

The Time When the Lord Wants to Visit Us

by Annie Poonen

This sermon reflects on the concept of 'visitation' in the context of various personal experiences and biblical examples. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and responding to God's visitation in our lives, even in times of suffering or challenges. The speaker draws parallels between personal encounters with God and instances of visitation in the Bible, highlighting the need for repentance, surrender, and learning from God during these times.

Duration: 38:44

Scripture: Luke 19:41, Genesis 2:23, Hebrews 13:12, Ruth 1:6, Ezekiel 14:3, Hebrews 13:2, Mark 9:24, Psalm 139:23

Topics: "God's Visitation", "Responding to Divine Encounters"

Description

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Transcript

In my college days, there was a day called a visiting day. We stayed in a hostel, a girls hostel, and they had rules there. So one day in a month or a couple of weeks was the visiting day where our parents or anyone who had prior admission, like prior permission to visit us, they could come and visit us in the evening for half an hour.

And so when my dad was passing through that town, he would inform me and he planned to come and visit me for that half an hour. And I remember the days of excitement when I was looking forward to seeing him. And even though it was for half an hour, I had so much excitement looking forward to that day, that half an hour.

And then at the end of the half an hour, there would be a gong, loud gong, when the visitors would have to leave. And the sorrow I had was more than the excitement I had before his visit. And sometimes he'd be late because he was coming from some distance away, and the half an hour would be less and less.

And you know, it was a time of happiness ending in sorrow. So I was thinking of those days of visiting, visiting hours. And then I was reminded of something which is in God's word.

If you, if you turn to Luke 19 verses 41 to 44, Jesus said about the time of visitation. I was thinking of that the time of visitation when Jesus would visit his people. He saw, he was approaching Jerusalem and it was at the time very close to his death.

And as he came near Jerusalem, he started weeping. And he, he said these words when he, after he wept. Would that you, even you had known this day the things that make for peace.

But now they are hidden from your eyes because you did not know the time of your visitation. I thought of those words, the time of God's, of our visitation, when God and Jesus want to visit with us and meet with us. How terrible it was for the people of that, those days who missed the time of his visitation when Jesus was there with open arms, calling his people towards himself.

And he, he wanted to shelter them like a mother hen wanting to shelter its chicks under its wings, but they would not come to him. They refused not only that, they didn't recognize him as a savior and redeemer. He was their only hope and he was their strength and comfort, but they refused.

Not only they refused, they rejected him in such a cruel and humiliating way. They put him to death. And that was the suffering that the son of God had to bear for us.

They did not know it was the time of visitation for them. And sometimes I think some things which God allows in our lives, those are times of our visitation. That's the time when God wants to meet with us.

I fully believe, especially when sad things happen to us. I mean, when happy things, when good things happen to us, we are happy and we rejoice in the Lord. But when sad things happen to us, I always think, Lord, I know that you allowed this in my life.

Let it be a time of my visitation. Let it be a time when you can meet with me and you can tell me, what are you trying to speak to me, Lord, help me to learn something from this. Let me take it as a time of visitation from you.

I can begin with the time when I accepted the Lord or when the Lord spoke to me. It was after a time when I had almost died after food poisoning. And when I realized that Lord had brought me back and given me life, and I surrendered my life to him.

That was almost the first time I realized it was a time of my visitation, when God wanted to meet with me. And since then, I have felt many times when God was reaching out his hand to me in love, trying to speak to me, encourage me and show me things which I didn't know at my times of ease and at times of plenty. And I value those days.

I really value those days because those lessons which I learned are so precious. And there were times when I used to ask God for something and his reply was, no, that's not my will for you. There was a time when there was sickness in my life.

I remember when my youngest son was just two years old, I had rheumatoid arthritis and whatever medicine I took didn't help me. And I was in bed in this pain and I was reaching out to God. Then also I felt God allowed this and this is my time of visitation when I can cry out to him and learn from him.

I said, Lord, if you heal me and give me back my strength, I live for you and for your people. And I surrendered my life to him and miraculously God healed me. And I haven't forgiven, I haven't forgotten

that promise I made to the Lord.

I said, I want to live for you more than I did before. Another time when that healing was so precious to me, I've never had pain in my joints since that time. I praise God for that healing which he gave me.

Many people I know have not been healed. God has a plan for them. But for me, it was in his mercy that he gave me that healing.

