

Waiting On God

'Teach me Your ways O Lord, lead me on a straight path because of my enemies ... Wait for the Lord; be brave and let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for the Lord' (Psalm 27:11 & 14).

'Show me your ways O Lord; teach me your paths. Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation. I wait for You all the day long' (Psalm 25:4 & 5).

God is the God of our salvation, and two of the ways we relate to Him is to trust Him and wait patiently for Him; if necessary all day long or sometimes, for years. Twice in the above Psalms we are told to wait for the Lord. King David had to wait years and exercised an enormous amount of patience for the Lord to deliver him from his enemies, including from King Saul and his own son Absalom, both of whom wanted to kill him. 'I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry' (Psalm 40:1). Waiting for God is the key to learning His ways. If we are not prepared to wait for Him, there may be some things we can never learn. There is a form of spiritual discipline that is mentioned many times in the Bible but is not generally understood or practiced by many Christians. There are many scriptures that speak of waiting on God or waiting for God and are essentially the same; it is a form of waiting that is specifically related only to God. There are two forms of waiting; one is waiting for a prayer to be answered in our own lives and the other is what all Christians are waiting for – the second coming of Jesus.

'From ancient times, no one has heard, nor has the eye seen any God but You, Who acts on behalf of him who waits for You' (Isaiah 64:4). The distinctive mark of the one true God is this: He acts on behalf of those of His people who wait for Him, and one of the ways we need to relate to God the Father, is by waiting for Him to act on our behalf. What is really involved in waiting for God? Doing nothing until we are directed by Him to act. Why is waiting so very important? It increases our respect for His sovereignty and teaches us to be patient and wait for His will to unfold. Why is there so much emphasis on waiting for God in the scriptures? The scriptures say, 'My soul waits for God alone. My salvation comes from Him. He alone is my Rock and my Salvation, my Defence and my Fortress. I will not be greatly shaken ... My soul, wait in silence for God alone for my hope is from Him. He alone is my Rock and my Salvation; He is my Fortress. I will not be moved' (Psalm 62:1 & 2, 5 & 6). If we wait for God to act and trust in Him, we will not be shaken when difficulties come our way. We are told to be silent before Him. What is involved here, is the need to focus our whole attention on God. Waiting on God is looking to Him and continuing to look to Him. Waiting is important so we do not make hasty or unwise decisions or actions; not yielding to outward pressures but focussing all our attention on God and waiting for His will and His outcome. That is why there is so much emphasis written in the scriptures regarding waiting.

What are the results produced by waiting for God? We are acknowledging God in a very special way and are giving Him His rightful sovereign place in our lives. Waiting produces patience and endurance. Waiting builds a relationship with Him that cannot be built in any other way. He is our Source and all our answers can come only from God. He is our King and Sovereign and we need to acknowledge His sovereignty. The initiative and timing is with God. We cannot tell Him when to act. We have to wait until God – in His wisdom – is ready. We have to acknowledge the fact, we are completely dependent on God and that is very difficult for some of us to accept. Most people have a deep desire to be independent of God and waiting for God deals with that desire for independence. Waiting for God develops stability and is mutual. As we are waiting for Him, so He also waits for us. 'The Lord waits to be gracious to you so He will be exalted. He waits to show mercy for the Lord is a God of justice. How blessed are all those who wait for Him' (Isaiah 30:18). We often think it is only us who waits for God, but we can be encouraged by that scripture. It says God waits for us. We need to be patient.

