

Waiting Patiently

Isaiah 40:31 and Selected Verses

Did you ever feel like God is far-off or unreachable? Like you've made a call to Him quite a few times and every time you've left your message on His phone and you wait and wait but there's no call back? And you wonder "Is he ever going to call me back?" Have you ever felt that way? We all have. It's called A Season of Waiting. As I mentioned in my message a few weeks back, we pass through different seasons in our lives. The season of waiting is one of them. Are you in this season right now? Have you been, in fact, in this season for a while? If you're not in this season, I bet you're gonna be sooner or later. You just wait and see.

We're in the sixth part of our series called "Truth and Consequence". The truth we're learning today is that we go through a season of waiting. And the consequence of that depends on what you do while waiting. The title of my message this morning is "Waiting Patiently".

So, what are you waiting for? A restoration of a relationship? Healing? Job promotion? A friend or relative coming to the Lord? Your own spiritual growth? Career move? Real friends? Winning at Lotto? We've got to talk if that's what you're waiting for. Don't even think about it. And I'm waiting for you to change.

Whatever it is, it's all a season of waiting. Maybe it's just a little thing, but for you right now, it's the only thing that matters. It's what you think about every day.

Today we're going to talk about, how do you handle a season of waiting? More than that: How do you grow through a season of waiting?

But first, why does God make us wait? I think that's a good question. If God could create the world in six days, why do I have to wait six months to get a job? Does that make sense? If He could do things immediately, why do I have to wait?

Because of what waiting does to us. Because of what happens inside of us when we wait. Because waiting is one of God's greatest tools for growth. How do I know that? The Bible shows us again and again how it is a tool.

Before I show you how to wait and the way it helps us to grow, let me show you three things that this tool of waiting does in our lives.

What does waiting do? **Why does God make us wait?**

1. IT RENEWS OUR STRENGTH.

Do you ever feel like you run out of gas? Emotionally and spiritually, not physically? You see, waiting is one of the ways that God refills our tanks. Waiting is one of the ways God uses to help you and I to get recharged emotionally. I need it and you need it too.

Isaiah gives us a beautiful picture of this.

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Is. 40:31)

I like that picture! I need that kind of strength in my life. Walking, enduring, but not wearing out. Running, giving out great amounts of energy, but not wearing out. And mounting up with wings like an eagle, doing things I never thought I could do because of God's strength through waiting. Waiting forces us to stop so that God can recharge our spiritual batteries. And we all need that sometimes.

Let me let you in on a little secret: You're not the Energizer Bunny. A lot of us would like to think we are. We want to keep on going and going and going like my wife. And I have to tell her to stop in the name of love. That's why we're going to see a movie afterwards. We're going to go to a quiet place.

2. IT REFINES OUR CHARACTER

A verse in Romans about why God allows us to wait: ***"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they***

help us learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us. (Romans 5:3-4 TLB)

It's like an assembly line: We get on this assembly line of character, but where does it start? It starts with waiting. Then, when I respond with patience, God develops strength of character in me. It's His assembly line for character. It's something like the cameras of old. You take a picture but it takes a few days for it to develop. First, you take out the negative, take it to the store so their developer can process it and turn it into something beautiful. Our young people here don't know the suffering we had to go through just waiting for the picture to develop in the lab, right? Today you don't have to wait to see a picture. But God uses times of waiting to develop us.

Folks, if all you can see in people's lives are the negatives, they just haven't been to the Developer yet. As soon as we go to the Developer through times of waiting, God begins to bring out the positives in our lives. It's the process He uses, to bring out the full color of our personalities and gifts and all He made us to be. It develops our character.

God made us and He loves us. Every one of us. So doesn't it make sense that He knows just what to do in our lives to bring out all that He made us to be? The Bible says one of the reasons we have to wait -- because He loves us enough to want to develop us not just give us what we want. So waiting develops our character.

3. IT ALSO REFOCUSES OUR PURPOSE

Look at what the Bible has to say about the expert, the Olympic champion on waiting, Job. We all know his story of waiting. James 5:11 says, "*You have heard about Job's patience, and you know the Lord's purpose for him in the end.*" You see, on the other side of patience is purpose. On the other side of waiting is a renewal of God's will in our lives. That's what happened to Job. As he waited

through those difficulties in his life, those terrible tragedies, on the other side, he found more blessing and purpose than he'd ever had before.

If God wants to change the direction of our lives, to better the direction of our lives, first, before He can change direction, before any of us can change direction He's got to get us to stop. Once God has stopped us, He can turn us in the direction He wants us to go for greater blessings. It refocuses the purpose that we have in our lives.

We want what we want when we want it. But God doesn't give us what we want, when we want it. We think that's because God doesn't want us to have what we want when we want it. But the truth is, God doesn't give us what we want when we want it, because God wants to give us more than we could ever dream of. We want a little, God wants to give us much, and waiting is one of the ways He refocuses our purpose so that He can give us what He wants to give us.

