

Wait on the Lord

We just moved to the suburbs after 28 years in the city of Reading. We sold our house in June 2009 but had placed it on the market in February of 2008. We waited 15 months for our house to sell. During that 15 months we frequently questioned the decision to sell the house. We were pretty sure the Lord was moving us but we questioned that when the house didn't "just sell!". Sometimes we would go two and three months between showings! Lord, if this is of You why aren't we even showing it? I had pretty much decided I was going to live there the rest of my life – which was fine with me. After 24 years in one house you pretty much have it how you want it.

Our plan was to sell that house and rent for a year or two to see what the market does and what God wants us to do. When it finally did sell –after I got over the shock - we were talking about the length of time it took and my husband - who is the money guy in our family – said something to the effect of, "Do you realize if this house had sold in the first few months we had it on the market I would have invested it in stocks that have now taken a nose dive. We would have lost our shirts!"

Through that experience God has reminded us – again – that He is faithful and always does what's best for us! Romans 8:28 says that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose."

By causing us to wait God protected our assets. In hindsight we see that. We could not see it or understand it as we were waiting. We had to trust our initial understanding that God wanted us to sell.

In most things God's timing isn't always what we would choose. We know that everything He does is right and that His timing is always perfect – even though it may not seem like it to us. So, one of the steps in sanctification or Christian maturity is getting to the point that we're able to wait patiently for Him to act in our lives and trusting Him to time things perfectly.

Think about what you're waiting for right now. Isn't everyone waiting for something, an answer to prayer? for the Lord to save a family member that you've been praying for for years? Maybe you're believing Him for healing and you're still waiting for that to happen.

There are several times in the scriptures when we're reminded to wait on the Lord. Psalm 31:24 says, "Be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord." So, from that it's clear that if we need courage to wait then waiting for God's timing in something can be scary. It looks like He might not hear us or will have forgotten about the situation. Could that happen? Of course not, but if we don't understand God's faithfulness or show courage we might listen to those frail or evil voices that cause us to doubt or lie to us.

Psalm 37:7-9 says, "Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land."

So, we're to wait when it looks like the guy doing evil prospers while we do things right and find ourselves still waiting on the Lord. God will cut off evil men in His

time. We're to wait and while we're waiting it looks to me like doing the right thing will be blessed. Verse 9 tells us that the blessing will be that we inherit the land. This is significant in that God's blessing to Israel was the Promised Land. This was seen as the basis for life. If you were left out of this land God's favor was clearly not on you. Land was the height of physical blessing. But, it was also the promise of spiritual blessing. God will bless us as He sees our need when we wait for Him. AND we will see that the evil will not prosper but be cut off. That would be a sure sign of God's disfavor. Regardless of what physical blessings God gives us for our righteousness we can KNOW that we do not want to be cut off from His land of blessing.

In Psalm 130 the psalmist is crying out for mercy because of his own sin and says in verse 5 that he will wait for the Lord, his soul waits and his hope is in the Lord. SO, even when it's trouble we're in because of our own sin we can count on God. He's our hope though we will have to wait for Him to respond in His timing and there may be earthly consequences as we wait! While we wait He is our hope and that hope is certain. We can count on God to give the mercy because that's what He promises us. If we confess our sin he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He is faithful to forgive so we can wait in hope through any difficult circumstances that are caused by our sin, when we repent of them, God will respond in mercy to us. He is a God of love and mercy.

Well, what I thought we would do is look at two biblical examples, one who did not wait on the Lord and one who did.

What Biblical people can you think of who did NOT wait on the Lord?

We could go as far back as Adam and Eve. Wouldn't they have been better off if they had checked with God before assuming they understood what the serpent wanted them to think He had said? There that fruit was hanging all beautiful in front of them and they didn't want to wait knowing that God would remind them that they weren't to eat it.

Sarah with Hagar was the classic. She took things into her own hands rather than waiting to see what God would do to keep His promise. How about the Israelites as they were enslaved in Egypt? Wouldn't you have been tempted to rise up against the powers there but by waiting for God to take them out He led them through the Red Sea safely after completely financing their escape with the wealth of their Egyptian neighbors. How about when Moses was with God and the Israelites made the golden calf? They apparently thought there was a limit to the time they had to give God to do something for them. They waited in Egypt but not while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, patience and impatience (just like us).