Waiting patiently deals with our tendency to fret. The opposite of fretting and feeling anxious is peace, acceptance and serenity. We are told to cease anger and forsake wrath. We cannot be peaceful and wrathful at the same time, so if we put away our anger we will have peace. The difference between anger and wrath can be seen like this: anger is like a pressure-cooker of water that slowly comes to the boil. Wrath is when the water and steam explodes all over the kitchen, scalding anyone who is too close. If we give in to anger, in due course, wrath will come and hurt those closest to us. We need to nip anger 'in the bud' so it does not develop into full-blown wrath. We need to turn the heat off, but how do we do that? By waiting patiently for God. Waiting and trusting deals with fretting, anger, wrath and anxiety (along with high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, eczema, heart problems and stress). Learning to wait on God develops peace, serenity, humility, meekness and gentleness which brings joy and good health (Proverbs 3:8) and a massive inheritance. The inheritance (the earth) is for those who have learned to wait. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek (gentle, humble) for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

'Consider it joyful when you encounter various trials. Understand that the trial of your faith brings patient endurance. Allow patience and endurance do a perfect work in your hearts so that you may fully develop, be complete, lacking in nothing' (James 1:2 to 4). We see here, God uses patience to help us develop and grow

spiritually. When we are tried by fire and endurance has done its full work, we become mature and complete not lacking anything in Christian character. It is the Lord's plan for us to endure anything that comes our way in life, in an attitude of hope. If we shrink back or become bitter, God will not be pleased with us (Hebrews 12:15). Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2) and that is an ordeal we will never have to go through, but we need to follow His example and patiently endure whatever our 'cross' is. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Waiting patiently cultivates endurance and perseverance. There is a specific process in which the element of patience can develop. 'Let us rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering (that is pressure, affliction, hardship, persecution) brings endurance. Endurance develops a mature character. Character produces the hope of salvation' (Romans 5:3 & 4).

Other results that come from waiting for God are steadfastness and spiritual maturity. The end result of constantly waiting is a people who are fully developed, fully mature and lacking nothing (James 1:2 to 4). The process of becoming spiritually mature can be very painful because our faith is always being tested. As we undergo and stand the test, that develops perseverance and out of that perseverance, comes maturity and a Godly character. Perseverance means holding on and not giving up when things become tough. It is easy to wait when being busy distracts us, but waiting is extremely difficult when there is nothing to do but wait in silence. We need to wait because God is the only solution to our problems. Trusting God in a difficult situation can be a trial, especially when the opposite happens to what we have been praying for. Waiting and trusting God in these circumstances, strengthens our maturity and character. Waiting also brings about peace and serenity.

The scriptures say we are not to be anxious or worried about anything but in all things with thanksgiving, continue to make our wants known to God (Philippians 4:6). The key here is to continue and persevere. We need to have the correct attitude and accept God's infinite wisdom, and we must delight ourselves in the Lord before He will give us our desires. 'Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires and secret petitions of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him and He will bring it to pass ... Be still and rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him ... Do not fret, for it only leads to evil doing. Evildoers will be cut off – but those who wait for the Lord (in the end) will inherit the earth' (Psalm 37:4 & 5, 7 to 9). There are many other verses in the Bible that tell us to wait. 'To be overhasty is to sin' (Proverbs 19:2). 'Everyone who is impatient and hasty comes to poverty' (Proverbs 21:5). The Bible is full of promises for those who have patience, so if we want to succeed in our Christian walk, we have to cultivate patience just like people of the Bible had to.

'My times are in Your hands' (Psalm 31:15). God has complete control of the time element of our lives and when we take that into our hearts, there is a release of tension and pressure. We often concern ourselves about what is right but have no concern for the correct time. We have to learn to wait for God's time which brings us into harmony with God. God invites us to walk with Him not ahead of Him. 'Do two walk together except they have agreed?' (Amos 3:3). So we see that walking with God means walking in step with Him, harmonising with Him, walking in time with Him as we would to music, and submitting to Him. The Bible teaches there is a correct time for every activity. There is a season and a time for every matter or purpose under heaven. As humans, we often try to do the right thing at the wrong time.

'To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to hug and a time to refrain; a time to search and a time to give up searching; a time to receive and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to discard; a time to rend and a time to sew; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace' (Ecclesiastes 3:1 to 8).

