

Lorna and I don't have a great history with boats. Years ago, when we were living in Scotland, we went out on a couple of rowing boats with my brother and his friend. It was just a little boating pond, but somehow my brother managed to snap his oar. And we ended up laughing so much that we tipped up too much and ended up sinking!

Then a couple of years ago Lorna nearly did the same thing on a motor boat in Lough Derg. For some reason, as soon as she took control of the boat, it went crazily from side to side. I really thought we were all going for a swim!

Then we've had more than a few horrible ferry crossings. The worst was probably when we first moved over here in 1999. We were on one of those really fast ferries and it was just awful. Everything was flying off the tables and Lorna and I were both extremely sick.

And so these days, most of the time when we get on a boat, we take our travel-pills, put on our little pressure point wristbands, and sit down and try and move as little as possible.

And so nothing would make me want to swap places with Noah and his family. Can you imagine being on that boat, feeding the animals, cleaning out their pens, dealing with a whole range of noises and smells, and not just a few hours or even a couple of days? It must have been horrible.

But finally things began to change because God was faithful. Genesis 8:1-14: *"But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. ² Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. ³ The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, ⁴ and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible. ⁶ After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark ⁷ and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. ⁹ But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. ¹⁰ He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. ¹¹ When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. ¹² He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him. ¹³ By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. ¹⁴ By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry."*

1. Waiting on God's Timing

Have you ever struggled with God's timing? Have you wondered why things are taking so long in your life, why God's work seems to go so slow? Have you ever felt as if God has forgotten about you?

In Psalm 13:1-2, David asked: *"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"* Time is a real challenge to faith. As the hours turn to days, then to weeks and months, it becomes harder and harder for us to keep on trusting in the Lord.

I don't know if Noah and his family felt like that. The Bible doesn't give any insight into how they felt during their time on board the ark. It doesn't tell us if they wondered if the rain was ever going to stop, if the flood was ever going to disappear, if they were ever going to see dry land again.

But it does tell us that they had to wait an incredibly long time:

- *"Rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights."* Genesis 7:12
- And *"The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days."* Genesis 7:24
- And even when the water started to recede, things went painfully slow. *"On the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat."* Genesis 8:4 5 months of floating eventually came to an end as the boat rested somewhere in the mountain range of Ararat.
- But it took another 7 months before the land had dried out: *"By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry."* Genesis 8:14

That means that Noah and his family spent a year and 10 days on board this ark. Surely they must have got tired of that confined space, of all those animals, even of each other. And yet, they waited and waited on God's timing.

a) It is different from ours

And we need to learn to do the same. God says: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:9

God’s ways are often not what we would choose. His timing is often different from ours. He is never impatient. He is not in a rush. And so we need to learn to “Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.” Psalm 27:14 We need to wait on God’s perfect plan and his perfect timing.

2. Trusting In God’s Faithfulness

But we can do this with confidence, because we can trust in God’s faithfulness. “God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark.” Genesis 8:1 Noah and his family might have felt like they had been forgotten. They might have felt alone and abandoned in that boat on an unending ocean, but the reality was that God hadn’t forgotten them. He hadn’t abandoned them.

Instead he remembered them. And so stopped the rain. He closed the springs of the deep. And “He sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.” Genesis 8:1.

God had kept Noah and his family in his heart. He was holding them in his hands. And he would complete the work that he had begun in their lives to protect them from the flood and provide for them a new world in which to live.

a) God Remembers His People

And this is the wonderful truth that we can stand on this morning. On numerous occasions throughout the Bible, God declares that he remembers his people. He doesn’t start a relationship with them and then abandon them. He doesn’t start to work in their lives and then walk away. He is a faithful God, who remembers his people and his promises to them!

And so the Lord says in Isaiah 49:15, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”

Yes we might still go through impossibly difficult times. We might still experience incredibly dark days. We might still struggle with seemingly unnecessary delays. But throughout them all, we can wait in confidence because we know that God has promised, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5

We can be sure that God has not forgotten us. We can be certain that he has not discarded us. We can hold on to the wonderful truth that he has not given up on us.

b) God Keeps His Covenant

That’s because he has covenanted himself to us. God said to Noah: “I will establish my covenant with you.” Genesis 6:18 God had committed himself to Noah and his family, and so he would keep his agreement, he would honour his contract.

And God will do the same with all those who have trusted in Jesus. This is his promise: “I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.” Jeremiah 32:40

The moment we repented from our sin and turned to trust in Jesus, God covenanted himself to us. He promised his complete forgiveness, his unending love, his constant presence, his powerful protection and his eternal blessing – and nothing and no-one can make him go back on his word!

Today we can wait on God’s timing with confidence because we can trust in God’s faithfulness because he always remembers his people. He always keeps his covenant. He will complete the work that he has begun in our lives!

3. Partnering in God’s Work

But that doesn’t mean we should always sit back and just let things happen! “Let go and let God!” is not the whole story of the Christian life! Noah waited on God’s timing and trusted in God’s faithfulness, but he also got involved in trying to recognise and understand what God was doing.

