

Waiting upon the Lord: The Antidote to Uncertainty

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I am very grateful for the opportunity I have to speak with you today. I would like to begin with a scripture in Ecclesiastes 9:11:

The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. [emphasis added]

I ponder this scripture each time I have a conversation with someone who didn't get into the graduate program they applied to, doesn't know what job to take, came home from their mission early, or has had other unexpected experiences. As I listen to their stories, my mind returns to that scripture and the reality that "time and chance happeneth to [us] all."

Today I would like to explore this scripture with you, but I suggest that another way of talking about time and chance is to use the word *uncertainty*.

Uncertainty as a Core Human Experience

Though the sources of your uncertainty will likely differ from mine, I believe this scripture in Ecclesiastes speaks the truth. No one will be immune from uncertainty or from the struggle, questioning, heartache, and pain that may accompany it.

Uncertainty has many faces. It includes questions, doubts, ambiguity, and the discovery that persons (or things) are not quite what we expected. In essence, uncertainty is a reflection of the gap between our desire for the ideal and our experience of reality. The ideal represents how we think things ought to or should be; reality is how things actually are. Though we live our lives in the real world, our dreams and goals are often reflected in ideals. When we experience "a gap between the ideal and the real,"¹ we experience uncertainty.

In some of my research I have studied this gap for women transitioning to parenthood. My colleagues and I have focused our attention on what new mothers thought their ideal work situations would be versus what their real work situations were. We defined work situations broadly, including opportunities to stay home, to combine work and family, or to combine school and family. The majority of the mothers in our sample (more than 70 percent) experienced a gap between what they believed to be ideal and what their actual work and family situation was.² I tell you this to

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exemplify the claim in Ecclesiastes that “chance happeneth to them all.”

Uncertainty Challenges Us

My colleagues and I also discovered that the greater the gap, the higher the likelihood that a mother would experience depression. I think this finding reflects something else about uncertainty: gaps between our ideals and our real circumstances challenge us. When reality hits or when things don’t go as planned, we may struggle.

About two and a half years ago, after many years of hoping another child would come to our family, my husband and I discovered we were pregnant. Even our children had been hoping we would have another baby. They had been praying in family prayer for a new brother or sister, and my son told me he had dreamt of a new baby coming to our family. Because of their prayers, we told our children about the pregnancy right away, thinking it would reaffirm their faith and shore up their testimonies.

Unexpectedly, about ten weeks into the pregnancy, we lost that baby. The pregnancy had felt like such a miraculous gift after so many years of waiting; losing that baby felt like God was taking the gift away.

The loss left me with many unanswered questions and much uncertainty. Loss was not a new experience for me, but somehow this loss shook me to my core. Frankly, I didn’t know if I could hope for another child; I didn’t know if I could trust God the way I had before this loss. I felt like somehow I had failed God—or maybe He had failed me. This was a time of uncertainty. It reflected a gap in my own life between the ideal (a fertile body, a healthy pregnancy, and a healthy baby) and the real (infertility and a miscarriage).

Uncertainty can be painful.

If uncertainty is inevitable and if it can be so challenging, what do we do about it? Elder Robert D. Hales taught:

As we ask these questions, we realize that the purpose of our life on earth is to grow, develop, and be strengthened through our own experiences. How do we

do this? The scriptures give us an answer in one simple phrase: we “wait upon the Lord” [Psalm 123:2].³

I would like to spend the remainder of this address talking with you about how we can put Elder Hales’s insight to use in our own lives by waiting upon the Lord during times of uncertainty.

A Study on Waiting: Four Principles

One of the most beautiful scriptures on waiting upon the Lord is found in Isaiah 40. Listen to these promises:

Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.

He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.

Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.⁴

Because the Lord “fainteth not, neither is weary,” He will be the source of our strength. Notice Isaiah did not say that you will find the Lord right away or that He will answer all of your questions right now. He did promise, however, that as you wait upon the Lord, you will have the capacity to endure life’s uncertainties.

As I have turned to scriptures like this one for answers and have reflected on my own experiences with uncertainty, I have discovered four basic principles that help us wait upon the Lord. I believe this waiting is the antidote for uncertainty.

First, waiting includes actively seeking God. As we seek, we must trust that we will find Him.

