

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE | FOUR SESSIONS

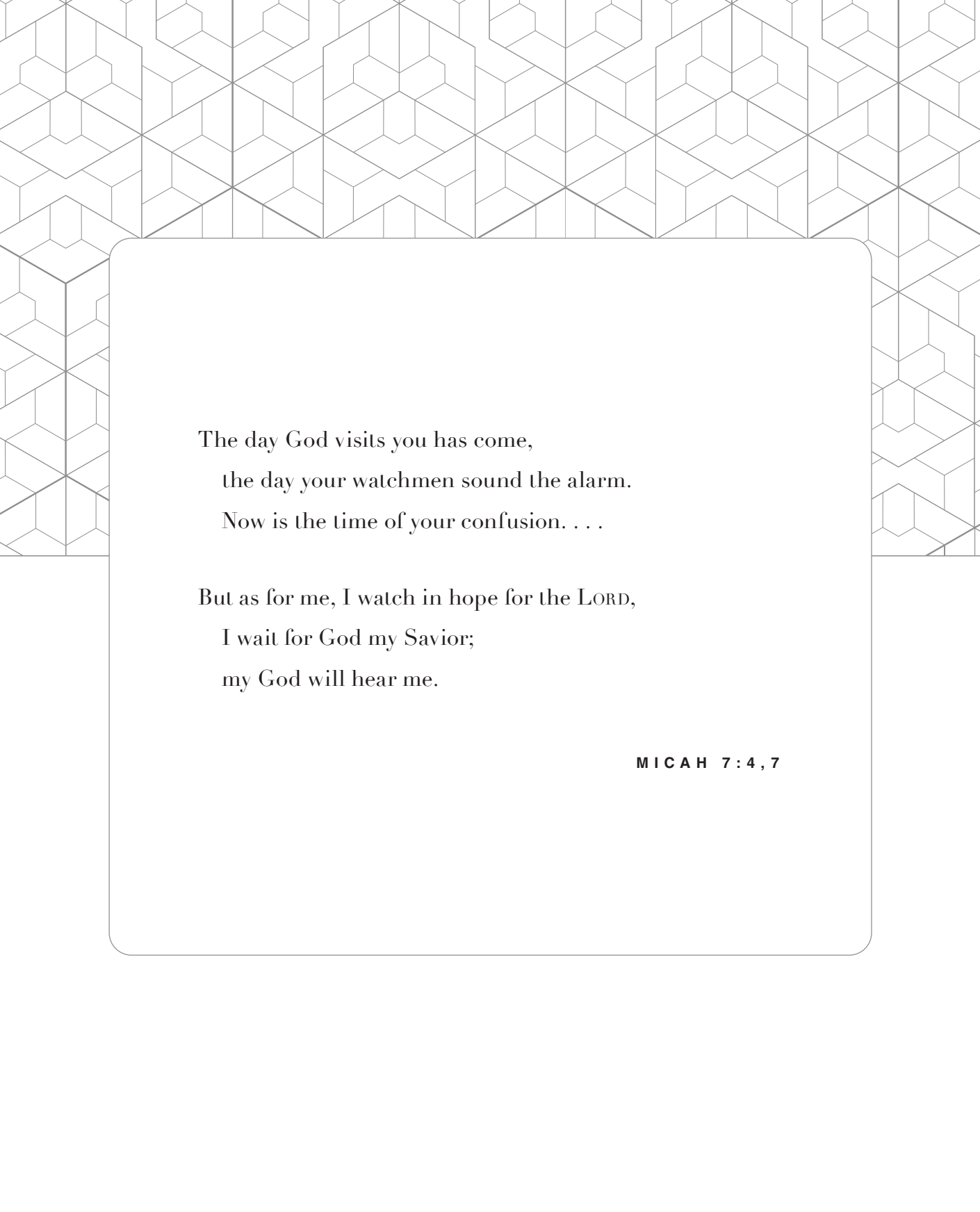
Waiting Here For You

An Advent Journey of Hope

Louie Giglio
with Dudley Delffs

 HarperChristian
Resources

 passionpublishing



The day God visits you has come,
the day your watchmen sound the alarm.
Now is the time of your confusion. . . .

