

Waiting on the Lord

Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
Autumn Ridge Church, Rochester, MN
January 1-2, 2011

Scripture: Psalm 130

I doubt that there is a single person here who enjoys waiting. I hate it. I especially loathe waiting in checkout lines. Sometime ago I was standing in a local store and my blood pressure was going up because the checkout girl was having a long conversation with a customer in front of me.

They were talking about the weather and Christmas plans and the movies they enjoyed. I was mentally preparing a speech in which I was going to give this young lady a piece of my mind for making we wait. Finally it was my turn and I opened my mouth to give vent to my frustration when she said, "Hello Pastor Steer, great to see you. I loved your sermon last weekend on patience."
God has a lovely sense of humor.

The reason we dislike waiting is because it is not only boring it is often painful. Here is a young child waiting for Christmas but it never seems to come. Here is a new college graduate waiting for their first job. But no employer calls back. Here is a young lady waiting to see if marriage is going to be part of God's plan for her life, but no relationships materialize. Here is a couple waiting to see if they are going to have a child, and every month the answer is no.

No wonder we avoid waiting. So how surprising then that God calls his people to wait. 43 times in the Old Testament we are commanded to, "Wait on the Lord." Abraham was 75 years old when God told him he was going to be a father. But he had to wait 24 years.

God told Moses he would lead the people to the Promised Land but first they had to wait in the desert for 40 years. Malachi promised that the Messiah was coming but the people had to wait 400 years until Jesus was born.

Why does God do this? After all he is the Lord Almighty. He can make things happen whenever he wants to. Yet God sees advantages to us when we wait for him.

We are going to explore those benefits today as we consider this important spiritual discipline of **WAITING ON THE LORD.** There is an outline in your RidgeLines if you would like to follow along with me.

The first thing we find is that **WAITING ON GOD IS POSITIVE**

So Jeremiah writes, **"It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." (Lamentations 3:26)**

There are several reasons why waiting on God is good.

First, **waiting encourages Godly virtues.**

Waiting on the Lord produces patience, submission, dependence, and contentment with a less than ideal circumstances.

David is surrounded by his enemies yet he encourages himself to, **"Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." (Psalm 27:14)**

Waiting on God chases away worry.

The Psalmist acknowledges this when he tells us, **"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes." (Psalm 37:7)**

Second, waiting on God is good for **waiting demonstrates trust.**

Waiting means that we trust that God knows what he is doing. Waiting reminds us we are not in charge.

Waiting on the Lord is the continued daily decision of saying "God, I will trust you and obey you."

We find these wise words in Proverbs, **"Do not say, 'I will pay you back for this wrong! Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you'." (Proverbs 20:22)**

Waiting anticipates the time that God will act.

This fills us with hope and expectancy.

So David declares, **"I wait for you, O Lord; you will answer, O Lord my God." (Psalm 38:15)**

Waiting involves trusting in God's present and future promises expressed in his word.

As the pilgrims marched up Mount Zion they would sing, **"I wait for the Lord, my souls waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning." (Psalm 130:5-6)**

The Prophet Micah gives his own testimony, **"But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me." (Micah 7:7)**

The point is that what God does in us while we wait is as important as what we are waiting for.

Then waiting on God is good for **waiting is a picture of the Christian life.**

John Milton captured this beautifully in the sonnet he wrote on his blindness. He concludes with the profound observation,

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

Waiting on God is not to be an occasional activity but our constant occupation. So Hosea tells God's people to, **"Wait for your God always." (Hosea 12:6)**

Paul refers to this practice of waiting as part of the life of faith when he tells the Corinthians, **"You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus to be revealed." (1 Corinthians 1:7)**

People who wait in line are often miserable. We saw pictures on the television this week of thousands of people who were stranded in airports because of the blizzard on the east coast. One passenger said they had to wait in line for ten hours just to reach the ticket agent who then told them they couldn't get on a plane for four more days. Yes waiting in line can be horrible, but waiting on the Lord can make us happy. So Isaiah exclaims **"Blessed are all who wait for God." (Isaiah 30:18)**



The reality is if we want to know God in an intimate way we must wait for him. Isaiah explains this divine principle when he tells us, **"Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him." (Isaiah 64:4)**

So let us understand that waiting on God is not inactivity. It is not an excuse for doing nothing.

John Ortberg writes, "Waiting on the Lord is the confident, disciplined, expectant, active sometimes painful clinging to God.

Now sometimes this expression of "waiting on the Lord" is horribly abused by Christians. You meet somebody whose life has no direction and you ask them how they are doing and they will respond, "Oh, I am just waiting on the Lord." When you press further you discover that they are not actually doing anything. They have some vague hope that a friendship or a ministry or a job or some money will mysteriously appear.