Another time of visitation for me was when we started CFC. And my children were small and we had to make a lot of adjustments in our home. People were coming.

We had four meetings in a week, four days. And Sundays it would be morning and evening and some days afternoon also. And we had to clear out our rooms and people would come.

And sometimes there would be brothers and sisters from distant places who would come and stay with us. And we opened our home to them. And there were times when I felt that there was hostility from my relatives, from friends.

Even though I had not even wished evil or no hatred for them, but God taught me, this is the time for you to learn to love others. That is the time when you can learn what it is to have that divine love, God's love, which doesn't depend on what others do to us. But those experiences have made me richer, stronger in the Lord, and made me long for that divine nature which only Christ can give, taught me to forgive others, not to expect even an apology from others.

So I praise and thank God, even during these days of pandemic, when all of us, most of us have so many limitations and so many hardships, but when we think of others who are going through more hardships, we can cry out to God and say, Lord, have mercy on these others who are suffering more than me, more than I am, and help me to be mindful of the needs of others. Sometimes, during these days, I think of instances when God visited his people in the Bible, and I get comfort from that. One of those is in Genesis chapter 2, verses 23 to 25, we read that the children of Israel were under slavery.

Their taskmasters kept increasing their load, their burden, and they had to work harder and harder, and there was no sign of any relief for them. Then we read these wonderful words, the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue came from slavery came up to God, that cry came up to God.

God heard their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew, that's so wonderful. God sees his people and God knows, that's such a comfort to us when we are under some heavy load.

Those are the comforting words which God wants to give us. He sees our struggle. He sees our physical problems, our spiritual need, our longing for victory in so many areas.

Sometimes we have to cope with difficult children, with sickness. Some of us have to deal with aged parents. Some of us have had to deal with loss in our family, loved ones who have passed away.

At least one, we can think of at least one person who may have died of COVID. Just today I heard of a dear friend of ours, his son, just a 40-year-old young man died of COVID, leaving his wife and two small children. And this also is the time God has appointed for his visitation for us.

We can cry out to him and say, Lord, in my struggle, in my weakness, which I cannot describe to anyone, I cry out to you. I thank you for your word, that you can see me and you know me and you are there to help me. This is the time of visitation from you, Lord.

Please speak to me. Please strengthen me. Give me comfort.

Give me strength to go through these days. A second instance which comforts me, which reminds me of a visitation from God is when we read of Jacob at the time when he met with God in Peniel. Until then, Jacob was leading a selfish life and he was so manipulating.

He got whatever he wanted by his own cleverness and shrewdness. He managed to get a lot of wealth from his uncle and father-in-law. He got two wives and lots of children and he wanted to get away from his tired father-in-law and uncle and he was escaping from them.

But then it came to a time when he realized ahead of him was his dreaded brother who wanted to kill him. He was in a fix. And that was the time of visitation for him.

God met with him at a place called Peniel. He was struggling, but God overpowered him and broke him. And after that, everybody knew that Jacob had met with God because he was limping.

Whoever saw him said, there's something different about this strong man. He suddenly becomes so weak. He's having to lean on a stick on his staff.

But we read that after that encounter, the sun rose. The sun was shining on his face. There was a shining and an appearance which God gave him, which people knew that he had met with God and God blessed him then.

It was a breaking experience, but it was a blessed experience. That shining appearance must have been with him and this limp which he had must have reminded him, I'm no more the strong Jacob I used to be, the manipulating Jacob I used to be. I'm a weak person, but God has met with me and he has blessed with me.

That was his comfort. And sometimes that is the breaking that some of us have had to face. You know, sometimes we are such strong sisters and we can do things in our own way and we have a clever way of doing things.

We can manage our home. We feel our way of doing things is the wisest way and we know a lot more than others do and we can manage things on our own. Then God allows, God meets with us and we don't need a penial experience where God meets with us even though we struggle.

He overpowers us and he breaks us and says, my child, from now on, depend on me. I'll be your strength. Don't depend on your cleverness or your strength, your ability to do things by yourself.

You depend on me. I'll strengthen you and I'll uphold you. I'll lead you.

I'll hold your hand and I'll lead you. You don't have to worry about anything. What a comfort for us if we have and when we have had a penial experience with God.

I praise and thank God for the breaking experiences God allows in our lives. Sometimes through sickness. Sometimes when things don't go our way, disappointments, loss, whatever it is, misunderstanding from

people, even our loved ones don't understand us.

