

Praise for *When God Says “Wait”*

“In *When God Says, ‘Wait,’* Elizabeth captures readers through previously unexplored anecdotes of familiar Bible stories and then connects you with these ancient icons, venturing deeper into their narratives. With Elizabeth’s own graceful confessions and by linking our own emotions to those of these past heroes, we internalize so much more than just the moral of their stories. We take on their hope, their insight, and their love for God in a way that helps us navigate this ‘lonely, unmarked territory’ that is waiting. We have known Elizabeth and her husband Kevin for many years. We value their guidance, direction, and most of all their genuine desire for a relationship with Christ. This book is the culmination of years of grappling with questions and faith-testing waiting with practical insights of the way God works in these times.”

—Pauli and Chip Wade, Lead Creative at Wade Works,
Star of HGTV’s “Elbow Room” and “Curb Appeal”

“Elizabeth Thompson is a kindred spirit. I love her writing style, heart, and quirky humor. She writes with authenticity and wisdom. *When God Says, ‘Wait’* gives practical, biblical precepts, but it also unites our hearts with beloved biblical characters. Thompson masterfully paints scenes from these characters’ lives in such a way, you feel you’re there. Time is removed. Rather than biblical saints, they become people just like us. Their stories are ours. It’s a must-read for anyone struggling with God’s timetable. Healing, hopeful, and filled with grace to help us trust God as we wait on Him.”

—Andy Lee, Author of *A Mary Like Me: Flawed Yet Called*

“*When God Says, ‘Wait’* is a must-read. Elizabeth gives us confidence and courage in times of waiting, ensuring that we will be ‘better because of the wait.’ We are better because of this book, too! With solid scriptural advice, practical prompts, and unmatched wit, Elizabeth helps us find faith in times of uncertainty. Whether you’re a mom, student, business owner, or wife, this book is for you!”

—Lara Casey Isaacson, Author of *Make It Happen*

“It’s hard to be the example, but someone’s gotta do it! Thank goodness it is Elizabeth—her journey through waiting, wit in expressing it, and wisdom to learn from it. This book is not only a beautiful testament of one woman’s faith, but a reminder of the many Bible heroes who God told to wait. Oftentimes life leaves us in the gap between what is and what will be. Thank you, Elizabeth, for refining the gifts that can only be given as we wait. Those gifts and this book will be a gap-filler and hope-giver to women all over the world.”

—Laura Whitaker, Executive Director,
Extra Special People, Inc.

“As Elizabeth writes, when speed is our cultural priority, ‘wait’ feels like a bad word. Thanks be to God that this does not have to be the case and that through *When God Says, ‘Wait’* we can uncover a roadmap to prayerful, humble, practical, and hopeful waiting—even in the midst of heartbreaking trial! Any reader will feel indebted to Elizabeth’s fearless take on the misconceptions of waiting, sharing from a deep well of scripture-rich wisdom. While most authors dealing with such tender topics may shy away from hard-to-swallow truths, Elizabeth guides, challenges, and encourages just like a best friend—with vulnerability and humor—so that your heart can fall deeper in love with a God who sees, hears, and cares.”

—Marilisa Schachinger,
Founder and Event Planner, Martel Events

When God
Says
wait

Navigating Life's *detours and delays*
without Losing Your Faith,
Your Friends, or Your Mind

Elizabeth Laing Thompson

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Print ISBN 978-1-68322-012-1

eBook Editions:

Adobe Digital Edition (.epub) 978-1-68322-304-7

Kindle and MobiPocket Edition (.prc) 978-1-68322-308-5

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Cover design: Faceout Studio, www.faceoutstudio.com

Published by Shiloh Run Press, an imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 719, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683, www.shilohrunpress.com.

Our mission is to publish and distribute inspirational products offering exceptional value and biblical encouragement to the masses.



Printed in the United States of America.

Dedication

For Kevin

“I was made and meant to look for you
and wait for you
and become yours forever.”
—Robert Browning

Acknowledgments

When you pursue a writing career for thirteen years, you have a lot of people to thank.