But that is not the meaning of waiting on the Lord.

That person needs to talk to a pastor or a Christian counselor to get some direction for their life.

They can join a small group or a ministry team as they wait on the Lord.

They can go back to school or apply for jobs all the time calling on God to reveal his will and purpose for them.

This leads us into the next grand truth.

WAITING ON GOD IS REWARDING.

When we wait expectantly for God to work we are not disappointed.

Three biblical examples illustrate this principle.

Very few people recognized Jesus when he came at the first Christmas but there were a couple who did.

One was an old man called Simeon.

We are told, **"He was waiting for the consolation of Israel." (Luke 2:25)**

At exactly the right moment the Holy Spirit moved Simeon into the temple courtyard when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be presented to God.

Simeon had the extraordinary privilege of holding Jesus in his arms and telling God, **"My eyes have seen your salvation."** (Luke 2:30) All because he waited.

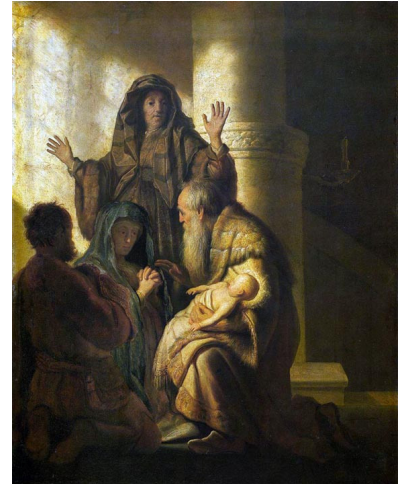
Another person who was rewarded for her waiting was the Prophet Anna.



She was 84 years old and never left the temple but worshipped day and night fasting and praying. Look how God rewarded her.

Just like Simeon the Holy Spirit made her paths cross with Mary and Joseph. We read, **"She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem."** (Luke 2:38)

In the New International Version it says "looking forward to" but it is the very same word used to describe Simeon's waiting.



Then we move to the first chapter of Acts where Jesus commands his disciple, **"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised."** (Acts 1:4)

That is exactly what the disciples did and a few weeks later the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost.

The testimony of scripture is that God rewards waiting.

So what are you waiting for in 2011?

Do you have some ambitious spiritual goals?

Pursue them with hope and expectation as you wait on God.

So we see from scripture that waiting on God is both positive and rewarding.

The question now is how do we wait on God?

The answer is that **WAITING ON GOD IS BEST EXPRESSED IN PRAYER.**

Simeon and Anna were both people who spent a lot of time in prayer as an expression of their waiting.

We read that the apostles spent the time between Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit by joining together constantly in prayer (Acts 1:14).

Prayer helps us to discern the voice of God.

Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice."

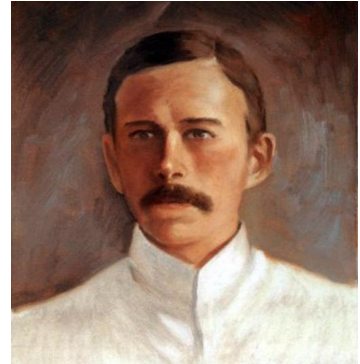
As we wait on him we are able to distinguish between our imagination, the words of the world and the voice of God.

It should be the ambition of every Christian to know the voice of the Shepherd. This is the value of a Prayer Week and of this practice of waiting on God.

A person who knows God's voice will be spiritually effective. John Hyde was such a man.

We have a prayer room named after him in this building. John Hyde was a missionary to India in the 19th and early 20th century. He would start to pray about an issue and would not stop until he heard the voice of God.

John Hyde had a great concern for the Punjab area of India and he poured out his heart to God for the Punjab. His missionary colleagues believed that it was Hyde's waiting on God in prayer that caused a revival in the Punjab in the first decade of the 20th century.



Now I know, a story like that can be both encouraging and daunting. Most of us don't have the capacity to pray for days and nights as John Hyde did, often going without food. But Hyde didn't start like that. It was on the boat from America to India that he began to wait on God.

Some of us are at that beginning stage ourselves.

We are just starting to wait for a minute or two at a time and that is fine. Let us use this prayer week to get into the practice of waiting on God however brief it may be.

Now I want to make three practical applications for how we can wait on God in prayer this week.

The first is the **Prayer Commitment Card**.

You will find this in your RidgeLines.

This is a commitment between us and God.

No one else will see it.