Second, waiting includes trying to understand God’s plan for us.

Third, while waiting, we can choose faith and hope.

Fourth, as we struggle in the waiting, we can find reassurance in God’s love for us.

First Principle: We Must Actively Seek God to Find Him

First, we must actively seek God. As we seek Him, we must trust that we will find Him. Here are two scriptures that form the foundation of this principle.

The first is found in Isaiah 8:17: “And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.”

The second is found in Jeremiah 29:13: “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

If we could have a conversation with each other right now, I would want to hear your stories about times when you felt the Lord was hiding and you had to look for Him or times when you felt you searched for Him with all your heart. Usually we talk about searching with our eyes, so I am intrigued by the concept of searching with our heart.

Since we can't have that conversation in this setting, I will share one of my stories with you. My miscarriage was not my first experience with uncertainty. One of my first major bouts with uncertainty began when I was in my early twenties. My husband, Chris, and I were recently married and were hoping to have children. As months passed, and then years passed, we discovered that it would not be easy for us to get pregnant. So we waited. In the waiting, we filled our lives with graduate studies, Church service, and friendships. We had a good life. But our struggle with infertility was deeply painful to me. There was so much uncertainty in that waiting. Would we ever discover why we were unable to have children? Would we finally be able to welcome a child into our family? What should I do with myself while I waited? Work? Get a PhD?

This uncertainty and waiting invited me to regularly turn to God for answers. I was discovering the first principle of waiting upon the Lord: I had to actively seek God in order to find Him. To seek Him, I studied the scriptures. I studied teachings of prophets. I attended ward meetings. I went to the temple. I magnified my calling. I prayed

fervently. Despite my seeking, the answers did not come swiftly.

I remember sitting with my ward in Newark, Delaware, on a day when I felt like the heavens were particularly silent. (Remember that scripture in which Isaiah referred to the Lord hiding His face?) One of our congregational hymns that Sunday was “I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go.” We sang these words:

*But if, by a still, small voice he calls
To paths that I do not know,
I'll answer, dear Lord, with my hand in thine:
I'll go where you want me to go.⁵*

Those lyrics represented my uncertainty—those “paths that I do not know”—and through the other lyrics of that hymn, I began to receive an answer to my prayers. In the midst of my uncertainty and longing to know, I had to put my hand in the Lord's hand. I had to let Him lead me.

As we continued singing the hymn, I received a distinct impression that the Lord wanted me to go deeper into darkness and uncertainty on an unknown journey. I felt impressed that the journey would include further graduate studies, but I also felt that I would not immediately receive the answers I sought about having children. Instead, I had to keep moving forward. I had to keep waiting and seeking. In such darkness, I couldn't seek the Lord with my eyes alone. I had to seek Him with my heart. What a deeply humbling thing it is to wait upon the Lord. Though I did not receive all of the answers I sought, I was finding the Lord, and He was helping me feel His presence in my life.

So I kept moving forward. Later in that same school year I attended the general Young Women meeting. Many of the talks that evening focused on personal revelation. The closing address was given by President Gordon B. Hinckley. This was a significant talk for me. President Hinckley taught:

Find purpose in your life. Choose the things you would like to do, and educate yourselves to be effective in their pursuit. . . . In this day and time, a girl needs

an education. She needs the means and skills by which to earn a living. . . .

Study your options. Pray to the Lord earnestly for direction. Then pursue your course with resolution.

The whole gamut of human endeavor is now open to women. There is not anything that you cannot do if you will set your mind to it. You can include in the dream of the woman you would like to be a picture of one qualified to serve society and make a significant contribution to the world of which she will be a part.⁶

In this message the Lord offered me a vision through His prophet of the kind of future that could be mine. Again, I received no particular answer to my lingering question about when or whether I would have children. My uncertainty was not resolved, nor was my waiting over. Yet I was reminded that “the whole gamut of human endeavor” was open to me. Regardless of whether I became a mother, there could be a work for me to do. I felt a confirmation that continuing my education could help me become “one qualified to serve society and make a significant contribution to the world” around me. President Hinckley was reinforcing the message I had received a few months before while I sang that hymn with my ward members.

In faith, seek the Lord. Put your hand in His, and take this unknown journey together.

