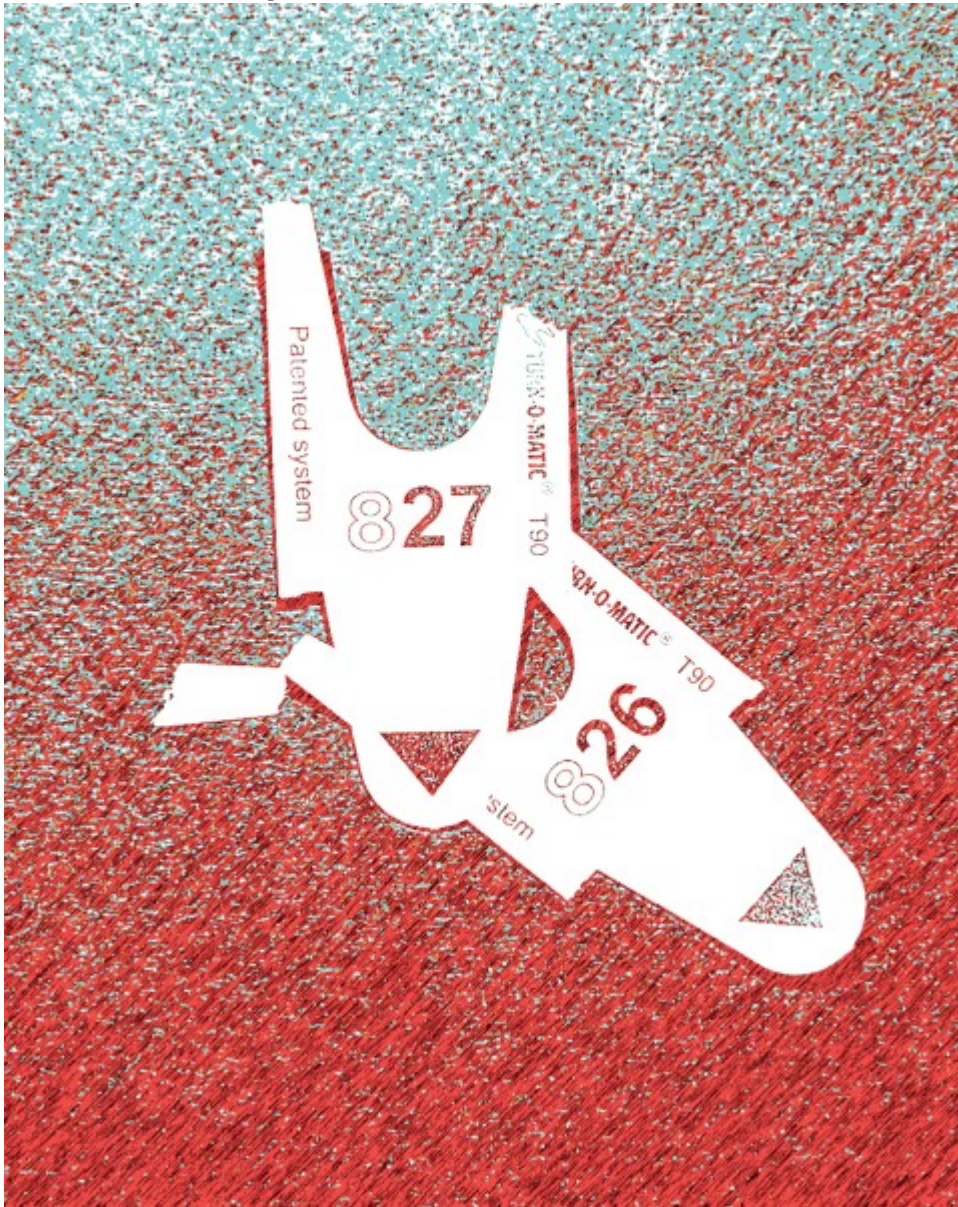


The spirituality of waiting

If God is present in the planting and the harvest, then God is present in the time when nothing seems to be happening.

