

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: October 28, 2012

How Long?

by Dan Trygg

“How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Yahweh is God, follow Him!”

I Kings 18:21

I was thinking about some of the people in my life who are struggling, ...some who are hurting, ...some who are wandering, ...some who are keeping God at arm's length, ...and some who seem to repeatedly go back to the same issues they have been shipwrecked by in the past. **I found my heart crying out to God, “How long, O Lord, will they continue to be stuck? How long will it take for them to break through to a new level in their spiritual walk?”** Many seem to be going around the same mountain, over and over, and they don't seem to realize it. Some seem to be in a prison of their own making. They bring consequences, bondage, pain and affliction upon themselves, ...but they are resistant to any outside input. Some could *care less*, and seem content to spend their lives on foolish and destructive things. Others, however, are definitely in real pain, yet they are closed to the suggestion that *they* may be contributing to their unhealthy state. They know of God, but have ruled Him out as a source of practical help in their lives. Then there are those who are sincerely pursuing God, and yet seem to be stuck. The emotional connection I feel with *them* is entirely different, as I cry out, “How long?” on their behalf. As I was pondering all this, **the Lord prompted me to do a study on that phrase, “How long?” in the Bible.** The results of that study form the basis of today's meditation. **This heart cry came from two very different directions. There was the cry of God's heart concerning people, ...and there was also the call of the human heart to God.**

The first “How long?” was from Exodus 10:3. God said to Pharaoh, **“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?”** It is a question repeated many times to many of us, throughout the centuries. In 16:28, He asked Israel, **“How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and instructions?”** This was at the beginning of their time together. God had delivered them from Egypt, and they were on their way to Mount Sinai, but already they were showing their resistance to simply trusting and obeying God. He had to teach them through the hard knocks of natural consequences, and even Divine judgments. Unfortunately, most of them did not learn from these lessons. When God brought them to the land of promise, they refused to enter in. As a result, they all were condemned to wander and *die* in the wilderness. They never received God's blessing that was meant for them. **“How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?”** Has God done things for you? Can you remember answers to prayer, or wonderful blessings He has given to you? Do not spurn Him, or turn away from what He asks you to do for Him. I have seen many who started out well come to nothing, because they repeatedly rejected the calling of God upon their lives. This tendency was passed down from parents to children and grandchildren. Joshua had to warn them, **“How long will you put off entering to take possession of the land which the Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has given you?”** (Josh. 18:3). Just like their parents and grandparents had missed out on God's blessings, this new generation was putting off obeying the Lord's calling for them to “take the land”. God had *so much more* to give them, but they were settling for what they knew, instead of moving ahead in obedience and faith.

The next “How long?” was spoken through the prophet Eli to his sons, **“How long will you make yourself drunk? Put away your wine from you!”** (I Sam. 1:14). A prophetic destiny, a priestly ministry and a positive leadership potential were all thrown away by the appeal of alcohol, and the indiscretions that often accompany its use. In the end, not only did they miss the blessing, they died violent deaths at the hands of Israel's enemies, ...the judgment of the Lord upon their disregard of Him. I have known *many* who chose to prefer their drugs or alcohol over the Lord. Some paid a horrific price to maintain their habit. As Solomon wrote in Proverbs, **“How long, O naive ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge?”** He warns, “The waywardness of the naive will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.”³³ But he who listens to Me shall live securely, and will be at ease from the dread of evil” (Prov. 1:22, 32,33). In another Proverb, Solomon wrote, **“How long will you sleep, O sluggard?”** (6:9). Our excesses can easily steal away our time and productivity. Our lives become wasted and empty. We have no direction or purpose. **“How long will you wander about, O backslider?”**, calls the Lord (Jer. 31:22). **“How long will you remain unclean?”** (Jer. 13:37). We do not have to stay in this condition! We can acknowledge our poor choices, and confess our sins to the Lord to receive a renewed relationship with Him. We can repent and return to the Lord to receive His pardon and acceptance. This is not to be a vain religious ritual, however, but an honest, sincere resolve of our heart. David wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). **“How long will My**

honor become a reproach? How long will you love what is worthless and seek after deception?" Some dishonor God by foolish talk, speaking disparagingly of things they do not understand. Others dishonor God by the inconsistent life they lead. The time in the past was enough time wasted on empty pursuits. Now it is time to seek the Lord. "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (Jas. 4:7-8). God does not *want* to discipline, or judge. He desires what is good and beneficial for *you*. He desires to make your life to be a blessing to others. When we work with God to love and help others, *we* find a deeper joy and satisfaction than we ever found in our searches for entertainment, pleasure and escape. Not only do we feel fulfilled, but we bring God honor and joy.

