



The Season of Waiting

Everything in the Bible from the third chapter onwards is waiting. It's there that life goes wrong for all of us but a promise is given by God that His Chosen One will restore all things, and the rest of the Old Testament can be read as a tale of waiting for the Chosen One's arrival. Even when Jesus does arrive, in the New Testament, He has to wait 30 years to get started in public ministry, and after His death and resurrection it's time for more waiting as He ascends to Heaven, leaving the promise that He will return.

Christians therefore live with "eschatological tension" - we've tasted the age to come but it's not here yet. We believe in and love God but we don't see Him face to face yet. Alongside this, everyday waiting is made more tense for the Christian, especially when waiting for good to come now and for rights to be wronged because we believe in a personal and active God who loves us and rules over all things. This increases the tension: why are we waiting?

Lamentations 3 describes one of the most painful and extended periods of waiting in the Bible: that of the faithful remnant of Israel after God sent foreign armies to destroy Jerusalem. Ravaged by war, the writer knew that it would be 70 years before the restoration would begin (Jeremiah 25:11). That they can conclude "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases" is astonishing, and might tempt us to think that they have superhero powers of faith beyond ordinary people like us – except that the Bible won't let us think that way. The writer says, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him" (verse 25), and this is backed-up by Isaiah 64:4 and Galatians 5:22 which tell us that patience, the ability to wait contentedly but persistently, is a work of God in us.

Here are **six choices** we can make through which God gives us grace to wait well.

1. Be honest about the struggles of waiting, don't fake contentment

See also Psalm 13:1 and 1 Peter 5:7. We can be honest with God and know that He understands (He wrote Proverbs 13:12, after all).

2. Focus on God, not on what you're waiting for

When we're thinking and praying about what we're waiting for, it's so easy for that to become the only thing that we focus our hopes on. This is deadly dangerous, tempting us towards idolatry as we put our hope in the thing we want rather than God. Even if we don't go that far, giving all our attention to something we don't have focuses our heart on an absence. What we really need is to turn our eyes towards Jesus and His fullness first. Search your Bible to see His beauty and faithfulness. Sing songs about His goodness and love. Bring to mind what He's done for you over the years – sins forgiven, provision granted, other blessings. Pray prayers of thanks and praise.

3. Trust that He cares, rather than believe lies about His character

Seasons of waiting are great opportunities for the enemy to turn your heart against God. We must not sit in judgement on God's character when our knowledge of Him and His plans is so limited. But we can believe and trust what He has shown us about Himself (e.g. Romans 8:31-22, John 11:35).

4. Persist in prayer, rather than giving up

Our faith shrinks when we give up praying for something. I don't always feel like praying about things I've been waiting long years for, but God loves resilient faith and blesses it as we exercise it.

5. Get on with today, rather than putting life on hold until you get what you've been waiting for

This is worth doing if for no other reason than what you're waiting for might not happen. Jesus will give you everything you need to follow Him today, and redeem the

waiting through this (which may involve taking practical steps to bring about the end of your waiting). This can be very difficult if you have to make a decision which suggests a dream dying – but we do believe in a God who raises the dead, remember?

6. Look forward, rather than fixating on now

Whether your dream dies or is brought back to life, whether you see what you've been waiting for come to pass or not, Christian hope is always bigger than the things of this life. If you're more aware of what you presently lack than what you'll get in eternity, you're looking in the wrong place. Stories about God graciously answering people's prayers and ending their waiting in this life are lovely but they're a "happy mid-point" rather than the happy ending we're to wait for: God's coming Kingdom. Think and dream about this, celebrate the moments we experience it, make all your choices in light of it until you groan in anticipation of it. (And, by the way, Jesus says that if we seek His Kingdom we'll get all the other things we need thrown in too.) When that day comes, all our waiting will have been worth it.

Questions:

- Luke said that waiting for the green man to appear on the crossings along Princes Street was the place which forced him to consider the nature of human beings as creatures whose existence is fixed in a single moment of time and space - where do you find yourself getting most bored or frustrated with everyday waiting?
- More seriously, what things are you waiting on God for?
- How did God speak to you on Sunday through the preach?
- How can we be encouraged by the many stories of waiting in the Bible?
- Have you experienced God's grace in waiting in the past?
- Which of the six choices Luke listed do you struggle with the most?



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