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf said it beautifully: “The Savior is ‘not far from every one of us’ [Acts 17:27]. We have His promise that if we seek Him diligently, we will find Him.”⁷

Second Principle: Waiting Includes Trying to Understand God’s Plan for Us

The second principle I have discovered is that waiting upon the Lord includes trying to understand God’s plan for us.

I felt as I listened to that hymn and as I listened to President Hinckley that God had a plan for me. If I continued to faithfully seek Him, things that needed to be revealed to me would be revealed.

Today I want to share that same faith with those of you who are struggling through uncertain times. God has a plan for you. As you seek

Him, He will help you come to know what that plan includes. But as I share my faith with you, I also want to share a few other things about the phrase “God has a plan for you.”

First, the plan God has for you may not match the ideal you have envisioned. In fact, if we take that scripture in Ecclesiastes seriously, it probably won’t match the ideal you have envisioned. But you can have faith that together you and the Lord can create something truly remarkable.

Some of my students this semester shared a blog post with me titled “You’re Not Messing Up God’s Plan for You.” The author taught, “It’s tempting to think that God has some master plan that He’s measuring me against, and if I take one misstep I’ve missed my chance for happiness forever.”⁸

I can relate to that fear. When life doesn’t seem to match the ideals we envision, we may struggle just as this author did, worrying that we don’t measure up or fearing that we are disappointing God.

She continued:

But you know what? As I’ve examined that mindset, I’ve learned that I need a better understanding of God and what the term “His plan for me” means.

I’m learning that God is much less a divine dictator who demands perfect compliance to a predetermined plan for our individual lives and much more a cocreator with us of the kind of lives we want to live.⁹

What a fantastic distinction! God is not a dictator; instead He is a cocreator. His plan includes creating a remarkable life *with us*.

Part of understanding God’s plan for each of us is having the faith to enter into a partnership with Him. We do this by making and keeping covenants. When my eldest daughter, Elena, was baptized, I tried to teach her about how our covenants connect us with Christ by sharing this quote by Elder William R. Bradford: “Be a companion with Christ, and he will draw near unto you and be your best friend. There is no better friend than Christ.”¹⁰

Through our covenants we are bound to Him and He is bound to us. What better friend could

you have than Christ? Together you and He can create a remarkable life.

Second, God's plan for you will not match the plans God has for others. You must come to know what the Lord wants for you personally. President Uchtdorf taught:

We may share the same gene pool, but we are not the same. We have unique spirits. We are influenced in different ways by our experiences. And each of us ends up different as a result.

Rather than attempting to force everyone into a mold of our own making, we can choose to celebrate these differences and appreciate them for adding richness and constant surprises to our lives.¹¹

It takes courage and faith to celebrate and appreciate the beauty of our differences, to give others space to discover their own paths, and to trust that God will help you just like you see Him helping those around you. This may include celebrating the wedding of a friend when you have no marriage prospects on the horizon. It may include being excited for someone who just got into the graduate school of their dreams even though you didn't. I know what it is like to feel forgotten or insecure when others get the things you hoped for, but if you can learn to celebrate and appreciate differences, I believe your heart will be more open to what God has in store for you.

At BYU Women's Conference in 2015, Elder M. Russell Ballard pled:

Each of you must come to know what the Lord wants for you individually, given the choices before you. . . .

Once you know the Lord's will, you can then move forward in faith to fulfill your individual purpose. One sister may be inspired to continue her education and attend medical school, allowing her to have significant impact on her patients and to advance medical research. For another sister, inspiration may lead her to forego a scholarship to a prestigious institution and instead begin a family much earlier than has become common in this generation, allowing her to make a significant and eternal impact on her children now.

Then he posed this question: "Is it possible for two similarly faithful women to receive such different responses to the same basic questions?" He emphatically responded:

Absolutely! What's right for one woman may not be right for another. That's why it is so important that we should not question each other's choices or the inspiration behind them.¹²

What is right for one of you may not be right for another. With this understanding, we can encourage each other, celebrate and appreciate our differences, and move forward in a partnership with the Lord. We need not judge or criticize. Our encouragement and love amid our differences will enhance our capacity to celebrate together. It will also enhance our individual capacity to understand God's plan for us as we create that plan *with Him*.