Every matter mentioned in those verses, tell us there is a right time for everything to happen. There are fifteen opposites here. Apart from war and killing which are of course always wrong, none of these opposites are always right and most of them are not always wrong, but most are correct at the right time. In our age of wanting everything to be instant, many people have difficulty waiting for the right time for what they want. One essential requirement for being sure the timing is right, is patience or being willing to wait until God clears the way. We need to cultivate sensitivity to God's timing because there is a time for everything on the earth. Impatience leads to irritability which leads to anger, hastiness and fretting. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

One area of our lives where we need to exercise patience is waiting for the Lord to give us the 'green light' to proceed in ministry. We may be fully aware God has a particular ministry for us that will produce spiritual children and we sometimes get so excited about it we feel like we cannot wait, but we must. Moses was called to deliver the children of Israel but acted too soon and killed the Egyptian, then had to run for his life. He served his father-in-law Jethro for forty contented years (Exodus 2:21) before the Lord finally called

Moses back to his original ministry (Exodus 3:1 to 4:20). We can liken waiting for the Lord, to a conductor of an orchestra. If a musician within the orchestra plays the right note at the wrong time, the whole musical piece sounds wrong, but if the musician keeps his eye on the conductor, then the notes will be played just at the correct time. We need to keep our eyes on our Conductor and wait for His signal for the correct time. We need to see ourselves as musicians in God's holy orchestra, waiting for the instruction to play our part. It takes patience to wait on God for direction, especially when our calling will lead us to something as important as a soul-saving mission. God does not waste time during the periods of waiting, but He uses that time to help us grow and develop enough so we can perform our task properly so our ministry will not wither and die.

An expectant mother has to wait for her unborn baby to develop and grow until it is able to sustain life, so too we need to develop until we have matured in the Lord sufficiently, so the demands put on us during the time of our ministry do not cause us to wither and die spiritually, or burn out. We need to be able to sustain our lives, both spiritually and in the natural while we are serving God. Just as a baby born prematurely has difficulties surviving, so too does a premature ministry struggle to survive and may die. But just as a mother knows she is about to produce a child and knows it is in the child's best interests to wait, so we need to yield to God's timing and His sovereignty, and wait patiently to produce our spiritual children. Jesus had the most wonderful ministry on earth that has produced an incredible amount of fruit, but even Jesus had to wait for the Father's timing. 'Truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing of Himself but only what He sees the Father doing, for whatever things the Father does, so the Son does likewise ... I can do nothing on My own. As I hear so I judge and My judgement is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of My Father Who sent Me' (John 5:19 & 30). That is the pattern all people in ministry must follow. Jesus inferred He never pre-empted the Father and we must be the same.

Impatience is not seeking the will of the Father, but fulfilling our own will to 'get moving'. If we pre-empt the Father's timing, even when we know the ministry is His will, it could lead to disaster. We need more than faith to receive God's promises; we need patience (Hebrews 6:12). Impatience leads us to make hasty decisions and we pay the price. The real problem with impatience, is it takes the initiative away from God, Who is working all over the world to fulfil His purposes and plans. It is always a question of His timing. We can do the right thing at the wrong time and ruin a carefully set up plan God has, so to walk in His timing is so important. We need to learn to wait on the Lord. Getting frustrated will not impress God nor will He hurry things along. He will do things in His time now matter how we react. In fact how we react could determine how long we wait. Frustration and impatience can cause us to become discouraged, and we must consciously avoid allowing frustration to discourage us, because that will keep us from hearing and receiving the scriptural references on patience and taking them to heart. The churches of old, those active in the New Testament, were told these things several times. If we are impatient and frustrated, we cannot hide it from God and it will hold us back in the Lord. Perseverance is active and we must run with endurance (Hebrew 12:1), but patience is inactive or passive – it is doing nothing except waiting.