Lysa TerKeurst has called writing a book “a sacred adventure with God,” and what a sacred adventure this was! Every day spent writing was a day spent in constant communion with God. Thank You, Father, for trusting me with Your Word and with this message.

My husband, Kevin, did not blink when I announced that I wanted to become a writer. He has read every draft, loved every story, humored every angsty moment. He has flown me to conferences, bought me a laptop when I ran over mine by accident (long story), and viewed every dollar spent as investment, not expense. He has gladly given me permission to do what I love and be who I am. Thank you—I am so blessed to be yours.

Thanks to Cassidy, Blake, Avery, and Sawyer, for being you, my four spunky miracles.

I can't begin to describe the debt I owe my parents and family—they have read and critiqued and prayed and fasted and mourned and rejoiced with me. Thank you to Dad, Mom, David, Lisa, Jonathan, Talia, Alexandra, Jesse, and many of my aunts and uncles and cousins. Kevin's parents, Bill and Glenda, have always encouraged, always believed, and often wrangled kids so I could write.

My writing partner, Emma, knows what I want to say and how I want to say it better than I do. She has sacrificed sleep, work, vacation,

and sanity to help me write this book and get it right. I never want to write without you, Emma. (Really, I never want to do anything without you—*parabatai* are meant to be together always.)

Many thanks to my agent, Jessica Kirkland, for taking risks and dreaming big and fighting hard. You make the writing life a spiritual venture.

I'm so thankful for the blessed friends who have fasted and encouraged and mailed emergency chocolate: Sara, Julie, Karen, Allison, Laura, Melissa, Jeanie, Heather, Katie, Mindi, and Stacey. You have made the journey—and life—a joy.

Thanks to the women in my church who have been so encouraging and supportive. Thank you for letting me borrow some of your stories to share.

I'm deeply thankful to everyone at Barbour for their outstanding work. Thank you to Kelly McIntosh for your positive spirit, gracious words, and excellent standards. You've made the publishing process a great experience. Thank you to Laura Weller for your first-rate work editing the book—special thanks for keeping my commas under control. Thank you to Shalyn Sattler and Mary Burns and the entire marketing team for your creativity and enthusiasm. Many thanks to Ashley Schrock, creative director, for making this book beautiful. I am grateful to Brigitta Nortker (who is no longer at Barbour), for believing in this project.

Thanks to my writers' group in Athens, Georgia—Emma, Gail, Muriel, and Susan—for sticking with me. Gail, thank you for talking me into going to a Christian writing conference when I was ready to give up—you changed my life!

Thanks to The Tenors for the music that kept me inspired and in the zone.

And of course, I have to thank the baristas at my Starbucks for keeping me happily caffeinated, for letting me hog the window seat, and for not looking at me weird when I got crazy-eyed and started swaying in my seat to "Hallelujah."

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Wait Is a Four-Letter Word

Miriam's Story

No Ordinary Child

Based on Exodus 2:1–10

Miriam crouches at water's edge, bare knees quivering, thin legs scratched by reeds, heart aching as she listens to her baby brother wail from within a basket. She prays, pleading harder than she has ever prayed in her young life.

And just when she thinks she can no longer bear the baby's screams, she hears voices—women's voices—laughing and chattering in Egyptian. They are coming closer.

Hope and fear surge, lightning through her veins; her stomach roils, the earth tips sideways. *Don't faint*, Miriam commands herself. Drawing a shaky breath, she bites down on her fist so hard she draws blood. These Egyptians will either save her brother or drown him. Either way, she cannot make a sound. She inches back into a thicker patch of reeds.

A pretty Egyptian girl, not much older than Miriam, wearing the robes of a servant, steps forward and parts the reeds. She spots the basket. The baby cries again, his voice now hoarse, weak. This tiny cry is worse than the rest, a dagger to Miriam's heart. He is hungry.

The servant girl gasps, looks around, flaps helpless hands. At last she tiptoes forward to draw Miriam's brother out of the basket.

