

Waiting on God

by R. Stanley

Waiting on God is an essential part of Christian discipleship and growth, allowing us to know God's mind, strengthen our hearts, and fight the enemy.

Scripture: Psalm 27:14, Isaiah 30:15, Isaiah 55:8, Romans 15:5, Ephesians 6:13

Topics: "Christian Discipleship", "Patience And Waiting"

Description

R. Stanley preaches on the importance of waiting on God in a fast-paced world, emphasizing the need for patience and the art of 'Waiting on God.' The sermon delves into the reasons why we should wait on God, such as knowing God's mind, strengthening our hearts, and fighting the enemy. It highlights the biblical understanding and experience of waiting on God, which is essential for Christian discipleship and growth.

Transcript

In an age of fast food, electronic mail and instant everything, the art of waiting on God is disappearing fast. The modern generation may soon forget the spelling of patience. Even if a preacher may occasionally speak on patience, the trend of the times is such that the congregation will leave the service with the prayer, "OK Lord, give us patience, but give it right now!"

The God of the Bible is known for waiting. He never acts in haste. His very name is the "God of Patience" (Rom 15:5). In all His dealings with man, sinner or saint, He is patient throughout. If He had not been so, everyone of us would have perished long ago. As He is patient with us, it is only right that He expects us to be patient in our relationship with Him. This is what the Bible calls as "Waiting on God." So much is preached and published on the subjects of prayer, worship and meditation. But specific teaching on waiting on God is scarce though this exercise is quite essential for Christian discipleship and growth. In this article I have attempted to lead the reader to a Biblical understanding and experience of waiting on God.

Why wait on God?

a) To know God's mind

According to Apostle Paul, "God has given us the spirit of a sound mind" and "we have the mind of Christ" (2 Tim 1:7; 1 Cor 2:16). This does not imply that whatever we think is according to the mind of God. What is meant here is that under the New Covenant, God through His Spirit puts His laws in our mind and writes

them on our hearts (Heb 8:10). In other words, at new birth He gives us the potential ability to understand His mind. But the truth always remains that God's thoughts are higher than ours as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isa 55:8,9). "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7b).

Waiting on God is an exercise by which we calm our minds and tune them up to receive signals from Above. An agitated and turbulent mind cannot recognize God's voice. Psalmist David prayed, "Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me... On you I wait all the day" (Psa 25:4,5). This sounds like a morning prayer. Having made such a prayer at dawn, David had been waiting for the answer all through the day.

Rarely does God reveal His mind instantly. His delays are purposeful. He knows when our minds are ready to respond to the revelation of His will. Our minds get prepared during the time when we wait on Him. We imbibe a spirit of reverence when we wait on God. In the same Psalm we quoted above, David says, "Who is the man who fears the Lord? He shall teach him in the way He chooses... The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him" (Psa 25:12,14).

Waiting on God to know His mind is comparable to a servant looking to his master for orders and instructions. This is pictorially illustrated in Psalm 123:2, "As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God." Nothing else should interest us if our attention before God is to be undivided. To hear the voice from Above, it is necessary we stop our ears to the voices from around. Directions for the first missionary movement were received while a team of five prophets-cum-teachers was waiting on God with fasting and prayer (Acts 13:1-4).

We miss God's will at critical situations just because we don't withdraw ourselves for a while to wait on Him. We draw rash conclusions and rush into courses of action which are totally outside the will of God. The beheading of John the Baptist was not an ordinary news to Jesus. John was both a family member and a fellow worker to Jesus. "As soon as Jesus heard the news, He went off by Himself in a boat to a remote area to be alone" (Mt 14:13). When He heard that His friend Lazarus was sick, He waited a while to know His Father's mind in the matter. The four days of delay paved way not only to perform a resurrection miracle but also prepared a pulpit for Jesus to teach precious truths on resurrection (Jn 11).

When we are at crossroads, and there are more than one option, waiting on God is indispensable. Deciding between good and bad is easier than choosing between good and better. What is apparent may not be the actual. Only God knows which is best for us. He alone knows the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10). We are concerned about the immediate but He cares for the ultimate. Many a headache and loss can be avoided if only we take time to wait on God to see how He would steer the events. Eliezer made a trip to Mesopotamia to hunt for a bride for Isaac. When he saw Rebekah who was exquisitely beautiful and exceptionally helpful, he was quite excited. However he "remained silent so as to know whether the Lord had prospered his trip or not" (Gen 24:21). Interestingly, during that time, the groom was also waiting on God by spending time in meditation out in the fields (v 63). What a lesson for parents and youngsters!

Another reason why we must wait on God is--

b) To strengthen our hearts

Discouragement is the most effective tool in the hands of the devil against the children of God. There's hardly any saint who has never been hit by the arrows of discouragement. Problems, pressures,

perplexities and pains spare no Christian. No other words of encouragement are found so often in the Bible like "Fear Not!" The only way to live above fear, worry and depression is to wait on God.

