

Wait on the Lord

Every Sunday, we gather around the Great Secrets of life. We call it “worship.” But we don’t spend much time agonizing about why we don’t experience the joy and the fruit of those Great Secrets in our daily lives. I contend that this is because we have no discipline with reference to them.

How do we uncover a sense of discontent in the spirit? How do we become aware of the poverty of the spirit in our own lives? How do we wait upon Life with all of the expectancy that comes from waiting outside a door or listening for a car to arrive? How do we add that excitement as an ongoing expectancy that undergirds all of our activity, that adds a new dimension to what we do and plan? Until we discover the answers to those questions, we should not expect much growth in the spirit, sufficient strength for the battle, or depth of fulfillment in our religious life.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who understand the poverty of the Spirit, for they are the ones who will receive the joy of the Kingdom.” The Beatitudes suggest that those who know, and whose lives are shot through with an awareness of what they do not have, and are waiting on Life for it, will receive it.

Most of the time we are running – keeping up with our schedules and the agendas that must be met – and it becomes difficult to talk about waiting. When the agenda is already made up, then what you are waiting for is the next item that you have already planned. And so when you pick up the Bible and read the words, “Wait upon the Lord,” you don’t really know what they mean. The kind of waiting that you have been doing is devoid of expectancy. It is just the space between now and the next thing you have on your program. And thus, there is no risk in it. As a matter of fact, none of us are prepared to do much waiting around that which we think we do not have any control. So much of the waiting we do is empty waiting.

The flower waits upon the rain and the sun, and there it is. The waiting is a natural part of its fulfillment. When we translate that to our own religious consciousness, waiting is a quality of spirit. It is a quality of the spirit that might be called unhurried, unperturbed, watching. Just in case some of you feel that

waiting is meaningless or inactive, the word “watching” is very important. And the kind of waiting that is implied in the language of our faith is waiting that is watching. The idea is that no matter what you are doing at the moment, there is a part of you that is waiting at the edge of your insight, of the breaking through of things you have never known before that supports all that you do. You have an idea or two, and it is together in your brain, but you don’t move too quickly because there is a waiting principle in the spirit that is always literally looking and watching. For it knows that much that it ought to know, much that it could know, much that would be known, has been lost in the process of living.

As T.S. Eliot said, “Where is the life we have lost in living?” Waiting is interested in that life. And it only takes a flower to remind me of this quality of the spirit – unperturbed, steady, unrelenting, watching. And then I realize that life has been too expensive for me, and occasionally I must go looking for that which I once knew as utter, unrestricted hope and expectancy.

The amazing thing about the spirit of waiting is that it is a depth experience. It probes beyond the present. That may be the problem we have with it. I have watched in airport lounges what happens when we have ten or fifteen minutes to wait for the plane. Many people read a book or work with their computer. You have ten minutes when you could wait, and probe some of the reality that you don’t find time for in your scheduled life. And then occasionally I go around and look over shoulders to see what in the world is being read. When you discover that, then you know what is happening. We are making sure that every space is programmed.

You have had experiences in waiting for people. Waiting, in other words, is one of the great experiences. Isn’t that amazing? Have you have forgotten it. We used to sit on the porch in the summertime waiting for someone to come visit us. Those were some great moments.

As I try to reflect on those moments when I have been waiting for someone to arrive, I realize that waiting is always full of the past. This is potentially what makes it an experience full of content. If you say in church, let us now wait upon the Lord, and then you sit down and bow your heads, some of you will recall

doing it before without result. Others will recall times when certain things were communicated that they weren't prepared for. Memory moves in upon the waiting moment to reflect upon the past. And the past floods in and memory goes to work, and the waiting moment allows you to own as living enrichment, the ground over which you have walked. That is foundational to religious living.

But the experience of waiting is a very focused moment. For a scattered people, it becomes an experience of intentionality. If you are going to wait for someone at the station, you don't run all over the city. You go to the station and sit down or go somewhere close to the place you expect them to arrive. And that itself is a religious experience for us. Then there are a few moments where nothing else matters. And you understand what Jesus meant when he talked about the necessity for a singleness of eye. There are a few moments when people start coming through the gate when you forget how focused you are. You, who claim you cannot have singleness of purpose, have experienced it. The intention of the moment defines even your body's space and its responses. In the present waiting is literally full of presence – both yours and the anticipated one.

There is a searching quality to the waiting moment, and so it is in searching that all of your awareness system comes alive. You are looking for somebody, and they haven't shown up. There is the noise of a car door; you hear it. Some footsteps mean different things now. Literally, all of your awareness is peaked by the experience of waiting.

If the waiting experience is full of the past and defining to the present, probably its most exciting principle is that it has a way of catapulting you into the future. The experience for which you are waiting is a literal claim against a coming time. Waiting is hope being lived. But it is not only a claim against a coming time. That time is already present in the act of waiting. Waiting owns the future in a very strange way. It pulls and tugs at the future and literally drags it into the present by active participation.

What if you so owned the future and so anticipated anything, any event, any change, with such comprehensive anticipation that it almost breathed in the now? Talk about personal growth, spiritual depth, and social change. That is the secret

of growth itself. Show me a man, woman or child, living in absolute anticipation, and you will show me a claim upon my own life.

Now as you hope and work under the burden of that hope, and as you expect, because of that hope, to see something new, then what you do is move beyond the surface level of the world, and in your lived hope, expressed in your work and in your action, you literally pay tribute to a world that is not yet.

One of our problems is that because we do not nurture within ourselves the quality of waiting, we lose the depth that could be ours. For if waiting was alive in our life – body and spirit – it would move the life beyond its entrapment in the historical-event-sequence reality, and the life would at least have peaks and glimpses of that for which it waited. And that would inform the life always with that which threatened the arrangement that had your name upon it now.

I believe that we haven't begun to touch the resources that are ours. The joy of my day, day after day, is that I have discovered and am discovering daily, more fabulous resources of mind, and body and spirit, than I ever knew I had. The mind is sharper, the spirit is more buoyant than I ever have experienced, and it hasn't just happened. I didn't just wake up one day and have it happen. It was a result of agony, struggle, waiting, learning, discipline, trying to find ways in the midst of a busy day to wait, to anticipate, to expect.

Your whole identity, and your dignity is locked up with this experience of waiting. I sit in that station. I hear the train. It is already in the station, but I haven't seen it yet. But there is the clear awareness that what I am going to encounter, the person who is coming, for whom I am waiting, is him or herself full of waiting. And all of a sudden I am joyed by the fact that the watcher is also the watched for. And in that fact, I discover anew the literal aliveness and the concern-ridden, love-ridden, universe. And I meet one who has also been waiting to meet me.

They that wait upon the Lord will have an amazingly exciting time. They that wait upon the Lord will discover that there are sources of strength and renewal that they have never known before. They that wait upon the Lord will discover in the moment of embrace that they have been waited for, and oh, if that will not do

it . . . They that wait upon the Lord will find their strength renewed, their imagination fired, their commitment confirmed.