the hand of my Savior. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Work in Progress

He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

Scripture: Philippians 1:3-11

Song: “Take My Life, and Let It Be”

My life is littered with unfinished projects: the tin whistle I never learned to play, the neglected beginner piano book, a copy of *Moby Dick* permanently bookmarked at page 174. Don't even mention the fitness equipment in the basement. I'm good at starting things, not so good at following through.

What a comfort that God doesn't lose interest in, get distracted from, or abandon His plans for you and me. We will not end up gathering dust on a back shelf in God's workshop or, worse yet, be pitched into the scrap heap. As surely as God has begun a good work in us by the grace of Christ, He will certainly fulfill His purpose in us. Our creator is also our completer.

Spiritual progress in our lives sometimes feels like two steps forward and one step back. Even so, we need not doubt that God is at work in us, smoothing edges, teaching lessons, and shaping us into the likeness of Christ. God won't quit until we have become all that He intends. Since God refuses to give up on us, let's not give up on God. It will be worth it when we see His finished project!

Father, give me confidence that You will finish every good thing You have begun in me so that I may someday stand before You complete in Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Tending the Garden

The creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God (Romans 8:21).

Scripture: Romans 8:19-28

Song: “This Is My Father’s World”

Bible study has complicated my grocery shopping. Now I choose to look for labels proclaiming “cruelty-free” and “certified humane.” At the supermarket, I’m trying to take seriously what the Bible reveals about God’s care for His creation (Deuteronomy 25:4; Psalm 104; Matthew 10:29).

Paul tells the Christians in Rome that God’s great redemption involves not only the rescue of human beings but also the liberation of the whole creation. We have God’s permission to use the world (Psalm 8), but surely that doesn’t include abusing it or its creatures (Proverbs 12:10). Figuring out how to take better care of God’s creation challenges me. I’m not ready to give up hamburgers, but I care about how animals are treated. I want to make personal choices that protect land and plant life. I wonder how I can help make the oceans healthier.

Learning to delight in God’s handiwork is probably a step in the right direction. Maybe the real challenge is learning to love what God loves, not only our human neighbors but also cedar trees, lightning bugs, and those pesky moles in the yard. I’m talking about love that nurtures and heals. That kind of love is bound to make a better world for us and our grandchildren to the glory of God.

Father, the beauty of Your love is all around me. Give me eyes to cherish that beauty and a heart to share that love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

An Unscheduled Appointment

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps (Proverbs 16:9).

Scripture: Proverbs 16:1-9

Song: “Guide My Feet, Lord”

I had set aside a day for pastoral visits but without success. A nursing home resident was visiting his doctor. A patient was out of the room for tests. One woman was traveling, and another was quarantined. Tired and frustrated, I pushed on to one final hospital contact on my list. After hiking across the broiling parking lot, I discovered that the patient I had come to see had been released an hour earlier.

Feeling utterly defeated, I turned from the desk and spotted a familiar face across the lobby. She was the wife of a local minister. Her husband, a colleague I knew well, was in surgery. I could see she was alone and scared. When I offered to sit with her, she almost wept with relief. I stayed until her husband was stable.

That morning, I had made careful plans that came to nothing. But in the afternoon, God led me to the most important meeting of my day. Without my knowledge, God had brought me to the right place at the right time. I still make plans, but I'm more relaxed these days. When my schedule goes awry and I seem to be spinning my wheels, I take a deep breath and watch for whatever God might have in mind. I'm no longer surprised when God has a better plan than mine.

Father, I think I know where I'm going today, but if You have something better in mind, I'm ready! In Jesus' name, amen.

A Plywood God

[The wicked man] sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet (Habakkuk 1:16).

Scripture: Habakkuk 1:5-17

Song: “All Creatures of Our God and King”

In a museum exhibit of movie memorabilia, I spotted a golden idol. The prop was a relic from the 1956 film *The Ten Commandments*. One memorable scene in the movie depicts the Israelites dancing and worshipping before a golden calf made by Aaron. On screen, the idol is impressive. In person, it is disappointing, a shoddy plywood construction gilded with paint. Clearly, it was cobbled together to last only long enough for filming, a shabby image, hollow and rough-edged.

Old Testament writers often mocked the idols of other nations, and Habakkuk joins that chorus. He charges the Babylonians with worshipping their own fishing nets. Since the nets provided a livelihood, the fishermen offered sacrifices to their fishing gear. Such foolishness is not confined to ancient times. Things we are tempted to idolize are worthwhile in their own right—health, family, financial security, national pride—but a closer look reveals that these things cannot save us.

We can be thankful for our blessings, but we must remember that it is God who sends those blessings. We can be grateful for the creation, but only the Creator deserves our worship. In the end, false gods always fall short. Idols, no matter how cherished, will not sustain us through turmoil and sorrow. Only the one true God can sustain and save us. After the plywood has buckled and the nets have tangled, the living God remains.

Father, give me the wisdom to love You above every created thing. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let Your Light Shine

[God said,] “The righteous person will live by his faithfulness” (Habakkuk 2:4).

Scripture: Habakkuk 2:1-5

Song: “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”

After John Clifton failed to convince city leaders to install streetlights in colonial Philadelphia, he took matters into his own hands. He hung a bright lamp in front of his home. The light, situated at an intersection, drew considerable attention. Neighbors followed suit, hanging lamps outside their homes. Eventually, the city council was won over.

Clifton started with a belief (or faith)—the conviction that lights would benefit his city. Then that faith spilled over into action, what we might call faithfulness. To apply a popular expression, it was easy to “talk the talk” about streetlights. It took more effort to “walk the walk,” to hang a lamp and lead by example. Habakkuk reminds us that God calls us to both a believing faith and a doing faith.

Faith within encourages us to live faithfully on the outside. In turn, that outward faithfulness brightens the world and points toward the Savior we serve. I find that to be a helpful way to think about my Christianity: inward faith that leads to outward faithfulness. I wear a small cross inside my shirt. When it falls into the open, someone will say, “Oh, you’re a Christian!” That’s fine with me, but I’m praying for the day someone will tell me, “I already knew you were a Christian. I can tell by the way you live.”

Father, help me be faithful to You today in everything I say and everything I do. In Jesus’ name, amen.