

Waiting Isn't a Waste

Waiting with Time

James 5:7-8

Mark Vroegop

"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:7–8).

I'm sure you've heard of road rage, but have you heard of "sidewalk rage?"

Before you roll your eyes, just think of the last time you were in the grocery store, shopping mall, or airport. What happens when you get behind someone who is not very aware of others or talking on the phone or not as fast-paced as you are? Be honest. Did you think, "Man, I wish I was filled with peace like them. Must be nice"? I suspect not. Weren't you frustrated?

In my research for our series on waiting, I discovered that there's even something called a Pedestrian Aggressiveness Syndrome Scale. It gauges a person's level of aggressiveness by behaviors like:

- Walking by a slower moving pedestrian and **cutting back** too soon (feels hostile or rude)
- **Not apologizing** when expected (after bumping by accident or coming very close in attempting to pass)
- **Acting in a hostile manner** (staring, presenting a mean face, moving faster or closer than expected)
- **Not yielding** when it's the polite thing to do¹

Now I'm sure that you've never been guilty of such behavior!

But it's interesting to consider the last time you felt the low-grade frustration because someone was walking or moving slower than you wanted. Somewhere in your head, you determined how fast other people should be moving. Based upon that evaluation, it's very natural to allow our expectations to control us emotionally and then physically.

One of the reasons that we are terrible at waiting is because of how we approach time. And we may not even realize what is going on with how we think about time.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/talk/2011/02/16/133782592/-sidewalk-rage-yes-its-a-real-concept>

Throughout the month of December, we've been looking at the subject of waiting by expositionally examining a series of texts. We're learning that the Bible has a lot to say about waiting. Here's what we've looked at so far:

- **Truth** – considering what I know about God when I don't know about what's going on in my life. Remembering that I can't buy manna in bulk.
- **Trust** – choosing to worship while we wait – focusing, adoring, and seeking. Being cautious that I don't miss the sunrise with everything else that I'm doing.

I read a great illustration from a busy mom at our church:

So. . yesterday, we had a big morning with several things to do to close out our [school] semester. The kids and I were running late. . .I was lamenting the not-quite-all-the-way baked egg casserole for our tutor breakfast. . .the craziness of a few other things, etc. My fourteen-year-old pipes up from the passenger seat, "Mom. . .don't miss the sunrise for the cinnamon rolls!" and the ten-year-old says, "Yep. . .I was just thinking that." Conviction activation. Eyes turned. Thanks for an application so practical that even the younger ears easily grabbed ahold of it.

I love that! And I especially love it when kids can help their parents be godly.

Today we're looking at the issue of time. Waiting always involves time. And the goal of my sermon today is to not only help you think biblically about time when you must wait. I'd actually like you to see time spent waiting on the Lord as something you choose to do. I'd like to see you move from tolerating waiting to valuing waiting.

Now, the best text I know on this issue is in the fifth chapter of James. If you've been around College Park during 2021, you may recall that before our study in Isaiah, we explored the book of James. The text we're going to study today, I covered in May.

This morning, I want to go back to that text and spend a higher percentage of time on application than I did in the previous sermon on this text. I'm a little reluctant to go back to a passage we examined in May, but this was one of the passages that really got me thinking about the subject of waiting.

Three Truths & Two Applications

For those of you who were with us through James, hopefully you'll remember that the book of James is particularly focused on how to navigate hardship and suffering. The book begins with that theme:

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4).

James identifies that Christians need to have a different perspective in regard to how they think about and see trials. They are to see something—like a trial—differently because of the greater purpose and

plan that are at work. Chapter 5 is at the end of the book of James—as it is drawing to a close. There are three truths here:

1. Waiting Is commanded

The first thing to note here is that waiting is not just something that happens to you. It's something Christians are commanded to do.

“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7a).

Christians are called by God to live with a different perspective. They are commanded to look beyond the temporary circumstances of life and remember what really defines their lives. In this verse, the command to be patient is directly connected to the coming of the Lord.

This is particularly important in light of the word “therefore.” It's connected to the previous verses (vv. 1-6) where it seems that the people of God were facing unfair treatment. Here, James invites them to see their hardship through the lens of their theology. As I said in our first Advent series sermon—“what do I know about God when I don't know about my life?”

When we fail to think like this, it's easy to become irritated, anxious, angry, and hopeless. This is why waiting can be a place where we justify our sinful responses. We have expectations about how our life is going to go. We have expectations of how long something will take. We have expectations of how much information we need or how much control we'll have.

James commands Christians to be patient. The word has the idea of long-suffering. I like the combination of these words because it gets to the issue of our expectations as it relates to time. When someone thanks you for being patient, they are expressing gratitude that you were willing to wait longer than what you would have expected or longer than others.

But patience and waiting don't flourish in a faster-paced society. Chelsea Ward writes,

The fast pace of society has thrown our internal timer out of balance. It creates expectations that can't be rewarded fast enough—or rewarded at all. When things move more slowly than we expect, our internal timer even plays tricks on us, stretching out the wait, summoning anger out of proportion to the delay.²

Nor do these qualities flourish during seasons of high stress. That's why you might find people a wee bit less patient these days

Time warps because our experiences are so intense. Every moment when we are under threat seems new and vivid. That physiological survival mechanism amplifies our awareness and packs

² <https://nautil.us/issue/22/slow/why-your-brain-hates-slowpokes>

more memories than usual into a short time interval. Our brains are tricked into thinking more time has passed.³

It becomes a vicious cycle: You expect things to happen quickly. When they don't, you become frustrated. And when you get angry, it seems like everything is taking even longer!⁴

Believers in Jesus are called to approach time differently. Patience is an act of war against our self-sufficiency. And that's why it's commanded.

