



# Astronauts Waiting on Space Station for Spacecraft Repair

*The Wired Word for the Week of July 7, 2024*

## In the News

Two NASA astronauts are stuck waiting aboard the International Space Station (ISS) due to several mechanical issues with Boeing's Starliner spacecraft on its inaugural flight. A mission that was expected to last just a few days has been underway for over a month, and the two astronauts have no set date to return to Earth.

Starliner launched on June 5 from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida. Flight commander Barry "Butch" Wilmore and flight pilot Sunita "Suni" Williams were onboard, and they arrived at the ISS one day later. On the way, they encountered issues with helium leaks and thruster outages. These problems need to be resolved if Wilmore and Williams are to travel safely home. Steve Stich, NASA's Commercial Crew Program manager, said recently that the space agency is considering extending the maximum length of Starliner's mission from 45 days to 90 days.

The mission is part of the Commercial Crew Program at NASA, which has a goal of certifying Boeing's spacecraft to perform routine missions to and from the ISS. According to the NASA website, this program intends to provide "safe, reliable, and cost-effective human transportation to and from the International Space Station from the United States through a partnership with American private industry."

As commercial companies such as Boeing and SpaceX focus on providing human transportation services, "NASA is freed up to focus on building spacecraft and rockets for deep space missions." NASA wants to use its resources to put people back on the moon as part of the "Artemis missions in preparation for human missions to Mars." (See "Moon Visits, Eclipse and Space Tourism Coming in 2024," *The Wired Word* for the week of January 14, 2024.)

Astronauts Wilmore and Williams were originally scheduled to return on June 14, but have since had their return delayed multiple times. "We are taking our time and following our standard mission management team process," said NASA's Stich in a statement. "We are letting the data drive our decision making relative to managing the small helium system leaks and thruster performance we observed during rendezvous and docking."

Boeing and NASA will carry out ground tests in New Mexico as they seek to understand why some of the Starliner's thrusters failed during the first leg of its journey. Four of the five failed thrusters have now been restored, but one thruster is not expected to work for the remainder of the mission.

The astronauts are currently not in danger, say NASA and Boeing, because they are safely aboard the ISS. They have abundant supplies while in orbit, and the schedule of the ISS is

relatively open through mid-August. Wilmore and Williams are said to be "integrated" with the Expedition 71 crew aboard the ISS, and during the wait they are helping the crew with station operations. In addition, they are assisting with tasks associated with NASA's possible certification of Starliner.

"The crew's feedback has been overwhelmingly positive," said Mark Nappi, vice president and program manager of Boeing's Starliner program, in a statement. They "know that every bit of learning we do on the Crew Flight Test will improve and sharpen our experience for future crews."

Even before the launch, Starliner was plagued by issues. The flight was originally scheduled for May 6, but was postponed after a problem with an oxygen valve. A new launch date was set for May 25, but a small helium leak was discovered on the service module. Helium leaks and a thruster issue then threatened to delay the spacecraft's docking. Five days after docking at the ISS, Boeing and NASA said the spacecraft was experiencing five "small" helium leaks. At the time, they said enough helium was available for the return mission.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[NASA Astronauts Stuck Waiting Aboard ISS to Return to Earth Amid Issues With Boeing's Starliner.](#) *ABC News*

[Boeing Starliner Spacecraft Could Wait Months Before Return, but Officials Say Astronauts Aren't Stranded.](#) *CNN*

[What Is Commercial Crew?](#) *NASA Explore*

### **Applying the News Story**

Reflect on how the experience of the astronauts on the ISS connects to your own experiences of waiting. In particular, think about how you managed the stress of waiting, how you used the time, and how "waiting for the Lord" affected the experience, if at all.