There was one other group of people in the "How long?" study. They were the *emotionally hurting*. The prophet Samuel had anointed Saul to be Israel's first king, and prayed for him diligently. He was devastated that Saul had turned away from God, and the Lord had rejected him as king. Samuel withdrew to his home in grief and disappointment. One day, the Lord came to him, "**How long will you grieve over Saul?"** (I Sam. 16:1). It was time to get Samuel moving again. *There is a time to grieve, and a time to move on.* It was time for the next assignment: to anoint David to be the next king. In Jeremiah 4:14, God exhorts those with "troubled, harmful, or sorrowful" thoughts to come to Him for help. "**How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you?"** We can *wash* our hearts from sickness, and be saved. To those in extreme pain, God cries out, "**How long will you cut yourselves?"** (Jer. 47:5). These were people who were in severe and terrifying circumstances, who were gashing and cutting themselves in sorrow and anguish. **God offers hope. He indicates that there is a solution. It comes through Him.**

The other side of the coin is the cry of the heart of people calling out for God. In Psalm 6:3,4, David cries out, "**My soul is greatly dismayed, but You, O Yahweh-- how long? ⁴ Return, O Yahweh, rescue my soul; save me because of Your steadfast love.**" David had a clear hope in God to help him in his confusion and trouble. Then, in Psalm 13:1,2, "**How long, O Yahweh? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? ² How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?"** Here we see a different side of David's experience. He was not receiving a prompt answer from God. In fact, he was feeling as if God had forgotten him, and had withdrawn from him. His heart was sad, and his enemy was getting the better of him. *Nevertheless*, David was calling out to God. He expected God would, in the end, come through for him. From Psalm 35:17, "**Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue my soul from their ravages, my life from the lions.**" The lions here are his enemies, people who were contending with him, speaking evil accusations about him, and attempting to entrap him. Throughout the psalm, he calls upon God to help him. Again, it does not *seem* as if God is responding, but David continues to press in, asking for His help. In Psalm 74:9,10, "**We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, nor is there any among us who knows how long. ¹⁰ How long, O God, will the adversary revile, and the enemy spurn Your name forever?"** It looks like God is far away. There is no sign of Him anywhere! No miracles, no prophets. The enemy is speaking evil of God, mocking Him, yet the expectation is that God *will* answer. He *can*, and He *will*, put a stop to this. The "How long?" is both a cry of frustration *and* faith. In Psalm 79:5, the psalmist wrote, "**How long, O Yahweh? Will You be angry forever?"** The enemy had invaded the land, and even defiled the temple and taken the holy city. The psalmist knew *this was a result of God's anger at their sin*. This could not have happened, unless God had withdrawn His protection. The cry is, again, both a cry of frustration *and* faith. Frustration that God did not come to their aid, yet there was a confidence that He could have prevented what happened, ...and *even now*, if His anger will cease, He will come to their aid. In the next psalm, he wrote, "**How long will You be angry with the prayer of Your people?"** (80:4). Another psalmist wrote in 89:46, "**How long, O Yahweh? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire?"** Even Moses had written, in Psalm 90:13, "**Do return, O Yaweh; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants.**" The expectation is that He *will*. This gave Moses courage and faith to call out to God. Psalm 94:3, "**How long shall the wicked, O Yahweh, how long shall the wicked exult?"** God can put a stop to it, if He wants to. The writer calls out to Him to intervene. Jeremiah 12:4 records, "**How long is the land to mourn and the vegetation of the countryside to wither? For the wickedness of those who dwell in it...**" Jeremiah recognized that the sin and mismanagement of the people caused a drought. He calls upon God to bring rain. Habakkuk cried out, "**How long, O Yahweh, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, 'Violence!' Yet You do not save.**" Again, both frustration *and* faith. "Where are you, God?", *and*, "You can save us!" Finally, the souls of the saints under the altar in heaven cried out to God (Rev. 6:10), "**How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"** They were comforted by God's answer, that there was *a number* to be filled before this evil world is judged. Peter had written, "The Lord is *not slow* about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). **Just as we long for God to answer us, He is waiting for us to respond to Him.**