

9. Wait

This series on “Little Words” would not be complete without some attention to the word “wait.” You may think that there should not be any place in the Christian life for periods of waiting. A little consideration may convince you, however, that some place for waiting in our lives will help to determine the effectiveness of our service to and for our Lord. After all, Jesus had an important place in his life for periods of withdrawal when He was alone with the Father.

It is true, of course, that a “born again” child of God inevitably wants to share his or her experience in the Lord with others: family, friends, acquaintances, and even total strangers. This not only should be the natural desire of every child of God but also of every church. This is what makes Christianity a missionary religion. There are no more important words in our gospel than “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .” (Matthew 28:19).

But to be more effective in sharing our faith there need to be periods for most if not all of us when we withdraw for a period of renewal or a refreshing of our experience in and with our Lord. In other words, the Christian religion has an important and necessary place for witnessing but at least an occasional period for a fresh touch of the Divine Spirit. That period of waiting may at times be very brief. All that may be needed is time to breathe a prayer. Other times, however, there will be a need for an extended time of withdrawal for reading, meditation, and prayer. Some of us may have outstanding periods of renewal in a retreat or gathering with others. Some of us will prefer to be alone with our Lord at such times. This will be determined, to some

degree, by the nature of our personalities. Some of us would not feel at ease in the presence of others at such a time of “soul searching.” Let us never forget, however, that the proper balancing of witnessing and waiting in our lives will help to determine the effectiveness of our work for our Lord.

Old Testament References

Before we call attention to the words in the New Testament that are translated “wait” or “waiting,” we will refer to a few outstanding Old Testament references. Some of the Old Testament references are quoted, while others are listed for you to check in your Bible.

As we should expect, there are a number of references to “wait” in the Psalms. The psalmist wrote:

Lead me in thy truth, and teach me,
for thou art the God of my salvation;
for thee I *wait*, all the day long
(Psalm 25:5).¹

The closing verse of Psalm 27 is as follows:

Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
yea, *wait* for the Lord! (Ps. 27:14).²

Have you had an experience similar to what the psalmist wrote about here?

I *waited* patiently for the LORD;
he inclined to me and heard my cry (Ps. 40:1).³

For God alone my soul *waits* in silence;
from him comes my salvation
(Ps. 62:1; see also 62:5).⁴

¹ Italics added for emphasis.

² Italics added for emphasis.

³ Italics added for emphasis.

⁴ Italics added for emphasis.

The psalmist also wrote:

I *wait* for the LORD, my soul *waits*,
...
my soul *waits* for the LORD
more than watchmen for the morning
(Ps. 130:5-6).⁵

Psalms 69:3 is another verse that emphasizes waiting.

Isaiah contains some great verses on “wait,” as follows:

Therefore the Lord *waits* to be gracious to you
(Isaiah 30:18).⁶

Then there is the familiar statement that some of us memorized in the past:

But they who *wait* for the LORD
shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint (Isa. 40:31).⁷

The following are some additional references in the Old Testament to “wait” or “waiting”: Isaiah 8:17; 33:2; 49:23; 64:4; Daniel 12:12; Micah 7:7; and Zephaniah 3:8.

We shall concentrate primarily for the remainder of this chapter on the New Testament. The more mature we are as Christians, the more we will be conscious at times of the need for a time to withdraw to wait for a fresh touch of the Divine Spirit. After that renewal comes, we are prepared to go back to the task to which God has called us. One phase of

⁵ Italics added for emphasis.

⁶ Italics added for emphasis.

⁷ Italics added for emphasis.

that task is not only to witness by word of mouth but also by the life we live.

New Testament Words Translated “Wait”

This section spells out the subject somewhat more fully than in most previous chapters. Even so, it does not attempt to list all the words that are at times translated “wait” or “waiting” in the New Testament.

Most of the words cited are words with a prefix. For example, three of the words sometimes translated “wait” are *decomai* with one of the following prefixes: *ek*, *apek*, or *pros*. An example of *ekdecomai* is Acts 17:16: “Now while Paul was *waiting* for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that city was full of idols.”⁸ We will come back later in this chapter to this experience of Paul. He had a tremendously busy and, in some ways, fruitful ministry while he was waiting. Another place where a form of *ekdecomai* is found is 1 Corinthians 11:33 where Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians to “wait for one another” when they came together to eat. This may have been a reference to “love feasts” that some biblical scholars believe the early Christians had from time to time.

There are eight places where some form of *apekdecomai* is found in the New Testament. In the Revised Standard Version, it is always translated “wait,” “waits,” “await,” “waited,” or “waiting” (Romans 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Corinthians 1:7; Galatians 5:5; Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 3:20). Notice that all of these references except the last two are from the Pauline epistles. (Some of the ancient manuscripts have a form of *ekdecomai* in 1 Peter 3:20.)