2. Waiting Is normal

Part of the problem with waiting is that we see it as abnormal or unusual. It would seem that James wants us to realize that waiting should be something we expect. You feel this, don't you? We have call-ahead seating, online ordering of groceries, Amazon Prime delivery, call backs if you're on hold, etc.

Melissa Fessenden says:

Decades of research indicate that we now expect everything to happen faster. For example, not only do people in different cities and cultures walk at different speeds but since the 1990s walkers around the world have picked up the pace—by up to 10 percent, one psychologist estimates. Not that long ago, we were happy with a four-second load time for web pages. But now waiting longer than a second for a web page to load seems intolerable.⁵

James offers an illustration from farming.

"See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains" (James 5:7).

To be a farmer is to work hard and then wait. There's a lot of work for a farmer to do, but there's so much that he can't control. Waiting is an essential part of his job description. If the farmer doesn't embrace waiting, he should find a new profession.

Why does James use this illustration? It's because he wants to remind his readers that waiting is as normal to a Christian as it is to a farmer. It's part of the equation. And it reminds us that we're not in control of everything, we don't know everything, and we can't fix everything. Waiting confronts our sense of autonomy and entitlement.

And so, it seems to me that the one group of people who ought to be most peaceful, the most patient, and really good at waiting—should be those people who are waiting for the coming of the Lord.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/our-world-getting-faster-because-our-brain-hates-waiting-180954519/>

⁵ Ibid

3. Waiting Is a Choice

Rather than seeing patience and waiting as the last resort, James calls us to choose patience and to “establish your hearts.”

Waiting means that I’m not in control. Patience means that I feel tension, disappointment, frustration, or fear. And yet to “establish [my] heart” means that I return to and rehearse what I believe. In fact, the word “establish” means to fix firmly in place, to prop something up, and to set up.

Think of this like dropping an anchor. It’s freezing the moment and remembering who you are and who God is. It’s keeping your spiritual moorings in place. It’s being busy but in the right way—being busy to remind your heart what you know to be true instead of panicking with what you don’t know.

For some of us, this could be very liberating because we think that waiting is passive. But what if we could see waiting as something that we choose. What if we could see waiting as an opportunity to embrace?

Rather than being frustrated, angry, or anxious; what if we embraced our waiting or even chose to wait?

Using Our Wait Time

Hopefully, you’re starting to see waiting differently. Let me give you two practical applications. According to Bradley Baurain in *On Waiting Well*, we need to consider the difference between waiting *for* the Lord and waiting *on* the Lord.

First, there is waiting for, staying in place literally or figuratively until a person arrives or an event occurs. This is the sense in which the people in Isaiah 40:31 waited for the Lord’s help. Second, there is waiting on, in the sense of attending to or serving someone. A server in a restaurant waits on customers. A courtier waits on a king, ready to do whatever he commands. When we wait on the Lord in this way, the principal element of waiting is simply being in His presence, which is in itself a delight and an act of worship. At any given moment, He might or might not invite or command us to do some specific action, but at every moment the right thing to do is to wait upon Him.⁶

All waiting involves time. How do we use time well in our waiting? Two ways:

Wait the Right Way

We’ve spent much of the focus of this series on trying to change how we think about waiting. I hope that you are starting to see the spiritual value of waiting. I think we have a natural, negative bias against waiting. And it isn’t getting easier. There are a number of steps to consider here:

⁶ Baurain, Bradley. *On Waiting Well* (p. 15). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

- Identifying that waiting is often an issue of control, a battle between my will and God's will
- Realizing that the emotions we feel when waiting aren't unusual and we don't have to live by them
- Rehearsing what we know to be true about God—using the “Lord is” list
- Leading our hearts by faith to **F**ocus, **A**dore, **S**eek, and **T**rust
- Embracing the transformation that comes as we wait

Rather than seeing waiting as a waste, we can see it as something good: *“It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD”* (Lam. 3:26).

Wait Right Away

The other application is something we haven't talked about yet. Psalm 106:13 says, “But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel.”

So, the caution here is about only thinking about waiting as something reactive. What if part of the problem is that we aren't proactive with waiting. Back to the farmer—he tills the soil, plants the seed, but he plans to wait. What if we could build waiting into the equation? What if before we do anything else, we build waiting on the Lord into the equation—because it's that important?

For example, suppose you learn some information, or something is really bothering you. You're inclined to act to address the issue or solve the problem. What if you learned the spiritual value of slowing down and taking time to wait on the Lord? Imagine what would happen if you chose to see an opportunity and as you develop your plan for your next move, you build waiting into to equation? Imagine if people around you are panicking and they're talking about it—a lot. What would it look like if you did not talk with them until you've really sought the Lord? What if you are really good at what you do? What if your skills and talent have been honed such that you know what to do and you know how to move forward? You are going to need to build time for waiting on the Lord into your life in intentional ways.

Remember that we read in Isaiah 30:1— “Woe to those who go down to Egypt and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord.”

One of the reasons that we have a monthly prayer meeting, start the year with a twenty-four-hour prayer event, and have prayer week—is to start us off in the right perspective.

Waiting always involves time. We need to wait for the Lord the right way but also wait for the Lord right away.

Ben Patterson says it really well: “Waiting is not just the thing we have to do until we get what we hope for. Waiting is part of the process of becoming what we hope for.”⁷

⁷ Ibid.

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