



"Patience! Patience! You are always in a hurry, but God is not."
—Charles H. Spurgeon

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The Overlooked Work (Part One)

For nearly all of us, [waiting](#) is uncomfortable. Because of life's frantic pace, we get frustrated if it takes thirty seconds for a traffic light to turn green. Our stress levels rise just thinking about going to the DMV, because we know it will mean waiting in line for an interminable amount of time in a roomful of other irritated people. Handwritten letters are slow, and in the last decade or so they have been largely replaced by e-mail. Now, however, sometimes even e-mail is too slow, and so we text so we can communicate without having to wait.

Any device or technique that eliminates the need to wait will always grab our attention, and often our pocketbook. Most of our lives are spent in such a high gear that whenever we have to wait, our frustration often comes boiling forth. As the recent trend of road-rage indicates, when people are forced to wait, it sometimes drives them insane. Living only three-score-and-ten years or perhaps fourscore, we all have a degree of time-sickness—an obsessive belief that time is slipping away, that there is not enough of it, and if everything is not sorted out right now, it may just be the end of [the world](#).

The fact is, we hate waiting—yet Scripture says so much about it, especially waiting on [God](#). Consider the three great virtues. Waiting on God stands at

the core of biblical hope ([Romans 8:23-25](#)). The Bible uses the word "hope," not in the sense of a vague wish, but as a confident trust in a future event. We do not just *wish* for our future redemption and adoption; we know and trust that it will happen at our resurrection. But until that hope is realized and fulfilled, we wait.

In like manner, [faith](#) and waiting are also closely linked. Our faith in God is often manifested by waiting on Him. If we trust Him—if we have faith in Him—we wait for Him to work things out that we cannot (or should not) do on our own.

The "[love](#) chapter" of I Corinthians 13 demonstrates the waiting aspect of love when it describes *agape* love as suffering long (verse 4). Love requires waiting while it "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (verse 7).

Though it may sound incongruous at first, waiting is actually a work. One's actions—or lack thereof—demonstrate what is in one's heart. Waiting on God is a work that demonstrates faith in Him, just as much as any example of law-keeping or other Christian deed. In fact, it is often one of the most difficult of all works.

The Bible is full of stories of great "waiters"—not those who wait on us in restaurants, but the men and women who wait on God. They demonstrated their trust in God by waiting years—even decades—for a promise to be fulfilled or to see what God was doing in their lives. It seems that all of God's servants go through a time of waiting. Their stories usually focus on their lives' most dramatic moments, yet they typically spent far more time waiting on God than they did bringing water out of rocks or giving birth to a prophet or sacrificing an only son.

Consider that Noah preached and built the ark for over a century. While he certainly was not idle during that time, think about how much of his life was taken up by waiting for God to act and finally make the world right—even after being personally given divine instruction.

Hebrews 11 highlights Joseph's faith in terms of the instructions that he gave on his deathbed, but prior to that, he had plenty of waiting to do as a slave

and then as a prisoner. It took over two decades for his visions of his family bowing to him to come to pass. After he was made second-in-command of Egypt, he could have sent either an army or an ambassador to his family—either to settle the score or to make amends. Because of those dreams, he knew that he would see his family again, yet he did not attempt to make it happen, even though he had nearly supreme authority in the local world. Many men would have been tempted to force their treacherous brothers to bow to them. Instead, Joseph waited on God, who not only fulfilled his visions, but did it so that [repentance](#) and reconciliation also occurred. No amount of human will or authority can cause that. Joseph understood the power and [wisdom](#) in waiting on God.

Then there is [Moses](#). It is probable that Moses had some idea early on about the part that he would play in delivering Israel, but he first had to go through forty years of preparation in Pharaoh's palace. Maybe after forty years he thought the time was right for him to step into his destiny, yet in taking matters into his own hands by killing an Egyptian, he acted too soon by half. He had to wait an *additional* forty years in the desert, watching over dumb sheep. In terms of God's working through him, his life did not even begin until he was eighty years old! Even then, he had to wait yet another forty years for his job to be complete—and at the end, he was not able to see the fulfillment because he had acted rashly way back in his youthful eighties.

[King David](#) was anointed to be king as a young man, but while he was waiting on God to establish his throne, he spent many years dodging Saul's attempts to kill him. Zechariah and Elizabeth had to wait until they were "well advanced in years," before they had a single child. But look at what that child—John the Baptist—became!

All of these "waiters" endured long periods of time during which it probably appeared that nothing of significance was happening. Yet they remained faithful to God during those waits, and kept waiting long after most people would have given up on God. They waited after others would have concluded either that He was not there or that they needed to take matters into their own hands. But the waiters had the wisdom to keep walking with God and to remain faithful until the time was perfect for God to bring His will to pass.

Though time does not hold the same importance to God, the Father and the Son have their own experiences with waiting. Once [sin](#) entered the world, they waited 4,000 years before providing the full means of reconciliation between God and man. The Word, who had been with the Father from the beginning, endured what must have seemed an eternity of loneliness and separation from His divine Companion after taking on mankind's sins. The Father Himself waited three long days and nights while [Jesus](#) slept in the belly of the earth. How long did that feel like to Him?

Jesus was offered all of the world's kingdoms if He would but bow to [Satan](#), but He rightfully chose to *wait* an additional two millennia before He will establish His [Kingdom on earth](#). Even now, as the fulfillment of [the gospel](#) nears, He is waiting for the perfect time to overthrow the corrupt governments of men and set up His own. How much anticipation must He feel as He patiently waits for the signal from our Father—until His day (the day of the Lord) begins?

Next time, we will look at some of the examples of waiting in the life of Abraham, the father of the faithful.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[How Long, O Lord? \(1994\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The numerous biblical references for trumpets suggest an announcement of a specific event and an alarm of what is to follow. In most cases, the devastating, horrendous events themselves are the figurative trumpet blasts, calling people to repent. God in His mercy has not revealed the specific times these horrendous events are to occur, but has revealed what is necessary for us to know. Our preparation for His Kingdom is best served by our not knowing specifically, spurring us on to greater activity in doing God's work. Preparation and constant vigilance should never stop (I Thessalonians 5:6-10, II Peter 3:14-18).

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Spiritual Hard Hat Zone](#)

by David F. Maas

We may not realize it, but our Christian lives are constantly under construction. It is this point of view that will make it easier for us to deal with both spiritual setbacks and progress.

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