

“According to the Own Due time of the Lord”

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I have a timing dysfunction. I’ve come to believe that timing is a talent or gift, probably distributed at some meeting I missed. The problem is best expressed in my inability to get on or off an escalator. It doesn’t seem natural to me that stairs should move. When I was young, it didn’t matter. The only escalator in my universe was at Grayson’s Department Store on Washington Boulevard. But now, they are everywhere—at airports, in hotels, in subway stations. I can’t tell when to get on and when to get off. I stand and wait, and rock back and forth, and hesitate. Everyone in my family has tried to help. My son Chad once rocked with me, saying gently, “Mom, you can do this.” My husband says with veiled impatience, “Just close your eyes and step on!”

This disability has been confirmed by other events on the conveyor belts of my life. Those moving steps of life seem to come too early or too late, and I often trip to get on or off.

Timing

Earlier this year, I heard Elder Dallin Oaks give a devotional address that spoke to my heart. His subject was timing. He said, “We cannot have true faith in the Lord without also having complete trust in the Lord’s will and

the Lord's timing.”¹ Elder Oaks addressed one of my most serious personal theological issues. I have spent my entire life both questioning and marveling at the unfolding of the “due time of the Lord” (1 Nephi 10:3). I sometimes perceive divine timing as either heavenly interference with my personal plan or endless waiting on the Lord for something I think I deserve now.

As members of the Church, we know the commandments. We are goal oriented, and we believe in working out our salvation. “We live in a world of quick fixes and instant gratification.”² We're drawn to day planners and hand-held computers. We sometimes think we know and may even deserve specific blessings at scheduled times, that our lives should unfold in a self-prescribed order. When we quarrel with the Lord's timing, it's usually because we think events come too early or too late.

As a young woman growing up, I had only one plan: to marry and have children immediately. Some of my best friends married their prom sweetheart right after high school. I didn't even have a date for prom. I waited. I went to college. My twenty-first birthday came. I was still dateless. My younger sister was already married. Then things turned around. I graduated from nursing school and applied to graduate school. I was accepted with a full-tuition scholarship that included a generous living allowance. I even enjoyed a few dates. I thought the Lord finally understood my plan.

During the summer of my twenty-fourth year, as my second younger sister was making wedding plans, I was packing for graduate school. I had a boyfriend, but my timing dysfunction was in full bloom as we continued a sort of approach-avoidance relationship. But I was hopeful. Then, on a Tuesday evening, my bishop called me to go on a mission. As I pictured myself giving up my scholarship, going away for a year and a half, coming home older than a quarter century and totally dateless, it was all the wrong time! “Why didn't he call me when I was twenty-one?” I whined.

As I prayed for direction, however, I knew I must go. So I declined the scholarship, put my affairs in order, and served with faith and abandon in Colombia, South America. I never looked back and have never regretted that decision. My mission became one of the defining events of my life.

Six years ago, a gentlemen caller came in a relentless pursuit of marriage—at the wrong time, I thought. Why didn't I meet him at the prom thirty years earlier? Why not twenty years later, so we could waltz into retirement together? But we married, and he has become the love and light of my life—my eternal life.

Still, my timing dysfunction continues. No matter how much I study and prepare and repent and try again, I seem not quite ready for what's coming next. Just as I achieved the status of professor and began my dream to be a scholar—spending time reading, writing, and sharing with adoring students at my feet—I was called to be a dean. My days are now filled with people and policies and decisions that never appeared in my academic plan.

I found comfort in the fact that my children are launched (sort of—I keep coming home to dirty dishes, and they keep coming home with laundry) and my Church assignment was relatively light—until eighteen days ago. Sisters, you are looking at the least likely, most inexperienced, perhaps most untimely, new ward Relief Society president! When my bishop extended the calling, the immediate response from both my husband and me was that this was not our time. But we could not deny the inspired faith of our bishop and the sweet and powerful comfort of the Spirit, and we were compelled to recognize, for reasons beyond our knowledge, that this may be “the Lord's own due time.”

Elder Neal A. Maxwell warned, “When we are unduly impatient with an omniscient God's timing, we really are suggesting that we know what is best . . . —we who wear wristwatches seek to counsel Him who oversees cosmic clocks and calendars.”³ When we are impatient, “we are suggesting that we like our timetable better than God's.”⁴

Life Doesn't Happen in Chronological Order

I am going to say something that may sound contrary to logic. Sisters, “life doesn't happen in chronological order.” What I mean is that life is not like a string in a single, flat dimension with knots tied at assigned distances. Much of what teaches us most in life is not self-scheduled. Life is multidimensional, dynamic, and eternal. It includes our life before, the past-present-and-future of this life, and our life after, with overlapping and interacting events and people and reminders of the divine.