One of the great stories in the Bible about that is in 1 Samuel 1-3. It's the story of a woman named Hannah. Hannah waited for a child. The difficult thing about Hannah is that her husband also had another wife, Peninnah. who kept having children and she wasn't too kind to Hannah about it. In fact, the Bible literally says that "Peninnah provoked her bitterly to irritate her." How would that feel? You're not able to have children and your husband's other wife was saying, "I got one Hanna, how about you? Look what I have. Look at what you don't have." Year after year this happened. She had children, Hannah had none.

Year after year, Hannah would go to the temple. She would talk to God about it, "God, I pray that you would send children into my life." And she waited and she waited.

The Bible tells us that one day God heard her prayers and answered her prayers. And God sent into Hanna's life a boy. We never hear the name of any of Peninnah's children. But we do know the name of Hannah's boy. His name was

Samuel. Samuel became the great prophet of Israel. Samuel became the great leader who laid his hand on Saul and on David and said, "You're going to be the king." Samuel got two books of the Bible named after him. That's not bad!

What was God doing? Why did God make Hannah wait? Because while Hannah was waiting, her life was developing. She was developing patience. She was developing a prayer life, a trust in God. Don't you think when that little boy, Samuel, that God wanted to use so much, was growing up, that Hannah didn't pass some of those things along to him? Of course she did! In order to develop a Samuel, God first had to develop a Hannah. And He did it through a time of waiting. He wanted to give to her more than she could ever dream of. God uses times of waiting to refocus our purpose.

The truth is, sometimes we have to wait for the best. We love to say that to our kids. "Sometimes you just have to wait for the best. That's just the way it is." But we hate it when God says that to us! But it is true.

Waiting renews, refines, refocuses.

Some of you may be thinking, "I've spent a lot of time waiting and none of those things have happened for me. How come I'm not seeing those things happen?" It's important to understand that it's not just that we wait but it's how we wait. If the fact that we waited developed our character immediately, for instance, then the people with the best character in Northern Virginia would be the people in rush hour traffic on I-66 going West when it's all jammed up and I know for a fact, those aren't the people with the best character. So, it's not just waiting, it's how we wait.

How can I grow through a season of waiting?

The truth is we haven't learned how to live until we've learned how to wait. Why? Because we spend so much of life in the waiting room. If I think I'm not

living while I'm waiting, I'm going to spend a lot of life feeling like I'm not living. The key is to learn how to wait.

There's a lot of advice about this in the Bible because God knew how much we'd have to struggle with waiting. So, **How can I grow through a season of waiting?**

I. WAIT FOR THE LORD

Isaiah 49:23 (ESV) says, **"Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame."**

When you wait, what are you waiting for? Are you waiting for the Lord? Or are you waiting for the answer? Are you waiting for what you want to happen? Or are you waiting for God to act?

Think this through with me. It's an incredibly important lesson God gives to us on how to wait. *"Wait for me"*, God says. But, we tend to wait for the answer. We pray and we want God to answer that prayer. We wait for the answer.

But the Bible says make it more personal than that -- *"Wait for the Lord."*

Basically, we need to make our waiting less goal-oriented and more God-oriented. Instead of waiting for this one thing to happen, when you and I can turn our eyes to God and say, "God, You could do this in a moment. In a second. So what I'm waiting for is for You to be at work. I'm waiting on You. Because You're the one in control." God is in control. Waiting, for you and I, should be a powerful, personal experience of trust. Times of waiting are often our greatest opportunities to trust in God.

I'm afraid sometimes when it comes to asking God for things we're waiting for, we sort of see it as some heavenly Wheel of Fortune game. I get my chance to walk up to the wheel and spin it and see what I get. If I'm lucky, God gives me what I want. But if I'm unlucky I don't get what I want. The truth is, a lot of times we think it's luck. We think it's good fortune. But it's not. We're waiting on a

powerfully personal God who knows us and loves us and cares about us. We're waiting on God to act.

Isaiah 64:4 *" Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him."*

Folks, we're not just waiting for the answer to come. We're waiting for God to act on our behalf. It's acknowledging that he is in control, that he is Sovereign, that he is faithful, he is loving, and we're putting our trust in him no matter how long it takes. Isaiah 64 tells us that while we're waiting, God is working on our behalf.

You see, the end of the story, in your life, if you wait, is going to be a great ending. Again, Isaiah 64:4 *" Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you..."* If I'm going to wait in a way that develops me as God wants to, I have to learn to wait on God and not just wait on the answer.

One of the most difficult lessons I've had to learn in my life is that there's a difference between God's will and God's timing. Sometimes I can know something is God's will, know He wants to do it, but it's not time yet. You see that all throughout the Bible. So, just wait for the Lord.

2. WAIT IN A CROWD

You're not alone when you wait. There's an incredible difference between waiting alone and waiting in a crowd. Have you ever gotten stuck in a layover in an airport all by yourself and you have to wait alone? The time just drags by. But if you're with your family, a big group of people you enjoy being with, it's a party. There's a difference between waiting alone and waiting in the right kind of crowd.

Now, I want to introduce you to a couple of crowds that we all wait in.