But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD,
I wait for God my Savior;
my God will hear me.

MICAH 7:4,7

Waiting Here for You Bible Study Guide

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Welcome

Christmas. It's right around the corner. You may be looking forward to it and the opportunities it brings to get together with family and friends. Or you might be dreading it and all the stress it creates. In either case, it's easy to get caught up in the hustle surrounding the season and forget the reason why we celebrate Christmas in the first place. This is the goal of this study—to help you focus more intentionally on what Jesus' birth in Bethlehem means for you today.

Christmas is much more than just a memorable day of gathering with family and friends to open presents and eat a delicious meal. It's more than shopping, wrapping, cooking, eating, and watching your favorite holiday movies. The season of Advent in historical church traditions—the four weeks leading up to December 25th—reminds us that the story of Christmas is one of *waiting*.

The people of Israel waited 400 years for the promised Messiah to arrive. For those four centuries, there was no prophet, no voice, no promise, and no act of God recorded in Scripture. When Malachi penned the final words of his book in the Old Testament, nothing followed . . . just silence. Generation after generation, the people of Israel kept their faith alive by holding on to the promise that someday the Lord would send the promised Deliverer to them.

Finally, “when the fullness of the time had come” (Galatians 4:4 NKJV), the voices of angels broke that silence, announcing to a group of bewildered shepherds, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:11–12).

At Christmastime, we celebrate the birth of Jesus—God’s beloved Son—born to this world in human form. We sing songs like “Joy to the World” to commemorate the incarnational origin story of our Savior. But the hope of Christmas is also about waiting and about the hope we find in the midst of our waiting. Because while we’re waiting, God is still working.

Even though we may feel stuck and wonder when, how, or even if our wait will end, God is actively moving forward with His master plan for our lives. We may think nothing is happening when we’re weary and at the end of our rope. We are afraid to believe that our wait could ever be over. But then something suddenly shifts. There is the moment when God reveals Himself and His plan and His power in our lives, just as He did in a manger in Bethlehem.

Advent invites you to slow down, to view this Christmas season through a whole new lens, and to discover a faithful God in the midst of your waiting. It prompts you to think about your own seasons of silence and realize those times are never wasted when you are waiting on God. But even more, Advent helps you recognize that God is always with you in the waiting.

Louie Giglio

How to Use This Guide

If you picked up this guide, you are likely wanting something more in this Christmas season. Perhaps you struggle with stress, anxiety, depression, grief, or loneliness this time of year. As the shadows of winter fall, you may think about all that you've lost—loved ones, relationships, opportunities. Or perhaps you usually enjoy Christmas, but you're going through something—an illness, an injury, a financial struggle, a battle with addiction, a concern about your marriage, or a fear about what your children are facing.

Or maybe you feel drawn to this study for other reasons. Things seem to be going well and you are grateful for so many blessings . . . yet there's a longing to experience Christmas in a deeper way. Even as you enjoy the holiday season, you're mindful of those who suffer around you, those in need, and family and friends who are struggling. Wherever you find yourself, this study will help you discover the real meaning of Advent—as a season of waiting in which you can recognize all God is doing in your life as you wait on Him and with Him.

Before you begin, keep in mind there are a few ways you can go through this material. You can experience this study with others in a group (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any other small-group gathering), or you may choose to go through the content on your own. Either way, know that the videos for each session are available for you to view at any time by following the instructions provided on the inside cover of this study guide.

Overview

Each session in this study is divided into two parts: (1) an overview section designed for both individual and group engagement, and (2) a personal study section that you can do on your own throughout the week. The overview section provides a basic framework for that week's focus and offers ways to get the most out of the video content and to engage the key ideas that were presented in the teaching. Each session includes the following:

- **Welcome:** A short opening note about the topic of the session to introduce the big idea and to get you started.
- **Connect:** A couple questions to get you thinking about the topic and to break the ice if you are part of a group study.
- **Watch:** An outline of the key points covered in each video teaching along with space for you to take notes as you watch each session.
- **Discuss:** Questions to help you (and your group) reflect on the teaching material presented and apply it to your lives.
- **Respond:** A short personal exercise to help reinforce the key ideas.
- **Pray:** A place for you to record prayer requests and praises for the week.