If we have been wronged, we need to wait for the Lord to avenge us, for vengeance belongs to God. 'Beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave the way open for God's wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord' (Romans 12:19). Patience was once called long-suffering; it leaves room for God to act. Patience is an irreplaceable aspect of Christian character that we need to cultivate; it is powerful. 'May you be strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory, with endurance and patience with joy' (Colossians 1:11). That can also include tolerance, persistence, perseverance, forbearance and long-suffering. Notice in this verse, patience is an expression of God's power. It is not a mark of weakness but of strength. 'The man who has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down' (Proverbs 25:28). That is a 'picture' of a man who loses control of his temper which as we know, can sometimes lead to violence. That is not strength, that is weakness. It is a man strong in character who rules his own spirit. Patience will stop us from being provoked into rash behaviour when we are confronted or challenged by the wicked, thoughtless people in this world. We have to learn to let things go and do nothing about them. Vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will repay the wicked in His time. 'The man who rules his own spirit and is slow to anger is better than the mighty who takes a city' (Proverbs 16:32).

Waiting for healing can seem endless. The ultimate healing we read about in the Bible seemed completely hopeless. 'When Jesus heard Lazarus was sick, He stayed two more days where He was'. Four days later, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1 to 45). If Jesus had not been listening to the Father He would have healed Lazarus instead of raising him from the dead. The raising of Lazarus from death brought many to salvation because they believed on Jesus. Mary and Martha gently rebuked Jesus for not coming sooner, but their faith made them realise that even then, God would do what Jesus asked, and the same happens today. Sometimes Christians criticise others because they misunderstand their patience in a given situation, but there is Someone Who always understands our patience, and that is God Himself.

When we are waiting for a loved one to turn to God, sometimes people misinterpret God's patience as indifference to sin, but that is wrong. The patience of God should lead the unsaved to repentance. Some think because they have not come under the judgement of God, they believe the sinners have got away with

it. 'The Lord is not slow about what He promises according to some people's perception of slowness, but He is extraordinarily patient toward you, not desiring that any should perish but that all should turn to repentance ... Consider that the patience of our Lord is our salvation' (2 Peter 3:9 & 15). God is patiently waiting for people the world over to come to repentance. 'Do you despise His kindness and patience? Do you not know that the patience of God leads to repentance?' (Romans 2:4). God's patience is revealed when He does not intervene hastily in any given situation, unless there is no time to wait. For example, God could wait for a person to come to Him all their lives if necessary, then on their deathbed He urgently sends someone to lead that person to Jesus at the last moment. We recently led a very elderly woman to Jesus just three hours before she died. The Lord waited patiently for many years for her to repent, and when her time had run out, He urgently brought her to salvation. That is the purpose of God's patience. God passes over sin because He chooses to show mercy and exercise patience. But once His patience has run out, we need to look out! Patience is a characteristic of God and also of Jesus. 'For this reason Jesus shows His patience for an example to those who will believe on Him for eternal life' (1 Timothy 1:16). 'A servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome but instead be gentle and patient toward all people, and correct others with gentleness in the hope that they will come to repentance and come to know the Truth' (2 Timothy 2:24 & 25).

Supernatural transformation is a miraculous change that happens within us and is another result of waiting on God. Here are some beautiful promises for those who have met God's conditions. 'Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, Creator of the ends of the earth, does not grow weary or tired; there is no searching of His understanding. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks strength He gives power. Young men will faint and be tired and the fittest will stumble and fall exhausted, but those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength. They will fly as with wings up close to God as eagles soar up to the sun. When they run they will not grow weary; they will walk and not tire' (Isaiah 40:28 to 31). This scripture shows us that at the end of our natural strength, if we wait for the Lord, He will give us His supernatural strength. This scripture says, "They will renew their strength." The Hebrew translation is literally; "They will exchange strength." When we have come to the end of our own resources and there is nothing more we can do except wait for the Lord, in the place of our weakness, God will give us His divine, supernatural strength. Waiting for the Lord is the key to experiencing the supernatural. It is a foolish thing to try to help God answer our prayers. We need to have a 'hands off' approach and let God do it all, unless He clearly tells us otherwise.

