

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Advent Week 3: Joy in the Midst of Waiting

If there is one universal experience we all have in common, that we can all relate to, it's the experience of waiting. "Waiting...it's my favorite!"...said NO ONE, EVER. But perhaps we need to rethink our attitude toward waiting. We tend to think of waiting as delayed satisfaction/fulfilment. But from God's vantage point and purposes, waiting can very likely be an opportunity for preparation and growth. From a spiritual formation stand point, what we want to ask ourselves is: What's more important to me...whatever it is I'm waiting for, or being transformed into the likeness of Jesus? The reality is growth and transformation is not a painless process. But it is good and necessary, so for that we can be thankful when we find ourselves in situations or seasons of waiting.

- Q. Describe something you've waited for recently...or perhaps something you're currently waiting for. (Describe the various thoughts/feelings you experienced while waiting.)
- Q. Have you experienced a significant season of waiting? Explain (Again, describe the various thoughts/feelings you experienced during that time.)
- Q. How have you been formed, or experienced growth, by waiting? What do you think God may have wanted to teach you? (About yourself, about Himself, about life.)
- Q. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being high) how joyful are you? Explain.
- Q. How has your trust in God's goodness been tested?
- Q. How has a desire for instant gratification affected you? Give an example or two.

Times of waiting are both testing and forming. It can allow us to get a helpful gauge as to how well we truly believe God is good, powerful, and present. We were introduced to a concept in the sermon of joy being an act of defiance. Additionally, learning to welcome and embrace moments or seasons of waiting can also be an act of defiance.

Q, What do you think of that? How can you/we lean into that?

Times of waiting also allow us (if we let it) to ask ourselves what it is we truly want more than anything else. Do we want whatever it is we are waiting for? Or do we want God and what He wants for us? Do we want God to change our circumstances or do we want to experience God in the midst of our circumstances? This brings to mind Paul and Silas in jail in Philippi as we read in Acts 16. They had been "severely flogged" and put in stocks. But while in jail they prayed and sang hymns, which we could say were expressions of joy. What were they praying for? If it were me, I'd be praying that God would get me out of this situation. But when the opportunity arose for them to escape they didn't, which tells us that they weren't praying and waiting for that. Apparently, they wanted (and were waiting for) something bigger, deeper, more important. As we read how the situation played out, they had their eyes on God's glory and

purposes more than their situation. Since that's what they wanted, and nothing can hinder that, they had reason to be joyful.

Times of waiting also allow us the opportunity to submit our wills to His. I assume anyone reading this understands, at least in principle, that submitting our wills to God's is part of the Christian life. But the question becomes, do we submit joyfully or begrudgingly? The world we live in elevates self-will, and the fulfilling of it, was the ultimate goal and prize. To submit and surrender our wills, joyfully and willingly, to another is an act of defiance against the "god of this age" and an act of worship to the One True God.