### **The Big Questions**

1. When have you endured a time of waiting that you expected to last a few days, but went much longer? How did you adjust? What types of resources, spiritual or otherwise, were helpful to you?
2. The NASA astronauts do not know when or how their mission will end. In a similar manner, we cannot predict the future -- for ourselves, our families or our congregations. How do you handle the stress of uncertainty, particularly in matters of life and death?
3. NASA and Boeing are conducting tests to gain a better understanding of the spacecraft's problems, and the Starliner astronauts are forced to observe these tests from a distance. When have you had to put your welfare in the hands of others? What challenges come with this type of trust?

4. When forced to wait, what do you do to fill the time? What type of activity is beneficial, and what is not?

5. Have you ever found yourself "waiting for the Lord"? What challenges or comforts were part of that experience?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Isaiah 40:30-31**

*Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.* (For context, read [Isaiah 40:27-31](#).)

These verses are no guarantee against becoming weary, but their assurance is in the renewal God promises to those who "wait for the LORD," which is a way of saying that we need to take time to listen for him -- but on his schedule, not ours. Those who wait for God "shall run and not be weary." In fact, the Hebrew word translated as "wait" here and in the following passage is translated in the NIV as "hope" -- to wait with high expectations, not merely to await further developments.

**Questions:** What does it mean for you to wait with hope and high expectations? How does such an approach affect your prayers? When, if ever, have you found your strength renewed by waiting for the Lord in this way?

#### **Lamentations 3:25-26**

*The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.* (For context, read [Lamentations 3:22-30](#).)

In the context of Lamentations, waiting had a particular meaning. Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians, the temple was ruined, and many of the people of Jerusalem and the Judean nation were forced into exile. The five hymns that constitute Lamentations are, in effect, funeral dirges for Jerusalem.

Fortunately, the prophets told the people that though they had sinned against the Lord, God was not forsaking them. And so the laments contain not only mourning, but also expressions of hope that God would eventually redeem them from exile. It was that "eventually," however, that occasioned the *waiting*. We know from history that it was years before the people got to return to Judah, a time long enough that many of the generation that went into exile died.

For the most part, it was their children and grandchildren, many of whom were born in Babylon, who were finally given the opportunity to repopulate Judah. For those who were marched out of Judah, the waiting for God to change their circumstances was a long one that required not only patience, but also the kind of faith that says, "What we hope for may not happen in our lifetime, but we believe it will happen, and so we are going to live in that hope."

**Questions:** How does long-term waiting fit into your life of faith? What have you been waiting a long time for that has not yet happened? Have there been events or things you have prayed a long time for that you believe now will never take place? What has this aspect of time taught you about yourself? About God?

### **Luke 12:35-37**

*Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes ...* (For context, read [Luke 12:35-40](#).)

Waiting for the Lord does not mean that we sit around and make no attempt to influence the course of events. We know that there are times, such as when faced with the opportunity to do some good, when to do nothing is wrong. The Christian tradition speaks of "sins of commission" (the bad we do) and "sins of omission" (the good we fail to do).

Waiting can include the good use of time. In these verses, Jesus describes the situation of servants in a house where the master is away. Rather than just sitting around doing nothing, they have the lamps lit, food that can be served up quickly, and everything ready for when the master returns, even if it is in the middle of the night.

In much the same way, just as the Lamentations passage above tells us that God works for those who are waiting for him, so too those who are waiting for God ought to be active on his behalf.

**Questions:** In times of waiting, what good can you do in the service of God? How can faithful Christian service be a statement of faith? In cases where activity is not possible, can patient waiting on divine action be a faithful response? Why or why not?

### **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**

*... a thorn was given me in the flesh, ... Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. ..."* (For context, read [2 Corinthians 12:6-10](#).)

This is the apostle Paul's comment about some unspecified but persistent ailment he had. He prayed three times to be relieved of it, but God did not remove it. Instead, Paul wrote that the answer to his prayer is, "My grace is sufficient for you, for [my] power is made perfect in weakness." What Paul asked was not granted, yet Paul found in that response no reason to stop praying.

