

The Anatomy of Waiting

(Psalm 40:1-3)

What does it mean to wait on the Lord? I want to suggest to you that although as Christians we are very familiar with the terminology, we may not be as familiar with its full meaning much less the practice. Often when Christians think of waiting on the Lord, they think in terms of waiting for something from God, i.e. a wife, a new job, or a wayward child to come to the Lord.

Waiting on the Lord can involve waiting for God to work in your life in a specific way? But it's so much more than that. The biblical understanding of waiting on the Lord suggests that the greatest blessing of waiting can happen while we're waiting and not just when we receive from God what we've been waiting for.

Many often think that God's work is done when we receive what we have been waiting for. But what we don't realize is that God's best work is often done while we are waiting. While you're waiting for God to fulfill a good desire, He's working to prepare you for receiving what He's promised.

This morning we are going to learn from David three vital lessons about waiting, which we must apply in order to know God and His best for our lives. David, who was a man after God's own heart, has much to teach us. He not only knew the blessings of waiting on the Lord, but he also knew the heartaches of not waiting on the Lord and getting ahead of God.

Main idea: When we are waiting on God, we are waiting with God and He makes the waiting worth it all.

1. Waiting is seeking the presence of God

The first lesson we want to see about waiting for the Lord is that waiting well is foremost about seeking the presence of God. David writes,

“I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.” (Psalm 40:1). Notice that David was not just waiting to receive something from the Lord, he was *waiting for the Lord*.

Now we don't know for sure what specific events in David's life led to the writing of this Psalm. What we do know is that it speaks to a time when David felt like he was in a pit of quicksand that humanly speaking he could not get out of.

When you study the life of David, there were numerous times when he was in distress before and after he sat on the throne. There were times he suffered distress because of his enemies, like King Saul, who wanted to take his life. There was distress that came to his life as a result of not waiting on the Lord, which led to unwise and sinful decisions. There was also much distress that he suffered because of the sinful decisions that his children made, which were some of the hardest times in his life. In verse 12-14 of this chapter, David speaks of the iniquities in his own heart and also of those who sought to take his life and delighted in his pain.

We know from the biblical record of his life, and especially from the Psalms, that in various seasons of his life David waited for the Lord. He waited not just for God to get him out of a jam, but to encounter the restoring and renewing presence of God.

At the end of chapter forty, David testified, *“But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, “Great is the Lord!”* (Psalm 40:16).

We know that when David waited on the Lord, he wasn't passively waiting on the Lord to do something for him. Verse one indicates that he cried to the Lord, which means that he poured his heart out to God. But notice also that as David waited for the Lord, he didn't just talk to God about his problems, he talked to God about God—he worshiped the Lord.

He writes in verse 11: *“As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever*

preserve me!” (Psalm 40:11). In times of distress, David encouraged and strengthen himself in the Lord His God (1 Samuel 30:6).

Now it’s important to note that the words translated *waited* and *patiently* in verse one, are actually the same Hebrew word. So, David actually said something like, I waited and waited for the Lord.

In Psalm 25:1-3, we gain further insight into what David meant when he said he waited patiently, or waited and waited for the Lord: “*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame*” (Psalm 25:1-3).

Notice here that David describes his waiting for the Lord, as lifting up his soul to the Lord and putting his trust in the Lord. In other words, waiting on the Lord is looking to God and putting your hope and trust in Him.

In Psalm 27:4, David makes clear what his greatest pursuit was: “*One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.*” (Psalm 27:4). And after explaining what his greatest pursuit was, namely to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, he concludes, “*Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*” (Psalm 27:14).

Where does divine strength and courage come from? It comes, David explains, from waiting and waiting for the Lord—from turning our attention away from our problems and unto God.

Debilitating worry and panic sets in because we tend to glimpse at God and gaze at our problems. Divine strength and courage come when we do the opposite—when we glimpse at our problems and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord.

David waited and waited on the Lord. Can our lives be characterized as men and women who wait and wait on the Lord—who seek the face of God fervently and frequently? Is there a place you regularly

frequent in order to get away and get alone with God—a place where you meet with God—where you can focus on God with an open bible and give Him your undivided attention?

When you do pray, is your time with God more request based or worship based? As Daniel Henderson explained, “A request-based approach to prayer simply seeks God’s hand—what He can do for us. A worship-based approach to prayer seeks God’s face—the beauty of who He is. If all we ever do is seek God’s hand, we may miss his face. If we seek his face, he will be glad to open his hands in provision and power.”

When David waited patiently on the Lord, he encountered the presence of God. David continues in verse one, “*I waited patiently for the Lord and he inclined unto me...*” In other words, in his waiting David knew God was listening, he knew God was leaning in, he knew that he was in the company of God.

In the New Testament, James writes, “*Draw near to God and he will draw near to you*” (James 4:8). The greatest value of waiting on the Lord is knowing that you’re in the presence of God and comprehending Him as He has revealed Himself in His Holy word. The Lord has called us to experience transformation in His presence (2 Cor. 3:17-18).