Life's most precious moments do not happen and are not remembered or cherished according to a specific time clock. When you think about the most important events in your own memories, I don't think you stop to arrange them in chronological order. Your past life flows in your memory without time: you think of the birth of your last child, your own first day of school, a kiss from your grandmother. You don't care in what order they happened. In our hearts and memories timing, does not matter. As we reflect on our lives in a larger perspective, time is neither linear nor measured.

One reason to live in obedience and repentance today is to sweeten our future memories. When we step back, our picture of life includes so much more than our trials of today or impatient hopes of tomorrow.

When you do family history, when you make that marvelous discovery of your great-grandmother's father, do you care whether his mother was twenty or thirty-five when he was born? Of course not! You care that you found him. Even if he lived in 1786, he is part of your family now. Time blends together as hearts are turned to each other across time and generations.

I need only try to interpret Isaiah or John's Revelation to know that my measures of time are irrelevant. Without our help to figure it out, the Lord is aware of His Kingdom and the events in our lives.

Waiting, Patience, and Hope

Unplanned events in our lives are not always too early. Often, our greatest trials are when we must wait. And, sometimes the waiting seems like forever. Mark Twain said, "All good things arrive unto them that wait—and don't die in the meantime."⁵

Remember Sarah of the Old Testament? The Lord told Abraham, "And lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son" (Genesis 18:10). "Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old . . . ? And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh . . . Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son" (Genesis 18:12–14). "And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son" (Genesis 21:1–2). We are promised in modern scripture that "all things must come to pass in their time" (D&C 64:32).

Waiting is a part of the challenge of mortality. We may think that we need only to endure our storms of life. Sometimes the trial of our faith is waiting itself. Waiting for a child to return to faithfulness, waiting for an uncertain diagnosis, waiting to marry—all of these uncertainties try our patience and our faith.

Rather than recognize “the Lord’s own due time,” we may give the Lord due dates for our blessings or relief from trial. To any first mother-to-be, the last weeks of pregnancy seem like forever. She looks forward with anxious expectation of her due date. Sisters, how many children do you know who were actually born on the morning of their due dates?

On the other hand, waiting can be a gift. Our sisters of the past waited on each other in childbirth. Such waiting meant gentle comfort and service. To wait for a missionary often means a commitment to supportive patience and personal preparation. To wait up at night for a child’s return is a gift of confidence and security.

Patient waiting strengthens faith. The scriptures tell us, “I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry” (Psalm 40:1); “Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me” (Micah 7:7). Elder Neal A. Maxwell teaches, “Patient endurance permits us to cling to our faith in the Lord and our faith in His timing.”⁶

When we learn patience and to wait, we invite hope. The Psalmist says, “I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope” (Psalm 130:5). Elder Maxwell explained that “real hope is much more than wishful musing. . . . Hope is serene, not giddy, [being] eager without being naive, and pleasantly steady without being smug. Hope is realistic anticipation which takes the form of a determination—not only to survive adversity but . . . , to ‘endure . . . well’ . . . (see D&C 121:8).”⁷ Sisters, to endure well with hope is to anxiously engage in our own lives, to face our own life condition, submit to the Lord’s will, and to thrive. A popular poet penned, “Surviving is important. Thriving is elegant.”⁸

An Eternal Perspective and Divine Rhythm

When we learn lessons of waiting, patience, hope, and faith, we begin to gain an eternal perspective. Without such a perspective, our plans are small and uninspiring. As one author put it, we are “measuring out of life in tepid

teacups.”⁹ When we have an eternal perspective, we recognize the divine rhythm in our own personal lives. When we allow life to happen, embrace our own experience—whatever it is—and watch with patience the unfolding purposes of God in our lives, we are then able to claim our own lives as children of God and our relationship with a personal Savior. Otherwise, we are living for a wish for a life that is not ours. It demands a quiet courage to wait with patience.

