

WAITING FOR GOD!

by Rita Langeland
Hidden With Christ Ministries
P. O. Box 3267
Tustin, California 92781 USA

***For the LORD is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him.”
Isaiah 30:18 (NKJV)***

In American culture one of our greatest collective weaknesses is our inability to wait. We don't like to wait in line at the grocery store or the fast food restaurant drive-thru more than a minute or two. If we feel that someone else's inefficiency has been the cause of us being forced to wait - we feel incensed at their rude treatment of us. It could be safely said that "waiting" is not a discipline that we have cultivated as a society. Yet "waiting" is a spiritual discipline that is very essential for our development as mature Christian believers.

Though there are several different scriptural ways of "waiting upon God" such as waiting in prayer, I am referring here to the concept of "waiting for God." More specifically, I am addressing the issue of waiting for God to move on our behalf according to the promises we see clearly written in His Word.

Over the course of more than 20 years of pastoral ministry I have observed many people stumble in their relationship with the Lord when they have had to endure a season of "waiting for God." Some allowed themselves to become so frustrated in the "waiting period" that they took matters into their own hands with disastrous results. Others mistakenly concluded that God didn't care about them or their situation and eventually sunk into a mire of hopelessness, becoming bitter at God.

Neither of those scenarios are the intention of God when He allows a season of waiting in our lives. It is His heart to be gracious to us and to bring a blessing and a purpose to the waiting. Isaiah 30:18 (NIV) concludes with, ***"Blessed are all those who wait for Him."***

But as Americans, we have been taught an ingrained cultural value stated in the well known adage, "God helps those who help themselves!" as if it was a quote straight from the pages of the Bible. (which it is not!) I believe that this cultural mindset has contributed to the temptation to try to "make things happen" in our own strength when God is asking us to wait upon Him to intervene.

In the past I struggled with the feeling that I was being lazy or irresponsible if I didn't "do something" to help change a situation that needed God's intervention. Even after I prayed about a matter, I battled waiting even a single day to see if God would intervene. I always felt compelled to "do something!" I have learned over the years that it is much harder to wait than it is to act.

G. Campbell Morgan was a great Bible teacher from England who was born in 1863. He retired from his pastorate at Westminster Chapel in London in 1943 at the age of 80. He made a profound observation about waiting for God. He said, "Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given." Learning this vital principle will help you resist the temptation to try to bring about your own deliverance.

In the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John we find a story about a family that was **"waiting for God"** to intervene in a desperate situation.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, ***"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."*** ***Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. (John 11:1, 3-6 NIV)***

This story illustrates several important points. Mary and Martha had a need. Their brother was deathly ill. They cried out to the Lord by sending word to Jesus of their brother's sickness. Then we can observe an astonishing thing - Jesus intentionally made them wait - by staying two more days in the town where he was preaching instead of responding immediately to their plea. That waiting period must have been excruciating for the two sisters as they watched their brother's condition grow worse and worse. Sound familiar?

Perhaps you have a need and you have prayed to God about it but it seems like God is making you wait a painfully long amount of time for the answer. Could there possibly be some redemptive purpose in the "waiting?" In the case of Lazarus, the purpose of the delay in answering Mary and Martha's request is plainly stated. It says, "...so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

If you read the rest of the story in John chapter 11, you will find that Lazarus died several days before Jesus reached the town of Bethany. When He arrived, Jesus performed one of the most outstanding miracles recorded in the Gospels by raising Lazarus from the dead after he had been entombed for 4 days. The Son of God was definitely glorified by this miracle and many believed in Him after that event. (Please note - God was not glorified in Lazarus' sickness - He was glorified in Lazarus' resurrection! Some people have erroneously taught that God sends sickness to people so that He can be glorified through it. That is certainly NOT the point of this Gospel story nor is it an opinion held by the author.) Through the difficult waiting period, Jesus brought forth a miracle that was far greater than healing - it was raising Lazarus from the dead! Lazarus became a walking testimony to the power of God and to the reality of Jesus as the true Messiah that the Jews had been awaiting for centuries.

Often when we are waiting for the intervention of God we cannot imagine what good there could possibly be in having the answer delayed – especially when the situation appears to be growing worse by the day. But God always has a higher purpose in mind. Many times that purpose has to do with a work God wants accomplished in our hearts. In other words – sometimes when we are waiting for God – He is actually waiting for us! The first part of Isaiah 30:18 (NKJV) says this: ***"Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you;"***

This scripture clearly states that God waits...but what is God waiting for? I sincerely believe that God is waiting for our hearts to come into alignment with His will. Often a season of waiting for God will reveal what is in our hearts that needs to change. A classic example can be found in the Book of Exodus (chapter 15) when the children of Israel were walking through the wilderness just after they escaped the pursuing Egyptian army by a miraculous deliverance. They walked for three days and found no water. God was fully planning to provide fresh water for them – He had no intention of allowing them to die of thirst. Yet He allowed them to wait three days and then find a pool of bitter water before He acted on their behalf. During that waiting period, something in their hearts that displeased God was exposed.

Even though they had just seen a miracle of unprecedented proportions when God split the Red Sea for them, instead of trusting God to perform another miracle, they began to grumble against Moses, their God-given leader. The spirits of unbelief and complaining were revealed by this waiting period. These were issues of the heart that God wanted His people to be cleansed from. Can you walk through a season of waiting for God to intervene in your situation without complaining or stumbling in unbelief? It is what God desires for each of us. Yet it is often the waiting period that exposes those sinful tendencies in our hearts. So if you have found yourself struggling during your "wait" for God's intervention, simply ask Him for forgiveness and ready your heart in faith. Trust God's Word of promise in Isaiah 30:18 that says, ***"Blessed are all those who wait for Him."*** If you do, you will find out just how much God loves to be gracious toward you, and you will have a testimony like Lazarus did, of the power and the goodness of the Lord.

Rita Langeland
Hidden With Christ Ministries
www.hiddenwithchrist.com

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