In his book, ten questions to diagnose your spiritual health, in the chapter where he asked the question, “Are you more sensitive to God’s presence,” Don Whitney writes, “Many wives complain that their husbands can sit in the same room with them for extended periods and never acknowledge their presence by speaking. Does this develop intimacy? Obviously not. When a person’s prayer life is decaying by silence, is it any wonder they feel unaware of the nearness of God? God is a real person who is very present. Ignore Him, and He will seem distant. Talk with Him often, and you will almost certainly feel closer.

I want to commend in this context the practice of praying through a passage of Scripture, especially one of the Psalms. (By the way, if you

haven't received a book yet on how to pray the Psalms, stop by the Connection Counter at the end of the service). Let the words that have originated in the heart and mind of God Himself become the vehicle [by which you encounter God], and carry the burdens of your heart and mind to God. I've taught this ancient way of prayer in seminars and countless people have testified that praying from God's Word brings them into the presence of God as never before. Praying this way helps you more often experience prayer for what it actually is: a real conversation with a real person."

Brothers and sisters, waiting on the Lord is more than waiting for God to do something for you, while you passively stand on the side lines.

Mark Vroegop put it this way: "Waiting for the Lord is living on what I know to be true about God when I don't know what is true about my life. To wait is choosing to focus on what I know about the Lord instead of panicking about what I don't know about my life. When your struggling to wait stop rehearsing your panic and start rehearsing who God is."

He goes on to explain that the waiting we often practice and the waiting taught in scripture can be compared to the difference between waiting at the DMV or waiting for your bride to walk down the aisle. These two kinds of waiting produce two different emotions. When we're waiting at the DMV our attention is focused on how long it's going to take to get what we came for. When the groom is waiting on his bride, her glory commands his attention and he waits with joy and anticipation.

Similarly, when who God is commands our attention in prayer, His hope giving glory will inform our requests and incline our hearts to His will and ways.

This brings us to our second point, waiting is surrendering to the plans and purposes of God.

2. Waiting is surrendering to the plans/purposes of God

David testified in the end of verse one, *“I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry.”* Let me ask you, when David waited on the Lord in worship, when he took his eyes off of his problems and put them on God and God leaned in and made His presence known to him, what was David’s cry, what was David’s response? Was it, my kingdom come, my will be done?

When Job lamented before God, and questioned why God would allow him to fall into his pit of despair, and God, after some time, leaned over the portals of heaven and revealed His glory to Job, what was Job’s response? Job’s response was to put his hand over his mouth, keep quiet and continue listening (Job 40:3-5).

And after Job sat still before the Lord, and God was done speaking, Job replied, *“You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.’⁵ My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.⁶ Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes”* (Job 42:4-6).

How many of you know, Job wasn’t in a pit of despair and grief because of sinful decisions he made. But in his deep grief he lost sight of God and began to question why God would allow him to lose the dearest thing to him, namely his children.

But when God showed up, and revealed His glory and power to Job, Job no longer needed an answer to His why questions. Seeing and knowing who God is was enough.

And that is the main message of the book of Job. God is worthy to be sought not just because of what He can do for us, but because of who He is. Although God restored the prosperity that Job had before, it was seeing God that brought Job out of his horrible pit.

Daniel Henderson observed, “Your definition of prayer sets your destination in prayer. Whatever your definition will determine whether you think it works.”

How do you define prayer? A beloved saint, who was trapped in a pit of despair, said to me recently, Pastor, I've been praying about this distress in my life for several years now and nothing has changed. How many of you know, God does mighty things in answer to prayer? But the greatest value of prayer is not that prayer changes things, but that prayer changes us.

I have found this definition of prayer to be very helpful, Prayer is intimacy with God that leads to the accomplishment of His purposes. While you're waiting for an answer to prayer, God is often preparing you for the answer.

Waiting for the Lord is an active rather than a passive spiritual discipline. It's more like a waiter at a five-star restaurant as opposed to a frantic impatient customer sitting at a table waiting to be served. A well trained and experienced waiter waits attentively nearby or walks by frequently to attend to the requests of his guests. While his guest is sitting at his assigned table, the waiter's eyes are watching and his ears are attentive. Unless someone takes their place, an excellent waiter doesn't wander off to the back of the restaurant to check the notifications on his smart phone. He's always nearby and in position to see, hear and respond to the slightest direction.

In Psalm 25:4, David writes: *"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long"* (Psalm 25:4-5). Here we see that David waited and waited for the Lord not just to receive deliverance from trouble, but for God to teach him and guide him in the way he should go. Remember, if you only pray when you're in trouble, you're in trouble.

Although David faced troubles because of circumstances beyond his control, which the Lord delivered him from, some of the greatest trouble in his life could have been avoided if he would have waited on the Lord. But how many of you know, God in His mercy doesn't abandon His children, even when we are the ones that dug the pit that we are in. As David testified in Psalm 51:17: *"a broken and contrite*

heart, O God, you will not despise.” God’s mercy is greater than our mess ups.