If you are doing this study in a group, make sure you have your own copy of the study guide so you can write down your thoughts, responses, and reflections—and so you have access to the videos via streaming. You will also want to have a copy of *Waiting Here for You*, as reading it alongside this study will provide you with deeper insights.

If you are part of a group study, please keep these points in mind:

- **Facilitation:** You will want to appoint someone to serve as a facilitator of your group. This person will be responsible for starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. If *you* have been chosen for this role, there are some resources in the back of this guide that can help you lead your group through the study.
- **Faithfulness:** Your group is a place where tremendous growth can happen as you reflect on the Bible, ask questions, and learn what God is doing in other people's lives. For this reason, be fully committed and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members.
- **Friendship:** The goal of any small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build friendships. Seek to make your group a safe place. Be

honest about your thoughts and feelings, but also listen carefully to everyone else's thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Keep anything personal that your group members share in confidence so that you can create a community where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

If you are going through this study on your own, make the experience part of your Advent celebration of the Christmas season. Consider connecting with one or two other friends or family members who are also completing this study or observing Advent. Touch base with them at least once each week and compare your experiences and observations.

Personal Study

The personal study is for you to work through on your own during the week. Each exercise is designed to help you explore the key ideas in the video teaching and delve into passages of Scripture that will help you apply those principles to your life. Go at your own pace, doing a little each day—or tackle the material all at once. Remember to spend a few moments in silence to listen to whatever God might be saying to you.

Note that if you are doing this study as part of a group and you are unable to finish (or even start) these personal studies for the week, you should still attend the group time. Be assured that you are still wanted and welcome even if you don't have your "homework" done. This personal study is intended to help you hear what God is saying and apply His words to your life. So . . . as you go through it, listen for Him to speak to you, and ready your heart and mind to experience His presence while you wait.



Session One

God Is Working While You Wait

*The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.*

LAMENTATIONS 3:25-26



Welcome | READ ON YOUR OWN

From an early age, we grasp the idea of waiting . . . and we rarely like it. We are told by our parents (and others) that we have to wait our turn, wait until after dinner to get dessert, wait until Christmas morning to open all those wonderfully wrapped presents we see under the tree. As we grow older, we get more accustomed to waiting . . . but oftentimes we don't like it any better. We wait to finish school and receive a degree. We wait to get the job we've always dreamed of. We wait for that "right" person to finally come into our lives.

We wait . . . and then wait some more.

You're likely waiting on something right now. Maybe you're anticipating an upcoming trip that you've been planning for months or expecting a baby to arrive. You might be anxiously awaiting results from the doctor for yourself or someone you love. You could be waiting to see if an important relationship will survive challenges you both are facing. As you wait, you may be facing circumstances that stir up feelings of impatience, fear, uncertainty, and anxiety.

The people of Israel understood what it meant to wait . . . and we can assume they didn't like it either. God had promised through His prophets to send them a Messiah. But year after year, generation after generation, century after century, God's promise did not come to pass. Yet, as we will discover in this session, this didn't mean that God was doing nothing while they waited. When Jesus finally arrived, the Bible makes it clear that God had been working each and every moment to reveal His perfect plan at just the right time.

The same is true in your life. Regardless of what you are waiting on, or how long you've been waiting, you can trust that God is working as you wait.

Connect | 15 MINUTES

If you or any of your group members don't know each other, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then discuss each of these questions:

- How does your family typically celebrate Christmas?
- Why did you decide to do this study? What do you hope to experience?

Watch | 20 MINUTES

Now it's time to dive into the video for this session, which you can access by playing the DVD or through streaming (see the instructions provided). Note any key concepts that stand out to you.