Two examples of people trying to 'help' God out are these two common scenarios: A woman feels she is ready for marriage and prays for a husband. After several years of waiting she becomes impatient and marries a non-Christian. At first everything is rosy until the woman wants to teach their children about the Lord and the husband forbids it. There is contention in the home and they end up in a messy divorce with several hurt children in tow. The children are forced to endure years of two separate households with two separate sets of values and possibly step-parents as well. If the woman had waited for God, she would have saved herself and her children from years of unhappiness. When it comes to marriage, it is better to remain single and wait for God's choice of spouse for you, than to marry a non-believer. We are not to be unequally yoked with a non-believer (2 Corinthians 6:14) so if there is someone out there praying for a spouse, even if it takes years, wait for God and continue serving Him faithfully while you wait. Actually, it is not scriptural to seek a spouse; in fact we are told not to. 'Are you married? Do not seek to be free. Are you unmarried? Do not seek a spouse' (1 Corinthians 7:27).

Scenario number two: You have been born-again and want your spouse and adult children to be saved too. You do not understand their lack of enthusiasm regarding salvation and so you bombard them with scriptures and preach to them every day. You demand God save them and you become worried about them going to a lost eternity. Your incessant preaching causes real contention in the home. You do not want to wait. You want them saved immediately. Eventually your adult children have had enough and refuse to have contact with you, then your spouse leaves. In this case, having wisdom and praying silently for them would have been the better option. Wait for God, because He saves each person at the correct time for them – not the correct time for us. While you wait on God, pray faithfully and quietly for your spouse and children to come to the Lord – and claim these scriptures. 'As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord' (Joshua 24:15). 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and all your household' (Acts 16:31).

Here is another tragic example of catastrophic consequences that actually happened when someone trying to 'help' God answer their prayers, interfered in God's plan and the 'answer' went terribly wrong. Abraham and Sarah had come to the end of their own physical strength. Abraham was 99 years old and Sarah was 90 (Genesis 17:1 & 17) and way passed childbearing years (Genesis 18:11), but God had promised Abraham a son and heir (Genesis 15:1 to 6). However, Abraham failed to wait for God. In fact neither Abraham nor Sarah were initially prepared to wait for God. With Sarah's suggestion and consent, Abraham went ahead and sired Ishmael with Sarah's maid, Hagar (Genesis 16:1 to 4). Hagar was a slave and had no choice but to consent to having sex with her employer. Ishmael means; 'God has heard' or 'God hears'. The Lord said Ishmael would be a wild donkey of a man; his hand would be against every man and every man's hand against him, and he would live in hostility to the east and on the borders of all his kinsmen (Genesis 16:11 &

12). What an appropriate description of the Arab and Middle-eastern nations who are the descendants of Ishmael and look at the problems they still cause the sons of the promise; the Jewish people. The situation with Ishmael caused contention between Abraham and Sarah, and contention between Hagar and Sarah when previously there was none (Genesis 16:5 & 6). It caused two dreadful and terrifying ordeals for Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 16:9 to 11 then 21:9 to 19) and contention between Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 21:9). None of these things would have happened if Abraham had waited for God and Ishmael never born. How different history would have been; how different would life for the Israelites be now? Abraham made his mistake and tragically, all his descendants have been paying for it ever since. Abraham did not solve his problem by going ahead of God, he created far more problems and the effects are still being felt four thousand years later, and the problem is more acute now than it was then. It is the descendants of Ishmael who are the unrelenting, violent enemies of Israel and of the descendants of the promised Seed, Isaac and Jacob. If ever history has a lesson for us to heed, it is this one. It is better to wait for God because impatience can have a terrible result. We need to realise we cannot help God out by trying to solve our problems our own way. We need to wait for God and realise He is more than capable of doing what He has promised. By trying to help, we only mess things up.