Firstly “He sent out a raven.” Genesis 8:7. But that just kept flying back and forward, without telling him much information.

Then, “He sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground.” Genesis 8:8:

- The first time it came straight back, as it found no-where to land.

- The second time it brought back a freshly plucked olive leaf, giving evidence of the new life growing on the drying planet.
- The third time it didn't come back, showing that the water had receded.

This wasn't because Noah was impatient. There is a beautiful rhythm to his actions here as he sends this bird out once a week, following God's example of a weekly cycle.

Instead, I think this is Noah getting involved in what God was doing in the world. Noah wasn't a passive passenger in this whole process. He was involved with God in building the ark. He was involved in boarding the animals God brought onto the ark. He had been feeding them the food that he had stored onto the ark. And now he is involved in investigating the drying process on the earth.

a) Active Participants

God has not called us to be passive passengers in his kingdom. Instead he has called us to be active participants: ["For we are God's fellow-workers."](#) 1 Corinthians 3:9

And so trusting and waiting doesn't mean that we switch our brains off, sick back and let God do his work. Instead it means seeking to understand God's ways, struggling to comprehend his purpose and plans and getting involved in what he is doing in his world.

4. Responding to God's Commands

But as we do this, we always need to remember who is in charge. In response to the evidence from the dove, Noah removed the covering from the ark and saw that the ground was dry, but he didn't make the decision on when to leave the ark. Instead God commanded him. Genesis 8:15-17: ["¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶\"Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it.\""](#)

a) Listening

For over a year Noah and his family had experienced safety and security in this boat. It had been their home, their world. But God had so much more for them!

He didn't want them to stay on that boat forever. It had a time and a place in their lives – but they weren't called to stay there! They had to get out, and bring the animals out to, so they could explore, enjoy and fill the new world that God had provided.

This is where the people of Israel failed. After being rescued from slavery in Egypt, they stood on the border of Canaan – the new home that God had promised to give them. But they were afraid. The challenges ahead were great. The enemies were fierce. The battles ahead were terrifying.

And so, instead of trusting in God's promise to be with them and give them the victory, they rebelled against God and said, ["We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."](#) Numbers 14:4. Instead of launching out into God's provision, they wanted to go back to the familiar. As a result they wasted 40 years wandering in the desert until that whole generation had died!

b) Obeying

But Noah was someone who walked with God. When he was told to build the ark: ["Noah did everything just as God commanded him."](#) Genesis 6:22 And when he was told to enter the ark: ["Noah did all that the Lord commanded him."](#) Genesis 7:5

And so when God told him to leave, he obeyed. Genesis 8:18-19: ["So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another."](#)

And this is what we need to learn. Jesus said: ["If you love me, you will obey what I command."](#) John 14:15 God's commands may be demanding and challenging. It may feel easier and safer to stick with what we know, what we are used to.

But God has prepared a new life for us as we wait on his timing, trust in his faithfulness and work in his partnership. So let's not hesitate, but let us listen to, and obey Christ, as he commands us to move forward.

5. Celebrating God's Goodness

So Noah and his family stepped out of the ark into a brand new world. There was so much for them to explore and to do. But look at what they did first. "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it." Genesis 8:20

Noah's first response was to worship – to celebrate God's goodness, to rejoice in his grace, to thank him for all that he had given.

a) Willing Sacrifice

And he was willing to do this with some of the animals that he had just rescued on the ark. From a logical point of view, this didn't really make sense. Surely there were so few animals around, and the world was so huge that every animal was needed to repopulate the earth. None could be spared.

But true worship doesn't hold back for practical reasons. True worship isn't stingy. Instead it is costly. It is sacrificial. David said "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." Samuel 24:24

Why should we give like this? Because God has already given to us like this. "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1 In view of all that God has done in our lives, how could we hold back anything from the one who loved us and gave himself for us?

6. Receiving God's Grace

But this chapter doesn't end with Noah doing something for God – but with God again expressing his grace to Noah! Genesis 8:21-22: "The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

²² "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

God was pleased with the sacrifice that Noah had made and so he promised mankind that he would never again destroy the world in that way and that the regular pattern in this world of nature, temperature, seasons and light will continue as long as the world does.

a) Abundant Grace

And this is what it is always like for God's people. When we respond to all that God has done in our lives, with sacrificial service and worship – he responds again by giving us even more grace! "From the fulness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another." John 1:16

God has rescued us, redeemed us, adopted us into his family, baptised us with his Spirit. He has given us the desire and ability to live for him, equipping us and empowering us for ministry. And when in gratitude and worship we respond with our lives laid down in a living sacrifice for him – he showers his grace on us again, in gifts of joy, satisfaction, purpose, love and eternal rewards!

Conclusion

Those days on the ark must have been tough for Noah and his family. But God was with them and that made all the difference in the world. And so I pray that we too will follow in their footsteps:

- Waiting on God's Timing
- Trusting In God's Faithfulness
- Partnering in God's Work
- Responding to God's Commands
- Celebrating God's Goodness
- Receiving God's Grace

Andrew Burt
Enniscorthy Christian Fellowship
November 5th 2017