OUTLINE

- I. The advent season is about remembering that God will come through for us.
 - A. The story of the Messiah's arrival on earth is a story of waiting.
 - B. God had promised His people, the Israelites, that He would send a redeemer.
 - C. Throughout the Old Testament we find prophecies foretelling the Messiah, including Genesis 3:15, Deuteronomy 18:15–19, Psalm 110, and Isaiah 52:13–53:12.
- II. Four hundred years had passed between the writing of the last verse of the Old Testament and the arrival of Jesus.
 - A. There was no prophet, voice, promise, or recorded act of God during this time.
 - B. But then, into the silence, angels appeared to shepherds and told of the birth of the Messiah.
 - C. What this says is that even in the silence—in the waiting—God is still working.
- III. All of us know what it means to be stuck in a time of waiting . . . and we rarely like it.
 - A. You are likely in some place of waiting—waiting for a child to come home, a spouse to tell the truth, a test result, a pregnancy, a court sentence, a miracle to happen.
 - B. You may be waiting for the holiday season to end so normal life can resume.
 - C. We are not good at waiting, but the reality is that God is not often in a hurry.
- IV. While we are in this time of waiting, we need to keep our focus on God's promises.
 - A. We are waiting on many things, but what we're really waiting for is Jesus to come.
 - B. When He returns to this world, He will put an end to the pain of this planet.
 - C. Advent is knowing that Jesus has already won and not losing sight of that truth.
- V. In Revelation 21, we get a picture (and promise) of how it will all come down in the end.
 - A. We are getting a new heaven and a new earth (verses 1–2), where we experience God's very presence (verse 3), comfort, and joy (verse 4).
 - B. Everything that is currently wrong with this world we will be set right in that day.
 - C. This is where our season of waiting ends—the future that God has in store for us.

Discuss | 35 MINUTES

Discuss what you just watched by answering the following questions.

1. We all know how Christmas is celebrated in our society, but how familiar are you with the tradition of Advent? What role has it played in your past Christmas seasons?
2. As discussed in the video, Advent is about waiting in expectation and remembering that God comes through on His promises. What are you waiting on right now? What does it mean for you to wait in expectation that God will come through on His promises?
3. The Lord promised that He would send a Messiah . . . and then His people waited in silence for 400 years for Jesus to arrive. Why do you think God made His people wait? How do you typically respond when you don't hear from God as quickly as you want?
4. Is there something significant that you continue to wait on God to provide? What evidence have you glimpsed, if any, that God is working while you wait?
5. How does the birth of Jesus give you hope that God is actively working for your good and on your behalf, even though you may not be able to fully see it?

Pray | 10 MINUTES

Praying for one another is one of the most important things you can do as a community. Make this time more than just a “closing prayer” to end your group experience by openly sharing your needs and how you’re asking God to come through for you. (If you feel comfortable, you might even want to share the prayer that you wrote to God in the Respond section.) Use the space below to write any requests mentioned so you can pray for them in the week ahead.

Name

Request

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Personal Study

As you go through this Advent study, a key part of your growth will involve studying Scripture. The Bible, which we call *God's Word*, contains life-giving words from your heavenly Father, exemplified by Jesus, and illuminated by His Holy Spirit. As you dive into these exercises, listen for God to speak to you and remain receptive to hearing His voice. For the fullest study experience, we encourage you to read the *Waiting Here for You* devotional alongside this study. Use the daily reading schedule on the following page to help guide you along.

Weekly Reading Plan

Before You Begin	Read “What Are You Waiting For?” and “The Story of Christmas Grace” (pages 7-15 in the <i>Waiting Here for You</i> devotional)
Day 1	Complete Study 1 and read “Just the Right Time” (page 18)
Day 2	Complete Study 2 and read “God Works While We Wait” (page 22)
Day 3	Complete Study 3 and read “Choose God’s Way” (page 26)
Day 4	Go through the Connect & Discuss questions with a friend or someone in the group and read “Jesus Sets You Free” (page 30)
Day 5	Complete the Worship While You Wait exercises and read “By His Wounds You Are Healed” (page 34)
Before Next Week	Read “Seek and You Will Find” (page 38) and “Compassion Over Consumption” (page 42)