In spite of his mistake, Abraham is both our Spiritual father in the faith, and our pattern to follow. His experiences are very important for us. Abraham is the Spiritual father of us all and the Spiritual father of many nations. His faith was attributed to him as righteousness (Romans 4:16 to 22). The same applies to us. Just as Abraham is the father of all believers, so we must walk in the same footsteps of faith. One of Abraham's greatest tests was waiting for God to fulfil his promise of a son and heir. God told Abraham that he would have an heir and through that heir, all other nations would be blessed. His descendants would be multiplied and would be as numerous as the stars in heaven and as sand on the seashores. Everything in Abraham's life depended on the fulfilment of that promise but he had to wait for God's timing.

Abraham eventually learned his lesson and Isaac was born 14 years after Ishmael but it took a full 25 years before God fulfilled His promise to Abraham regarding Isaac. There was a supernatural transformation in Abraham and Sarah's bodies. God restored their ability to have a child so Isaac could be born, which was the outcome of waiting for God. God's promises are sometimes like seeds. The faith for fulfilment needs time to take root and grow into the promised result. During that period of waiting time, we are waiting for God. Waiting for God is a necessary and logical requirement for us to receive God's supernatural ability that will produce the result we require. A greater test for Abraham would have been God's request that Abraham kill Isaac. By that time, Abraham had learned to trust God enough to carry out the task, but before Abraham had a chance to slay Isaac, God stopped him (Genesis 22:1 to 18). That kind of faith, trust and belief in God's promises, is just the same as we need in order for God to give us supernatural strength. Nothing is impossible for God and we can read how the same supernatural transformation happened with Elizabeth and Zachariah, and they went on to have John the Baptist in their latter years (Luke 1:5 to 80). Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength.

The ultimate goal we are waiting for is the return of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus. All of God's people are a waiting people. We are waiting for the coming of Jesus, His Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10). We are waiting for the right time for Jesus' return. 'When the proper time had fully come, God sent His Son ...' (Galatians 4:4). There was a precise moment in time that was right for Jesus to come and there is a precise time that will be correct for the return of Jesus. 'Making known to us the mystery of His will according with His good pleasure which He purposed in Jesus, in the fullness of time to unify all things in our Messiah, both things in heaven and things on the earth' (Ephesians 1:9 & 10). Everything in the universe, on earth and in the heavens will be under one head – Jesus our Messiah. Just as we hear in an orchestra all the musical instruments coming together to bring about the crescendo – so it will be at the end of this age when the times have reached their fulfilment. Jesus will be King over the entire universe and we will take our place with Him in the Kingdom. We have to think of ourselves as a kind of musical instrument – waiting for the Lord's direction to play our part and be in time and in harmony with God's purposes. To get this 'tune' right in our part of God's plan, we have to wait on God for His will to be played out. The timing is from God. We are called to serve God while we wait for His Son. That is where perseverance and patience take their place. We serve with perseverance while we patiently wait for Jesus. Jesus Himself is waiting to return to earth (Hebrews 10:12 & 13). Right now in heaven, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, waiting – and He has been waiting for 2,000 years. Heaven must retain Jesus until God's purposes on earth have been fulfilled (Acts 3:21).

There are many elements that go together to make up a strong Christian character. If any one of these elements are missing, then the character is weakened. Patience, endurance or perseverance are elements every Christian should have. If we carefully study the warnings in the Bible regarding the end times, we will notice those chapters do not give us a very happy picture of what the world will be like immediately prior to the return of Jesus, and many Christians are so terrified of that scenario, they have come up with the rapture theology to talk themselves into believing they will avoid it. There are many frightening things mentioned in those verses, but the main requirement is for Christians to patiently endure it, and the only way to be saved

is to endure it. There are a few verses we must lay hold of if we are going to get through. 'See, I (Jesus) have warned you beforehand ... He who endures to the end will be saved ... only he who patiently endures to the end will be saved ... you must be ready ... watch therefore, for you do not know when the Son of Man will come ... what I tell you I tell all: Watch' (Matthew chapters 24 & 25; Mark chapter 13). There is no escaping it. The key to survival and success is patient endurance. Some people will not realise they are at the end until the end comes. 'If anyone is able to hear, let him listen ... herein is the call for the patience and faith of God's people' (Revelation 13:9 & 10). 'Here comes a call for the patience of God's people; those who keep the commandments of God and faith in the Lord Jesus' (Revelation 14:12). Jesus knows if we have been patiently enduring (Revelation 2:19).

