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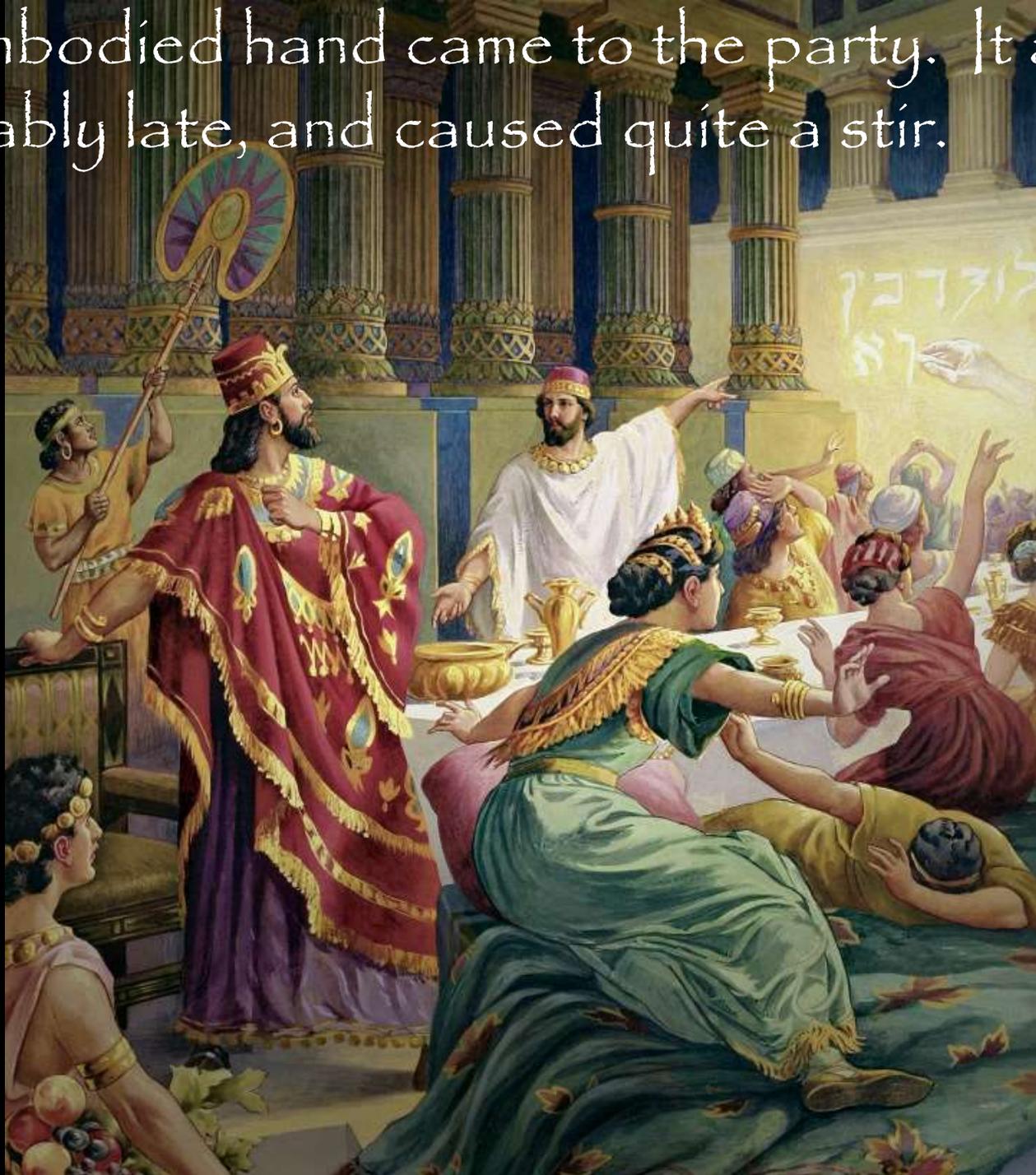
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A disembodied hand came to the party. It arrived fashionably late, and caused quite a stir.



So how did Belshazzar get to be the last king?

King N. died in 562 BC after reigning for 43 years.

- The vast and glorious and mighty kingdom of Babylon had only another 25 years left, but no one at the time would ever have foreseen its end.
- His son Evil-Merodach took the throne, but was assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglissar.
- He reigned for 4 years (we don't know how it ended) and was succeeded by his son Labashi-Marduk.
- L-M lasted only one month before he was put to death in a conspiracy; one of the conspirators, Nabonidus, reigned as king from 555-539 BC. Well, sort of, anyway.

So how did Belshazzar get to be the last king?

King N. died in 562 BC after reigning for 43 years.