Study One

Waiting Room

Most people develop different ways of coping with having to wait. Think back to a time when you were at a doctor's office or in line for an event where you were forced to wait longer than anticipated. You may have observed that some people fidget and complain, clearly upset at having to wait but trying to contain their frustration. A few may act entitled or appear outraged by having to wait along with everyone else, demanding attention and special treatment. Others may seem stoic and quiet, withdrawing into themselves as they try to ignore or deny the situation. Most people seek to distract themselves by texting, checking email, surfing social media, or listening to a podcast or music on their phone. A couple might exchange small talk with one another, offering opinions on the weather, sports, or why they are there.

Regardless of how you tend to respond when forced to wait, the reality is that it rarely speeds up the process.

When waiting on larger goals, dreams, and outcomes, it can be challenging to know how to be present in the midst of waiting. Most of us grow impatient. We want to know what to expect and when to expect it. We want things to happen on *our* time. While we know we cannot speed up the process of waiting or hurry God along, we still don't know what to do with ourselves during the in-between time while we wait. Which is why learning to experience God even while we wait makes all the difference.

1. How would you describe your usual response to unexpected delays that result in waiting longer than you want? When was the last time you experienced this?

How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

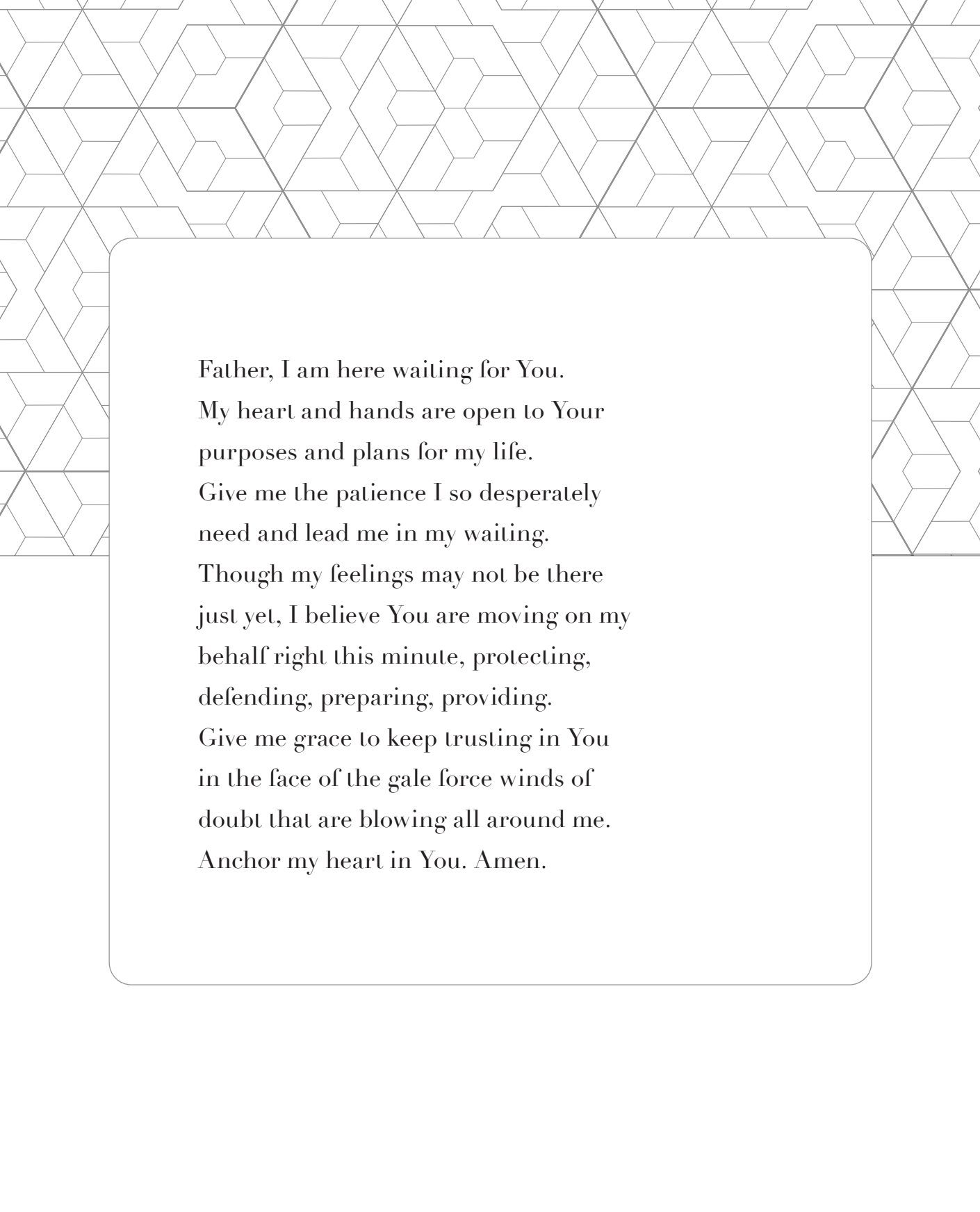
P S A L M 13 : 1 - 2

2. This psalm includes references to waiting on God and expresses the writer's frustration over not feeling heard or seen by God in the midst of his distress. The psalmist's sentiments remind us that our frustration is a normal, human response to the urgency we feel in our need. When have you felt like God had forgotten you or was hiding His face from you? How did you respond to this sense of waiting on God to speak or reveal Himself to you?
3. What's the longest you have ever waited on something you desperately wanted? How would you describe your relationship with God during that season of waiting?

4. How do you usually spend the weeks leading up to Christmas? Why is waiting for Christmas to arrive different from many of the other things you wait on in life?