Miriam watches his tiny, fat feet kicking as his blanket—the blanket she herself made for him—slips off and falls into the mud. Her arms ache for the feel of his soft, chubby body; she can almost feel him cuddled up warm against her chest, where he belongs. But still she does not move, does not make a sound.

The servant girl, holding the infant awkwardly—away from her body, as if he is diseased—steps away from the water and calls out. Miriam recognizes a few words in the foreign tongue: *Baby. Hebrew.*

Her stomach writhes. She is going to be sick.

She can't watch.

She can't look away.

Slowly, she creeps along the riverbank after the girl, keeping herself hidden in the tall grass. The servant girl carries the boy—still kicking and squirming but no longer crying—to the group of women clustered at the edge of a shallow pool, giggling and gossiping as they wade in the water.

A tall woman, dressed in royal garb, steps forward. The laughing voices grow silent. Miriam's breath catches.

Pharaoh's daughter.

The servant girl lifts the baby up so the princess can see.

Kick, kick—fat baby feet dangle over the water.

Miriam's legs quake. Her teeth clamp down over her tongue, holding a scream inside. Her fingernails dig into dirt, holding her body down.

Time stops.

The princess reaches a hand toward the baby.

Miriam prays—not words, just anguished need slung heavenward—till she thinks her head and heart might burst.

The baby giggles.

The princess smiles.

Pharaoh's daughter reaches out bangled arms and draws Miriam's brother into her chest, hugging him close, nuzzling his soft hair with her chin, lifting him high into the air over the water so that even Miriam can see his smile and hear his happy squeal.

Hours later, Miriam stands on her own doorstep holding Moses in one arm, a sack of coins in the other—payment from Pharaoh's daughter, compensation for the wet nurse Miriam promised to find.

Mother opens the door. Whimpers.

Her expression leaps from fear to disbelief to ecstasy. She falls to her knees. Miriam rattles off the story, the bargain: care for the

baby until he is weaned, old enough to return to the princess and be raised a prince of Egypt. Trembling, Mother takes her son, breathes him in, and rocks him there on the doorstep. She pulls Miriam down into a hug, sobbing, “Blessed, blessed girl,” over and again into her hair. Miriam thinks her heart may fly away.

Throughout the day and into the night, family and friends flock to their house to smile on the miracle babe. A celebration breaks out, the likes of which no Hebrew has seen for years. With the party still going, the sound of Father’s booming laughter filling their tiny home, Miriam sneaks away and crawls onto her pallet on the floor, dizzy with exhaustion, drunk with joy. Sleep is already tugging her down and under, lullaby waves, when she feels a calloused hand, gentle on her forehead. “Sweet Miriam, you have saved us all.”

Miriam pushes up and throws her arms around Father’s neck, breathing in his familiar scent, wood smoke and spices.

“Do you know what I think?” he says in a confidential whisper, brushing hair back from her face. “I think God will use our baby to save Israel. One day we will send him back to Pharaoh’s household, and somehow, some way, God will use his position and learning to free us all. One day, thanks to you, we will no longer be slaves.”

“Really?” Miriam sucks in air. “How long will we have to wait? How many years?”

Father taps a finger on her nose. “I don’t know, darling, but when you have hope, time flies.”

Miriam bounces up and down, no longer sleepy. “I can hardly wait.”



I hate waiting.

If you haven’t noticed, *wait* is a four-letter word. Coincidence? I think not.

It goes something like this:

God is good. Life is. . . pretty good. We have been following Jesus for a while, and many of our prayer requests—at least the most important ones—have been answered. Our faith is strong, the future brightly shining.

But then. . .we want something. Something that can't be bought, earned, or achieved. We have done our part—worked, grown, taken risks. Like young Miriam, we feel a promise ringing in our hearts—*Surely what I have prayed for will happen, and soon!*—but now we have reached the point where the decision is out of our hands, which means it is in God's. And at first that knowledge feels comforting. Our hopes, our heart, our happiness—all in the hands of God:

God the Father, who loves us and wants us to be happy.

God the omniscient, who knows us better than we know ourselves.

God the omnipotent, who has a plan and the power to execute it.