All those things can turn, God can turn to a penal experience and can be a day of visitation for us also. Praise and thank God for that. And a third example of God's visitation is for a time when God reached out to a widow called Naomi.

Naomi and her husband, they left Bethlehem at the time of famine and they went to the region of the Moabites and they lived there with their two sons. And then her husband died. She was left a widow.

The two sons married Moabite girls. That must have been a different experience for her to accept two girls from a different culture, different background, even different religion. And she worshipped the one true God to accept those two girls.

Must have been a breaking experience for her, but she accepted them. Then another tragedy, both her sons died. So there were now three widows who had to fend for themselves, but God had a plan of visitation for them.

And we read in Ruth 1.6, Naomi heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. She didn't have to struggle. She could go back to her home country and she had hope.

And we know how the Lord met with her and blessed her through Ruth. And through Ruth came David and the royal line and Jesus came into the world through the line of David. How much God blessed that widow, those two poor widows.

That was the day of visitation for them. Thank God, even if whatever helpless state we are in and we are alone, we don't have to feel that we are alone. And Jesus said about helpless widows, how God is the God of widows and orphans, and how even an unjust judge would help a widow.

He used those parables to teach us that in our time of helplessness, God meets with us and visit with us. Another example I can think of in our generation is Amy Carmichael who came to India. She did wonderful things in rescuing hundreds of girls, baby girls from unfortunate lives of prostitution, perhaps, and poverty, definitely.

And she rescued them and made a home for them and gave them a happy home. And she used to call these girls stars, clusters of stars, she called them. And she had such joy in rescuing those girls.

But even for her, there was a day of visitation. Many of us don't know that she had an accident and she fell down and she became a cripple and she couldn't walk after that. She had to be in bed.

What a tragedy for a woman who had such a useful life, blessing so many little girls. We think, is that the end of her life? No, I think it was the beginning. It was her day of visitation because from that bed, sick bed, from that crippled days, those days, she wrote so many poems which have blessed us and blessed many people throughout the world and her books have been more of a blessing.

I had the privilege of studying with a couple of girls who were brought up in that fellowship and they are such precious gems who love the Lord. So we praise and thank God for her life also and in her life also, there was that day of visitation. Though it was a sad time, it was a day of visitation for her.

I also came to know of a very dear and beloved brother in Kerala, in India. He was not a Christian, but as a newly married man, he had a bad accident and he became a paraplegic. He got paralyzed from his waist

down and he thought that was the end of his life.

All his relatives forsook him and thought he's going to die anyway. So they forsook him. His wife was expecting a baby and her family came and took her away because they couldn't stand to bear to see her crying and crying and there he was all alone in that room waiting for somebody to come and even turn him over in the bed or supply some food and he had a vision of Jesus and Jesus met with him.

That was his day of visitation. If you see him now, you'd see what a glorious countenance he has, that joy of the Lord. His wife came back and she also met with the Lord and they both became a couple and now they have a son who's got a job.

All three of them have started a home to help people, crippled people. They have started a home where such crippled people can come and get help and be taken care of in Kerala. And he's an example.

When you see him and some people came to, because he became a Christian, came to put him to death. He said, you can do what you want with my life. After all, only six spans of my life are alive.

The rest of my body is dead. So if you want, you can put me to death. I don't care.

I know that I'll be with the Lord. And those people were so moved, they left him alone. And he still continues that work, as far as I know, serving the Lord.

So I praise and thank God for examples like that, living examples, who met with God, who had that precious visitation from the Lord and whose lives were changed. Lastly, I want to talk about a family who got a visitation from Jesus. We all know, if you read in Luke 10, verses 38 to 42, we read of Mary and Martha.

You know, I was saying how when Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, he wept because the people in Jerusalem were rejecting him. But outside Jerusalem, in a town called Bethany, there was a family which accepted him and welcomed him. And he would stop by in that home, in that precious home, and have some good food and refresh his body before he went to Jerusalem, before he got the attacks from the enemies.

He got a time to be refreshed by visiting that precious home. But there also, they had that day of visitation. Martha was the one who welcomed and she was known for her hospitality.

The hospitality is good. We read that in Hebrews 13, 2, we should practice hospitality, but without complaint. And Jesus also said about in parables, about being hospitable, a friend who comes at night asking for bread and his friend got up to give him that, just because his friend was kept on knocking.