Third Principle: As We Wait, We Can Choose Faith and Hope

Waiting, seeking, and understanding God's plan for us all require a tremendous amount of faith and hope. But how do we maintain faith and hope when uncertainty has such a strong capacity to make us doubt and fear?

That question leads to my third principle: as we wait upon the Lord, we can choose faith and hope.

To me, the opposite of faith and hope is fear. When I say that we can *choose* faith and hope, I am also implying that we can choose faith and hope over fear.

Some of you may be like me: a little anxious and a little afraid to try new things. When you experience anxiety or fear, it seems innate, not like a choice. In a 2008 devotional Professor Gregory Clark grappled with this tension between faith and fear. He argued that when we wake up every day, we choose to be either faithful or fearful. When we choose faith, we minimize fear. When we choose fear, hope and faith are virtually impossible.

Professor Clark explained:

When I am living in fear, I find change and changing—for the better, at least—almost impossible. It is important to learn how to live in faith rather than in fear because the process of changing for the better is at the very foundation of the Father’s plan for us.

He then asked, “What is the source of fear?” I really like his answer:

I think it is rooted in the assumption . . . that I must solve all my problems and face all my challenges alone, using my own resources. That is frightening, because deep in my heart I know how limited those resources are. . . . Knowing that I am not capable of changing myself or my circumstances for the better, I stand frozen in fear.¹³

Fear comes from the false belief that we are all alone.

What then is the source of faith and hope? Professor Clark said, “Faith is founded upon our memory of divine witnesses and blessings received in the past and upon our hope in divine promises for the future.”¹⁴

When we remember spiritual experiences or blessings the Lord has given us, it is easier to hope for those same things in the future. They remind us that we are not alone. This optimism in Christ’s divinity and this belief that we will continue to be blessed are the very essence of hope and faith. One thing that helps me remember is keeping a record of the spiritual experiences and blessings I have received in my life. On my hardest days I like to pull out that journal and realize just how much the Lord loves me and watches over me.

When I begin to feel afraid, rereading my journal reminds me that it would *not* have been better to lose hope, to stop trying to have children, to stop working toward my PhD, or to stop seeking God despite the heartache and challenges that have been part of my journey. Choosing faith and practicing hope have empowered me to act on God’s will—which includes embracing uncertainty and enduring beyond what I thought I could endure.¹⁵

Fourth: If We Feel Lost as We Wait, We Can Find Reassurance in God’s Love for Us

After my miscarriage, I discovered a painting by Brian Kershisnik. It is titled *She Will Find What Is Lost*. This painting has come to represent my fourth principle: if we feel lost as we wait, we can find reassurance in God’s love for us.

Sometimes amid the waiting, and despite our best efforts, we may find ourselves feeling lost. I told you about my experiences with infertility, my resulting questions about my purpose in life, and my struggle following one of my miscarriages. What I didn’t tell you is that after that miscarriage, aside from losing a child I had longed for, I began to lose myself. I felt distant from God; I sought Him but felt I couldn’t find Him. I struggled to find a sense of meaning or a sense of direction in my life. It took a considerable amount of waiting and struggling to choose hope, but I worked at it.

About a year and a half after that miscarriage, I discovered I was pregnant again. My anxiety about losing this baby was high. Despite my excitement about a new pregnancy, I began again to feel lost. One day while at work, that lost feeling was intense. I knelt down in my office in the Joseph F. Smith Building, and I prayed fervently that God would be with me in my waiting. It was a prayer full of faith and longing. In faith, I asked God to be with me in my waiting. I really longed for Him to confirm to me that my baby would be healthy. But while praying, I knew that I had to pray for something else: I had to pray that whatever happened to this baby in this pregnancy, God would be with me, that He would help me manage whatever pain, sorrow, or loss could happen. I had to pray for this because, though losing a baby is not ideal, the possibility was real. That was a humbling experience.

After that fervent prayer I stood up and tried to return to my regular routine. Part of my routine that day included walking down to the Richards Building to meet my daughter after her ballroom dance practice. As I walked down the steps and into the building, the most remarkable thing happened. It stopped me in my tracks. I felt a tingling from the top of my head to the tip of my toes. It

was truly electric. In my mind and in my heart I knew God was fully aware of me. He understood how lost and afraid I felt. He was with me then and would continue to be with me however long I needed Him. That was a rare but needed gift for me in that moment.