One is in the Bible. This book is filled with stories of people who waited. From A to Z. From Abraham who waited for a son to Zechariah in the New Testament who waited for a son, John the Baptist. It's filled with stories of people

who waited from first to last. From the book of Genesis -- Noah who waited 100 years for a flood to come while he was building an ark -- to Revelation -- John the Apostle who waited in exile on an isle called Patmos and God gave him a revelation there. It's filled with stories of people who waited for God to act. Paul, Nehemiah, Daniel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joseph, Mary, Peter, Joseph, David, Elijah, Ezra, Isaiah, Aaron, Adam, Esther, Ruth, Hanna, Hosea, Gideon, John the Baptist, Sarah, Leah, Martha, Lazarus (he waited in a tomb, dead for four days. That was some kind of waiting.) Joshua, Samuel, Caleb, Noah, Naomi, Job.

There was a Joseph in the Old Testament who waited to become ruler over Egypt, and there was a Joseph in the New Testament, the father of Jesus who waited two years down in Egypt to come back so the king wouldn't kill Jesus. They waited -- every one of them. When you and I read their stories it has incredible encouragement for us.

In Hebrews 6:15 it says *"And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised."* You may be thinking, "Those are all great people of faith. I could never wait like that." The Bible tells us Abraham waited patiently but the real story was Abraham struggled while he waited. God told him he was going to have a son. But he waited 25 years before that son was born. He struggled. While he waited Abraham said, "God, I don't see a son being born. I've got a better idea. Let's make my servant the heir. Instead of me having a real son, let's sort of transfer the title over to him. How about that for a great idea, God?" God said, "No, you've got to wait."

Then one time God came to Abraham and Sarah and said, "You're going to have a son," and they laughed. That's some kind of faith isn't it? Then Abraham decided he would take matters into his own hands. He decided that he would, through his wife's maidservant, have a son. He did have a son named Ishmael but that wasn't the son that God wanted.

Yet you look at the New Testament and the Bible says "Look at this guy. He's an example to you of patience. He's an example to you what it means to wait in the right kind of way." Apparently it's okay to struggle while you wait. Apparently, when it comes to waiting, it's not how you struggle during the time of waiting; it's "Do you trust God all the way through the time?" You may have a couple of stumblings, a couple of times when you trust in yourself rather than Him, but Abraham, he kept coming back to trusting in God. Every time he came back.

The word "faith" and the word "fail" begin with the same three letters. They just end differently. Apparently when it comes to faith and waiting, it's the end of the story that counts. If you've been struggling while you've been waiting, join the club. Join the crowd. They all struggled while they waited. We all struggle while we wait. That's part of what develops us.

We wait in a crowd, in a great crowd of people. Hebrews 12:1a *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses..."* This is talking about all the people who have gone before us that have loved the Lord. It pictures it like they're in the grandstands watching us and cheering us on saying "Hey, we waited. You can wait too! You can do it. How? *"... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."* (Heb. 12:1c)

There's another crowd we wait in. The one right here. You're in a crowd of people who have waited. If you start talking to each other you'd find out the five or six things that each of us have waited for in our lives. We've seen God work, many of us. You see, the encouragement that we can give one another helps us through times of waiting.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, *"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."* That's what we do through times of waiting. You have people around you that have waited for a job, are waiting for a job, who waited to get married, are waiting to get married, who've waited for

healing, who are waiting to get healed. There are people sitting all around you who are waiting for their dream to happen, who have waited for their dream to happen.

Finally, as you wait,

III. REMEMBER: GOD WAITS FOR YOU.

2 Peter 3:9 *"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* When you're going through a time of waiting, one of the healthiest things that you and I can do is to say to ourselves, "God is patient with me." He's patient with me because he's growing me, because He wants to change my heart and life.

When I look at God He has incredible patience with me. I make the same mistakes again and again. Same ones! God must look down and say, "Can't you be more creative and think of a different mistake?" Same ones. But He's patiently helping me to grow. I commit the same sins again and again. And God patiently forgives again and again. He has incredible patience. When I remember how patient He is with me, it helps me be patient with the circumstances in my life.

Colossians 1:11 tells us what God wants to do during these circumstances, what His patience can do for us, *"God will strengthen you with his own great power so that you will not give up when troubles come, but you will be patient."* Not only does God want us to be patient but He's willing to strengthen us to be patient. You're not even alone in trying to be patient.

The last verse especially fits some of your lives. Isaiah 30:18 (NLT) *"So the Lord must wait for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion."* Folks, God is patiently waiting. He waits for you to come to Him.

I know how some of you must feel. "I've blown it so many times. I've ignored God for so long in my life. I can't even believe I'm sitting in a church today! How

can I come to Him now when I've ignored Him so much? It would almost be embarrassing to come to Him now." God is patient with you. God waited 400 years to set His people free out of Egypt. He waited over 4000 years after He first made the promise that Jesus would come into the world before He sent Him. And you think you're wearing Him out because you made Him wait 10, 20, 50 years? Who are you kidding? God is patient with you. He's got plenty of patience for you. And the Lord still waits for you to come to Him so that He can show you His love. He's still waiting. He hasn't stopped waiting.

God wants to give you and I the strength to wait. But God is also waiting for us to show us His love.