**Questions:** How long do you think Paul waited before he understood that the answer to his prayer was "My grace is sufficient for you, for [my] power is made perfect in weakness"? When have you perceived a prayer of yours to have been answered in some way other than in the way you requested? How hard has it been for you to accept that despite your wait, a situation is not going to change, and that you are going to continue with your own thorn in the flesh?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. In the Christian tradition, a major theological challenge is found in the wait for Christ's return. Although Jesus says, at the end of the Bible, "Surely I am coming soon" ([Revelation 22:20](#)), he has not returned since his ascension into heaven 2,000 years ago. How do you account for this delay? Where do you find meaning in waiting, and how do you fill the time in a meaningful way?

2. Discuss this, from TWW team member Stan Purdum's sermon, "The Case for Faithful Delay": "Hope's evil twin, of course, is despair, and, says preacher and writer Frederick Buechner, it 'has been called the unforgivable sin -- not presumably because God refuses to forgive it but because it despairs of the possibility of being forgiven.' ... John Claypool, long-time rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Alabama, has said, 'Given our limited knowledge, despair is always presumptuous.' In other words, we really do not know whether or not a situation is hopeless until it is resolved. For that reason, hope is always a proper response to difficulty. To give in to despair before the outcome is known presumes we know what only God can know. ... Obviously, there is always the danger of false hope. It is possible, especially when strong emotions and terrible loss are involved, to grasp illusions and call them real. But when matters are still unresolved, if our choices are between hoping too much or hoping too little, the story of Abraham suggests that we would do well to err on the side of excessive hope. ... When a good outcome we really did not expect, even though we were hoping, suddenly appears, it forces us to re-evaluate our view of what is real. We are compelled, however briefly, to step back from our skepticism and entertain the belief that good news is a possibility. ... To hope for a peaceful outcome of any conflict -- well, that's hoping against hope. But for Christians, that isn't an unreasonable thing to do."

3. When have you "waited for the Lord" and received a clear answer? What effect did it have on your relationship with God? When have you waited and received no answer, or an ambiguous answer? How did you factor this into your life of faith? TWW team member Ako Cromwell also wonders, "What do you do when the clear answer is contrary to your expressed wishes (in thought or prayer)?"

4. In his second letter to a group of Christ-followers in Asia Minor, Peter says, "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" ([2 Peter 3:8](#)). How does this difference between our time and God's time affect our human experience of waiting? What would it mean for you to adopt more of a divine perspective than a human perspective, and how might this increase your patience?

5. TWW team member Bill Tammeus lifts up some words about waiting from French Reformed theologian and author Jacques Ellul in his book, *Hope in Time of Abandonment*. "Hope comes alive only in the dreary silence of God, in our loneliness before a closed heaven, in our abandonment. God is silent, so it's man who is going to speak. ... Man is going to express his hope that God's silence is neither basic nor final, nor a cancellation of what he had laid hold of as a Word from God." Discuss.

## **Responding to the News**

Identify a situation in your personal life, family life or congregational life in which you are challenged to wait. In your prayers, make an effort to "wait for the Lord," and in your actions try to fill the time with acts of faithful service. Trust God to be working for good in your life, even when the future is full of uncertainty.

### **Prayer**

God of all people, we pray for the astronauts who are waiting for their return to Earth. Let them know that you are with them, just as you are with each of us, as we wait for the future to unfold. Increase our trust in you, and keep us focused on the work you would have us do. In Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Other News This Week**

## **Painted Lady Butterflies Make Trans-Atlantic Flight**

*The Wired Word for the Week of July 7, 2024*

### **In the News**

According to *Wikipedia*, the Painted Lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*) is "one of the most widespread of all butterfly species, found on every continent except Antarctica and South America." But in 2013, entomologist Gerard Talavera, from the Botanical Institute of Barcelona, discovered a kaleidoscope (swarm) of the orange, black and white butterflies on a beach in French Guiana north of Brazil and east of Suriname. How did they get there, and what was their point of origin, Talavera wondered.