But for the difficult and dreadful terrain the Psalmist walked through, he would not have given us so many priceless Psalms. The call to wait on God is not so loud and repetitious in any other book of the Bible. Take for example Psalm 27:14, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord!" David confessed that he would have lost heart if he had not waited on God in faith (v13).

God alone is omnipotent. We all have weaknesses, but in different areas. There's no Spiderman in the Church. God has blessed us with limitations and inabilities so we may walk humbly before Him and others. True we have our natural strengths and skills. When we wait on God, He anoints them with His Spirit so our accomplishments and activities for His Kingdom are acceptable to Him. When we wait on Him, the spiritual powers overrule our natural abilities. This is the meaning of the famous passage in Isaiah 40:29-31, "God gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and become tired, and the young men shall utterly fall. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not grow weary; they shall walk and not faint!" The fear-filled disciples became spiritual revolutionaries when they collectively waited on God for ten days and received the power of His Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:5,8,14; 17:6b).

God chastises those whom He loves. No parent who spares the rod loves the child sincerely (Heb 10:7-10). During periods of chastisement, our hands become tired, knees shaky and feet faltering (vv 12,13).

Prophet Jeremiah's testimony is enlightening and encouraging: "I am the one who has seen the afflictions that come from the rod of the Lord's anger... The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words... The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! By His mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. They are new every morning... The Lord is good to those who wait for Him... It is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord... Let them sit alone in silence beneath the Lord's demands" (Lam 3:1,19,22,23,25, 26,28). There's nothing that strengthens our hearts like the remembrance of the mercies of God in reverential silence.

The situation we find ourselves in may be just "mire and mud." Yet when we wait on God, He will not only bring us out of the horrible pit, but also set our feet on a rock, stabilize our walk, and stir up our hearts to sing! (Psa 40:1-3). This doesn't mean we will experience instant deliverance always when we wait on God. Rather the night will shine as the day, and darkness as light! (Psa 139:11,12). Our hands may be fettered with chains but our hearts will be given feathers to soar high. That was the experience of Paul and Silas in the Philippian prison. There's no way to be triumphant in darkness except by waiting on God with trust and confidence. God will send His servants to encourage us at such times. We must not be disappointed if their shouts of prayer do not lift us an inch. Here is the Scriptural prescription for our malady: "Who among you fears the Lord and obeys His servant? If you are (still) walking in darkness, without a ray of light, trust in the Lord and rely on your God" (Isa 50:10).

Just yesterday we would have witnessed the power of God spectacularly in fire from Heaven. Next day we may be sitting dumped in depression. The only thing we desire may be death. There may again be wind, earthquake and fire. Based on our yesterday's experience, we may look for God in these elements. But He

may not be there in any of them. This is where patient waiting on the Lord helps. He will speak through "a still small voice!" (1 Ki 18:38; 19:9-13). Sometimes God's ways are "in the whirlwind and in the storm" (Nah 1:3b). Other times He leads us through "still waters" (Psa 23:2b). There's no stereotype with God. Only those who habitually wait on Him will not miss Him.

Thirdly, we wait on God--

c) To fight the enemy

It is only natural to run for shelter and refuge on the face of threat and danger. It's a reflex action that's common to humankind. But in this era of swift and lethal weaponry, no place is absolutely safe unless God protects us. Because our times are in His hands and we are in His palms, we must learn to relax in any situation. The profitability of waiting on God when we are threatened and hounded is best explained in Isaiah 30:15,16. "The sovereign Lord says: Only in returning to Me and waiting for Me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength. But you would have none of it. You said, No, we will flee on swift horses... But the only swiftness you are going to see is the swiftness of your enemies chasing you." God says that He would wait for us even if we would not wait for Him. What a gracious God He is! (v 18). Elsewhere in the Book of Isaiah we read, "When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a banner against him" (59:19b).

God's silence and slowness in acting on our behalf when we are under the severe attack of our enemies may be due to two reasons. Either God wants to strengthen us by delaying deliverance or He wants to sanctify us. It is when we wait on the Lord we will understand why. Here's a classic passage on this subject: Isaiah 59:1,2,9,10, "Listen! The Lord is not too weak to save you, and He is not becoming deaf... Your sins have cut you off from God... It is because of all this evil that deliverance is far from us. That's why God doesn't punish those who injure us. No wonder we are in darkness when we expect light!... Even at brightest noontime, we fall down as though it were dark!" Taking time to sit before God in self-examination is the only way to experience victory.