The example that I found that I thought we could most relate to is Saul in 1 Samuel: 13. He had been proclaimed the King by God through Samuel who communicated to the people that they were getting their wish for a king but that it was clearly a rejection of God. The Ammonites quickly confront him. The Spirit of the Lord comes on him and he goes to war against them and Israel soundly defeats them. He gives God the credit. He makes sacrifices at this point and rejoices in the Lord and apparently he does it all within the guidelines God spelled out in the book of Leviticus. Later, though, there's a problem with the Philistines and Saul calls Israel to arms again – some come and some hide. Samuel, who is God's prophet and Saul knew it, had told Saul to wait 7 days for him to come to tell him what to do. On the 7th day Saul gets anxious – he

wants to inquire of the Lord about battling against the Philistines who are already positioned against him and his army. His men are afraid and he's supposed to wait for Samuel to get there?

1 Samuel 13: 8 – 12 He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. 9 So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. 10 As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. 11 Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, 12 I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering" (the NIV says that he said "I felt compelled to offer).

Back in chapter 10:8 Samuel had told Saul to go to Gilgal and wait seven days when he would come to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings and that Samuel would then show Saul what he was to do. Obviously, Saul had not waited for Samuel and also obvious by the excuses he was making is that he knew he had been supposed to wait.

We don't know what Saul was thinking but we do know from the scripture that it was what he said, what he thought and how he felt that made him decide to make an offering without Samuel, the priest. Perhaps he thought that as the king he could do what he wanted to do and not wait for Samuel who was God's representative. Remember that

though Saul was king he was neither prophet nor priest, making offerings was not his job, only the priest could make a sacrifice.

Did he have any options? His first one might have been to pray. There's no indication that he did. Another option might have been to send one of the men with him as a messenger to Samuel to inquire if he was coming or if he had new directions for him. Or he could have waited until the *end* of the 7th day (Samuel appeared on the 7th day -- just not when Saul was looking for him). He actually blames Samuel for not being there and kind of brags about what he's done.

But, what were the consequences for not waiting?

Verse 13 And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

One of the biggest problems here that we need to see is that Saul doesn't bother to repent. He justifies his actions. The sin isn't the problem as much as the pride of unrepentance. He makes excuses but that's not repentance.

This is still often the way we act before the Lord. We get convicted of sin and in our hearts we justify it, make excuses to others about it but we fail to confess it and repent – to turn from it. 1 John 1:9 – most of you can probably quote it for me. **If we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all**

unrighteousness. But, do you know verse 10? If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.

When we rationalize sin (like the sin of not waiting but taking matters into our own hands when we don't think God is moving fast enough) and make excuses rather than repenting for our behavior, we are calling God a liar. We're disagreeing with Him about what is or is not sin. When we don't wait for Him to do something but step out in our own strength and our own understanding we end up in sin. We will do things the worldly way and not God's way.

Saul wants Samuel to believe that his was an act of insight, of discretion. "It needed to be done and you weren't here. I did the logical thing to get the spiritual work done – I needed to go before the Lord before I went to battle." I'm sure the others with him thought it very wise of Saul not to go out before praying and sacrificing.

How often do we do something worldly out of impatience and try to make it look or sound spiritual? The best example I can think of is what I've heard called missionary dating. A single person wants a mate or a companion so badly that they get tired of waiting for the Lord to bring that right Christian and they start to see and sometimes even end up marrying a non-Christian. There are consequences and it's not always easy to wait but it's harder to suffer for the rest of this life because we didn't wait.

I think we also see this kind of impatience with wanting revenge on someone. A person gets hurt by another and they want revenge, they think God should punish that person. They fail to see the punishment so they meet it out themselves, either in gossip to others about the situation or some more direct path. Vengeance is mine says the Lord.

His people don't want to wait for Him to do it though His will be effective and ours will ultimately hurt us much more than the object we're aiming for.

The most unconvincing part of Saul's excuses is that he "forced himself" to make the offerings. This would seem to indicate that he knew it was wrong. He had to overcome some conviction not to do it but he did it anyway!

