

# Pandemic Emotions Series

## Part 9

### The Agony and The Urgency of Waiting©

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## Pandemic Emotions

### Part 9—The Agony and The Urgency of Waiting

Irving Stone wrote “The agony and the ecstasy,” the biographical novel of the life of Michelangelo Buonarroti, perhaps the greatest artist of all times.<sup>1</sup> Through profound suffering and poverty this now beloved man brought to us the most powerful sculptures ever created, including Pietà,<sup>2</sup> Mary mother of Jesus holding her crucified son. His creative genius, his incomparable art, involved waiting—waiting on the court, on the Pope, on the quarries hewing the marble, on the scaffolding, on the distresses of his own body wracked with pain and near blindness from painting the ceiling of the Sistine chapel.<sup>3</sup> Imagine, lying on your back for months on end, suspended in a scaffold, with fresco paint and sand falling into your eyes. He waited ages when it was done to be able to walk fully upright until his eyes adjusted to normal vision.

What about you, in your waiting during this pandemic and the accompanying worldwide disasters? **How do you feel just waiting?** Try waiting right now—for 60 seconds. How do you feel? Impatient? Restless? Frustrated? Like waiting is wasting? Like you’re going crazy?

This pandemic has created so much waiting! Daily, waiting for the small things like the plumber, Lysol wipes, delivered food? How about the great uncertainty waiting for your future to unfold? What has been the hardest for you? In our world of intensified needs are we just waiting for the pandemic to pass so we can get on with our lives? What value might there be for learning, living with the agony and the urgency of waiting? We wait, while untold numbers die and we can’t be there to comfort them. We wait, predictions rising of starvation of millions to come, and we are too far away to help. We may cry out, “Where are you now, God? Don’t you see the need?”

#### Let’s Reflect on Jesus’ Waiting

What about Jesus while He was on earth? He did a lot of waiting. What must that have been like for Him? He **too** was immersed in a very needy world, with no end of need. During his lifetime on earth, he saw no end of waiting for things to be made right. He reminded his disciples, “... the poor you will always have with you,” (Matt. 26:11). Here was the creator of all things, waiting, waiting--waiting on people, his own creatures, to be ready...waiting for what? Even His creation is waiting for something, “standing on tiptoe” for us to “come in to our own.” (Romans 8:19-22, 39; 2 Cor 5:17, Philips paraphrase)...waiting, waiting, waiting....why? And then, there was the Father waiting, waiting for His beloved Son to finish His work. (John 4:34, 5:36) On the cross Jesus said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30)

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<sup>1</sup> Stone, Irving. 1966. *The agony and the ecstasy*. NY: Doubleday.

<sup>2</sup> Pietà sculpture is housed in St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican. Carved about 1498-99.

<sup>3</sup> The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican was painted from 1508 to 1512.

I know a little of what that's like, that waiting of a parent for the son. While our son David was still wearing his graduation robe at Wheaton, he and other MKs from Spanish America were recruited by World Relief to care for 10,000 refugees in Honduras. During the next three years and our frequent visits we waited often for David to have time for us. How strange, a puzzling role reversal, we parents waiting for our son. Growing up in the rain forest, David had waited for us innumerable times—times his physician Daddy was called out to care for the infirm. Now, David was in charge and we had to wait for him. It was so strange I even had nightmares about it!

Perhaps if we can enter into Jesus' waiting, we can find guidance in our own, perhaps comfort for our agony and surcease for our urgency. Remember the man at the pool of Bethesda, waiting for someone to put him in the water every year when an angel "troubled the waters?" Jesus knew that man's need for 38 years before He healed him! (John 5:1-8) Why did he wait? And the man blind from birth, who endured the taunts of "Sinner!" from the spiritually blind? (John 9:2) Recall the woman crippled for 18 years. (Luke 13:10-13) Jesus knew. Why did He wait? For 12 years the woman whose bleeding no physicians could cure suffered pain and social "uncleanness." Why did Jesus wait to heal her until she "touched the hem of his garment?" (Mark 5:24-29) Why did He wait? I imagine Jesus knew about blind Bartimaeus, probably passing him on the road as he begged year after year. Jesus healed him when he was audacious enough to shout, "Jesus!" above the noise of the crowd. Jesus asked Bartimaeus, as He asks us, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:46-52) Does he want us also to put into actual words what we are waiting for?