I encourage you during the rest of this service to think of three areas that you want to wait on God for in 2011.

They might be for the salvation of a spouse.

It might be for direction in your life, for the provision of a job, for the restoration of a relationship or for a particular ministry that you are either part of or would like to be involved in.

Let me encourage you to jot them down then keep this card somewhere you will see it. It could be at the front of your Bible or you might tape it to your mirror in your bathroom.

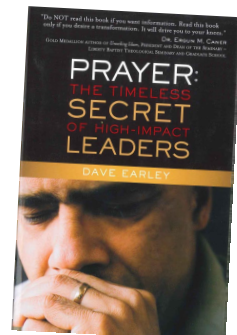
We sometimes make financial commitments.

This is a prayer commitment and it is every bit as important.

Practical Application number two involves **a quarter in your pocket**.

Last year our Elders and pastors studied a book on prayer called *The Timeless Secret of High Impact Leaders*.

Each month an Elder led a study on one of the chapters.



In December Greg Lappin gave a superb presentation. He began by handing out a quarter to every one of us. Well that had our attention. Greg then shared a secret of how to wait on God in prayer. He said "Put the quarter in your pocket. Every time you feel it there take it out, pray, then put it in the other pocket. Continue to repeat that exercise throughout the day."

At the end of the day the quarter might have moved pockets 20 times and we discover that we have communed with God and waited on him 20 more times than usual.

Now I am not going to give you a quarter because I think you all have one. So put a quarter in your pocket and every time you feel it there, call on God and trust that he will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.

Now I appreciate this works well for men's clothing. You ladies that wear a dress will have to work out your own arrangement and I am confident with the creativity of this congregation you will come up with something brilliant.

The third practical application is what we are calling **Friday Prayer for Families**. This is mentioned on the front cover of your RidgeLines. It is a recognition that waiting on God can be both individual and corporate. There is something very beautiful about praying with others and having others pray for us. The pastors and elders invite you to come to the Timothy Chapel next Friday between 7:00-9:00pm.

We want to pray over you, asking God to bless you and work in your life this year. You can come as individuals, couples or entire families. Maybe everything is marvelous in your marriage. We would like to pray that it will continue to be so.

Or perhaps you are facing a real struggle in your home. We would like to pray that God gives you victory in that area. You might be praying for a particular child or maybe to have a child. Let us wait on the Lord with you.

Anything you tell us will be confidential. There will be several groups of pastors and Elders and we will talk with you quietly and privately. After we have prayed you can either sit in the chapel and pray yourselves or you can go home.

You can stay for 5 minutes or the whole two hours if you want to. But please do take advantage of this. The Elders of the church have a spiritual responsibility to pray for this congregation. We like to do this at every opportunity.

In a few moments during our communion service we are going to pray for those who need healing.

But Friday evening is a special opportunity to pray for the families of this fellowship.

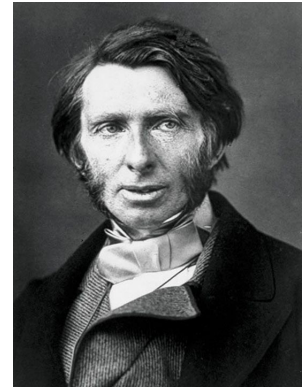
So let us use this first week of the New Year to wait on the Lord together.

Let us ask him to guide our church, to bring many to salvation, to develop disciples, to send out more missionaries, to keep us in step with the Spirit. As we wait on God let us remember that waiting on God is positive and rewarding.

Let me close with a beautiful observation on the importance of waiting from the painter John Ruskin, who likened waiting on the Lord to a rest in a piece of music.

Ruskin wrote, "There is no music in a rest, but there is the making of music in it. In our life melody, the music is broken off here and there by 'rests' and we foolishly think that we have come to the end of time.

God sends a time of forced leisure, sickness, disappointed plans, frustrated efforts, and makes a sudden pause in the choral hymn of our life. We lament that our voices must be silent, and our part missing in the music which ever goes up to the ear of the creator.



How does the musician read the rest?

See him beat time with unwavering count and catch up the next note true and steady as if no breaking place had come between. Not without design does God write the music of our lives. But it is ours to learn the time and not to be dismayed at the 'rests'. They are not to be slurred over, nor to be omitted, nor to destroy the melody.

If we look up, God himself will beat time for us.

With our eye on him we shall strike the next note full and clear."

Last summer I told the elders and pastors that I believe God has some new work for our church to do for him.

I am not sure what that is.

I believe that in time God will reveal it.

In the meantime let us wait on the Lord for him to show us what he has in store for us at Autumn Ridge.