How often does that describe you or me or some Christian that we know? In the case of the person that seems so right but isn't a Christian, we know it's not right to continue seeing them but somehow we justify that by our own influence they may come to know the Lord! After all, they have Christian values! We get into a marriage and find out it's not good. We've read and heard and know that God hates divorce but "my situation" is different. "I can leave my spouse because....," and they list the reasons.

"I know it isn't right to cheat the IRS, charge too much for this product, not turn all this money in, but times are hard. God knows I need this money and he gave me access to it. He must want me to have it."

All of these are examples of not waiting for God. If we wait He'll bring the right person into a life if it's His will that they marry. He'll help to resolve marital issues that are taken to Him. He'll provide for all of our needs when we aren't greedy or selfish. He will provide, He will deliver. Our job is to wait for Him to do it and look for what it is we're to learn while we wait. .

I wrote this shortly after hearing a Sunday School class about self control and it occurs to me that waiting for God is a matter of self control. We want what we want and we want it now. ("Lord, I pray you grant me patience and grant it to me now.") We KNOW that God is never late or early but by acting to accomplish something in our own

time - or not acting in the case of a breaking off an ungodly relationship – then we're taking what we want and not exercising the self control that would bring the blessing of what God has for us – in His time.

In your own life, what has God got you waiting for that you're tempted to usurp His authority over? Are you willing to wait for Him and receive the blessing or does it seem better to you to forge ahead on your own and forfeit the blessing?

Let's look at a Biblical example of one who did wait. Who can you think of that did wait for the Lord?

David is the one I want to use. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 24. Saul is the King but has been rejected by God as we read earlier. Samuel went and anointed David as King but it was about 13 years before David actually became the King. He had this knowledge that he was to become the King but never took it before God's ordained time though we'll see that it wasn't because he didn't have opportunity.

King Saul pursued David for a number of years. He was aggressive in his hunt for David and determined to put an end to the threat to his throne. He was very jealous of David's strength and reputation and so his goal was just to kill him and be rid of the threat.

In 1 Samuel 24 David has an opportunity to take Saul's life and is encouraged by his men to take it. David cuts off a corner of his robe (apparently just to make a point) but will not kill him and rebukes his men for suggesting that he kill the Lord's anointed. Listen to the conversation from 1 Samuel 24: starting in verse 8. **Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David**

said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day."

But after this Saul doesn't give up. He's still pursuing David and trying to kill him. Many people would say, "I should have taken him out while I had the chance." God gives David that chance again in Chapter 26:1-12. Then the Ziphites came to Saul at

Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?" So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had come. Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him.

Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruah, "Who will go down with me into the camp to Saul?" And Abishai said, "I will go down with you." So David and Abishai went to the army by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him. Then said Abishai to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice." But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?" And David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go." So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

A deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them! Wasn't this the perfect opportunity for David to rid himself and the world of this ruthless King?

David will again call out to the King and let him know that he was there and spared his life.

This is truly waiting on the Lord! Just before this David had had his experience with Nabal and Abigail where the Lord kept him from killing Nabal for his refusal to pay David and his men for the protection they had provided for his shepherds and flocks. Nabal had acted really foolishly and David had been tempted to meet out the punishment, to kill him. Abigail stopped him and the Lord took Nabal's life. (1 Samuel 25)

So, David has seen that indeed the Lord will take His revenge, it belongs to Him and not to David and so David exercises that self-control to wait for the Lord's timing. He actually expressed this to his men in verses 9 and 10. He said that the Lord will strike him or his day to die will come in battle.

Knowing that he had already been anointed king had to make these decisions difficult. Here Saul is right in the perfect spot for David to take his life and then his throne. But, he doesn't do it because he's not greedy for what God has promised. He's content to wait for God's timing. He exercises self-control.

David wrote Psalm 57 after he had fled from Saul in the cave. Look at where his mind and his heart are – they are on the Lord as his refuge and for His glory.

Psalm 57 To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.

1 Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. 2 I cry out

to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me. 3 He will send from heaven and save me; he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah

God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness! 4 My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts—the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. 5 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! 6 They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah

7 My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! 8 Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! 9 I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples;

I will sing praises to you among the nations. 10 For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. 11 Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!