We are all going to have to face severe difficulties at some time in our lives; every person on earth, Christians and non-Christians alike will all suffer trials of one kind or another during the course of our lives. Not one person can escape that. The illogical and silly thing is, as non-believers often turn to God as a result of facing trials, when believers face exactly the same kind of trials, some turn away from God like the second group in Jesus' parable (Matthew 13:20 & 21). As some people would say, "Go figure that one out!"

Whatever we are waiting for, we need to wait patiently; for a child, a job, a house, marriage, a healing, for a loved one to be saved, to be avenged or for Jesus' return. Patience seems to be inactive but it is not; it is waiting on God and keeping busy while we wait and we should be growing in God as He prepares us for the answer to prayer. Patience is a form of self-discipline and restraint. In our modern culture, self-discipline or self-control are considered 'old fashioned' but we need to understand, God disciplines and trains His people (Hebrews 12:1 to 12). As we read in these verses, we need to accept God's discipline with patience, not despising it or being discouraged. We need to cultivate patience without being lazy in our service to the Lord and we need to recognise patience is essential. 'We know that all things work together for the good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28). All of us need to meet the conditions before we can apply that verse to our lives. God does not say all things work together for everybody – only for those who love God and are called for His purpose. For that verse to apply to our lives, we have to meet three conditions laid out by the Lord; we have to love God; we have to be walking in our calling, and we must be fulfilling His purposes for our lives. If we have been called but are not fulfilling His purposes, He will treat us in such a way He will force us into His service to fulfil His purpose and His will, just like He did with Jonah (see the Book of Jonah). So all things only work together for good for those who meet His conditions. The 'things' may not even be for the good of those who have suffered it but may be for the good of the growing Kingdom of God.

Waiting is a distinctive mark of God's people on earth. That is what distinguishes God's true people from others. 'You turned from your idols to serve a God Who is alive and true and you await the coming of His Son from heaven, Whom He raised from the dead – Jesus, Who saves us from the wrath to come' (1 Thessalonians 1:9 & 10). We can see that serving God is a mark of God's people, but what about waiting for God? That is put side by side with serving. It is far easier for us as Christians to learn to serve than it is to learn to wait. Learning to wait is an essential part of our life's discipline. Waiting has been a mark of God's true people for more than two thousand years. We have been waiting for Jesus for that long, and we will have to continue to wait until the time is right. Waiting carries certain important implications. We are to think and act differently from people in the world. Waiting for Jesus' appearing should set Christians apart. 'The grace of God has come bringing salvation for all mankind, instructing us to reject all ungodliness and worldly desires to live sober, righteous and Godly lives in this present world. Awaiting the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus our Messiah' (Titus 2:11 to 13). A popular Orthodox Jewish saying that has been held for hundreds of years is this: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah and though He tarry, I will wait for Him every day." That has kept the Jewish people separate from all other people. It has marked them out. They are a waiting people. They are waiting for their Messiah. The exciting thing is, we are waiting for the same Messiah.

As a waiting people, we have a future that distinguishes us from most of the people on earth today. Waiting for Jesus causes us to lead a certain kind of life. A life that is self-controlled, upright and Godly. It is motivated by the fact that we are waiting for Jesus' return. 'Just as it is appointed for all people once to die and after that the judgement, so it is that Jesus, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to carry any burden of sin, but to bring to full salvation those who are eagerly waiting for Him' (Hebrews 9:27 & 28). Notice that Jesus is coming to bring full salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for Him. Eagerly waiting is not a 'ho-hum' approach to His return, but in a manner of excitement. That is one essential requirement of God's people on earth today – we are waiting for Him and it will be our final test of waiting. Everything will come to the God-appointed pinnacle of the age. Jesus warns us to be ready and waiting. "Watch, therefore for you do not know what day your Lord is coming ... You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at a time when you do not expect Him" (Matthew 24:42 & 44).