So, hospitality is something that we need and we need to have, but we should do it without complaining. And in this home, there was one defect. Martha, who was so hospitable, was so taken up with that hospitality.

She got, it said she was cumbered and burdened with it. And she kept on, but it didn't end there. She had a complaint in her heart.

She had a complaint against her own sister, that her sister was not helping her. And she had a complaint and it was so bad that she came and told, she complained to Jesus about it. That reminds me of the times when, when we started CFC and the Lord spoke to me and when I opened our home to have God's

people attending our home church and people would come and stay on and on and on, even though it was time to leave, they would like to stay on and have fellowship.

And sometimes we had to put some of them up at night and inwardly, I felt there was a complaint in my heart. And the Lord saw that, even though outwardly it was all smile and happiness, but inwardly there was a complaint. I started neglecting God's word and spending time with prayer.

I started becoming tired. I found that people were expecting more and more out of me. And so I became a slave of people, wanting to do more and more for them.

And instead of becoming a slave of God, I became a slave of people. I started neglecting my own health and my children and defeated in my spiritual life, irritable with the children, moody, there was no joy in my life, but outwardly nobody could make out. And my complaining spirit inside got so, and I thought of Mary and I said, Lord, my life is, even though I'm serving and serving, I think I'm serving you, but I know it's of no use to you because all that you can hear from me is the complaining and the grumbling, which is inside, which are not spoken in words, but from inside that complaining spirit.

I want to repent of that. In Ezekiel, it says in Ezekiel, I read those verses in Ezekiel 14, three, God showed Ezekiel a vision and said, Ezekiel, you know what the people on, he was an exile, he was a prophet in exile, but he said, you know what the people in Jerusalem are doing? They're having idols in their hearts. And God spoke to me through that and said, you're having an idol in your heart, an idol of pleasing people, wanting to be a good cook, wanting to be known as a person who's hospitable, wanting to know that you can manage everything.

You're a good mother, your children are doing well, everything's successful for you, but inwardly it's all hollow and rotten. Your idolatry is inside, you may not be showing a love for earthly things and all that, but that idol of wanting to please people is in your heart, get rid of that idol. And I remember, God, I surrendered my life, I said, Lord, I want to come back to you.

Everything will be a failure if I do all this just to please people. I sit in the meetings and instead of listening to God's word, I'm thinking of how to do the next meal, how to clean up and how to, did I leave the oven on, did I switch this off? Is something not working? My thoughts are all on those things, not on God's word. And God gave me a chance to repent, just like Martha, she took that correction in a good way.

Jesus told her, Martha, Martha, you're cumbered about too many things, only one thing is needed and Mary has chosen that part. And God showed me and said, and I repented and I said, Lord, I want to repent of all these things. Whatever you talk to Martha, I want to take it in my life.

Let me do less and less, but the minimum I do, if it pleases, if it's pleasing to you, that's all I want. That's all I wish for. And the Lord spoke to me and said, just like Martha, you have a spirit of competition, maybe, maybe a spirit of inferiority that somebody else can cook better than you.

And God helped me to deal with that. And now, and later on, I could see God helping me to deal with that in my own home, sibling rivalry, when one child does better than the other, when one child is better looking than the other, when one child is a better nature and more amicable and obedient than the other. And the Lord taught me, this is what Martha and Mary would have had to face.

Deal with these things, help your children to deal with them, not to be jealous of another in the family and not to feel inferior. One person may be very quick at learning things, but another child may be slow. You

spend time with the one who's slow and help her or him to get over that inferiority.

Encourage that child so that that child also can come up and, with your help, be able to master and overcome those problems which that child is facing. So all, the Lord took care of all those, takes care of all those feelings of guilt and rejection and has mercy on us and meets us. And he has a day, a time of visitation for us also.

Even if we are Martha's, we can be better Martha's. Later on in John 11 and 12, we read that Martha continued to serve, but this time there was no complaint. And she just served and Jesus must have noticed.

What was the food? Who would have prepared the food if everybody was sitting at Jesus' feet? Martha continued to serve, but there was no complaint. And for Mary, Jesus praised her. He said, you have chosen the good, best part, because Jesus didn't come there just to eat that good food.

He came there to teach that family something. And that was a time when he wanted to teach Mary and Martha something really precious about the coming days. Maybe a little later, their brother would get sick and die, they had to face those trials.