These are but five examples of Jesus waiting to heal when He had the power all along and (we believe!) could have done it sooner. Why did He wait? What was that like for Him, knowing their needs yet restraining Himself, refraining from showing His power?

(You can find many other examples of Jesus healing in these passages: Blind man (spit)—Mark 8:22. Deaf and dumb—Mark 7:32-35. Demoniac—Mark 5:1-11. Man with withered hand—Mark 3:1-5. Leper--Mark 1:40-45. Paralytic on the roof whose friends acted for him.--Mark 2:1-5.)

Why did Jesus wait when he had the power already? What purpose may He have had in waiting? What was it like for Him to wait? How did He know when the time was right? What about His waiting until "the fullness of time" to come to us? How will He know future timing to come again?

### **Why Does God Ask Us or Allow Us to Wait?**

For you, during this pandemic, do the needs around you seem so much greater than usual? Does it seem God could be more active in helping us to solve the world's problems, to intervene in all the trouble? Couldn't He at least intervene in some of the smaller problems, like losing our jobs or testing positive for the virus?

Perhaps there is something to be gained in the waiting, besides agony and urgency, besides frustration and fretting? Is there benefit in our agony? Any learning in our urgency?

## What Does Waiting Produce in Us?

You no doubt know Psalm 42. The writer pours out his agony, “As the deer pants for springs of water, so my soul pants for you, O God! My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:1, 2) He intensely longs for God and for his activities “of old.” He laments, “I used to lead the procession...” (v. 4) He feels forgotten, overwhelmed. His bones “suffer mortal agony” and his body suffers with longing. We can emulate his resolution as he determines, “Yet will I trust...” He models for us “self-talk,” the inner conversation so crucial in lifting us out of agony. In our waiting too, our longing for the days “of old” before the pandemic, our laments of lost ministry, we can declare, “Why are you so downcast, O my soul? Yet, will I trust...”

We take comfort too in our suffering from the words of Apostle Peter—remember the disciple who was so impetuous, so impulsive? Yes, that Peter has become our patient teacher, saying, “...*after* you have suffered a little... “ (I Peter 5:10)

It seems that our waiting can produce in us patience. It can help us focus on a new perspective and right priorities. It can purify us, as silver and gold are heated in the fire to remove the dross.

This matter of waiting has been very personal for me. As any missionary mom, I have found joy in my daughter Kathryn’s willingness to also become a missionary. What I don’t find joy in is the suffering that has led to in her life, with PTSD and many long-term physical ailments. I’ve cried out to the Lord many times, saying on her behalf, “How long, O Lord? “Can’t you rend the heavens and come down?!” My Kathryn is suffering because she made the choice to serve you...can’t you see?”

I want to share with you this prayer-poem I wrote one day pouring out my cries to the Lord.

### Suffering Time

Jesus, you were a stranger to Time  
Being from Eternity  
Yet you stepped  
Into our timed world—  
One more mortal suffering.

What was it like, Jesus, for you to wait?  
To see suffering you could have...  
Would have...  
someday  
when the time-was-right  
heal?  
You came “in the fullness of time”—  
Watching from outside of it  
‘til so much sin accumulated  
It had to have a Savior—

So much sorrow piled up  
It had to have some solace.

Jesus, what was it like for you  
To wait *twelve years*  
See the woman bleeding  
Pleading for help  
No doctors could give?  
Didn't it hurt to see her  
Knowing you had power to heal  
but you had to wait—  
to wait—  
to wait for a just-right time?