Then there is *prosdecomai*, to wait or look for with an expected favorable reception. Words based on

⁸ Italics added for emphasis.

prosdecomai are not found very frequently in the New Testament. It is translated “looking” in some places, such as the reference to Joseph of Arimathea. The latter was described as “a good and righteous man, who . . . was looking for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:50-51; see also Mark 15:43).

Prosdecomai is an interesting word. It is used fourteen times in the New Testament. In the Revised Standard Version it is translated “wait” or “waiting” only four times (Luke 12:36; Acts 23:21; Titus 2:13; and Jude 21.) It is also translated “looking” four times.

Another interesting thing is the fact that *prosdecomai* is found five times in Luke’s Gospel and only once in all the other Gospels (Mark 15:43). There it is translated “looking.”

Yet another interesting thing about *prosdecomai* is that it is used twice in Acts. So seven or exactly half of the fourteen times that it is found in the New Testament are in Luke’s writings. A consideration of the distinctive vocabularies of some of the biblical writers, particularly John, and to a lesser degree Paul, makes an interesting study.

There are a couple of times when *meno* is preceded with a prefix and is translated “wait.” *Meno* is a word we have had occasion to refer to previously, particularly in the chapter on “abide.” It was suggested that it is a rather distinctly Johannine word, appearing more than three times as often in John’s Gospel as in all the Synoptic Gospels and more times in 1 John than in all of Paul’s epistles. There are only two places in the New Testament where *meno* is found with a prefix, once as *anameno* (1 Thessalonians 1:10) and once as *perimeno* in Acts 1:4, a great verse.

Wait for the Promise

The words for “wait” in this section are a part of the instruction of the resurrected Christ to His disciples. He had

been appearing to them for forty days after His crucifixion and resurrection. It is said: “And while staying with them He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to *wait* for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 1:4-5).⁹

Jesus also said to the disciples: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The waiting in Jerusalem was preparatory, but we should remember that it was just as much a word from the Lord as the command to go.

Some of you may be saying that since the Holy Spirit originally came there is no need for us to wait or tarry for His coming. But, to repeat what has been stated previously, has not our experience as children of God revealed to us that from time to time even the most mature of us need to have a fresh touch by the Holy Spirit? When we feel that need, we should discipline ourselves to take some time to wait for the renewal that comes when we are deeply conscious of the Divine presence.

Possibly it should be added again that once the power has come or been received through the touch of the Spirit, the next step is for us, in response to His prompting, to go forth under His guidance and try as best we can to touch others with a touch somewhat akin to the touch that we have had.

We should be careful, however, that we do not misinterpret the divine touch in our lives. At times it may be an experience of a tremendously powerful touch that immediately renews our spirit. For many of us, however—

⁹ Italics added for emphasis.

and for some of us most of the time—it will be a gradual deepening experience so that we may need to wait for a considerable period of time. It seems that our heavenly Father, who respects our distinctive personalities, adjusts Himself, to some degree, as He works out His will and purpose for each of His children.

There are few if any things that will assure us of a more effective life for our heavenly Father than a proper balancing of waiting and witnessing. Waiting in His presence will not only clarify our thinking, but it will also deeply affect the kind of life we live in contact with members of our family and people in general. Witnessing by the life we live will strengthen tremendously our effectiveness as we seek to minister to people by word of mouth. People in general can fairly well tell whether we are in or out of touch with the Holy Spirit.

Possibly a brief statement should be made about several words in our English language that are closely related to “wait,” and to one another. Some of these words are translations of the same Greek words that are translated “wait.” Among the more prominent of these words are: “tarry,” “remain,” and “stay.” Really, these words are so similar in meaning to “wait” that some consideration was given to including one or two of them as an integral part of this chapter on “wait.”

Additional Exhortations to Wait

The following exhortations will be given in the order in which they appear in the New Testament. Some of these have been mentioned previously in the section on “New Testament Words Translated ‘Wait.’” Some of the exhortations will be interpreted to a limited degree and applied. In some cases different translations will be cited. These additional exhortations will be limited to those where

the word “wait” or “waiting” are in one or more of the versions of the New Testament.

Luke 23:50-51: “And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their plan and action) a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God” (NASB). The word “waiting” as indicated previously, is a translation of *prosdcomai* and is translated “looking” in the Revised Standard Version.

Luke 24:49: The Revised Standard Versions says, “stay in the city,” but the New King James Bible says, “tarry in the city,” while the Good News Translation (TEV) says, “You must wait in the city until the power from above comes down upon you.”

