



July 17, 2024

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

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IN THE MEANTIME . . .

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
(Psalm 13:1-2)

I'm sure you've had those "How-long?" experiences. The earliest one I can remember is when the family dentist was drilling my first cavity. The Psalmist wrote about "pain in my soul" and "sorrow in my heart," but a drill grinding in a nine-year-old boy's mouth can be a lot worse. It probably lasted about thirty seconds, but it seemed like forever. How looooooong?

The "How-long?" theme is very prominent in the Bible. The phrase occurs about 75 times. In some passages it refers to God's righteous impatience with unrepentant humans (Numbers 14:11-19, Mark 9:19), but usually it expresses the kind of human impatience I described above.

As life goes on, my "How-long?" moments have been deeper and more profound. Sometimes I've wondered if I could endure, but, by God's grace, I always have. What's more, I've always grown through the waiting. So I've tried to develop a "*meantime strategy*."

You see, a lot of my life has been lived "*in the meantime*" --- between significant events, either positive or negative. It's in the meantime that God tends to do his major work in my life. If I were to write my own biography, I would focus on major dramatic high points and low points. I'd skip the meantimes of my life because no one would find them interesting. But God seems to.

So, I've asked, How can I use those meantimes more constructively so that I can partner with God in what he's trying to accomplish in my life? One place I've put this into practice is in dealing with sleepless nights. Thankfully, I've been blessed with the ability to lay down and fall into a good night's sleep. But there are those other nights --- usually triggered by either a weird bedtime snack or an unresolved interpersonal issue --- when I wake up and can't doze off again. I keep trying new sleeping positions, thinking about happy experiences I've had, even counting sheep; but nothing works. I try to avoid looking at the clock, but an accidental peek reveals that my sleepless "How-long?" has lasted two hours. . . and counting.

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July 17, 2024

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One night I tried an experiment: what if I treated this tedious meantime as *quality time* God has provided for me to think new thoughts about some subject that comes to my mind? During the next few minutes, hours --- who knows? --- I developed an idea and outline for an *ABC Messenger* article. The next thing I knew it was morning. I had fallen asleep while doing my creative thinking and slept soundly. Amazingly, I also remembered the *ABC Messenger* ideas and quickly wrote them down. Since then, when I've had trouble sleeping, I try to remember to tell myself, "OK, this meantime is creative time! Thank you, Lord."

Based on these experiences, I have developed a personal version of a familiar Bible passage:

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face "How-long?" experiences, consider it all joy, because you know that the "in-the-meantime" testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance complete its work, so that you may be complete and whole, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

I wish I could talk to that nine-year-old kid in the dentist's chair!

Pastor George Van Alstine