Jesus, how did it feel to wait—  
Seeing blind Bartimaeus beg  
When you had riches stored up for him  
Knowing your Word would open his eyes  
After a wait?

Jesus, how did you feel  
With the man blind *from birth*  
The sorrowing parents  
The taunts of "Sinners!"  
To watch him grope his way  
Knowing you would some day  
Bring him joy?

Jesus, how did you feel  
When that paralyzed man  
Fell and broke himself  
Just doing his job to raise a family—  
Did you just want to jump right in  
Then and there  
To raise him up?  
You waited for his friends to carry him to you  
(What did you want them to learn?)  
To do the heroic, bold, audacious  
Tearing up someone's roof  
Placing him at your feet?)

Jesus, how did you feel waiting—  
Waiting—  
Waiting—  
For the angel to trouble the water

When all the while you had power  
To heal the man who waited  
    *Thirty-eight years...*  
    Hope against hope?  
And the woman crippled *eighteen years*  
Why did you wait?

Jesus—you waited  
    You who knew no time before  
    You took on flesh  
How long did you wait to know  
    You were The One—the Promised One?  
By what slow time process  
    Dawned awareness of your power?  
Creator of all  
    By your Word you called into existence  
    All things—even time!  
    Designed all mitochondria  
    Patterned every gene  
    Designed black holes and the universe  
    Beyond our comprehension.

Jesus, you had to wait—  
    Escaping the crowd  
        Who wanted to make you King?  
    Not running to Lazarus  
        At first fever  
    Though Mary grieved and Martha wept.

Weeping in Gethsemane  
    Enduring spit and thorns  
    Betrayal, slow death.

Did you choose constraints of Time  
    Just as you chose cold and hunger  
    To demonstrate your love?  
    To identify with our tick-tocking  
        Humble hum-drumming  
        Drip-dripping  
        agony?

And in my waiting, Lord,  
    The bedside vigils  
    The searing pain  
    The jellied bones  
    The helpless muscles

The stuck and hopeless hunkering down with feverish ways  
Do you wait with me?

You know the agony of waiting.

You send your presence to be with me--

“In all their distress” you too

Were distressed ...and you sent

“The angel of your presence: to be with them.

(Isaiah 63:9)

Why did you say to pray without ceasing?

(Do you inhabit the prayers of your people

As You inhabit our praises?)

To be persistent as the woman with the judge

When you say we have only to ask and you hear?

Is the persistence a “without ceasing” prayer to you

Because we need it

Or for some other purpose?

Lord,

You made us in Eternity

Please don't abandon us in Time.

Watching now from outside of Time—

What are you looking for? waiting for?

How we wait in time?

You suffered Time

The agony

The waiting

The not-yet-finished

Not-yet-right-time.

What did it produce in you?

Surely you must feel the pain of waiting

Feel the sadness

Feel the sorrow

delaying your divine touch.

My Kathryn, Lord, she's waiting

Stuck in time

Snail pace time

Almost losing hope.

Please come touch her in NOW time

Because her eternity seems dim.

Isn't it time for your second coming?

To split time with your radiance  
To erase pain  
To put an end to sin, to sorrow, to Time?  
Jesus, you're still waiting  
Though in eternity  
To split Time again  
suffering time.  
What is your signal for  
Another "fullness of time"—another coming?  
To "rend the heavens and come down"  
The world needs you NOW  
More than ever  
Come, Lord Jesus, come—  
Please leave eternity again  
Disrupt time once more  
Break all the cycles of crime  
And grief  
War and waiting.  
Lord, you don't seem to need time  
Yet you were constrained by it  
You rule over it  
You use it to meter out our mortal lives.  
You will redeem the time  
as harvests devoured by locusts  
You will restore...  
In time! I put my hope in You—  
Eternal One in Time.

Perhaps you will want to write your own prayer-poem of lament about your agony and urgency in waiting.

I suggest you listen to [\*Eagles Wings\*](#), written by Rueben Morgan and performed by Hillsong, "Here I am waiting for you."