God the Creator, who controls the cosmos (surely this one little request will be easy for Him).

All He has to do is snap His all-powerful, all-loving fingers and. . .*done*. Wish granted. Prayer answered.

So we turn to God with our request, asking Him to do for us The Thing we cannot do for ourselves.

But there's a problem.

He doesn't do it.

He doesn't *not* do it, either.

He does nothing. (Nothing we can see, anyway.)

God doesn't say no, but neither does He say yes.

God says, "*Wait.*"

Wait, what?

And here's the part that makes it really difficult to swallow: With God we don't get the kind of two-way human conversation we are used to. With prayer there's usually no verbal response from God, no explanation, no "*Here's My timeline for your life,*" no "*I hear you and I love you, but I can't give you what you want (yet) for the following loving, logical, and comforting reasons. . . .*" Instead, we pray and—nothing. Heaven resounds with His silence.

The longer the wait, the louder the silence.

But God is good, so we swallow hard and determine to wait patiently.

On good days, we turn back to prayer.

On bad days, we turn to social media. After two excruciating

minutes—a contentment-shattering onslaught of clever stories, air-brushed images, and Big Exciting Announcements—we find ourselves sinking into the abyss: *Everyone else is happy. Everyone else is getting the thing I need, right on schedule.*

With knotted stomach and burning eyes, we try to regroup, drawing on life lessons we have collected over the years. Our earliest memories (thank you, Disney princesses) sing, “Believe in yourself! Follow your heart! Dreams come true!” Our middle and high school teachers’ voices echo, “Never give up! You will get it soon because you are awesome (*everyone is awesome!*), and awesome people always succeed!” Our Sunday school education encourages us, “Be the persistent widow!” Our adult theology reminds us, “Keep on asking, keep on knocking!”

So believe and dream and ask and knock and ask again and knock again we do. We turn to the Bible, to classic, sublimely comforting waiting passages like “Be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD” (Psalm 27:14), or this, the crown jewel of all the waiting passages:

*Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart. . . .
Be still before the LORD
and wait patiently for him.*

PSALM 37:3-4, 7

With our faith renewed, we enjoy a little chuckle at our own expense, resign ourselves to wait patiently for a few more days (even weeks, if need be), and offer a prayer of apology for our impatience. In our contrition, we even do a heart check:

Dwelling in the land? *Check.*

Trusting in God? *Check.*

Delighting in the Lord? *Well, I could read and pray a little more, but. . . as of tomorrow. Check.*

And then we sit back and expect God to grant our request within

the next seven to ten business days.

The problem is, we keep adding our own words to these waiting passages, and we have no idea we are doing it. We read them, we think we understand what they are saying, but we don't realize that subconsciously we keep tacking a little asterisked addendum onto the end of them that goes something like this:

“Be strong and take heart and wait for the
LORD. . .”*

**because He is going to give you exactly what you want
really, really soon.*

“Delight in the LORD, and he will give you the
desires of your heart. . .”*

**and that is a guaranteed formula: If you work hard
and love God, then you will definitely, absolutely get
your heart's desires—and “desires” includes all of your
desires: admission and scholarships to the college you
want; the job and salary you want; the guy and wed-
ding you want; the apartment you want; the baby you
want; the family you want; the friend you want; the
health you want; the house you want; the happiness you
want—as soon as you decide you want them. . .or pretty
soon afterward.*

And so, armed with our unintentionally asterisked waiting pas-
sages, we wait. We pray. We read more waiting passages. We pray
some more. We try not to fidget. We delight in God. We delight in
God some more. We humbly remind God that we are *delighting in
Him* (teeth gritted, fists clenched, neck veins popping, but doggone it,
if we were any more delighted, we'd have a heart attack). We alter our re-
quest to make it sound more spiritual, more like a prayer God would
want to say yes to. We read more waiting passages. We get radical, and
we fast. We ask friends to pray for us and fast with us.

Time passes. Too much time. More time than we'd ever imagined.
As faith fades, doubts bloom. We question God, the Bible, ourselves.

