

Wait

If ever there were a single word that presented the utmost challenge to our nature it is the word “wait.” Especially in our fast-paced society, we don’t want to wait for anything. From the preparation of our meals to the cleaning of our clothes, we have to have it now. When just a relatively short time ago we thought it was amazing to be able to access the world wide web, today our amazement has changed to aggravation if web pages don’t come up within a second or two of our attempt to access them. Have you ever wondered why television commercials are now as short as 15 seconds? It’s because of our short attention spans and our need to get to the point and get out. And while we’re on this subject, I’ll go ahead and make a confession of my irritation with that traffic light in front of the church building. Being able to patiently wait for something is not one of my strong suits and that light certainly doesn’t help!

In spite of our desire for immediacy, there are some things that simply can’t be rushed. You can’t make a seed develop or a flower open before their time. You can’t rush a sunset. You can’t make a second go any faster than the tick of the clock. Some things just require a waiting period.

The word “wait” in its various forms occurs over 100 times in the Bible. Sometimes it has reference to serving (Exodus 21:13; Numbers 8:23-26). Many times it refers to someone lying in wait as if to set a trap (Deuteronomy 19:11; Acts 23:16,21,30). The usage as it pertains to this article is defined thusly: “To wait, look for, hope, expect.” That’s the definition of one of the Hebrew words used in the Old Testament. It is translated “wait” 26 times and all but five of those times it is used in regard to waiting for God. Another Hebrew word is translated “wait” 12 times but the majority of the time that it’s used it is translated “hope.” The Greek words translated “wait” in the New Testament are used infrequently but the predominant thought behind their usage suggests patience and confidence in the arrival of something or someone. For instance, Paul wrote in II Thessalonians 3:5, “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.” There, “patient waiting” is the translation of a single Greek word which means, “steadfastness, constancy, endurance, the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.”

When the Bible speaks of waiting in the manner in which we’re speaking of it in this article, its inspired writers are exhorting patience, hope and confidence in God. In essence, we must learn to wait on God. Does that mean that we sit around and do nothing, waiting for the Lord to pick us up and take us where He wants us to go? It doesn’t mean that at all. Instead, in learning to wait on God we are learning to trust His will. In learning to wait on God we are learning to abide in Him and not try to go beyond Him. In learning to wait on God we are developing the assurance that He will care for us and that He knows better than we do what is best for us. In our waiting, we learn to not fuss, fret and fume over the way things are.

Of all the “wait” verses in the Bible, none more greatly impress upon us the need to put our trust in God than those written by the Psalmist. Here are but a few of these powerful passages:

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.” (Psalm 27:14).

“I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.” (Psalm 52:9).

“I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.” (Psalm 130:5).

We may never learn how to patiently wait for the teller at the grocery store to get to us or how to patiently wait for that traffic light to go our way, but may we daily develop a greater confidence in God’s care for us and demonstrate our ability to wait on Him and trust in His promises. In so doing, our waiting becomes not a burden and a cause to complain but a blessing and an opportunity to build our faith.

Mike Gifford