- For some reason Nabonidus was removed from direct reign, and spent the last 10 years of his “reign” under what looks to be some form of something like house arrest at an oasis in the North Arabian desert named Tema.
- His son, Belshazzar, reigned as co-regent in his father’s place in the waning years of Babylon.
- Belshazzar, then, was a relatively young man with virtually unlimited power and wealth at his fingertips. So he did...what?
- He partied. A lot, apparently.

Why does Daniel skip right to the last king?

He leaves out a lot of Babylonian history—why?

- Remember—Daniel never intended to write a history of Babylon. Why did he write?
- He wrote to encourage the Jews to remain faithful to their covenant God during a troubling and turbulent time.
- And so he moves right to the last day—the last hours, really—of the last king of Babylon.

In chs. 2-4 we saw God working to change King N's heart, at least to the point where he confesses Him to be the true God, and bows in humility. But He doesn't do that with Belshazzar. Why not?

Why does Daniel skip right to the last king?

Answer: We don't know. But we do know 2 things:

- First, this: "He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings..." (Dan. 2:21).
- And second, King B. apparently had plenty of opportunity to humble himself, according to 5:22.

At the end of this night, once mighty Babylon "dropped through the trapdoor into the nether regions of history." ~ Dale Davis

The story behind the story...

- Isaiah 21:1-10
- Jeremiah 50:1-3, 8-10, 17-18, 31-32, 35-38; 51:1-2, 59-64 (and Habakkuk 2:6-20).

Ok—moving on: Here's our title for the book –  
The King of the Nations

Our key verse for the book is 4:34b—“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation.”

The book divides naturally into two halves...

- Daniel in the King's courts – chs. 1-6
- Daniel and the King's visions – chs. 7-12

Daniel 5—The last king of Babylon

- The terror of the disembodied hand – v. 1-12
- The judgment of the Most High God – v. 13-31

The terror of the disembodied hand ~ v. 1-12

A feast of idolatry and mocking ~ v. 1-4

Daniel sets the stage for us here...

- A great feast—Babylon was famous for them.
- For a thousand lords (one wonders: just how many lords does one need?).
- Presumably the wives of the thousand lords were at the feast as well.
- The king's wives and concubines were there too.
- The king—as was custom—drank the wine first, and after that it flowed freely.

And then the king had a brilliant idea...

## A feast of idolatry and mocking – v. 1-4

Jain Duguid makes an interesting observation: “by focusing our attention on this elaborate feast as the sole event worth mentioning in his account, the narrator subtly underlines for us the emptiness of the remainder of Belshazzar’s life. Unlike his illustrious predecessor, King Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed cities and carried off plunder, made mighty statues, and built the wonders of royal Babylon, the only thing that Belshazzar could make was a feast. The former built an empire, while the latter planned a party. Even the centerpiece of Belshazzar’s feast—the golden vessels that had been taken from the Jerusalem temple—had been carried off by Nebuchadnezzar, not Belshazzar.”

## A feast of idolatry and mocking – v. 1-4

The king's brilliant idea: since they were drinking freely anyway, why not bring out "the vessels of gold and of silver" taken from the temple in Jerusalem? So the vessels were brought out "and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them."

- In their drinking (drunken?) revelry they intentionally mocked the God of the Jews by praising "the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone."
- Verse 23 tells us that it was intentional mocking, profaning the name of God: "but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven."
- And all of this with the army of the Medes and Persians massed outside the city walls. Stay tuned.

## The mysterious disembodied hand – v. 5-9

The feast for a thousand lords was going well, in spite of the looming threat outside. With enough wine, you could forget about real life for a while.

And then, on the wall opposite the bright lampstand, a hand—and nothing else—appears. I could see Edgar Allen Poe drawing inspiration from this.

- The hand starts writing on the plastered wall. I picture the huge banqueting hall absolutely silent now, all eyes on the terrible disembodied hand.
- The hand writes only four words, and then disappears again. Opposite the lampstand, the words are clearly visible.

## The mysterious disembodied hand – v. 5-9

Daniel records only the king's reaction:

- “the king's color changed”
- “his thoughts alarmed him”
- “his limbs gave way”
- “his knees knocked together”

He was terrified. If he had had a little too much wine earlier, that fog was gone in an instant.

- He “called loudly” for his diviners, those who knew the dark arts and could interpret such things.
- He makes a lavish promise to anyone who can tell him the meaning of the four words—the interpreter would be fabulously honored in the fading, but still powerful, Babylon.

## The mysterious disembodied hand – v. 5-9

No one can tell the king the meaning of the words, and v. 9 tells us one more time: the king was terrified.

Back to v. 6 for a minute: “...his limbs gave way...”

