

October 17, 2020 WholeLife Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2800  
N Orange Ave Orlando, FL 32804 Genesis 39:20-23 While We  
Wait: Joseph by Andy McDonald

While none of us likes to wait, there are circumstances that make waiting worse.

It must be a little easier to wait if you know how long the wait will be. I think this is why there are signs posted at the entrance to rides at the amusement park of the estimated wait time. Of course Disney manages huge crowds historically and have discovered that people have a more enjoyable wait if there are interesting things to see and hear while they wait, and hence the whole “pre-show” experience.

I remember taking our kids to Sea World and being very hot and miserable and waiting for Clyde and Seamore Show. But then when were almost miserable enough to leave the Mime would show up and as we were entertained and mesmerized by his antics the waiting was made tolerable, even enjoyable.

Going to the dentist, no offense to those in the dental profession, is one of my least enjoyed adventures. So knowing the torture that is coming sitting in the waiting room is a place of mixed emotions: On one hand I just want to get it over with, and on the other hope some event of some kind calls them all away and we have to reschedule.

Do you remember waiting for Christmas? It was especially tedious when you had asked for a particular gift and you were pretty sure it was under the tree, and yet it was still a couple of weeks away.

And then there's also the surprise gift you've gotten someone for a birthday, anniversary, or Christmas. You save your money, searched and found just the perfect gift, and it's almost harder to wait for them to experience their surprise than it is to wait for your own gifts.

Relational waiting can be down right painful. I remember when one of my best friends in high school and college got cross wise with me over something. To this day I don't know what it was. But for several months we just didn't talk to each other. It was a bad wait until one day we just reconnected as if nothing happened and are good friends to this day.

Sometimes in families there are misunderstandings. Each side sort of waits for the other to be the first to say "I'm sorry." And while the relationship is wounded it is heavy waiting. And when someone finally says "I'm sorry," WOW there is this incredible lightness that comes in contrast to the heavy waiting.

Families are great places to learn waiting. One of the most valuable lessons mom's and dad's have to teach their children is the waiting of delayed gratification learning to not go for immediate benefit but instead a greater benefit that comes after waiting.

We've all been one or seen one, the spoiled child who pretty much gets what they want when they want it! Waiting, a delayed gratification learning just seem to be missing.

When those of you who grew up with the Bible stories, as soon as you hear the name Joseph, you almost naturally say and the coat of many colors. For those more into modern musical theater you may think Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber.

In my mind I must get the story of Hannah making little Samuel a new robe each year and Jacob making his special multicolor robe for Joseph. Because I've always thought of Joseph getting this coat at like 9 or 10. Truth is when Joseph is introduced to us in scripture he's a young man 17 years old.

He's sort of a goody goody spoiled child. When he finds out his older brothers have done something that would displease their father

he just can't hold back, can't sit on the information even to use it at some opportune moment. No, he's a rush to judgment tattler.

The whole family system knows Joseph is Israel's favorite of his sons. It is only human to have preferences. But nothing good comes when parents reveal their preferences by too much favor or too much discipline.

Joseph may have been a tattler to his dad seeking to contribute to their bond and draw them together, but the effect on his brothers was just the opposite, it pushed them away.

In that day and culture the rules about inheritance and first born sons was a big deal. Who got the blessing. And of course Israel whose name use to be Jacob had had that whole birthright and blessing thing with his brother Esau. So Joseph's brothers were fearful that their dad, might skip birth order and since Joseph was the oldest son from his favorite wife, Rachael, maybe dad was lining up the birthright and blessing for Joseph.

The older brothers would take the herds of animals to some distant grazing place, a little always on the move looking for good pasture and might be gone for even a couple of months. This time they had been gone long enough for Israel to be concerned. So he sends Joseph to go check on them and bring him word of their whereabouts.

When he finally locates them they see Joseph coming and no warm feelings stir in their brotherly hearts. Instead they say here he comes in his fancy coat. Probably has some for insulting dreams to share with us. Let's be done with him, let's kill him and throw him into one of these dry cisterns and report to dad that some ferocious animal must have devoured him. Then we'll see what comes of his dreams.

Ruben doesn't want to hurt his dad so he suggests instead of having blood on their hands just throw him into this cistern, he will die in time. (He planned to come get him out and send him home.) So that's what they did they threw him in the cistern and as they sat down to eat they noticed an Ishmaelite caravan headed to Egypt. They pull Joseph up, sell him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver. They take his special robe, rip it up, dip it in some animal blood, and take it to their dad to identify and the ruse is complete.