There may come times when friends and family folks may turn out to be our enemies. Prophet Micah tells us what we should do in such a situation: "Your enemies will be right in your our family. Therefore I will look to the Lord for His help. I will wait confidently for God to save me, and my God will certainly hear me" (Mic 7:5-7). When King Saul sent soldiers to watch David's house in order to kill him, David sang, "Lord, You are my strength; I wait for You to rescue me; for You, O God, are my place of safety. In His unfailing love, my God will come and help me" (Psa 59:8-10).

The weapons of our warfare are not worldly. They are mighty through God to knock down the devil's strongholds. We don't wage war with human plans and methods (2 Cor 10:3,4). We sharpen our spiritual weapons in prayer and waiting before God with perseverance (Eph 6:13-18). The Lord of Hosts is with us. We stand still and know that He is God! (Psa 46:9-11). In the classic passage of spiritual warfare, five out of six weapons are for defense! (Eph 6:14-17). This explains how waiting on God is the most powerful means of wrestling against Satan. It is by staying under the authority of God, we exercise authority over the enemy. Interestingly the word "patience" comes from two Greek words, meaning "stay under!"

In fighting the enemy, we must be more conscious of the orders of our Captain than our strengths and experience. Eventhough David was a man of war, he had the habit of inquiring of the Lord whether to go against the enemy or not, and how to go about it. In the case of Philistines, once the Lord commanded him to go, and next time He said, "Don't go." David surrendered his logical and reasoning powers to the Lord

of the Armies and that was the secret of his victory (2 Sam 5:18-25). Somewhere I have read, "A handful of patience is worth more than a bucketful of brains!"

Having looked at the main reasons WHY we must wait on God, let's browse the Bible to learn--

HOW to wait on God.

a) Pour out your heart before God.

Waiting on God is more than just praying. In prayer we essentially present our requests before God and seek His favour for an answer. But while waiting on God we simply open up and throw up ourselves before the Almighty. It is not an exaggeration if I say that waiting on God begins only after presenting our needs before Him in prayer. Waiting for an answer to prayer, especially for guidance, is often part of the answer. Here is David with his testimony and teaching: "Truly my soul silently waits for God alone; for my expectation is from Him... Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him" (Psa 62:1,5,8). Prayer can be offered in a hurry; but without taking time we cannot wait on God. The posture need not always be kneeling. It can be standing or sitting or walking or even lying down. It's a time of uninterrupted communion in our spirit with God. There need not always be a specific subject to dwell upon. It is just waiting on "God alone" (Psa 62:5a). It is an exercise of all our heart, mind, soul and spirit being filled with God Himself. It is fellowship in its purest form.

b) Saturate yourself with the Scriptures.

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope" (Psa 130:5). Waiting on God doesn't mean passivity or keeping our minds blank. This may attract the devil because he keeps roaming about to occupy vacant and well-swept houses (Lk 11:24-26). We must feed richly on the Word of God during seasons of waiting on God. This is what Jesus did during the forty days He spent in the desert before He began His public ministry. There must always be an open Bible before us when we kneel down to wait on God. The time of waiting on God can also be used to ruminate the truths we study during our regular meditations of the Scriptures.

God had revealed His plan to young Joseph through dreams. Everything that followed in his life was just the opposite. The imprisonment in Egypt on false charges of sexual misbehaviour provided for him an excellent time to wait on God who never fails His Word. Joseph had written the vision clearly in his heart. He had been assured that the vision was yet for an appointed time; though it delayed, he must wait for it; it would surely be fulfilled (Hab 2:2,3). The divine record says, "The word of the Lord tested Joseph until the time came for its fulfillment" (Psa 105:19). If we are really waiting on God, we will not employ fleshly methods to work out things for our promotion. You get the chicken by hatching the egg, not by smashing it open!

I urge you, dear reader, to read and reread Psalm 37 until its message sinks deep in your soul. During the 40 years of my walk with God (1963-2003), I have always experienced calm at the depth of my heart in spite of roaring waves above because I have believed every one of the 40 verses of this Psalm. Here is a sample passage from this golden Psalm: "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret--it only causes harm" (vv 7,8).

c) Keep on serving God faithfully.

Waiting on God does not mean we stop working for Him. Priest Zacharias kept on serving God till his very old age while waiting for an answer to his prayer for a child (Lk 1:5-14). David once lamented, "I am exhausted from crying for help; my throat is parched and dry. My eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to help me" (Psa 69:3). Nevertheless he kept on composing songs for God which became the Messianic prophecies and promises, like this Psalm. Servants of God down through the ages have testified that they had been soaking their pillows at nights with tears, but God anointed them with the oil of gladness when they stood on the pulpits. This is the power of waiting on God.

It is dangerous to become too busy to find time to wait on God because of the pressures of ministry and the demands of work. Waiting time is not a wasted time. The time spent in waiting to find the will of God will be saved while carrying it out. Waiting on knees brings us to our journey's end quicker than walking on foot!

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