Working with an interdisciplinary team of scientists, Talavera embarked on a decade-long research project to answer these questions. On June 25, he published the team's findings in *Nature Communications*. The team used "coastal field surveys, wind trajectory modeling, genomics, pollen metabarcoding, ecological niche modeling, and multi-isotope geolocation of natal origins" to reach the conclusion that the butterflies crossed the Atlantic Ocean from West Africa.

Tracking migration patterns of tiny, short-lived insects is notoriously difficult, since techniques such as banding, tagging or radiotelemetry, used on larger animals, are not possible. So the team had to become scientific "detectives," examining diverse clues to solve the Painted Lady riddle.

By comparing genetic data from samples collected on the coast of French Guiana with Painted Lady individuals from North America, Europe and Africa, the team was able to rule out North America as the point of origin of the swarm in South America. Tests of pollen found on the bodies of the butterflies revealed a connection with pollen from two African flowering shrubs. The researchers also analyzed the isotopes on the wings of the butterflies. These matched isotopes in western Europe. These clues, taken together, led the team to conclude that the kaleidoscope originated in Africa and Europe.

"The painted lady butterflies reached South America from West Africa, flying at least 4,200 km [2,600 miles] over the Atlantic. But their journey could have been even longer, starting in Europe and passing through three continents, implying a migration of 7,000 km [4,350 miles] or more," study co-author Clément Bataille, a professor of earth and environment science at the University of Ottawa in Canada, said. "This is an extraordinary feat for such a small insect."

Because their short lifespan ranges from a few weeks to a couple of months, a round-trip migratory cycle from Africa to the Arctic takes about six generations of butterflies to complete, with one generation passing the baton to the next.

The Painted Lady butterfly can reach speeds of up to 20 miles per hour. Their streamlined bodies and wings enable them to achieve efficient aerodynamic flight. Their migration spans over 9,300 miles from northern Europe to sub-Saharan Africa. But that movement allows for rest stops for refueling, feeding and breeding that are not possible when crossing over open water for five to eight days.

Such a lengthy non-stop flight by organisms that weigh less than a gram would be possible only if it was wind-assisted, and if the butterflies alternated active flying with minimum-effort gliding on prevailing easterly wind currents.

"The butterflies could only have completed this flight using a strategy alternating between minimal effort to avoid falling into the sea, facilitated by ascending winds, and active flight, which requires more energy consumption," study co-author Eric Toro-Delgado, a doctoral student at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology, said in the statement. "We estimate that without wind, the butterflies could have flown a maximum of 780 km [485 miles] before exhausting all their fat and thus their energy."

Journalist Ben Turner called the Painted Lady transoceanic flight "Herculean."

"We usually see butterflies as symbols of the fragility of beauty, but science shows us that they can perform incredible feats. There is still much to discover about their capabilities," says Roger Vila, a researcher at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology in Barcelona and another co-author of the study.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[A Transoceanic Flight of Over 4,200 Km by Painted Lady Butterflies.](#) *Nature Communications*  
[Painted Lady Butterflies Defy the Odds, First Evidence Shows It Crossed an Ocean.](#) *Wionews*  
[These Butterflies Flew Nonstop Across the Atlantic Ocean.](#) *Explorers Web*  
[These Incredible Butterflies Migrate Over the Atlantic.](#) *ZME Science*  
[Butterflies Cross Atlantic Ocean on 2,600-mile Nonstop Flight Never Recorded in Any Insect Before.](#) *Live Science*

## **The Big Questions**

1. What do you think motivated God to create the universe and everything in it, if what is contained in the universe, from the smallest insect to the most brilliant star, ultimately dies?
2. How does our faith speak to the transitory nature of our human experience?
3. How might the Painted Lady butterflies' strategy of alternating active flight with gliding on the trade winds be a metaphor for how we need to operate as Christians in order for our faith to survive over the long haul of life with its many challenges?
4. How might the Holy Spirit function for the people of God in our spiritual journey the way the trade winds functioned for the Painted Lady kaleidoscope? When, if ever, have you felt the Holy Spirit lift you in ways that enabled you to accomplish what you ordinarily would not have felt able to accomplish?
5. What can we accomplish together, as the collective people of God, that we could never accomplish alone?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Proverbs 6:6**

*Go to the ant, you lazybones;  
consider its ways and be wise.*

(For context, read [Proverbs 6:6-11](#).)