This brings us to our final point, waiting brings salvation by the power of God.

3. Waiting brings salvation by the power of God

As David continues to testify in song about the power of waiting for the Lord, he continues: *“He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. ³ He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.”* Psalm 40:2-3

What was this pit of destruction, which felt to David as if he was sinking in quick sand with no way out? The poetic language that David is using to describe this dark, desolate and distressing place is illustrating how he felt because of his circumstances more so than the circumstances themselves. The poetic metaphor that David is using is meant to help us enter into what David is feeling. They are not an actual description of his physical circumstances.

As John Piper noted: “It is good that we don't know what the experience was. It makes it easier to see ourselves in the pits with the king. Anything that causes a sense of helplessness and desperation and threatens to ruin life or take it away—that is the king's pit.”

Now, what lifted David out of his pit of feeling helpless and hopeless? What lifted Job out of his pit of despair? After being beaten and thrown in a dungeon, what lifted up Paul and Silas at midnight to pray and sing hymns to God, while the other prisoners listened? (Acts 16:25).

I want to suggest to you that like Job, and like Paul and Silas, David was delivered and began to sing before he was delivered. David said of the Lord, who he was waiting for, in verse two: *“He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.*

Notice the profound contrast between David feeling like he was sinking in quicksand, to having his feet set on a rock. David went from a place of uncertainty and insecurity to a place of confidence and stability. He went from a place of feeling like he was sinking down into a bottomless pit, to a place where he was being held up by a sure foundation.

The bible records that, among other things, David was delivered from attempts to overthrow his throne and also from the shame and guilt of his own sin. But I want to submit to you that David also knew the deliverance, the security and the peace that comes from God drawing near—from being still in the presence of God (Psalm 18:2). The presence and nearness of God was the one thing that he cherished and longed for more than anything else. God was His rock.

God can deliver us from whatever pit of trouble we might be in. But there's a deliverance—a stability and security that comes from knowing that God is near—a deliverance that comes from a God who promises that when we wait for Him—when we draw near to Him—when we stop rehearsing our problems and start rehearsing who He is, He will deliver us from the pit of desperation—He will turn our worry into worship and our panic into praise. He will put a new song in our hearts in our midnight hour.

David continues: *“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.”* (Psalm 40:3). Let me ask you, do you have a song in your heart? Do you regularly find yourself singing a song of praise to God throughout the day or is Sunday morning the only time you sing to the Lord?

Do you know, according to the Apostle Paul, singing songs and hymns from our hearts to God and to one another is a mark of being filled with the Spirit and of God's word dwelling richly in our hearts (Ephesians 5:18)?

In this fallen world, there will be times when we will mourn. But our bible tells us that although sorrow may endure for a night, joy comes in the morning. And the joy and peace that enables us to sing in our

midnight hour doesn't come only when God delivers us from trouble. It comes from knowing that God is near—from comprehending His glory and majesty by the power of the Spirit within us.

And this deliverance, which comes from knowing the nearness of God, whether God delivers us from trouble or not, causes the world around us to take notice. It's a divine witness to those around us who don't know God.

As a result of the song that God put in David's heart, he wrote, "*Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord.*" (Psalm 40:1-3). We become a powerful and awe inspiring witness to the lost and the hopeless around us not only when we sing songs of praise when God delivers us from trouble, but also when even in troubles and trials we don't lose our praise, trust and hope in God.

As one bible teacher noted, "The music of the rescued saints is a tremendous means of evangelism." John Piper

Where are you today? Are you in a pit of distress of your own doing or because of circumstances beyond your control? Wait on the Lord. Cry out to Him with a broken and contrite heart. Stop counting your problems and start counting your blessings.

And let me remind you of the greatest blessing of all. The sinless, spotless lamb of God was thrown in a pit of destruction for you. He went through hell for you. And after He suffered, bled and died for your sin, He was laid in a tomb. But listen to what David also wrote prophetically about Jesus in Psalm 16:9-10: "*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.*"

Although Jesus subjected Himself to a pit of destruction, and His lifeless body laid for 3 days in a tomb, right on schedule early Sunday morning, He was lifted up. And because His soul was not abandoned in the realm of the dead and His body did not see corruption, we can be assured that when we wait for Him in our pit of destruction, He will

incline unto us, He will hear our cry, He will lift us up in His good time and set our feet on the rock of His salvation. He will make our steps secure in this life and for all eternity.

Conclusion

O no matter what pit you may be in today, or whatever you may face in the days ahead, *Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*" (Psalm 27:14). God not only works on behalf of those who wait for Him to deliver them, He delivers us while we are waiting.

Remember, waiting on the Lord is not passive, it's active. It's not sitting on the sidelines until He gives you what you want. Rather, it's choosing to focus on what is true about the Lord, His love, His faithfulness, His mercy, instead of panicking about what you don't know to be true about your life.

Seek Him not just for what only He can do. Seek Him for who He is. When you do, His nearness will be your salvation, your strength and your song. Many will see it, be in awe of God, and put their trust in the Lord.