And Jesus would have wanted to teach them many things, how to handle adversity, how to handle persecution, so many things. But if we are taken up with outward things, how will we be able to hear God's word? So thank God for a person like Mary, who sat and listened and listened. And she must have thought, yeah, I'll help my sister afterwards.

Maybe I'll do the washing up. Maybe I'll do what she couldn't do. But this is the time when I can sit at Jesus' feet and hear from him.

And Jesus appreciated that. And later on, God made her, Jesus helped her to become a worshiper, helped her to do something which nobody else got a chance to do, to offer that, to pour out that pound of perfume. You know, perfume you measure in such small ounces, it's so expensive that we get a small quantity, small ounce.

And here was this woman who got a pound, such a large quantity of this precious ointment and just poured it without counting the cost at Jesus' feet. As I said once, I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing. That's what Mary learned.

Whatever the cost is, I'll offer it to the Lord. And he accepted. And all that I need from him is, oh, I'll give you back some more ointment.

No. All that we need, our reward is when Jesus says, well done, when we can hear well done from him. That's worth more than all earthly blessings, earthly rewards.

So these times of visitation are times when we can judge ourselves and we can say, Lord, show me where I am a Mata, where I need to change, where I want to be, where I can become more and more like Mary and take the warnings. And not just the warnings, take it for myself, but take it for my family. My children need that.

Let them grow up knowing how to share, how to pray, how to sit at your feet, how to learn from you, how to learn your word, to love your word, how to pray. And when they face trials like we are facing in these days

of pandemic, not to have any fear, but to trust in the Lord that he will see us and our family through. All those things we can learn and we can teach our children.

Praise and thank God that there are days of visitation for us also. Finally, I want to share about something, you know, in the city, in Jerusalem, we read that Jesus suffered outside the gates of Jerusalem. The cross was outside, he suffered outside the camp.

Before he came into Jerusalem, there was comfort in Bethany, but after his crucifixion, he was cast outside. And in Hebrews 13, we read these wonderful verses. Hebrews 13, 12, Jesus suffered outside the camp.

Verse 13, let us go to him outside the camp bearing his reproach. This is a chance for us to go outside the camp, just like Jesus did, and bear his reproach. I thought most of us don't have reproach.

Yes, some of us have had reproach because we left our family, our old culture, our old way of worship, and have come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior. There's been a reproach, and God has given us the privilege to bear that reproach. But there is an altar, verse 13, verse 10, it says there's an altar.

Let us climb the steps of that altar, and lay ourselves, and surrender ourselves on that altar. For me, that altar is in the shape of a cross. I say, Lord, I want to put myself on the altar, just like you, as you suffered, let me do my part in taking up the cross and becoming a worthy disciple of yours.

Let me bear the reproach. You know, this coming week is Thanksgiving week here in America, and in India there are a lot of celebrations which are going to happen in this month, where families get together and have celebrations. And sometimes it's not possible for us to be with our relatives and loved ones without having to compromise.

Sometimes it's difficult for us to be one with them and partake of all the things that they are going through, all those celebrations. Sometimes there'll be a prick in our hearts, this is not for me, I can't join in all this joking and laughing and lack of fear of God with unconverted relatives. That's the time when we can remember, Lord, I want to go outside the camp and bear your reproach, let me be your disciple, let me take a stand for you.

I want to offer myself again on the altar, take up the cross and follow you. So I praise and thank God that God has given us time to get ready, to prepare ourselves, to judge ourselves and to surrender ourselves to the Lord. Praise and thank God for these days of visitation He allowed, difficult days, but those are days of visitation.

Don't think of it as days of some loss or suffering or some tragedy, whatever it is, Lord, this is the day when you have chosen to meet with me and you're going to speak to me and you're going to bless me, I'm going to be a different person. I praise and thank God. Shall we close in prayer? I Heavenly Father, we praise and thank you for your wonderful plan for our life, that everything that you allow in our life has a purpose, nothing happens without your knowledge and you know everything about us and you care for us and you are there to help us.

Help us not to look at human help, but help us to look at you, eternal source of help and comfort and strength. Help us to be true and faithful to you, Lord. Give us grace to bring up our families, our children, to love you and to fear you so that in their generation there will be a testimony for you.

Thank you, Lord, for these days, these pandemic days, but blessed days when you are reaching out to us and you're calling us to yourself. Help us, Lord, to value these days and to surrender ourselves and learn from you. We ask these things in Jesus precious name.

Amen.

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