#### **Proverbs 30:24-25**

*Four things on earth are small,  
yet they are exceedingly wise:  
the ants are a people without strength,  
yet they provide their food in the summer; ...*

(For context, read [Proverbs 30:24-28](#).)

#### **Matthew 6:26, 28-29**

*[Jesus said,] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. (For context, read [Matthew 6:25-34](#).)*

These three passages all draw attention to the natural world, from which we can learn valuable lessons about life. In the selections from Proverbs, the writer points to the tiny, weak ant, which we can easily squash with our thumb, yet it diligently prepares resources when food is plentiful to have what it needs when food is scarce. No one orders the ant to take on this task, but it works anyway. The writer suggests that lazy people can learn a lot about honest labor from the humble ant.

Jesus uses the same teaching method in the Matthew text, when he urges his listeners to pay attention to nature: first, to look at the birds of the air, and then, to consider the lilies of the field.

By observing God's creation, Jesus says, we can learn about the futility of fretting about what we will eat and wear. His instruction to look is part of his broader teaching on trusting God's love, knowing God is aware of our needs, and seeking God's kingdom, rather than worrying about material goods.

**Questions:** How might Jesus have completed this sentence: "Look at the Painted Lady butterflies, how they ..."? What lessons do you think he might want us to learn from this insect?

### **Psalm 8:1-5**

*O LORD, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.  
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are humans that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?  
Yet you have made them a little lower than God  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
(For context, read [Psalm 8:1-9](#).)*

When the psalmist gazes at the heavens, he is blown away by the thought that God would care for humans, and give to humans such honor. He highlights the astonishing way that God uses even the weakest humans (as if to emphasize this preposterous idea, the text uses synonyms "babes and infants") to found a bulwark to silence the enemy and the avenger.

Such language inevitably brings to mind how God entered our human experience in the form of a weak, vulnerable baby, to defeat the threefold threat of the devil, sin and death. How could this be? Yet we are told that "God's weakness is stronger than human strength" ([1 Corinthians 1:25](#)).

**Questions:** Why are we often surprised when we learn some lesson from a child? What is the most surprising thing you have learned from a child? What is the most surprising thing you have learned from the Christ child?

When we see petals drop from a flower, spot a gray hair in the mirror, or feel an unfamiliar ache in our bodies, we are invited to reflect on the meaning of our own mortality. What are we human beings that God is mindful of us, mortals that God cares for us? What does it tell us about the size of the eternal God's love that God is mindful of humans whose average life span is somewhere between 73 and 79 years of age?

### **Isaiah 40:6-8**

*A voice says, "Cry out!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
All people are grass,*

*their constancy is like the flower of the field.  
The grass withers, the flower fades,  
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.  
The grass withers, the flower fades;  
but the word of our God will stand forever.*  
(For context, read [Isaiah 40:3-8](#).)

The prophet proclaims that God's promise to forgive, comfort and rescue his people, is based on the eternal, sure word of God. That word is placed in direct contrast with the grass that withers, the flower that fades and people who are just as fragile as grass and flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow (see also [Matthew 6:28-30](#)).

James points to the folly of boasting and trusting in riches and luxurious possessions, which rot, rust, and are eaten by moths. Our lives are as wispy as mist, as inconsequential as a shadow, lasting "a little while" before they vanish ([James 4:13-17](#) and [James 5:1-9](#)).