The longer God's silence stretches, the more things start to break inside.

I don't know what you are waiting for right now, but we all are waiting for something. If you're like me, you're waiting on several somethings. Sometimes The Thing we seek is not even a thing, but a feeling: peace, joy, relief, release, security, home. For many of us, waiting seasons are the first time our faith has been truly tested. They present risk and opportunity in equal measure, making us ask the hard faith questions, making us fight to find—and accept—the answers.

Yes, No, Wait, and. . . Maybe

You have probably heard some preacher say, "When you ask God for something, He gives one of three answers: *Yes*, *no*, or *wait*."

It's a good point, a nice sermon illustration. It makes sense.

But the problem is, *yes* is obvious. *Yes* means you get what you want. End of story, end of prayer request. Time to begin offering prayers of thanksgiving.

Yes is wonderful.

Yes is what we want every single time we ask God for something. *Yes* doesn't happen nearly as often, or as quickly, as we'd like.

And then there's *no*: Sometimes *no* is just *no*. You want to marry so-and-so, but he marries someone else. End of story. Find another guy.

But it's not always that clear-cut. The problem lies between the *no* and the *wait*. Because really, it's tough to tell the difference. Sometimes we think God's answer is *no*, but later—weeks, months, even decades later—the answer we thought was a *no* turns into a *yes*, so it turns out we actually had a *wait* all along.

And to make matters even more confusing, I believe God offers a fourth option—a theologically mind-bending option, which we will explore in greater depth in our chapter on persistence in prayer (chapter 6)—and it's this: "*Maybe. Ask Me again; you might talk Me into it.*" And that answer may be the most maddening—but hope-sustaining—answer of all.

Mr. Letterman Jacket

But back to the quandary of the no-man's-land between *no* and *wait*. I have more examples of this from my own life than I can count.

When I was eighteen, I fell madly in love with the most heart-stoppingly handsome, sincerely spiritual, adorably sweet guy I had ever met, who also happened to be a quarterback on our college football team *and* my closest friend *and* my ride to church twice a week in his sporty little Dodge Avenger. I spent the first two years of my college career begging God to make this handsome, whole-package guy—we'll call him Mr. Letterman Jacket—fall in love with me.

Two miserably long years later, the summer after our sophomore year, a summer filled with lots of vague but promising vibes, God's answer felt imminent. The two of us were going to join some college friends for a weeklong Christian conference in Paris—Paris! The one in France! The romance capital of the world! And I was sure the time (and place) had come for God to answer my prayer. All summer I begged, "Please, Lord, make things clear by the time we go to Paris." So when the Love of My Life kept asking *every beautiful girl at the conference* out to dinner along the Champs-Élysées, I had no way of knowing if God's answer was the *non!* it appeared to be or if it was a *wait* disguised as a *no*.

I tormented myself with questions: If God's answer was indeed *no*, did that mean no just for dating Mr. Letterman Jacket right now, but wait for a boyfriend and marriage, because eventually God would say yes when the right non-idiot guy came along who saw me for the prize I was?

Or did it mean no to a boyfriend and marriage and a first kiss, and yes to a life of celibacy and single-serve microwavable meals to be enjoyed in the company of my library of books and my houseful of cats? (I'm not making fun of crazy cat ladies here. I *am* the crazy cat lady. I adore cats, books, and—foodies, hide your eyes—I have been known to enjoy many a microwaved meal.)

Confused? So was I. . .and it certainly wasn't the last time.

For many of us, waiting is unfamiliar terrain. New territory. We have forgotten how to navigate it—or maybe we never learned to

begin with. And it's not entirely our fault. This world we live in is all about immediate gratification:

Fast food!

High-speed Internet!

Overnight shipping!

With speed as a cultural priority, it's no wonder *wait* feels like such a bad word. We don't believe in waiting.

Waiting is a waste of time.

Waiting is boring at best, agony at worst.

Waiting is the worst possible place to be.

A place? Yes, a place. Because waiting isn't just something we do; it's a place we live—usually against our will. It's a stage of life, a journey we take, a crucible for the heart.

