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# Our Deepest Prayer

BY TERRY W. YORK

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Waiting here, in silence, God,  
 we hear and own our deepest prayer.  
 Until this silence we'd forgotten  
 that these words were hidden there.  
 Resurrect to Life and Light  
 what we have buried in our night.

Amen.

*Terry W. York*

This hymn, “Waiting Here, In Silence,” is one of two texts written in response to a request by Burt Burleson, then pastor of DaySpring Baptist Church in Waco, Texas, and the musical shepherd of the congregation, Kurt Kaiser. At the time, my wife and I had been members of DaySpring for about a year. The request was that I write some lyrics that describe my thoughts about DaySpring – why we joined and what this worshiping community had come to mean to us. The poetic exercise was a calming and reassuring experience. It was good to identify and capture these thoughts so that they would not fade with routine and familiarity.

DaySpring Baptist Church is a special Christian community. Its attention to things sacred and simple – in its grounds and buildings, but especially in its worship – facilitates listening to the still small voice.

## **WAITING HERE, IN SILENCE**

“Waiting” is exactly the right word to begin this simple, sung prayer. But this is not anxious, red-light-at-the-intersection waiting. This is not standing with two items behind someone with twelve items in a ten-item checkout line. This is waiting of a deeper sort and it involves the entire self: body, mind, and soul. It is focus and surrender and an emptying. This waiting sits astraddle the line between the physical world and the spiritual world, leaning against the thin veil, listening in stereo.

Waiting of this magnitude requires silence rather than music as a background, focus rather than distraction. Silence alone can house the respect, honor, and awe that are due the prayer that will enter this private void. Silence of this sort is akin to, but deeper still than what we experience just

before the first word of the sermon is spoken or just after the last note of the symphony has faded away. It is the silence that bids us to whisper as we approach the rim of the Grand Canyon or enter the nave of a great cathedral. That kind of silence is created by, and is the environment of, this kind of waiting. A particular physical environment may enhance this stillness and waiting, but the crucial environment is within the geography of the soul, an inner space. Then the prayer is heard.

### **WE HEAR AND OWN OUR DEEPEST PRAYER**

The sound enters the void slowly, muffled at first, a whispered shouting as if from under a heavy trap door. We recognize the voice. It is our voice. Going deeper into the waiting and the silence we discover something rather unsettling about the voice we hear. It is not a single voice. It is a duet that calls—our voice, yes, but our voice in harmony with the voice of the Holy Spirit. God is down there in the middle of all we have hidden from him. Not only do we recognize the forgotten echo of our voice, we recognize our waiting on God as we see it reflected in God's waiting on us. What a holy place is this place of silence, waiting, and deep prayer.

Our deepest prayer is our voice connecting with the voice of the Holy Spirit in a place where our waiting connects with God's waiting.

### **UNTIL THIS SILENCE WE'D FORGOTTEN**

We know the location of the place of waiting. We have to know it in order to avoid it. Waiting is the foyer, the entranceway to the place of hidden things. We tuck things away in there and walk away. We can stay away if we are busy enough or if our surroundings, even our liturgical surroundings, are noisy enough. Yes, noisy enough. We know the weight of silence. We have learned that silence and waiting pull us toward that voice and that place and all that is hidden there.

We have long understood that overloaded calendars and daily schedules are not just about things that must be accomplished, that endless television, radio, and iPod music are not just about entertainment, that drinking is not just about being thirsty, and that eating is not just about being hungry. These are our avoidance techniques and ways to forget, but only God can completely forget our sins and failures (Hebrews 8:12). Such avoidance techniques are futile attempts to be God rather than to turn the matters of our deepest prayer over to God. Ironically, even shallow prayer can be a way of avoiding our deepest prayer.

Waiting in silence after our words have faded, anticipating (or risking) the difficult internal conversation of deep prayer, makes silence an uncomfortable and, for many, an unwelcome experience. As a defense, waiting is quickly labeled "unproductive" (a terrible accusation in our society) and silence "a missed cue" (inexcusable in the context of performance). These defenses that we set up in fear, block instead the path to rejoicing. The fear

is not silly. It is unnecessary, but not silly. It is true that a conversation with God at that depth of soul could spark confrontation, a struggle between what we want to keep buried and what God wants to resurrect for the purpose of redemption. It is right to enter that conversation knowingly, soberly, but not with fear of retribution. It is our loving God who waits for us even as we wait, and meets us in the silence to converse in deepest prayer. We eventually relax and understand that God does not wait in ambush. God waits in anticipation of liberating us, if we will but allow it.

### **RESURRECT TO LIFE AND LIGHT**

We understand the power of forgiveness, perhaps, one might say, all too well. We also understand its cost. We turn away when we see forgiveness in its most stark and raw forms. Recall the murder of the Amish school children in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, in 2006. We admired the immediacy and depth of the forgiveness shown by that community, but we turned away from it as well. It is difficult to look for very long at such shining. Such soul searching and illuminating brightness and purity is too convicting. We call on righteous indignation to come to our rescue, but it is confusing. With whom should we be angry at such a display of forgiveness—the Amish, Jesus, or ourselves? The Amish reaction reached to the very depth of our souls, putting at risk strangely treasured personal emotions of anger and rage.

