

Growing God's People

a journal for teachers and other learners

It's a Long Way to Harvest

Gardening has reminded me of what it means to wait. We put raised beds together and laid them in the sunlight next to the house as autumn settled the leaves onto the ground. Months later and unable to wait any longer I planted seeds in indoor containers while weekly snows were still in the forecast.

I watched their progress like a mother bird watches her eggs, waiting in my case for a little green beak to scratch its way through the unbearable soil and sprout tiny wings. Some came and some did not. Of those that came, some evidenced growth daily while others crept slowly outward as if they knew that the days of frost were still upon us. Before it was safe I moved the little plants outdoors to enjoy unfiltered sunshine, the free drink of rain, and the tickling of the winds and worms. Still everyday I would visit

and wait, and add to their numbers larger plants purchased from area stores. In time for these last two mornings of frost there was a small community of green vegetable-producing plants hovered together against the cold and waiting in full hope of sunshine, heat and rain.

Now I'm waiting to see what survived the frost, waiting to see what will grow strong and produce the most fruit, waiting for evenings at home and fresh produce on the table, and waiting for the chance to share with friends. It's been a good picture of the waiting we all do, and this *GGP* will hopefully help us wait a little longer.

Waiting a Little Longer

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When we practice the spiritual disciplines, we stand against the basic principles of this world. Through participation in these "disciplines of grace" we come to know more deeply the intimate love of God and the sufficiency of His grace.

By Robert Hodge

I've never heard anyone say, "To encourage spiritual growth I've been practicing the discipline of waiting." Yet it is impossible to think of disciplines like fasting, meditation, submission, confession, and solitude being practiced without the act of waiting.

Living a life of godliness—living before God in full recognition that our lives come from Him, are sustained by Him, and are lived in the world that He has created—is synonymous with living "a life of waiting" on the LORD.

Waiting flies in the face of an on-demand culture where service is fast, responses to one another are made within a few hours to avoid the offense of delay, and the act of waiting for bread to rise seems like wasted time. And yet as Christians we join in a long line of two millennia waiting for the return of Christ with shouts of: "Come Lord Jesus, Come!"

THE BIBLICAL PICTURE

The helpful teaching reference *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press)

puts waiting into five categories: patient endurance in difficult circumstances (Ps 27); waiting with a faith that calls for human inaction while waiting on the intervention of God (Prov 20:22); anticipatory waiting in which there is great hope and confidence that God will act at the right time (Ps 38:15, Ps 39:7, Is 49:23); an eschatological waiting in which we are waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus and the End of the Age (Tit 2:13, 2 Pet 3:12); and lastly, a waiting on the Lord that is a lifelong embrace of virtuous submission as one trusts in the faithfulness of God throughout their life.

BARRIERS TO WAITING

If we do not understand history—if we do not have knowledge of the past centuries of the Church and of Israel's history with God as His covenant people—then we are left with nothing but an eye-ful of our own experiences to try and grasp the many ways in which God acts within Earth years. The study of Christian history provides us with the macro-level story of long periods of waiting on the LORD through valleys of despair, and offers a glimpse into the lives of other saints who toiled beneath the heavens for fruit harvested by the next generation.

A second barrier to waiting is ~~that~~



Waiting a Little Longer, continued.

of poor theology, one in which we are spoiled children of God. Theology proper is a study of God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Christ, and in Scripture, history, creation and so forth. When we fail to see Him as He is it is because the eyes of our hearts are weakened by the flesh and see Him through a faulty lens. Most often this takes the form of a self-centered version of Christianity, and you and I become the object of history rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. A needs-based Christianity may be a great way to sell books and music, but when we embrace this teaching we become spiritual whiners who demand that God act within our timelines rather than His.

Within the body of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit breathed out books like Job and Ruth to complement the book of Proverbs and the wisdom psalms. We

learn that God's ways are not our ways, and that the "sayings of the wise" are not promises to be thrust in the face of God, as though in bringing trials into our lives He was somehow less loving, faithful, or present among us.

A CALL TO CONTINUE

In the end we must seize upon the words of Peter and wait patiently for the day of the Lord while hastening that day through faithful witness in evangelism and discipleship, and perseverance through the necessary trials and tribulations that will perfect the Bride until that moment when "the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn" and we rise to meet the Lord in the air and move into new places of life, work, and love in the new heavens and the new earth.



TEACHING AND LEARNING GOD'S WAY

The Plan and Will of God
The Virtue of Active Waiting

T. M. Moore

It is important, in the work of Christian education, to teach students the difference between the *plan* and *will* of God. The one we can only outline in broad strokes; the other we teach in specific detail, leaving students to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit as to how they should apply the will of God in their daily lives.

Joseph was able to know the *plan* of God only in a most general way. God had revealed to him in a dream that it was His plan for Joseph to be ruler over his entire family (Gen. 37:5-11). How this plan would unfold, and what specific shape it would take was a great mystery. Only as Joseph waited on the Lord and carried out the details of His will day by day would the surprising plan of God become clear.

Thus, in spite of the hardship inflicted on him by his brothers, and all the troubles he encountered as a slave and prisoner in Egypt. Joseph persevered in the *will* of God, keeping himself from sin (Gen. 39:7-9), serving diligently and with excellence (Gen. 39:3, 20-23), and maintaining fellowship with God, perhaps through the disciplines of meditation and prayer (Gen. 39:2, 21). Joseph knew that it was not in God's will that he waste his time in complaining, blame-laying, or lazing about. As a child of God's covenant he was called to continuous

worship and service in the Lord's name, regardless of his circumstances. This was God's *will* for Joseph.