The good news? We are not the first people to journey through the waiting wilderness. People in the Bible had to wait on God, and most were just as confused as we are, just as mystified and unhappy. Think for just a moment about some of these people, whose stories we will explore in the pages of this book:

Miriam, who may have expected God to use her baby brother to do something spectacular, but if you had told her how many years she would wait before seeing her hopes fulfilled, her people freed, I wonder how she would have felt, what would have happened to her faith. She spends decades—decades!—in slavery, waiting and wondering, before a burning bush finally lights a fire under Moses, and Miriam gets to dance out of Egypt, an aging woman leading her people in a song of praise.

David, who is anointed the future king of Israel when he is just a teenager, but spends years hiding in caves in the wilderness, fleeing his enemies, before claiming his promised throne.

Naomi, who loses her husband and two sons; devastated, she re-names herself “Bitter” and goes home to wait for death to set her free. Yet God gives her a new family, a second chance.

Sarah, Hannah, Jacob, Ruth, Joseph, Mary, Gideon, Martha, Abraham—like us, they hoped; like us, they waited in the dark. They didn't know how their prayers, their dreams, their lives were going to

turn out any more than you or I know our own futures. How easily we forget this when we read their stories!

Thanks to the Bible, we know their endings, the meanings of their stories, the things they could have done differently. But they simply lived their lives in the same way you and I do: not knowing the *ifs*, the *whens*, the *hows*, the *whys*. (Okay, sure, some of our Bible heroes did receive heavenly promises direct from God, but those promises rarely panned out in the way or in the timeline they expected, so I suggest we grant them a lot of grace, the kind of grace you and I would need in their same position.) Waiting was every bit as agonizing for them as it is for us. Every bit as confounding. Every bit as nail-biting.

As we explore their stories, they will equip us to live our own—particularly our problematic waiting times—with faith, patience, perspective, and a healthy dose of humor. Together we can plot a road map from scripture to help us navigate our own journeys through the barren waiting places.

The Road Ahead

I cannot pretend to foretell what lies ahead for you. I don't know how long you will wait—which prayers will be granted, which will be denied.

I can't promise you *yeses* for all of your prayers, but I can share with you the lessons I have prayed and studied and fought and resented and resisted and pleaded and fasted and pouted and wept and rejoiced and cajoled and wheedled and doubted and believed and laughed and hugged and sung and worshipped and persevered and kicked and screamed my way through.

I can offer you hope that the Bible can help you find the strength and spirituality you will need not just to *suffer through* your waiting times but to *grow through* them into the person God is shaping you to be. The person you might not even know you want to be.

I can offer you the insight that life *is* waiting—a series of waiting seasons between blessings, as God's plan for our lives unfolds one blind turn after the other. The insight that life *is* waiting—waiting for our dreams and desires, yes, but also waiting for heaven, where all that is

lacking in this life and wrong with this world will be set right at last.

At this very moment, God is telling you, and me, and everyone we know—our families, our friends (even the picture-perfect airbrushed ones)—to wait for something. And we are all in for a challenging ride:

When God says, “*Wait*,” He doesn’t tell us for how long.

When God says, “*Wait*,” we face one of life’s greatest tests.

When God says, “*Wait*,” we have decisions to make.

When God says, “*Wait*,” we can control only two things: how we wait, and who we become along the way.

This book is about the journey of waiting, the space between answers, and the decisions we make while we live there.

So what are we waiting for? Let’s get started.

Waiting Room Reading

For Further Study

You can read more about Miriam’s life in Exodus 15:1–21 and Numbers 12.

Journal Prompt

Are you happy with how you are handling this season of waiting so far? Why or why not? What’s the hardest part about waiting? Do you have questions about faith, God, or God’s promises that you need to resolve?

Prayer Prompt

All my longings lie open before you, Lord;

my sighing is not hidden from you.

My heart pounds, my strength fails me;

even the light has gone from my eyes. . . .

LORD, I wait for you;

you will answer, Lord my God.

PSALM 38:9–10, 15