I like to see the results of my labors. I work on an article and several months later it appears in print. I climb a mountain and reach the summit. Prayer operates by different rules, God’s rules. We do it in secret, so that no one notices the effort, and the results—God’s results, not ours—comes in surprising ways, often long after we expected them. Prayer means opening myself to God and not limiting God through my own preconceptions. In sum, prayer means letting God be God. Many prayers in the Bible come out of the act of waiting. Jacob waiting seven years for a wife and then seven more years after being tricked by her father. The Israelites waiting four centuries for deliverance, and Moses waiting four decades for the call to lead them, then four more decades for a Promised Land he would not enter. Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Anna, Simeon waiting like most Jews for a Messiah. God, who is timeless, requires of us a mature faith that may, as it did for many of these, involve delays that seem like trials. Patience is one sign of that maturity, a quality that can develop only through the passage of time. Children want things now: “Are we there yet?” … “But I want dessert now!” … “Now can we open our presents?” … “Is my time-out over?” In contrast, lovers learn to wait. Medical students wait through training. Parents wait in hopes that the prodigal will return. We wait for what is worth waiting for, and in the process learn patience. “My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,” wrote one of the psalmists. The picture comes to mind of a watchman counting the minutes for his shift to be over. I pray for the patience to endure times of trial, to keep anticipating, keep hoping, keep believing. I pray for the patience to be patient.

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