Joseph arrives in Egypt, is sold to Potiphar, and soon he is running the place, caring for all of Potiphar's entire house hold.

Every morning he wakes up in a nice place, with much freedom and responsibility. He decides each day to be a contribution. To make the world better for being there. Maybe in time he can barter for his freedom and return to his family in the meantime he will wait.

Here's the lesson for today about what we can do while we wait. Joseph is waiting with no clarity about ever seeing his dad and brothers again. So what does Joseph do while he waits?

He decides that everyday he will get up and be a contribution to Potiphar's home, to his affairs, to all that Potiphar has put under his oversight.

Being a slave is bad, but his position is about as good as it gets for a slave. Everything of Potiphar's has been entrusted to Joseph, that is everything except his wife. And when Joseph refuses to dishonor God by having an immoral relationship her, she accuses him of the very thing he refuses to do, and Joseph is thrown in prison where the king's prisoners are kept.

There is little doubt that if Potiphar had fully believed the story he would simply have had his slave put to death, but no he's sent to the king's prison.

If you've ever done any prison ministry you will hear from many of the inmates the fact that they either aren't guilty period, or aren't as guilty as that for which they are incarcerated.

I can't imagine being in prison, suffering the punishment the sentence for having messed up in some way. Serving time matching the infraction would be rough period.

But Joseph being in prison, charged and convicted and sentenced, for something for which he was not guilty makes the waiting for the time of sentence to go by much worse.

And while too many prisoners claim to be innocent, the sad reality is that some are innocent.

You may or may not have heard of the Innocent Project. It was founded in 1992 by Peter Neufeld and Barry Scheck at Cardozo School of Law and it works to exonerate the wrongly convicted through DNA testing and to reform the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice.

They work on cases like Albert Woodfox who was kept in Solitary Confinement, most of in Angola Prison, for the longest record of 43 years.

February 19, 2016 his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday, he packed his belongings in a garbage bag and walked out of the prison to freedom. He had done some things that deserved a short jail time, he was no saint, but was innocent of that which kept him in solitary confinement for 43 years. For the first 5 he never went outside. He has written his story in a book titled Solitary Unbroken by four decades in solitary confinement. My story of transformation and hope.

What would you do while you wait to be exonerated, while you wait for freedom, day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade 43 years! Listen to Albert's words:

“Every day you start over. You look for the humanity in each individual.

I made my bed every morning. I cleaned the cell. I had my own cleanup rag I used to wipe down the walls. When they passed out a broom and mop I swept and mopped the floor of my cell. I worked out at least an hour every morning in my cell.

By the time I was 40 I saw how I had transformed my cell, which was supposed to be a confined space of destruction and punishment, into something positive. I used that space to educate myself, I used that space to build strong moral character, I used that space to develop principles and a code of conduct, I used that space for everything other than what my captors intended it to be.

In my forties, I saw how I’d developed a moral compass that was unbreakable, a strong sense of what was right or wrong, even when other people didn’t feel it. I saw it. I felt it. I tasted it. If something didn’t feel right, then no threat, no amount of pressure could make me do it. I knew that my life was the result of a conscious choice I made every minute of the day. A choice to make myself better. A choice to make things better for others. I made a choice not to break. I made a choice to change my environment.”

I’m sure the stories aren’t wholly dissimilar of the 375 DNA Exonerees achieved by the innocent project. Often where the real perpetrator is then apprehended because now they are looking for them again. Amazing cases like Sunny Jacob and Peter Pringle both served 15 years, each for the accused murder of police officers, both proved innocent by DNA evidence after 15 years in jail. Today they are a 71 and 80 year old couple in Ireland running the Sunny Foundation to help people wrongly incarcerated.

I like to think of what Albert did in the words of Benjamin and Rosamund Zander, he choose to be a contribution. Can you embrace life as a place to contribute and determine, even in periods of waiting to be a contribution?

I think about the mundane reality we all find ourselves in at one time or another of simply waiting in line. We can stress over someone cutting line, we can fume at the inefficiency of those working the counter to which we are headed, we can wish ourselves some other place, we can be as unpleasant as the wait itself, or. . .

