

How do the five stages of grief compare to your own experience of waiting, and which stage do you find yourself in most often during difficult times?

The son wanted his inheritance early, essentially telling his father he was dead to him. In what ways do we sometimes treat God the same way by demanding things on our timeline?

When you look back at situations that brought you into a season of waiting, what patterns do you notice in how you responded to God during those times?

The sermon mentions we often bargain with God saying things like if you do this, then I will do that. What bargains have you tried to make with God, and why do you think we struggle to trust Him without conditions?

The father was watching the horizon waiting for his son to return. How does this image change your understanding of how God views you during your times of wandering or waiting?

During difficult waiting periods, people often choose either to grow closer to God or walk away from Him. What factors influence which direction someone takes, and what helps you choose to move toward God?

The son rehearsed his apology and planned to ask to be a servant, but the father restored him fully without questions. Where in your life do you need to accept God's complete restoration instead of settling for less?

The sermon states that God wants to walk through our mess with us, not after we clean ourselves up. Why is it so hard to invite God into our messiest moments rather than waiting until things improve?

Looking at the five reminders from scripture about waiting, which one do you most need to hold onto in your current season and why?

The key question posed was are you willing to let God in during your waiting. What specific barriers or fears keep you from fully inviting God into your times of uncertainty?

Small Group Guide: The Waiting Room - Week 3

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with prayer, asking God to speak to each person and help them be honest about where they are in their waiting.

Icebreaker Question

Share a time when waiting for something turned out differently than you expected—either better or worse.

Sermon Summary

This week we concluded "The Waiting Room" series by examining the Prodigal Son story through the lens of waiting. We explored four stages people experience during times of waiting:

1. **The Situation** - The event that puts us in waiting
2. **Looking Back** - Asking "what if" questions
3. **Bargaining** - Making deals with God
4. **Restoration** - God meeting us where we are

The key message: God wants to walk through our mess with us. He doesn't require us to clean up before coming to Him—He meets us in the middle of our junk.

Key Scripture

Luke 15:11-24 - The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Supporting Verses:

- Habakkuk 2:3 - God's plan is on time
- Isaiah 41:10 - God is holding us up
- Psalm 37:7 - God is with us in the waiting
- Psalm 30:5 - Joy is coming

- Romans 8:28 - God wants to use our stories
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Discussion Questions

Understanding the Message

1. Which "wild living" TV character description resonated most with you and why? (Consider sharing which generation you're from!)
2. The sermon outlined four stages of waiting: Situation, Looking Back, Bargaining, and Restoration. Which stage do you find yourself in most often when facing difficult times?
3. What stood out to you most about how the father responded to his son's return? How does this challenge or confirm your view of God?

Personal Reflection

4. The pastor mentioned that the son never remembered his own place in his father's house—only how well the servants were treated. Why do you think we sometimes minimize the blessings we've had when we're in difficult situations?
5. Share about a time when you found yourself "bargaining with God." What were you asking for? How did God respond?
6. The sermon stated: "It's during this moment we decide. Are we going to grow closer to God or turn away from Him?" Have you faced this decision? What helped you choose to move toward God rather than away?

Going Deeper

7. The pastor said, "If the son doesn't choose to come back, this is a totally different story." What does this teach us about God's respect for our free will, even when we're making poor choices?
8. Read the five stages of grief mentioned in the sermon (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance). How are these similar to what we experience in waiting? How are they different?
9. "God restores us and doesn't ask questions." How does this truth challenge the way you approach God when you've messed up?

Application

10. The closing challenge was: "Are you willing to let God in? Are you willing to allow Him to sit with you in the waiting?" What would it practically look like for you to let God into your current waiting situation?
11. Which of the five verses shared at the end speaks most to your current situation? Why?

- Habakkuk 2:3 - God's plan is on time
 - Isaiah 41:10 - God is holding us up
 - Psalm 37:7 - God is with us in the waiting
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Key Takeaways

✓ We all enter seasons of waiting through different situations—job loss, health issues, relationship struggles, or uncertainty about the future.

✓ Looking back and asking "what if" is natural, but we can't change the past—we can only choose how we move forward.

✓ Bargaining with God is different from asking Him for clarity. It's okay to ask for understanding; it's not okay to try to manipulate God.

✓ God doesn't wait for us to clean up our mess before welcoming us back. He runs to meet us while we're still far off.

✓ The choice to turn toward God or away from Him during waiting seasons determines whether we grow in faith or walk away from it.

✓ God wants to use our stories—even the messy, painful ones—for His purposes.

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Choose one of the following to practice this week:

Option 1: Stop Bargaining, Start Trusting

- Write down any "if/then" statements you've been saying to God
- Rewrite them as honest prayers that acknowledge your fears but express trust in God's character
- Example: Change "God, if you heal this, then I'll trust you" to "God, I'm afraid of what might happen, but I'm choosing to trust that you're good no matter the outcome"

Option 2: Invite God Into Your Mess

- Identify one area where you've been keeping God at arm's length
- Each day this week, spend 5 minutes honestly talking to God about this situation—no cleaning up, no pretending, just raw honesty
- Journal what you sense God might be saying to you

Option 3: Remember and Celebrate

- Like the father who prepared a feast for his returning son, take time to remember how God has restored you in the past
- Write down 3-5 times God has been faithful during your waiting
- Share one of these stories with someone this week as an encouragement