Acts 1:4 is closely related to the preceding verse from Luke. In a sense it ties Luke and Acts together. “And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.” See the comments on this verse under the heading “Wait for the Promise.”

Romans 8:23-25: “. . . We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Now, a quotation from an old and highly respected commentary: “They (Roman Christians) have already received adoption, and as led by the spirit are sons of God, not only when their mortal bodies have been quickened, and the corruptible has put on incorruption, will they possess all that sonship involves. For this they wait and sigh, and the inextinguishable hope, born of the spirit dwelling in them, guarantees its own fulfillment” (EGT).

1 Corinthians 1:7: “. . . You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Read verses 4-8 to understand and appreciate the setting of those words. Verses 6, 7, and 9 are translated as follows in the Good News Translation (TEV): “The message about Christ has become so firmly established in you that you have not failed to receive a single blessing, as you wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. . . . God is to be trusted, the God who called you to have fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

Galatians 5:5: “For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness.”

Philippians 3:20: “We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven” (TEV). This verse “vividly pictures Paul’s eagerness for the second coming of Christ as the normal attitude of the Christian colonist whose home is heaven” (WP). Do we eagerly wait for the second coming of Christ as the call for us to “come home”?

1 Thessalonians 1:10: Paul had a report that the Thessalonians had turned from idols to serve a living and true God, “and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” Let me ask again, Do we patiently wait for His return? Our answer to that question, if sincere, will be a major factor in determining how effective we will be in ministering to the needs and hurts of those whose lives we touch.

Hebrews 9:28 “. . . 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.” Permit me to ask again, “Are you and I waiting eagerly for His return?” If our answer is, “No,” why not? Is there

something in our lives that needs to be changed before we can eagerly wait for His return or for Him to call us home?

A Busy Wait

Acts 17:16 begins the second of a relatively long and busy waiting period for Paul at Athens. During the time he was having to wait for his traveling companions—Silas and Timothy—to catch up with him, “his spirit was provoked [“stirred to its depths,” WMS; or “was greatly distressed,” NIV] as he saw that the city was full of idols.”

The original plan was to label this section “A Fruitful Wait.” There is considerable evidence, however, that the stay at Athens was not a particularly fruitful wait for Paul. It is true that he made some unusual contacts and had some converts. Really, the nature of some of his contacts was restricted to Athens, which was a cultural and educational center for Greece. For example, some of the Epicurean philosophers heard Paul speak and brought him to the Areopagus on the Hill of Mars, the most prominent and sacred place in Athens. There, away from the crowd, they could hear him better and were free to exchange ideas with him and ask him questions. You would find it helpful to read carefully Acts 17:16—18:1. You would discover, among other things, that Paul’s waiting in Athens was not entirely fruitless. The last verse (34) of Acts 17 says, “But some men joined him [Paul] and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.” Have you ever noticed that Luke in his Gospel and in Acts generally follows the practice of balancing his references to men and women?

Although there was some response to Paul’s preaching and teaching in Athens, there was a marked contrast between the response at Athens and Corinth, his first stop after he left Athens. It was at Corinth that Paul first became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, who were

evidently a wonderfully active and effective couple. They are mentioned six times in the New Testament, and four of those times Priscilla's name is mentioned first,¹⁰ possibly suggesting that she was more outstanding as a Christian than her husband. If so, this should not surprise us. The same is true of many contemporary Christian couples.

It was at Corinth that the Lord appeared in a vision and said to Paul, "Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you, for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). This was the result: ". . . and he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

A Divine Wait

Our heavenly Father never asks or expects His children to do something He has not or will not do. Waiting by our Father necessitates a degree of patience beyond our comprehension. Just imagine the patience it required for Him to wait for Noah to complete the ark in preparation for the flood.

This patient waiting by our heavenly Father is clearly evident in the Old Testament in general. We should be grateful, however, for the effectiveness of some of God's chosen leaders in the Old Testament. Among these would be listed Moses, a king and psalm-writer such as David, and other kings and prophets. But there were others, chosen by God himself, who were not faithful to the task given by the Lord.

The spirit of patiently waiting is just as evident, at least on the surface, in the New Testament. Imagine the patience required of Jesus as He waited to announce the purpose of His coming into the world and to begin His public

¹⁰ "Priscilla" in Acts 18:2, 18, 26. "Prisca" in Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19.

ministry. And what patience it required for Him in His attempt to help even the Twelve to understand the purpose of His coming into the world.

It does not seem that the disciples fully grasped the nature and purpose of His mission to the world before His death and resurrection as evidenced by the debate about who would be greatest in His kingdom even on the way to Jerusalem where he would be arrested, tried, and crucified (Matthew 20:20-28). As Jesus waited patiently, His disciples did not fully grasp the purpose of His coming and the nature of His Messiahship.