Biblical writers often remind us of our creatureliness and mortality in passages like [Genesis 3:19](#) ("you are dust, and to dust you shall return") and [Isaiah 64:6, 8](#) ("We all fade like a leaf ... we are the clay, ... the work of your hand"), while emphasizing that God is our creator in [Psalm 100:3](#) ("It is he who made us, and not we ourselves") and [Isaiah 64:8](#) ("Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; ... you are our potter").

Humans are not only distinct in our physical mortality from God who is eternal spirit ([John 4:24](#)), but morally inconstant and fickle, in contrast with the righteous nature of God.

**Questions:** What is the eternal "word of God" saying to us? How do you react to that word? What emotion does that word evoke in you? How might contemplating the transitory nature of things and people, and the eternal nature of God, provide you with needed perspective, helping you know where to place your trust?

### **2 Corinthians 4:7, 16-18**

*But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ... So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For our slight, momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.* (For context, read [2 Corinthians 4:6-18](#).)

Paul speaks about the transitory nature of our physical bodies, which he describes as clay jars or earthen vessels, in which "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" shines in the face of Jesus Christ (v. 6).

In his earlier letter to the Corinthians, Paul had written about how God deliberately called people who were not wise, powerful or of noble birth, choosing instead the foolish in the world to shame the wise, the weak in the world to shame the strong, the low and despised in the world,

things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one could boast in God's presence, unless they boast in the Lord ([1 Corinthians 1:25-31](#) ESV).

The theme of God's power working in and through weak people pops up again in [2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#), where Paul says he would gladly boast of his weaknesses. To boast of our weaknesses seems counterintuitive and goes against what the world wants us to believe. But Paul indicates that weakness serves a purpose: It is through weakness that the power of Christ is more operative and obvious, and in the strength of Christ, Paul is strong.

**Questions:** What might happen if a museum placed a nation's crown jewels in a shiny box? Might viewers see only the receptacle and never actually open the box to see the treasure inside?

Why doesn't God place the treasure of the life of Christ only in strong, beautiful, smart, prominent people, instead of in ordinary, unspectacular, unimpressive people?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Reformer Martin Luther wrote, "The power of God is present at all places even in the thinnest leaf. ... God is entirely and personally present in the wilderness, in the garden, and in the field." How might embracing this vision shape our appreciation of creation?

2. Discuss how the work of these artists relates to our faith.

British nature artist, Andy Goldsworthy, crafts artwork from rocks, ice, leaves, twigs, reeds, thorns and other materials he finds in the environment. Then, through photography, he documents how his creations change over time as the environment changes.

"I want my art to be sensitive and alert to changes in material, season and weather. Each work grows, stays, decays. Process and decay are implicit. Transience in my work reflects what I find in nature. It's not about art," he stated. "It's just about life and the need to understand that a lot of things in life do not last."

An art critic wrote that in photographs of his works of art, Goldsworthy "captures the infancy stages of creating them, the majestic full bloom of the mature piece, and then the decline and demise that comes with time. ... We as the audience get to see his humanness in his successes as well as his failures."

British land artist Richard Shilling, who was inspired by Andy Goldsworthy's transitory sculptures, wrote that "What is important to me throughout what I do is the ephemeral nature of our environment, the cycles, how everything is in flux and ever changing and how all existence is transient."

Shilling wrote that he finds satisfaction in that "perfect moment where everything comes together and a sculpture lights up as if at its pinnacle moment and has come alive." There is even greater joy, he explained, when the artwork created with ephemeral materials "reaches its zenith in only a short moment before beginning to degrade and returning back to nature from where it came."

"All that effort to see that magical moment before you simply just leave it behind," Shilling added. "There is no way you can possess or own that moment beyond that time so you have to simply leave it and let it go and that is very liberating indeed and an allegory for the transience of our existence."

How might ephemeral art (like the transoceanic flight of the Painted Lady butterflies) instruct and encourage us by reminding us both of our own fragility, and also of God's greatness?

3. How is God an artist? In what sense are we a part of divine art? What are we to make of the transient nature of creation, including of our own human lives? Is all of God's "art" transient? What can God create that lasts, and how does God create something permanent?