David is content to sit under the protection of God's wings – what a picture of God's love and compassion for us – as he waits for God to take revenge on his enemies.

Are you and I taking refuge in our God – under His wings? What are you waiting for God to do? Is it revenge? Are you living in unforgiveness of someone in an effort to punish them because you don't want to wait for God to do it? Are you waiting for God to save a family member or someone close to you? Are you praying and waiting or trying to accomplish this person's salvation according to your own plan? (How do we pray for these people? Are we telling God what to do or asking Him to do it?) Are things looking pretty grim economically for you? Are you waiting for God to provide that source of income that you and your family need? Bing and I were sure the Lord wanted us to sell

our house but we waited 15 months for it to happen. Were we wrong? Did it take Him that long to prepare us? God protected our money by keeping that house from selling for 15 months! We certainly didn't see that while we were waiting for it to be sold!

What is it that you're waiting for the Lord to do?

We use the word "wait" and we tend to think about a waiting room at a doctor's office or waiting for a train or a plane – those agonizingly long wastes of time that seem to fill so many of our hours. BUT, when God has us wait there's a purpose for the wait. He has something to teach us or show us about Himself. The worst part of this wait is that we can't always see His plan. In faith we're asked to wait – just as David did- until God's purposes for us can be worked out.

Before David was ever the King God had given him many lessons on His own faithfulness as He protected Him and provided for him while he was on the run. David was very young. He was apparently strong and smart but young can be taken advantage of and God spent those years training David and maturing him to take the throne and honor God in the process. David was sometimes scared – he fled to the land of the Philistines to avoid Saul hoping he would give up his pursuit of him. He was often crafty to get away from Saul. Once he pretended to be completely crazy but he was always looking for the Lord and how HE would save him or provide for him and then thankful to God when he was spared. He knew it was God's work not his own. He got to know God and he came to completely trust God and His purposes in the waiting. David's confidence was in God's steadfast love for him.

As you wait for the Lord are you impatiently waiting or are you receiving the training that God is providing as you wait on Him? Is your faith growing or waning as you look for help from the Lord? What blessings are you seeing from God as you wait?

To wait as it's used in scripture almost always implies expectancy. The disabled people in John 5:3 would gather at the pool at Bethesda waiting for healing. One man had been crippled for 38 years but he went there expecting to be healed someday. The Greek word for lie is also translated wait in other places. They would "lie" there expectantly. Paul used "eagerly await" in several verses in Romans and 1 Corinthians as did the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 9:28. "So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." Are you and I eagerly awaiting the Lord's return?

In speaking of the Lord's return 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says, "and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." This wait implies abiding in our waiting, this is confident, faithful, and patient waiting. We KNOW it will happen and we wait for God to determine the day and time.

As I write this it has become clear to me that waiting and hoping are intertwined in our faith. If we wait for God to provide, to avenge us, to rescue us, to deliver us from some sin, to save someone we have prayed for for years, or to increase our faith then as we pray and dig into God's Word and look for His direction we can KNOW that He will not let our prayers and desires go unanswered or ignored. He'll work out His own purposes for our good and His glory. So, we can patiently, confidently, and hopefully know that whatever He does or gives us or whatever method He uses to save a person or deliver us from sin is the best thing that could have happened.

This also means that we can patiently, confidently, and hopefully wait while we go through difficult circumstances and trials because He is still at work. He is never late but he is never early.

The bottom line is that impatience with God is sin. We usually think of impatience as being related to children and spouses but if we move ahead of God, if we refuse to wait for His response to our prayers, then we're being impatient with Him. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Paul exhorted us several times to be patient (1 Corinthians 13:1, 4; Ephesians 4:1-2). He even uses it in defining love in 1 Corinthians 13:4.

Paul says in Romans 8:24b-25, “ Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Patience, confidence, expectancy, and hope. These make waiting sound a lot more palatable don't they? Well, they're characteristics we develop only by being in God's word, growing our faith and understanding of who He is and how much love and compassion He has for each one of us.

In your waiting and my waiting, are we patient? Are you and I confident that God will act in His perfect time? Do we expect Him to work for our good and his own glory? Are we demonstrating to others that our hope is in the Lord as we wait for Him?