Option 4: Support Someone Else in Waiting

- Think of someone you know who is in a season of waiting
- Reach out to them this week—don't try to fix their situation, just sit with them in it
- Remind them of one of the five truths from the sermon verses

Group Prayer Focus

Share prayer requests related to:

- Current situations that have you in "the waiting room"
- Areas where you're struggling to trust God's timing
- Relationships that need restoration
- Strength to resist walking away from God during difficulty

Pray specifically for:

- Faith to trust God in the unknown
- Eyes to see where God is working even in the waiting
- Courage to invite God into the messy parts of life
- Grace to extend to ourselves and others during difficult seasons

Before Next Week

1. **Read through Luke 15 in its entirety** (all three parables—lost sheep, lost coin, prodigal son)
2. **Memorize one of the five verses** shared at the end of the sermon
3. **Journal about your current "waiting room"** and where you see God in it
4. **Practice inviting God into one difficult situation** each day

Closing Thought

"God is asking us to trust Him, to put our faith into Him, to trust no matter what happens, no matter what the outcome is, I'm still going to trust the Father."

The question isn't whether God will be with you in the waiting—He promises He will. The question is: **Will you let Him in?**

Leader Notes

- **Be sensitive:** Some group members may be in very painful waiting seasons. Create space for honest emotion without rushing to "fix" anything.
- **Share your own story:** As the leader, be willing to share about a time you struggled in the waiting or bargained with God.
- **Don't force sharing:** Some people may not be ready to talk about their situation. That's okay—let the Holy Spirit work.
- **Follow up:** Check in with group members during the week, especially those who shared about difficult waiting seasons.
- **Celebrate testimonies:** If someone shares how God has restored them or shown up in their waiting, take time to celebrate and thank God together.

5-Day Devotional: Finding God in the Waiting

Day 1: When the Situation Happens

Reading: Luke 15:11-16

Devotional: The prodigal son's situation began with poor choices that led to desperate circumstances. Perhaps you're facing a situation today—a job loss, health crisis, or unexpected hardship. Like the son feeding pigs and longing for their food, you may feel you've hit rock bottom. Remember, every waiting room experience begins with a situation, but that situation doesn't define God's presence. He doesn't wait for you to clean up your mess before He meets you. God sees you right where you are, in the midst of the difficulty. The question isn't whether God is present, but whether you're willing to acknowledge Him there. Your situation may be the starting point, but it's not the ending. God is already preparing your restoration.

Day 2: Looking Back Without Regret

Reading: Philippians 3:12-14

Devotional: When the prodigal son "came to his senses," he looked back—but not to wallow in regret. He remembered his father's goodness. We often replay our "what if" statements: "If only I had done this differently..." While reflection has value, God doesn't want you stuck in the past. Paul writes about forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead. Yes, examine what brought you to this waiting room, but don't set up permanent residence in yesterday's mistakes. God uses our hindsight to develop wisdom, not to paralyze us with guilt. The servants in the father's house weren't special—they simply stayed connected to the father. Your past doesn't disqualify you; it positions you to appreciate God's grace even more.

Day 3: The Bargaining Heart

Reading: Judges 6:36-40

Devotional: Gideon placed fleeces before God, seeking confirmation. The prodigal son rehearsed his bargaining speech: "Make me like one of your hired servants." We've all been there—"God, if You do this, then I'll do that." While asking God for clarity is biblical, bargaining reveals our struggle to trust. We want to control outcomes, to know the plan before we surrender. But faith means trusting God without the full blueprint. Notice that Gideon's fleeces came before his obedience, yet God graciously answered. Your bargaining doesn't offend God; it reveals your humanity. But don't let negotiation replace trust. God isn't looking for your perfect performance in exchange for His blessing. He's inviting you to rest in His character, knowing He's good whether or not He meets your conditions.

Day 4: The Father Who Waits and Watches

Reading: Psalm 37:3-7

Devotional: "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him." The father was watching, waiting, studying the horizon. This reveals something profound: God isn't surprised by your return. He's been waiting for you to come back to Him. The father didn't wait for the son to arrive, clean himself up, and present his rehearsed speech. He ran—undignified, passionate, full of compassion. This is your heavenly Father. He sees you from a distance, knows your struggle, and runs toward you. "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him," the psalmist writes. But remember—while you wait on God, He's also watching for you, ready to restore what's been lost. Your waiting isn't passive abandonment; it's active anticipation of a Father who never stopped looking for you.

Day 5: Restoration Without Questions

Reading: Romans 8:28-39

Devotional: The father didn't interrogate his son. No "Where have you been?" or "How could you?" He immediately called for the robe, ring, and sandals—full restoration to sonship. This is the heart of the gospel. God doesn't restore you partially or conditionally. When you turn to Him, He doesn't make you earn your way back or serve probation as a "hired hand." He places His robe of righteousness on you, His ring of authority on your finger, His shoes on your feet. Romans 8 declares nothing can separate you from God's love. Not your situation, not your looking back, not your bargaining, not even your waiting. God is working all things—even the painful waiting room experiences—for your good. The question isn't whether God will restore you. It's whether you'll let Him. Will you accept full restoration, or settle for being a servant when He's calling you His child?

Reflection Questions for the Week:

- What situation has brought you into a season of waiting?
- What "what if" statements do you need to release to God?
- In what ways are you trying to bargain with God instead of trusting Him?
- How does knowing God is watching and waiting for you change your perspective?
- Are you ready to accept God's full restoration, or are you settling for less than He offers?