The Final Wait

The discussion of the place of waiting in the life of a child of God would not be complete without at least a brief statement about the final wait for death with the privilege of going home to be with our Lord. Many do not have a chance to wait and contemplate. They are taken suddenly.

Have you had a member of your family who has waited for death to come? It may have been a young person, a son or daughter, a brother, or a sister, or more likely it has been an elderly father or mother, or grandfather or grandmother, or an uncle or aunt. If they have suffered a great deal, they may have looked forward to the relief that death will bring. But even more important for Christians, death will mean not only physical relief but also the privilege of entering the heavenly home.

Rather than additional discussion of waiting for the end, let me share a couple of experiences with you.

My dad, who was a great Christian and whom I think influenced my life for good more than anyone else, was suffering terribly with terminal cancer. In the midst of all that suffering he would refer to Jesus as “my wonderful Savior” or “my wonderful Lord.” He did not dread death. He

patiently waited for it. For him it meant relief from suffering but even more important, he would be with Jesus, his “wonderful Lord.”

I hesitate to share with you a more personal experience. On two occasions, I judge that I have gone as close to death as one can go and come back to live. The first time, some years ago, was when I had pneumonia so seriously. I was in school at Yale University and had gone to school that morning. By eleven o’clock I had to return home. My temperature was 104. Mrs. Maston called a doctor. He immediately put me in the hospital. I was desperately sick, in an oxygen tent for most of several days. To use the expression of one of the doctors, *I had pneumonia from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head*. It was in the blood stream. It was before the days of many of the more or less “miracle” drugs of today. Doctors, nurses, and friends all evidently thought I was going to die. They were wondering how they could get my wife and two small sons, one a severely handicapped invalid, back to Texas.

I might have been delirious—I was at times—but I had two occasions when I felt the Lord gave me the option to live or die. I said something like the following to Him: *Father, I am not afraid to die, but if it can be your will I would like to live for the sake of my two sons [who were children at that time] and for the sake of my work, which I feel is incomplete, I would prefer to live.* (I was in my thirties, which was more than fifty years ago.)

I was in the hospital four weeks, two weeks of which were in intensive care. My deep conviction through the years has been that my heavenly Father gave me these additional years and that I have the responsibility to use them in ways that He can and will approve and can bless.

Possibly I should not share any more with you concerning this experience and another experience a few

years ago when I had a severe heart attack when again I went as close to death as one can go and come back to live. I will not spell out that experience in any more detail.

Some of you have had some experience or experiences similar to mine. If you have felt that the Lord brought you back from death to life, you have doubtless experienced a depth of conviction that you had not had previously about using what time you have left in ways that our heavenly Father can bless and use. In other words, as long as the Lord sees fit to keep us alive, we have a responsibility to seek as best we can to live a life that will honor Him and keep busy doing what He can bless and use. We will patiently wait for His invitation to “come home.”

All of us who are children of God should be ready any time for His final call. We should welcome it for a loved one who is ready and waiting. We should seek to keep our own lives in such a vital union with our Lord Jesus that we will be ready any time. For some of us there may come a time, if we are not there now, when we could say, taking these words out of their original context: “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

David Brainerd, a missionary to the Native Americans in North America in the colonial days of our nation, kept a diary. Seven days before his death he wrote: “Oh, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen” (see Revelation 22:20b).

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the similarities to and/or differences between “abide” and “wait”?
2. The term “creative waiting” has come into the vernacular. How do you understand that term?

3. In music, “wait” can be a pause of different lengths. Waiting is signified by a “rest” lasting a fraction of a beat to multiple beats. How do you consider the importance of a pause, resting, during the day or for a longer period of time?
4. Have you come across the advice of physical therapists, workplace ergonomics experts, or social psychologists who advise a pattern of work-rest-work-rest in our lives? Where would the concept of Sabbath fit here?
5. Do you agree or disagree with Maston’s statement, “People in general can fairly well tell whether we are in or out of touch with the Holy Spirit.”? Why?
6. What are the connections, similarities, parallels, juxtapositions of “wait” to “patience” as one of the facets of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22)?
7. Do you perceive a lack of consistency in Maston’s thinking as he typically used male pronouns for much of the book, and yet in this chapter considered Priscilla possibly to be the more mature Christian?
8. Are there portions of this book that seem to be written in such ways as being for “insiders”? What is your response to that dynamic if that is your perspective?
9. What content do you find bothersome in this book— semantics, syntax, repetition of ideas, lack of application? How would you improve these parts?
10. Does Maston’s review of “wait” suffice for those in pain, whether emotional or physical?