Part of the fun of the Christmas season, especially for children, is the anticipation of the day itself. Waiting on Christmas to arrive, though, usually doesn't feel like that long of a time, given the full calendars and hectic pace. And we may even take comfort in knowing that regardless of what we do or leave undone, Christmas still comes. We can know with certainty that the hours, days, and weeks will pass leading up to Christmas Day.

5. Other than Christmas, when was the last time you waited on something with a fixed period of waiting? Perhaps you custom ordered something that took weeks or months to make and deliver, or you might have been counting down the semesters until graduation. Does waiting on something with a fixed endpoint seem easier to you than waiting on something without a clear timeline of fulfillment? Why?



Father, I am here waiting for You.
My heart and hands are open to Your
purposes and plans for my life.
Give me the patience I so desperately
need and lead me in my waiting.
Though my feelings may not be there
just yet, I believe You are moving on my
behalf right this minute, protecting,
defending, preparing, providing.
Give me grace to keep trusting in You
in the face of the gale force winds of
doubt that are blowing all around me.
Anchor my heart in You. Amen.

Study Two

What Are You Waiting For?

From the moment we first became conscious of time as children, we learned that waiting required anticipating something that would happen in the future. Sometimes, the length of our waiting could be measured—two hours until lunchtime, three days until the ballgame, four weeks until we could open presents at Christmas. But other times, it was less certain as to exactly when we would receive whatever we were waiting for.

As you saw in the teaching for this week, this is the kind of waiting—the one without a clear timeframe or calendar date—the Jewish people endured for generations. God had promised to send them a Messiah. He gave them clues about His identity through the prophets, but no one knew when this Messiah would arrive on the scene. As the centuries passed and the Israelites were invaded by one powerful empire after another, they must have often quoted the words of Psalm 13:1 to one another: “How long, LORD? Will you forget [us] forever?”

The people of Israel knew what God had promised them, but they didn’t know the Lord’s timing in delivering on His promise. Sometimes, the same is true in our lives. We know that we are in a season of waiting, but we don’t know how or when God will act. Regardless, it’s important for us to be clear on what we need from God and want Him to do in our lives—and then trust that He will provide in His own way and in His own timing. In this way, we stay engaged with God during the waiting and actively look for how He is providing for us. This prevents us from drifting away from God or passively resigning ourselves to whatever happens.