4. Seven-time gold medalist swimmer Caeleb Dressel relied on his teammate Brooks Curray to take his place in the preliminary heats for the men's 4x100m freestyle relay at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, so that he could be fresh for the final. Both American swimmers received gold medals for the team's winning performance, but only those who swim in the final are permitted on the podium for the medal ceremony. So immediately after accepting his gold medal, Dressel tossed it to Curray in the stands, thereby acknowledging his teammate's contribution to the team's success. Both swimmers were praised for their selfless behavior.

On his website, [Caelebdressel.com](http://Caelebdressel.com), Dressel wrote: "I appreciate any obstacle, knowing it will make me stronger. ... I am aware the only thing I control in my life are my thoughts and my choices, not my circumstances. I will live in the moment. I see the world as a beautiful place where happiness is only real when shared. Materials are nothing. I am neither above nor beneath any human. ... I will show people, although we are different, greatness is within us all."

What, if anything, do you find most inspirational about Dressel's behavior and statement?

How would you finish these statements?

"I will inspire people to ... "

"I will inspire people by ..."

5. When Austin Perine was 4 years old, he saw a TV program in which a mama panda abandoned her cub. His father Terance (TJ) Perine explained that the youngster was homeless.

When Austin learned that people could be homeless, too, he wanted to meet one, and then asked if he could spend his allowance on meals for homeless people.

"I can make a difference!" Austin told his dad.

In just 12 days, with TJ's help, Austin raised more than \$26,000 toward his \$50,000 goal in his GoFundMe "Show Love Fight Hunger" campaign.

"My dad said, 'Believe it, achieve it!'" Austin said.

TJ said he tries to teach his son to love others, but admits he's learning from him as well.

"Just as I am giving him valuable lessons, he's giving me valuable lessons," TJ said. "He's showing me how to love."

Pastor Carl Crouse wrote: "A beginning artist said [to] a master artist: 'I would love to peek over your shoulder, taking notes, watching intently, like a little mouse, just to learn.'"

Over whose shoulder would you like to peek, and what would you like to learn from that human or creature?

What valuable lessons have you learned from observing the lives of people you admire? How have they inspired you to think and act?

When, if ever, have you been surprised to learn something from a human or creature you didn't realize could teach you anything valuable? What was that lesson?

6. Respond to this: At the end of the late Stanley Elkin's biting little novel, *The Living End*, God calls together everyone hanging around in the afterlife. They've been demanding an explanation of life's mysteries -- how to put a square peg in a round hole, who shot John F. Kennedy, why people drive on a parkway but park on a driveway, everything. But mostly they wanted to understand what life was supposed to be about.

Elkin's disappointed deity eventually gets to the point: "Why did I do it (create the world) then? Why?" Audience members make guesses, all wrong.

"No," God thunders. "It was Art! It was always Art. It works by the contrasts and metrics, by beats and the silences. It was all Art. Because it makes a better story is why."

"But," God adds with a seismic sigh, "I never found my audience."

### **Responding to the News**

1. You can find more on *Vanessa cardui* to share with children in your life at [10 Painted Lady Butterfly Facts For Kids](#).

2. To help butterflies, you can create a pollinator garden, planting milkweed, goldenrod and asters in particular. You can also educate yourself about conservation efforts through the [National Wildlife Federation](#) and similar organizations.

3. Meditate on how God chooses imperfect, ordinary, fragile people to accomplish extraordinary things as you listen to [Earthen Vessels](#) (3:24) or [Weight of Glory](#) (4:00).

### **Prayer**

Creator God, we are amazed by the beauty, diversity and complexity of the universe you made. Every creature, great and small, relies on you for life, and reflects your glory. Show us what we need to learn from them. As we marvel at the wonders of nature, remind us that we also depend on you for every breath we take, and make us grateful and determined to use the life you have bestowed upon us for your honor. Amen.