by [Yolanda Pierce](#) in the [August 2024](#) issue

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(Century illustration)

The bag of microwave popcorn was taking too long. In the span of 20 seconds, I checked on it twice, wondering why I wasn't hearing the reassuring pop of the first kernels. And although it was barely a minute between when I put the bag in the microwave and when I took it out to shake the steaming popcorn into a bowl, it felt like forever. Disappointed in my own impatience, I thought my primary transgression was that I had gone too long between meals, so that all too familiar combination of hunger and anger had me shaking my metaphorical fists at a kitchen appliance. But with time and reflection, I realized that the real issue was the frustration I was feeling in this season of waiting on God.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that those who wait for God will renew their strength. It's a passage filled with incredibly uplifting promises: the faint will be given power; the powerless will be strengthened; you will be able to run and not grow weary, to walk and not faint (40:28-31). These are the exact promises I needed to hear after the end of a long semester, a long season, and a long year.

Yet there was that one pesky word at the beginning of the promises: *wait*.

As people of faith, we are between time people. We live in the tension between the already and the not yet, between the now and the is to come. We live in the tension between the command to wait and the fulfillment of what we have been promised. We have so many blessed assurances, promises in which we are confident, and yet it feels as if we spend a lot of time waiting on God to answer our prayers, hear our concerns, and meet our needs.

We wait for the next vocational assignment. We wait for the next financial blessing. We wait for one door to be opened and other doors to be closed. We wait for healing. We wait for reassurance that our labor has not been in vain. We wait for some sign that we are on the right path. We wait for hope to emerge in dry and weary places. We wait to feel seen and heard, to know that we are loved with an everlasting love.

We live in the tension of the between time, this liminal space. We live in the certainty of God's justice yet waiting to see it prevail; in the assurance that the last will be first and the meek will inherit the earth yet also in a present reality in which the powers and principalities threaten to overwhelm our hope. The work is already finished, and victory can be proclaimed! At the same time, there is much that is left undone, and time is filled with swift transition. Both statements are true in this liminal space, this threshold area, this waiting room, this between time in which God

dwells.

If God is present in the seed that is being planted and in the harvest that is yielded, then God is also present during the time when it doesn't look like much is happening at all. God is present in the soil doing its work beneath the surface, that duration of time when our human eyes fail to perceive anything happening. If God is present in the rising of the sun and the going down of the same, then God is also present in the darkness, in those moments when we wrestle with the evidence of things not seen. In this between time, we rest in the knowledge that God never fails. A harvest will come, and the sun will surely rise again.

Waiting on God is an active process. As we wait for God's divine justice, we can work to love our neighbors as ourselves. As we wait to hear from God, we can labor to do that which is required of us: caring for the widowed, the orphaned, the stranger, the unhoused, the least, the lost, and the lonely. As we wait for God's mercy, we can extend as much grace to others as God has so lovingly extended to us. As we wait for the new heaven and the new earth, we can act as the hands and feet of God. And as we wait to feel the fullness of God's love for us, to feel affirmed and comforted, we can speak life to all the dry bones that surround us.

As I finally settled in with my microwave popcorn, it occurred to me that as much as I think I am waiting on God, as much as I struggle with this between time of my prayer and God's answer, perhaps God is also waiting on me. What if God is lovingly, patiently, and tenderly waiting for me? For my active surrender, my acknowledgment that God is God and I am not? For me to admit the limits of my human understanding and simply trust and obey? Maybe the between time is about not just God's work but also my own: the work that I must do to be ready to receive the instructions, the next assignment, the blessings, or the answers.

Waiting is hard. The between time feels interminable. The is to come seems far away. And also, at the very same time, God's promises are true and will come to pass. We walk in the promise that those who hope and wait in God will renew their strength.