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”

MICAH 5:2

1. The Israelites only had clues from the prophets as to what the Messiah would do once He arrived on earth. Based on this passage in Micah, what might the people have assumed about the role of the Messiah and the actions He would immediately take?

2. Everyone is usually waiting on something in that uncertain, indefinite category—meeting your future spouse, moving for your dream job, starting a family. Most people are waiting on several things at once, which can compound the frustration. Naming the things you are waiting on can help you recognize the tension you are carrying while waiting. List as many items as possible below, briefly describing them, and note when you hope it happens, as well as when you think it will actually come to pass.

Waiting for . . .	When I hope it happens	When I think it will actually happen
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

LUKE 11:9–13

3. In order to avoid waiting, we may be reluctant to ask God for what we need and want. We may assume He already knows (which He does), so there's no need to ask. Yet Jesus tells us that seeking God and asking for what we desire is an important part of relating to God as our heavenly Father. If you haven't asked God for the items you listed above, what has prevented you from doing so? How does Jesus reveal the way God wants to respond to us when we ask Him for what we're seeking?

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my salvation and my glory;
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

PSALM 62:5-7 ESV

4. The psalmist reminds us that waiting is inherently about waiting on God as our singular source of hope. When we are focused on Him, we find strength, refuge, and security amidst our uncertainty. What are some other things you have put your hope in while waiting on God? How well did they distract you from your impatience and frustration with waiting?

5. How aware are you of what you are waiting for? Take a moment to consider each of the following statements and respond with whether you agree or disagree.

I am very aware of what I am waiting on in my life right now.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Disagree Strongly Agree Strongly

I frequently pray and ask God to grant me what I'm waiting on.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Disagree Strongly Agree Strongly

I tell trusted others about what I'm waiting on and ask for their prayers.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Disagree Strongly Agree Strongly

My faith in God will be impacted by whether I get what I'm waiting on or not.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Disagree Strongly Agree Strongly

Study Three

Promises in the Process

It's a scene we love to imagine. We read about it, sing about it in carols, and see it depicted in nativity scenes. There they are, some shepherds with their flocks out in the darkness, encamped on the rolling pastures outside Bethlehem. As the sun sets on another day, they build a fire, prepare something to eat, check on their sheep, and draw lots to see who will take the first watch while the others sleep. Then—BAM!—the night sky lights up brighter than day and angels appear, telling the shepherds not to be afraid, that they have good news—the best possible news—to share.

This scene is a study in contrasts, for sure. A normal night turns into a life-changing, history-making moment after which nothing will be the same. One minute these guys are counting sheep, and the next they're dazzled by angels. As sudden as this announcement seems, though, it didn't happen quickly.

A Savior had been promised throughout the Scriptures, beginning all the way back in Genesis 3:15 when God described how the Enemy would be overcome. Moses talked about a prophet that God would raise up at a later time (see Deuteronomy 18:15–19). David referred to the Messiah as both a king and a priest (see Psalm 110). The prophet Isaiah foretold how the Messiah would be a suffering servant (see Isaiah 52:13–53:12). Studying God's Word, it's clear He has a plan for saving His people. But after the prophet Malachi, no mention was made of the Messiah, or anyone else, for four centuries.

Suddenly, it all came together at once. God had not forgotten His promises nor abandoned His people. He was working actively throughout that long period of silence to bring His plan to fruition that night in Bethlehem. Generation after generation, people couldn't see what He was doing and didn't get the confirmation they wanted. But God's promises remained alive in the process of their waiting.

You may find yourself in a similar place today. You know what God has promised, but you feel stuck in the process of waiting. But just as God revealed to the shepherds that night, the Lord can move suddenly and unexpectedly to fulfill His promises.

1. Why do you suppose God’s promises about sending the Messiah are sprinkled throughout the Scriptures prior to those four hundred years of silence? What does His silence for that lengthy period tell us about how God views time compared to our view?