- The Aramaic says literally that “the knots of his joints were loosened.”
- One commentator says this: “most probably, this does not mean that ‘his legs gave way,’ as most English translations render it, but rather that he lost control of his bodily functions...”

Yes. Well. One can readily imagine the outcome of *that*, can't one? Either way, he was terrified. And his wise men had failed. Why didn't he call Daniel?

## The mysterious disembodied hand – v. 5-9

God had brought him to the end of himself.

- The king had no explanation for this.
- His religion had no explanation for this.
- His wise men had no explanation for this.
- He was trembling in terror—the Medes and Persians, under Cyrus the Great, were outside the impregnable walls of the great city, and he had apparently considered himself safe enough for the moment...until the hand appeared.

When you cry out to God for relief and the pain intensifies, when all you sense is silence from the only hope you have, what do you do?

## The mysterious disembodied hand ~ v. 5-9

“Death to our outer selves is excruciating at times. Fighting through chronic pain each day is exhausting. Watching my children battle sickness and struggle to make sense of this broken world can be heart-wrenching. Passing by beautiful homes like the one we once had stirs up sadness over what we’ve lost. And having to stop myself from chasing after my children in fear of losing my ability to walk because of a degenerating ankle bone causes me to grieve the life I always imagined I would have.” ~ Sarah Walton

At the end of yourself, in despair, where do you go?

## The mysterious disembodied hand – v. 5-9

We need to be careful answering this question if we have not really been in that place.

- That is a good time to realize that our greatest problem in life is not our circumstances, but our sin.
- Look at Paul's understanding of affliction in 2 Cor. 1:3-7, and then 8-11. What are its two purposes?
- There are Psalms for—and written by—the despairing: Ps. 13, 22, 42, 79, 86, 88.
- “A victim of a great evil once told me, ‘I learned that God wasn't going to go down my checklist of happiness and fulfill it. I learned what it meant to surrender to His will. Before, I wanted certain gifts from Him; now I want Him.’” ~ Randy Alcorn

## The Queen Mother's wise counsel ~ v. 10-12

The king's wives were at the feast, so this is most likely the queen mother who hears a commotion in the great banquet hall.

That she feels able to march right into the banqueting hall, right up to the king, and speak bluntly and directly is remarkable—queens certainly didn't do that (see Esther 1:12; 4:10-11, 16; 5:1-3).

- She reminded the king of what he already knew, but didn't want to hear: Daniel—the chief of the wise men, remember?—can tell you the meaning of the words. “Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.”

## The Queen Mother's wise counsel – v. 10-12

Notice what the Q.M. repeats 3 times in her declaration to the king:

- “In the days of your father...”
- “...King Nebuchadnezzar, your father...”
- “...your father the king...”

Why repeat this? Why say it at all? Why not just say, “In the days of King Nebuchadnezzar...”?

- Daniel was older now—having served faithfully as chief of the magicians and wise men of Babylon through the reigns of several kings and the turbulence of assassinations and conspiracies.

## The Queen Mother's wise counsel ~ v. 10-12

Why repeat this? Why say it at all? Why not just say, "In the days of King Nebuchadnezzar..."?

- She particularly emphasizes that King N. "made him chief of the magicians, etc., because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar."
- Her point? If King B. were a man like King N., he would have known where to turn when he needed help with a problem like this.

## The Queen Mother's wise counsel ~ v. 10-12

Why repeat this? Why say it at all? Why not just say, "In the days of King Nebuchadnezzar..."?

The Q.M. is a minor character in this whole world-changing event, yet it all turns on her words.

- It's a lot like Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:14-17.
- Or the little girl—who is not even named—in 2 Kings 5:2-3.

They do not have *major* roles in the Bible, yet they had *important* roles. None of the three knew the impact their words would have at the time, but all three were used by God to set significant events in motion.

## The Queen Mother's wise counsel – v. 10-12

God's redemptive plan was unfolding slowly—from man's perspective. God was patiently working all toward the coming of the Savior who would be born “when the fulness of time had come” (Gal. 4:4).

- The army of Cyrus the Great was outside the city walls. And even as the banquet was going on his army was quietly busy diverting the waters of the Euphrates river so that they could walk in to the city.
- God was orchestrating events: “He changes times and seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings...” (Dan. 2:21).