“Unfair” is a big word and “getting away with it” is a powerful phrase. Yet, by harboring these expressions of pride and fear we allow the hurt and hate to rip at our souls, to continue to devour us at whatever pace they wish. Forgiveness sends the beasts away (“One little word shall fell him”). Jesus taught us the meaning of the word, also its cost. He also showed us the new life forgiveness brings.

“Remorse” and “repentance” are on the same carefully guarded vocabulary list as “unfair” and “getting away with it.” In God’s care, “remorse” and “repentance” are cleansing words. In our hands, watching for remorse and listening for

repentance are effective ways to postpone forgiveness. They also “baptize” our addiction to “pay back.” Like all other addictions, this one hurts us. “Payback” and “revenge” make us eager participants in violence. That power, in our hands, corrupts us, indeed. God suggests that we leave such things to him (Romans 12:19). They are far beyond our finite mental and emotional abilities.

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**Going deeper into the waiting and the silence we discover something rather unsettling. God is down there in the middle of all we have hidden from him.**

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There are happier resurrections, the results of which are equally as freeing. The deep place of the little song and the big conversation is not just a place where sins and failures and destructive emotions are hidden. The place of our deepest prayer is also where we hide dreams and hopes that are too wonderful to seriously consider, even though it might well have been God who first whispered their possibility into our hearts and minds.

Releasing to the light our hopes and dreams carries the same risk as releasing our sins and failures, the very same risk. It is the risk of exposure, of being found out, to our embarrassment. "You *dreamed* what?" and "You *did* what?" are quite similar. Both expose the death of something within us. But resurrection awaits our deepest prayer.

The denial of hopes and dreams is as sad and painful as the denial of sins, failures, and frustrations. Hopes and dreams are private treasures that sustain us when all else is taken away. To relegate such life-giving possibilities to the same dark hole as life-draining sin and secrets is to declare our hopes and dreams dead before arrival. They must be brought to life and light.

It is easy to forget hopes and dreams. Or is it? Perhaps it is better said that we can more easily justify their suppression. Having used arguments of "humility" and "reality" to do the unpleasant and costly work of the suppressing, we dare not wait in silence to hear and own our deepest prayer. We fear that silence would needlessly expose us to the risk of reliving the disappointment and self-doubt. Why go there? If all it takes is busyness and noise to avoid such heartache, turn up the volume and load up the calendar.

## **A M E N**

If "waiting" is exactly the right word to begin this song of prayer, then "Amen" is exactly the right word to end it. Of course, says the astute reader, this is a prayer; we are supposed to say "Amen" at the end. But "Amen" is the right word because it matches "waiting" in its courage and commitment. In general lay-terminology, "Amen" means "so be it," or "let it happen." Saying "Amen" does not end the thought, the wrestling, or the encounter. "Amen" is to be to us on our feet what "waiting" is to us on our knees. If waiting is the prelude to deepest prayer, saying "Amen" is the prelude to action.

The action of the Amen necessarily begins with accepting God's love and forgiveness—believing it to be true, as humbling as that is. Without this first step, we might as well sing "The End" instead of "Amen." It would fit musically.

The next action of the Amen is giving oneself to waiting, not being in charge, not being in a hurry. Amen will have it no other way. It is no small thing to give oneself to the complete control of someone else. This happens in routine matters like boarding an airplane. It also happens on the rare occasion such as "going under" anesthesia before surgery. The trust level is

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profound. Waiting is of the same magnitude because what has been tucked away under one's control is about to be given over to God who delights in the act of freeing and liberating.

Next in the Amen process comes the conscious act of embracing silence. For some people silence is punishment or a curse, for others it is a sabbath. For the Christ-follower who prays "Amen" and means it, silence must become a familiar place and state of being. Without this silence—listening with body, mind, and soul—Amen cannot be accomplished

Listening to what? Listening to our deepest prayer and admitting that it is true. It is our dream and desire, or it is, indeed, our confession. Amen demands that this listening to and owning of the truth of our deepest prayer take place.

Notice how the Amen is taking us back through the sung prayer. Amen is a connection, not disengagement. The Amen attaches our prayer to our life, the moment just passed to the future just begun. The Amen declares that the words of our deepest prayer will no longer lie trapped, unattended and haunting.

Amen shuts the door on darkness, sealing the resurrection to life and light of what had been buried. There will be no more night for what has been confessed. There will be no more night for what has been dreamed. Both have been liberated by the singer's courageous entrance into waiting and silence. Amen blesses our deepest prayer as it rises and soars, answered and set free by forgiveness or redemption.

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# Waiting Here, In Silence

TERRY YORK

KURT KAISER

Wait - ing here, in si - lence, God, we hear our own, our

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deep - est prayer. Un - til this si - lence we'd for - got - ten

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that these words were hid - den there. Re - sur-rect to

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Life - and Light what we bur - ied in - our night.

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A - - - men. A - - - men.

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WAITING HERE  
Irregular