Jesus will reject some people because they have been unfaithful while they were waiting for Jesus. Four parables tell us this. The unfaithful servant who was put in charge of his Master's household, began to eat

and drink with the drunken and beat his fellow servants and the unfaithful servant was rejected (Matthew 24:48 to 51). In the parable of the ten virgins, five foolish allowed their oil to run dry and they fell asleep. That indicates they stopped 'filling' themselves with the Holy Spirit and became complacent in their walk with the Lord and the five foolish virgins were rejected (Matthew 25:1 to 12). The three men and their talents tells us the story of two men who used their talents for their Master, but a third man who buried his talent and was too lazy to serve the Lord using his God-given talent and was rejected (Matthew 25:14 to 30). The fourth parable tells us we need to welcome and help the poor and destitute because if we refuse, then we too will be rejected, but this parable specifically mentions Jesus' brethren, the Jews (Matthew 25:32 to 46). Jesus never called anybody but the Jews His brethren. In the first three parables, they say the Master took a long time. Those people did not stand the test of time. It is the final test for Christians and Jews alike. There will be a transformation for those who wait patiently for the Lord's return. 'We are citizens of heaven from where we patiently await the coming of our Saviour the Lord Jesus, Who will transform our body of humiliation to be changed to the body of His glory, according to the power by which He is able to subject everything to Himself' (Philippians 3:20 & 21).

There is no way we can produce spiritual fruit without enduring. How do we achieve endurance? By making a firm commitment to the Lord. We need to see that we have no alternative. Turning away from God is not an option – not if we want to spend eternity with Him. God's way is the only way to go to heaven. To escape eternal death we have no choice but to submit to God no matter what life brings. Even fully committed Christians must endure hardships but we know if we are committed to God, then He will sustain us. We need to value our salvation then the commitment will come easily, even though our lives may not be easy. 'I press on towards the goal to win the heavenly prize of the high calling of God in Jesus, so let us who are spiritually mature have this conviction ... and let us hold true to what we already have attained and walk our lives by that rule' (Philippians 3:14 to 16). The apostles did not give the new converts an easy message; 'It is only through many tribulations (trials, testings, pressure, hardships, afflictions, suffering), can we enter the Kingdom of God' (Acts 14:22). We need to remain wholly focussed on the Lord and on heaven. When we get to heaven, all our pain and troubles will be at an end, and so we need to keep our spiritual eyes on the unseen realm of eternity. If we take our eyes off eternity with the Lord, we will falter. We need to make a firm decision to endure patiently no matter what comes our way, because our suffering is temporal (2 Corinthians 4:17 & 18). Jesus spoke several times about the eternal rewards for faithfully serving God with patient endurance in the face of trials. Jesus said, "Hold fast to what you have until I come" (Revelation 2:25).

Christianity is a long marathon race and only those who endure to the end will be saved. Those who give up will be lost. We have an unseen prize waiting for us. We will all one day stand before the Divine and just Judge and will receive the reward that is due to us. For everyone who meets God's conditions there is a crown of righteousness, and His conditions are for us to patiently endure, persevere and persist right to the end. Some people endure great suffering and persecution. All those who have endured to the end will be saved, plus they will receive eternal rewards. 'I have fought the good fight; I have run the race; I have kept the faith. What is laid up for me is the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day (Judgement Day) and not to me only but all those who have yearned for His (second) appearing' (2 Timothy 4:7 & 8). We are eagerly awaiting the Lord's return and when He comes, there will be a glorious transformation of our physical bodies, so they will become like His glorious body. Waiting for Jesus will bring about the supernatural transformation.

Amen and God bless you.

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