## The Queen Mother's wise counsel – v. 10-12

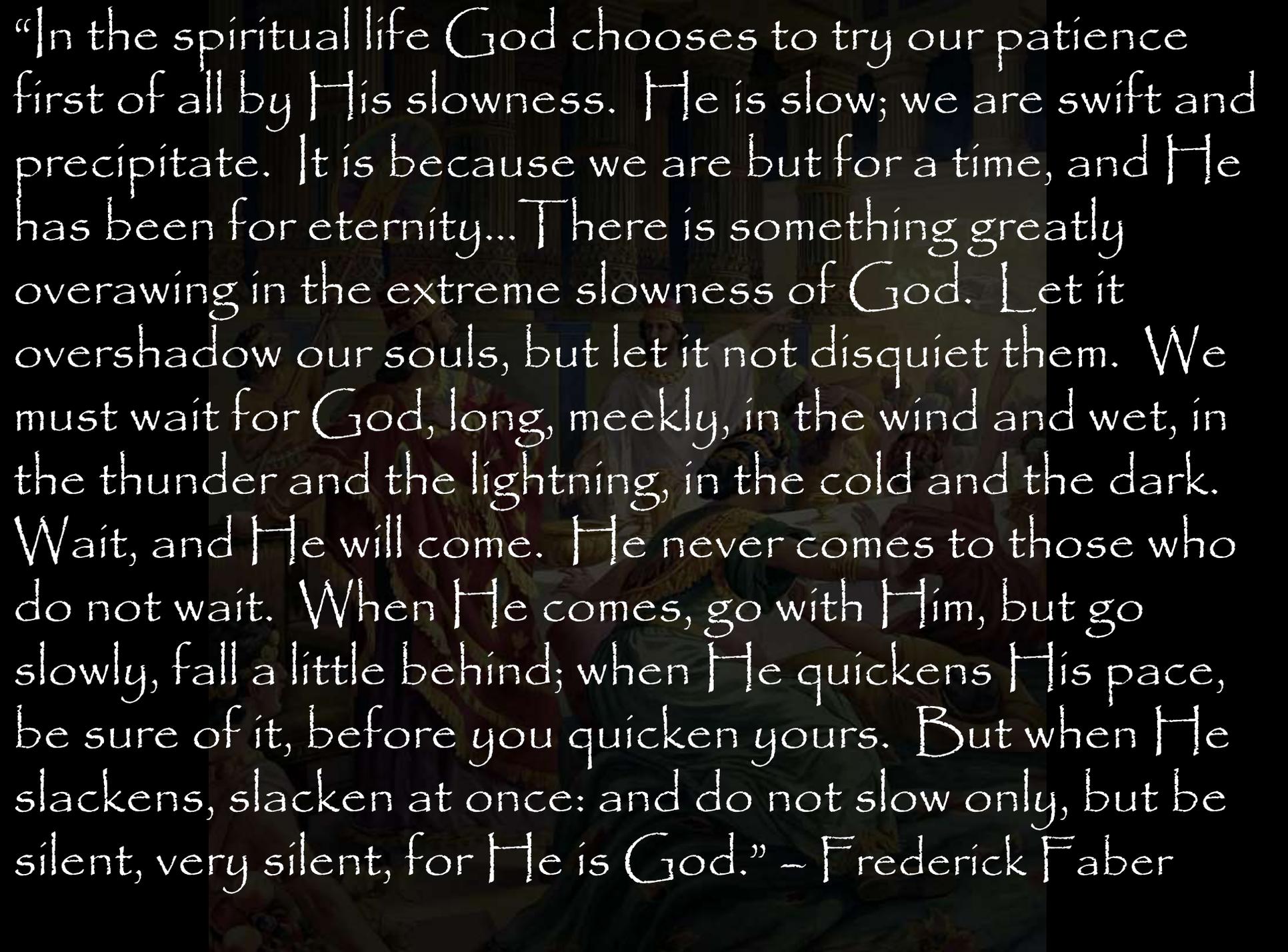
- God often works through what appears to us to be the most ordinary means—the vast majority of His stunning plan to reverse the curse of sin and restore all things—is unspectacular. Much of the work of God, much of Christianity, is mundane.

Question: *Why is God so slow?*

Answer: He isn't. He is patient. 2 Pet. 3:8-9.

See Rev. 6:9-11 and Psalm 13.

Frederick W. Faber gets to land the plane today...



“In the spiritual life God chooses to try our patience first of all by His slowness. He is slow; we are swift and precipitate. It is because we are but for a time, and He has been for eternity... There is something greatly overawing in the extreme slowness of God. Let it overshadow our souls, but let it not disquiet them. We must wait for God, long, meekly, in the wind and wet, in the thunder and the lightning, in the cold and the dark. Wait, and He will come. He never comes to those who do not wait. When He comes, go with Him, but go slowly, fall a little behind; when He quickens His pace, be sure of it, before you quicken yours. But when He slackens, slacken at once: and do not slow only, but be silent, very silent, for He is God.” ~ Frederick Faber