

God's Will for Your Wait

By Paul Tripp, *The Gospel Coalition*

In ministry there are often moments when you are propelled by a biblical vision but called by God to wait. Waiting can be discouraging and hard. So what does it look like to wait in a way that makes you a participant in what God is doing rather than someone who struggles against the wait? Let me suggest several things.

Remind Yourself You Are Not Alone

As you wait, tell yourself again and again that you have not been singled out. Remind yourself that you are part of a vast company of people who are being called to wait. Reflect on the biblical story. Abraham waited many years for his promised son. Israel waited 420 years for deliverance from Egypt, then another 40 years before they could enter the land God had promised them. God's people waited generation after generation for the Messiah, and the church now waits for his return. The whole world groans as it waits for the final renewal of all things that God has promised. In ministry, it is vital to understand that waiting is not an interruption of God's plan. It is his plan. And you can know this as well: the Lord who has called you to wait is with you in your wait. He hasn't gone off to do something else, like the doctor you're waiting to see. No, God is near, and he provides for you all that you need to be able to wait.

Realize That Waiting Is Active

Usually our view of waiting is the doctor's office. We see it as a meaningless waste of time, like a man stuck in the reception area until he has nothing left to do but scan recipes in a two-year-old copy of *Ladies' Home Journal*.

Our waiting on God must not be understood this way. The sort of waiting to which we are called is not inactivity. It is very positive, purposeful, and spiritual. To be called to wait is to be called to the activity of remembering: remembering who I am and who God is. To be called to wait is to be called to the activity of worship: worshiping God for his presence, wisdom, power, love, and grace. To be called to wait is to be called to the activity of serving: looking for ways to lovingly assist and encourage others who are also being called to wait. To be called to wait is to be called to the activity of praying: confessing the struggles of my heart and seeking the grace of the God who has called me to wait. We must rethink waiting and remind ourselves that waiting is itself a call to action.

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Let Your Waiting Strengthen Your Faith

As I think about waiting, I often remember what is said of Abraham in [Romans 4:18-21](#). The passage tells us that as he waited, Abraham was strengthened in his faith. That's not what we would expect, is it? We tend to think that, having been given a promise from God, a person might well begin to wait with vibrant faith. But as the wait drags on it seems like that faith would gradually weaken. So why did Abraham's faith on the whole grow stronger and stronger? Because of what he did as he waited. During his wait, Abraham became a student of the character and power of God, and the more he saw God for who he is, the stronger his faith became. He meditated on the glory of God, not on the difficulty of his situation.

There are three ways in which, like Abraham, you can let your waiting strengthen your faith. You can recognize that waiting is an opportunity to know God better through spending time in his Word, thus developing a deeper sense of his character, wisdom, power, and plan. Second, you can recognize that

waiting is an opportunity to know yourself better. As you wait, and as your heart is revealed, you have the precious opportunity to become a student of your own heart. What sins, weaknesses, and struggles has God revealed during the wait? Where has waiting exposed the lies and false gods that make waiting difficult? And third, you can recognize that waiting is an opportunity to know others better, as their hearts are similarly revealed. This can offer you precious opportunities for even more effective ministry to those in your care.

Determine to grow stronger, more effective, and more full of faith as you wait. It is, after all, a key part of God's intention.

Count Your Blessings

Vital to productive waiting is a commitment to resist the grumbling and complaining that often kidnap us all. To fight this tendency, learn to number your blessings as you wait.

I once heard a missionary leader tell a story of how he was dreading an extremely long road trip. Then the thought came to him that this time of being imprisoned behind the wheel of his car was in fact an opportunity. He decided that as he drove he would thank God for every little detail of blessing and grace he could recall, beginning with his earliest memory. As he drove hour after hour, he recounted to God year after year and decade after decade of blessing upon blessing. By the end of his journey, he still had not come up to the present day. As a result, rather than ending his trip exhausted and bored, he ended it excited and changed. He saw his life through new eyes, with the presence and provision of God in his life taking on a clarity and comprehensiveness he had never before glimpsed.

By contrast, waiting often becomes for us an exercise in reminding ourselves of what we don't have. How much better, how much more fruitful, how much more joyful, to take waiting as an opportunity to recount the many, many good things in our lives that we have been given---things we could have never earned, achieved, or deserved.

Long for Eternity

There is one other thing waiting is meant to do: God intends that waiting would make me long for home. When I consider this, I am often reminded of camping. I suspect the whole purpose of camping is to make you thankful for home. When you camp, everything is more difficult than it would be at home. In the beginning, that can be fun. But three or four days in, you begin to get tired of having to make a fire, having to hunt for drinkable water, and having to fish for supper. You quietly (or not so quietly) begin to long for home.

Waiting is meant to remind you that you live "between the already and the not yet." Yes, there are many, many things for which to be thankful in this life, but this place is not your final home. You are in a temporary dwelling in a temporary location. In the life and ministry you experience here, there is one aspect or another that can remind you this is not home. The hardships of your present life and ministry speak clearly: this is not the final destination. Waiting is meant to produce in you a God-honoring dissatisfaction with the status quo. Waiting is meant to make you hungry, to produce in you a longing. For what? To be home---home with your Lord forever, home where sin is no more, home in a world that has been made completely new. As you wait, keep telling yourself, *This is not my final destination.*

Right now, right here, in your personal life or ministry, there is some way, perhaps many ways, in which God is calling you to wait. How well are you waiting? Has your waiting produced in you a faith that is stronger? Or weaker? Has the manner of your waiting drawn you closer to God? Or further

away? Has your approach to waiting helped remind you of all the blessings you have been showered with? Or has it tempted you to continually rehearse your list of unmet wants? Has your waiting served to teach you truths about yourself? Or has it only made you more blind about yourself and angry about your circumstances? Has the way you wait enabled you to reach out and minister to others better, or has it simply drawn you deeper into the claustrophobic drama of your own waiting?

In each case, it's your choice. Take hold of the grace that God makes available. All of these outcomes are contingent on whether you choose God or self, fruitfulness or futility, his powerful grace or your own feeble will. Always remember that God is never separate from your wait. He is the Lord of waiting. He is the liberal giver of grace for the wait. Because your wait is not outside of his plan, but a vital and necessary part of it, he is with you in your wait. And remember God is not so much after the success of your ministry, he's after you. So as you wait, tell yourself again and again: *Waiting is not just about what I get at the end of the wait, but about who I become as I wait.*

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