Or we can say to ourselves this is my life right now.  
This is the time, this is the place where I can contribute  
I will be a contributor. I'll make a contribution.

And you can catch the eye of child bored out of their gord while their parent waits, and you make up a game to play with them and you can be a contributor.

The person in front of you or behind who needs to go to the restroom you can hold their place in line.

The person who looks overly distraught you can offer to help, and you discover they left their phone in their car and need to make a call and you can hold their place while they go get the phone or lend them yours.

Some of you right now are in what you believe to be impossible relational situations. It's not working as you imagined. I challenge you to temporarily set your wants, your needs, your desires aside and see how you might be a positive contribution to the other person. How can you contribute to healing? How can you contribute to their getting what they want without damaging you?

Some of you are wrestling with yourself. Never cutting yourself any slack. You want perfection maybe just out of yourself but probably

out of others too. But what if while you wait for the second coming when perfection will be a realistic possibility, what if you kicked perfection off your list and replaced it with, I will be or make a contribution! Leave the perfecting to the one who perfects, the one who began a good work in you and who promises to carry it on all the way to completion. In the mean time just be a contribution.

Some of you are in the poor me zone during the Covid time. You've spent way too much focus on how it's been bad for you and what you are missing and in the word of Bob Newhart's famous sketch on counseling, STOP IT! Change your mental gears and determine that you will wake up tomorrow, Sunday morning, and think, "How can I be a contribution to my world today? How can I make this world a better place because I passed this way?"

I think that's what Joseph did at Potiphar's house. I think he did it so well Potiphar didn't have him executed.

What did Joseph do in prison? His focus wasn't self-pity! His focus wasn't figuring out a jail break! Joseph said this is my world. This King's Prison is my canvas where I will paint. This is the best place right now where I can make a contribution. I will spend my life here making a contribution. I'm not in competition with my fellow prisoners! I'm not trying to fix every case. I'm not organizing an overthrow. All I know is that God has given me this day. The past is over the future is not here but today, right now I get to contribute.

Joseph had no idea there would be a baker and butler who would become fellow prisoners with dreams for him to interpret.

Joseph had no idea he'd be #2 in the country just under Pharaoh himself in charge of all of Egypt.

Joseph had no idea he'd marry Asenath and have two boys.



Joseph had no idea his whole family would move to Egypt to fulfill God's prophetic word to his great grandfather Abraham

That was all behind the hidden screen of the future. All he had was this day in prison. This day unjustly accused, unfairly imprisoned, innocent but incarcerated.

So What do we do while we wait? We join Joseph and we commit, even in unfair and unknown times of waiting to being a contribution.



What makes waiting harder for you to endure?

What makes waiting more tolerable for you?

Why do you think that “relational waiting” can be extra painful?

For you, how hard is the delayed gratification kind of waiting?

Who was the “family favorite” and how could you tell?

Were you ever punished for something you didn’t do? How did it feel?

How would you cope if you were in prison but weren’t guilty and had no idea if or when you might get out?

What enables us to willingly to engage in redemptive suffering?

Albert Woodfox served 43 years in solitary confinement for a crime he didn’t commit! He said, “Every day I made a choice to make myself better. A choice to make things better for others.” What can we learn from Albert about what to do while we wait?

How can you commit to being a contribution in every circumstance while we wait?



Join the conversation on Twitter [@wholelifeorl](#) #wlcTAKEAWAYS  
Sermon archives are available at [wholelife.church/sermons](#)  
Weekly podcast is available at [wholelife.church/podcast](#)



What makes waiting harder for you to endure?

What makes waiting more tolerable for you?

Why do you think that “relational waiting” can be extra painful?

For you, how hard is the delayed gratification kind of waiting?

Who was the “family favorite” and how could you tell?

Were you ever punished for something you didn’t do? How did it feel?

How would you cope if you were in prison but weren’t guilty and had no idea if or when you might get out?

What enables us to willingly to engage in redemptive suffering?

Albert Woodfox served 43 years in solitary confinement for a crime he didn’t commit! He said, “Every day I made a choice to make myself better. A choice to make things better for others.” What can we learn from Albert about what to do while we wait?

How can you commit to being a contribution in every circumstance while we wait?



Join the conversation on Twitter [@wholelifeorl](#) #wlcTAKEAWAYS  
Sermon archives are available at [wholelife.church/sermons](#)  
Weekly podcast is available at [wholelife.church/podcast](#)