The title of Brian Kershnik's painting returned to my mind again: *She Will Find What Is Lost*. God was helping me find what was lost. I was not alone.

Sadly, I did have another miscarriage. But this time I did not lose that powerful, sustaining witness of God's love for me. When we feel lost, we can find reassurance in God's love for us.

Previously I suggested that a core principle of waiting is that we have to seek the Lord in order to find Him. My experience has taught me that there is an interesting paradox amid that truth: sometimes, when we are lost, He will also find us.

This paradox may be best reflected in the parable of the lost sheep.¹⁶ President Uchtdorf taught about this parable. He said:

Is it possible that the Savior's message was that God is fully aware of those who are lost—and that He will find them, that He will reach out to them, and that He will rescue them? . . .

Our Savior, the Good Shepherd, . . .

. . . knows when you are lost, and He knows where you are. He knows your grief. Your silent pleadings. Your fears. Your tears. . . .

. . . You are His child. And . . . He loves His children.¹⁷

In My Waiting

In closing, I would like to share one more message regarding uncertainty. Sister Neill F. Marriott taught:

*Scripture says, "Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good" [D&C 90:24]. This doesn't mean all things are good, but for the meek and faithful, things—both positive and negative—work **together** for good, and the timing is the Lord's. We wait on Him, sometimes like Job in his suffering, knowing that God "maketh sore,*

and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole" [Job 5:18]. A meek heart accepts the trial and the waiting for that time of healing and wholeness to come.¹⁸

I am still waiting. In my waiting I have sought God and found Him. His plan for me is unfolding as I take His hand and accept the invitation to become a cocreator with Him. I am trying to choose hope and faith. Sometimes, when I am lost, He finds me.

Despite life's uncertainties, I pray that you will also seek Him, that you will strive to understand His plan for you, and that you will choose faith and hope. As you do these things, I hope you will receive heavenly reassurance. He knows you. He loves you. I testify that following these principles has helped me face uncertainty. I believe they can help you too. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, amen.

Notes

1. Bruce C. Hafen, "Faith Is Not Blind," BYU–Hawaii devotional address, 24 January 2017; see also Bruce C. Hafen, "Love Is Not Blind: Some Thoughts for College Students on Faith and Ambiguity," BYU devotional address, 9 January 1979.

2. See Erin Kramer Holmes, Jenet Jacob Erickson, and E. Jeffrey Hill, "Doing What She Thinks Is Best: Maternal Psychological Wellbeing and Attaining Desired Work Situations," *Human Relations* 65, no. 4 (April 2012): 501–22.

3. Robert D. Hales, "Waiting upon the Lord: Thy Will Be Done," *Ensign*, November 2011.

4. Isaiah 40:28–31.

5. "I'll Go Where You Want Me to Go," *Hymns*, 2002, no. 270.

6. Gordon B. Hinckley, "How Can I Become the Woman of Whom I Dream?" *Ensign*, May 2001.

7. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "What Is Truth?" CES devotional address, 13 January 2013.

8. Ariel Szuch, "You're Not Messing Up God's Plan for You," LDS.org blog, 22 February 2017, lds.org/blog/youre-not-messing-up-gods-plan-for-you.

9. Szuch, “You’re Not Messing Up.”
10. William R. Bradford, “Are We Following Christ’s Pattern?” *Ensign*, May 1976.
11. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “In Praise of Those Who Save,” *Ensign*, May 2016.
12. M. Russell Ballard, “Women of Dedication, Faith, Determination, and Action,” BYU Women’s Conference address, 1 May 2015.
13. Gregory Clark, “Some Lessons on Faith and Fear,” BYU devotional address, 6 May 2008.
14. Clark, “Some Lessons.”
15. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Fourth Floor, Last Door,” *Ensign*, November 2016.
16. See Luke 15:3–7.
17. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “He Will Place You on His Shoulders and Carry You Home,” *Ensign*, May 2016.
18. Neill F. Marriott, “Yielding Our Hearts to God,” *Ensign*, November 2015; emphasis in original.