I spent my early childhood on a farm where life followed a natural rhythm. I can mark the holidays of the year by the farmwork. Between Easter (April 10) and Mother’s Day (May 10), as soon as the ground thaws, my dad plows and plants. Two weeks before my birthday (March 3), calving begins. By the time the lilacs bloom, calves are “worked,” which includes branding and vaccinating. Then the cattle are herded out to range until after school starts (October 1), when they are brought back to the fields. Meanwhile, by Father’s Day, Dad is cutting, baling, and hauling hay. Every Fourth of July of my life, Dad is hauling first crop. By mid-August, the thresher is humming and the grain is harvested. By Labor Day, all of the hay is in and the cattle are held until market. Then the whole year starts over. My father and his father before him have continued this same pattern every year for more than one hundred years.

Within that pattern have been droughts, bad cattle markets, hailstorms, and broken-down tractors in the field. There have been long days of enormous work and worry. There have been terrible accidents, as when my grandfather lost his leg in the hay mower, but the lilacs have always bloomed in May, and the hay is always in the barn by October. Suppose my father planned a vacation. It seems like a reasonable request. Suppose he planned his life to plant in November and harvest in March, so he could rest in June? Or suppose he prayed and pleaded for harvest in April because the wait until August was just too long?

When the Lord extends His own due time, He is not withholding in punitive judgement. When we wait and submit to a divine rhythm, God may be allowing us to mature spiritually. Just as grain seed requires time to germinate and ripen, we require time to mature. We “know not” the Lord’s time (Mark 13:33). The scriptures say, “All is as one day with God, and time [is] only . . . measured unto men” (Alma 40:8); “for a thousand years . . . are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night” (Psalm 90:4; see also 2 Peter 3:8).

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “When His commandments teach us, it is in view of eternity; for we are looked upon by God as though we were in eternity.”¹⁰ Even with an eternal perspective, the Lord allows miracles in our time, in the daily moments of our lives, if we are willing to see them. These miracles provoke growth spurts toward spiritual maturity.

It is not always easy to gain an eternal perspective. Some trials or losses come as sudden crashing, wrenching, untimely, and unfair surprises. They hit us blindsided. They challenge all sense of perspective of time or hope or even faith. Fourteen years ago, I lost my eight-year-old son, Todd, in such a jolting ambush. It’s a shock that still stings. For years, as I set one less plate at the counter, washed and folded one less stack of playclothes, passed birthdays with no cake or candles, and hung the Christmas stocking that remains empty in the morning, time did not matter. For a time, even eternity did not matter because I only knew that he was gone. I lost all personal knowledge of where he was. It didn’t matter if I died. I might have wished it.

But a sweet miracle was sent after a wait of almost exactly seven years. My mother’s passing, though sudden and sad, was gentle and tender and attended by angels. She was able to share a courageous farewell with each family member and fade away in peace on Thanksgiving night surrounded by love. My father and sisters and brother and I were with her around the clock for four days. Like young children, we fluttered around her bed. We sang hymns and brought roses. We were privileged to witness a marital synchrony between Mom and Dad, a courage in my mother and a nobility in my father, of which we had never been aware. It was as if we were ushered into a new sphere of spirit—watching the intense powers of nature, as body and spirit struggled to separate under the profound influence of heaven. For four days, we lived on a different planet. We were witnesses to courage and divine knowledge as our mother willingly and bravely confronted her death.

Reminiscent of a woman in the work of birth, her swollen body labored in passage across the veil separating mortal time and eternity. And we were privileged to assist as midwives. It was a profound spiritual experience to care for her, to wash her face and brush her hair, to talk to her, and to pray over her. I felt like she was, as the poet described, a “deep weathered basket,” in which I longed to linger.¹¹ Every moment was a gift. As the end drew near, all was hushed, and we were taken away to a place of reverence. Never was there so much love or so much peace and so little matter of time in our family.

Throughout that sweet passing, I thought often of the contrast between her departure and the departure of my Todd. I learned much about “the Lord’s own due time.” I learned that God had actually waited with me in my years of grief. I don’t know why that lesson came after so long. We don’t have to understand everything about the Lord’s timing, perhaps precisely because we only have a view of mortal time. I learned that the greatest gift of the Savior and His Atonement is that He lives and we live in eternity. That is a truth, regardless of where we are in our belief or our doubt. In our mortal time, sorrows and losses will come, and life won’t happen as we hope or plan. We will suffer, sin, regret, and need to try again, and we will wait, but His gift is always there for us.

Our Time Is Now

If we cannot find patience for the Lord’s time, we run a great risk of missing what’s happening now. Now is our time “to prepare to meet God” (Alma 12:24; Alma 34:32). Eternity includes today. We need patience not only to await blessings of hope in the future but to endure the challenges and recognize the blessings of our lives now. This is a fullness of time for each of us, every day, right now. Our past experiences have prepared us for current challenges, and our actions now will have a significant effect on our own future lives and the lives of others that we cannot begin to imagine.