2. What promises from God’s Word speak directly to you and what you’re waiting for? How often do you remind yourself of these promises?

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, ‘Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die.’ The LORD said to me: ‘What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.’”

DEUTERONOMY 18:15–18

3. Why do you suppose Moses emphasized that God would raise up a prophet similar to himself, someone who was also an Israelite? What's the significance of God's response to His people's request in the passage above?

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

ISAIAH 53:4-6

4. What resonates or stands out to you in this prophetic description of the Messiah from Isaiah? What promises in this passage still apply to you today in the midst of your waiting?

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

LUKE 2:8-14

5. How does the angel’s message make it clear that God has kept His promises, even after 400 years? What hope do you find in this scene in the midst of what you’re waiting for?

Connect & Discuss

Waiting can often be a lonely business. Usually, the more important the object of our waiting becomes, the more we may be tempted to carry the burden of waiting alone. Yet throughout God's Word, He makes it clear that waiting is a communal process—something shared so that we can remind one another of God's commitments to us, encourage one another when struggling, and celebrate together in the fulfillment of His promises.

Take some time today to connect with someone and share something you're waiting for right now. It doesn't have to be the most personal item on your list, but it should be more than just *for Christmas to arrive*. If you're part of a group completing this study, reach out to a fellow group member and discuss some of your insights from this first week's session. Use any of the following prompts to help begin your time of sharing and waiting together.

What is one of your struggles this Christmas season? What would make your burden lighter?

Beyond Christmas, what are you waiting on that you would like to ask others to pray about?

What's one of God's promises that you're clinging to right now?

What's the hardest part of waiting, especially for things with no end in sight?

What is something you uncovered this week that changed how you are anticipating Christmas?

How can you pray for one another in the midst of waiting together this Advent season?

Worship While You Wait

Waiting in silence can feel unbearable, but God doesn't ask us to stifle our voices and suppress our feelings while we wait. He wants us to know that He cares, which means He wants to hear us give words to all that may be swirling around inside us. Of course, He already knows what we're thinking and feeling, but He wants us to experience the relational intimacy of sharing that with Him directly—in conversation and communication with Him.

Certain thoughts and emotions have likely risen up in you as you've begun this study. What you do with those thoughts and emotions will shape how you move through your times of waiting. Knowing you feel heard, seen, and accepted by your heavenly Father will provide you with confidence as you seek patience and peace during these in-between times. Prayer, worship, praise, and solitude will help you stay connected with God during this time.

For centuries, people have honored Advent by using a specially designated wreath that marks the passing of each week. Traditionally, the wreath was composed of evergreen branches. It included four candles in a circle and one "Christmas candle" in the center. There is nothing magical about using an Advent wreath, but it may enhance a sense of being intentional as you pause during this full season. Choosing to practice a personal Advent time alone with God often facilitates the peace, joy, and wonder we all long to experience at Christmas.

So as you go through this study, spend some time worshipping while you wait, using an Advent wreath of your choosing (or making) and lighting the corresponding number of candles. You will be provided with some questions or prompts each week, but the goal is simply to rest and listen to God as you reflect on the meaning of Christ's birth in your life. For this first week, choose a day and time that you can use consistently as your Advent moment with God. Purchase or make a simple wreath and find a spot where you can enjoy uninterrupted silence for at least fifteen minutes. Light one candle to signify this first week of Advent. Then use the prompts below to help you slow down and reflect as you draw closer to God.

What responsibilities and burdens are weighing on you this week? As they come to mind, release them to God and surrender them to His sovereign ways.

How would you like God to meet you this Christmas season? What do you need most from Him to enjoy the intangible gifts during this time of year?

Reflect on this past week and your experience completing the personal studies. What stands out or resonates most with you? What does this tell you about what it means to wait on God?

Spend a few minutes quietly stilling your heart before God, listening to His Spirit. What do you sense that He is saying to you?

Come, Thou long expected Jesus
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in Thee
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.
Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

**“COME, THOU LONG EXPECTED JESUS”
CHARLES WESLEY (1707-1788)**