As he persevered daily in doing the *will* of God, the Lord gradually unfolded more of the details of His *plan*. In Genesis 42-45, after Joseph, by his faithfulness in doing the will of God, had been appointed ruler over all Egypt, his brothers came to him for help in a time of famine, not knowing that the powerful governor whose aid they sought was their own long-lost brother. Yet as he watched his brothers prostrate themselves before him, the mysterious, wise, and good *plan* of God became suddenly clear. Joseph made himself known to them, and then explained that all that had happened to him was part of God's *plan*: "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen. 45:7, 8).

God has revealed the broad outlines of His eternal *plan*: He will build His Church, advance His Kingdom, bring the knowledge of His glory to light over all the earth, and come again to take us unto Himself. The details of His *will* are much clearer: make disciples, keep the commandments, love one another, seek the Lord, do mercy and justice, walk uprightly, and so forth. We actively wait for God's perfect timing in the unfolding of His glorious *plan* by daily performing as much of His *will* as comes into our purview. They are faithful in teaching the saints of God who constantly point out the broad and beautiful scope of the *plan* of God, teach and exhort them to faithfulness in obeying God's *will*, and thereby lead them in active waiting on God for strength and patience to know the fuller revelation of His glorious plan.



Sonnet XIX

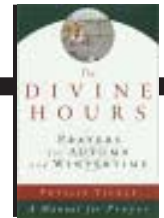
Milton was a man on a mission, pushing for huge social and political changes in the England of his day. He was also a prolific writer and travelled for a time on the scholarly lecture circuit.

At the age of 44 he began to lose his eyesight, and his *Sonnet XIX* is the first known sonnet of his to follow the onset of the disease that would quickly take his sight. It is evident that God was teaching him already through the trial of blindness, as Milton was forced to slow down and wait upon God.

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
either man's work or his own gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

—John Milton (1608-1674)

Featured Book



The Divine Hours, by Phyllis Tickle

Reviewed by Alice Caldwell

Several months ago, I came across two books by Phyllis Tickle—an unknown author to me. The titles intrigued me, *The Shaping of a Life – A Spiritual Landscape*, her autobiography, and *Divine Hours*. The autobiography is an account of Mrs. Tickle's path to knowing God. That book was of especial interest to me, since she is my contemporary and her background was similar to mine. I was so captivated by it that I didn't want it to end.

The Divine Hours (in 3 volumes—*For Springtime*, *For Summertime*, and *For Fall and Winter*) are books of greater significance. The difference from most devotional books I've read, is that these devotionals are to be read at fixed times each day of the year. The readings and prayers are to be read (and prayed) in the morning, at noon, at vespers and before going to bed. The included readings from the Scriptures follow the church year and are short and only take a few minutes to be read and pondered.

I didn't expect to like these books so much, so I was surprised I was so taken with them. This devotional is not just another devotional book, but is patterned after the Benedictine *Book of Hours*, written in the 6th Century. The prayers prayed are not petition, nor intercession, but worship and praise and they should bring you to a better understanding of the character of God.

The deeper practice of praying is considered an "office," where we give ourselves, our praise, our worship, and service to God for His honor and glory.

I had known for years that I tended to spend most of my prayer time asking for blessings, both for me and for my family and friends. The prayers from the book are not asking Him to do anything for me, but are offering myself to Him in praise and thanksgiving.

The prayers excerpted from the *Book of Common Prayer* are beautiful—someone has said that this book is one of the most beautifully worded books in the English language. The prayers have enabled me to pray what is on my heart, but what I could not express so well in my own words. The hymns are old, some ancient, and full of dignity and depth. The Lord's Prayer, prayed four times a day, has become richer in meaning to me, and not in the least trite, even when it is repeated so often.

Although the intent of the book is not to make you a better Christian, the results of praying the offices should make you stronger in the Christian faith, more effective in His service, and more intimate with God, the Father.



Preparing to Teach

Biblical Interpretation

2 Peter 3:11-13

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.



His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us his precious and very great promises (2 Pet 1:3-4)...and these promises enable and illumine the active waiting that we are to embrace in our life of faith. Reflect on the verses from chapter 3 as you gain some wait.

WORD STUDY

You will need a dictionary of theology and a concordance (both available in the church library). Read about promises throughout the Scriptures, and then look up *waiting* and *hastening* in the concordance to enhance your biblical understanding of these words.

promise

waiting

hastening



historical context

THEN: What are the local churches experiencing in the wider community in response to their faith in Christ?

NOW: How is this similar to parts of the Church today (Middle East, China, Sudan, and Europe)?

2

message of comfort

How does this message bring comfort to the churches? Why is a message of “death and destruction” good news to the 1st Century believers?

How are you and I vested to this world in ways that they were not?

3

the future

If you're alive in the days that immediately precede the Day of the Lord, what Scriptures will you have memorized for comfort (remember the Christians behind the Iron Curtain who had no Bibles)? Jot down a few you'd like to have hidden in your heart and ask for accountability in learning them.

4



text



word study



commentaries



meditation



outline



presentation