Late on the night of May 10, 1940, Hitler’s armies were attacking all over Europe. In England, Neville Chamberlain had resigned as prime minister, a betrayed and broken man. In the United States, Franklin Roosevelt had not yet been able to convince his country to enter what was perceived to be a European war. That night, Winston Churchill met with King George VI to form a new British government for the war; then he telephoned his friend President Roosevelt. The burden of the future of the entire world lay on the shoulders of Churchill. He said of that night, “I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, . . . that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and this trial.”¹² Sisters, our past lives are preparation for our trials now, and how we meet today’s challenges is preparation for our future and the future of those we love.

We would do well to take the counsel of President Gordon B. Hinckley, who said, “I don’t worry too much about the future, and I don’t worry very much about the past. . . . [It’s] the present you have to deal with. Reach out for every good opportunity to do what you ought to do.”¹³

Submitting to the “Own Due Time” of the Savior

We must “remember that it is upon the rock of our redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that [we] must build [our] foundation” (Helaman 5:12). The analogy of the rock of Christ is particularly significant as we think of our life plans. A rock is solid and timeless. His gift of the Atonement is timeless: infinite. Though we count time in this brief mortality, the Lord’s time and His gift are eternal.

The Lord knows of our mortal temporal struggles. Even at Gethsemane, the Savior Himself “prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him” (Mark 14:35) and asked, “Father, save me from this hour” (John 12:27).

All of us who would be disciples of Christ kneel sometime at our own Gethsemane. But we need not stay. When we can find the courage to surrender, to accept the gift of the Savior—who already suffered there—we can stand and move on to another garden. The Atonement offers the quiet promise of that safe passage.¹⁴

“The rock of our Redeemer” is timeless, infinite. The scriptures assure, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phillippians 4:13); “for in his strength I can do all things” (Alma 26:12).

The Lord watches over the timing and events of our lives. He knows of our waiting and its purposes. We are as impulsive children who must learn delayed gratification and the fruits of waiting in order to gain spiritual maturity. Isaiah offers a most beautiful promise: “But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31). “Blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isaiah 30:18).

Sisters, let us live with patience and engage in work of the Lord and embrace His timing in our own lives. Let us see today as part of eternity. Let us accept the timeless gift of the Savior, the rock of our Redeemer, and come unto Him.

When I become impatient and counsel the Lord with my short-sighted wishes, how presumptuous am I! How dare I question the timing of the Lord in the challenges and miracles of my life, when I can’t even get on an

escalator! I must “close my eyes in faith and step on,” in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Dallin H. Oaks, “Timing,” devotional address delivered at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 29 January 2002; available online at [Http://speeches.byu.edu/devo/2001-02/OaksW02.html](http://speeches.byu.edu/devo/2001-02/OaksW02.html) (retrieved 26 February 2002).
2. BYU Women’s Conference program brochure, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, May 2002.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, “Hope through the Atonement of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, November 1998, 63.
4. Neal A. Maxwell, “Endure It Well,” *Ensign*, May 1990, 34.
5. Mark Twain, letter to Orion and Jane Clemens, 3 April 1889; available online at [Http://www.twainquotes.com/Patience.html](http://www.twainquotes.com/Patience.html) (retrieved 28 February 2002).
6. Maxwell, “Endure It Well,” 34.
7. Maxwell, “Hope through the Atonement,” 62.
8. Maya Angelou, “Life Mosaic,” Hallmark Cards, 2001; quoted in *Conversations with Maya Angelou*, ed. Jeffrey M. Elliot (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989).
9. “Must There Always Be a Red Brick England?” *Time Magazine*, 26 March 1965, 60.
10. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 356.
11. Jane Relaford Brown, “Finding Her Here,” n.d.; available online at www.geocities.com/bkw22.geo/finding.html (retrieved 11 April 2002).

12. Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, vol. 1 of *The Second World War* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton-Mifflin, 1948), 667.

13. Gordon B. Hinckley, *Stand a Little Taller: Counsel and Inspiration for Each Day of the Year* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 382.

14. See Elaine S. Marshall, "Safe Passage," in *The Gift of the Atonement: Favorite Writings on the Atonement and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 101. *Young University Studies*, 1998), 129–30.