

## SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

During those times when we are in a crisis, when we are in the difficult period of being in between - when we are not there yet, when we have to wait - what do we do?

The command to wait is found in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, in Psalm 27:14, we are told, "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

In Acts 1:4, what were the 12 apostles told? "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."

Sometimes God tells us to wait. But when we hear the word wait in our society we view it differently than did the biblical writers. Waiting for us in the 20th century causes anxiety.

When we have to wait in line, we fold our arms, we shuffle our feet, we shift from side to side, we mutter to ourselves, we complain about how inefficient everything is. For us waiting has become a waste of time. We have a cliché - we say we are killing time when we are waiting. That is our modern view.

But when the biblical writers talked about waiting on the Lord, they weren't talking about killing time. Their waiting on the Lord was filled with eager anticipation. An illustration by Peter James Flamming paints a vivid picture. Imagine the dock of a large fishing village. A young wife, clutching her baby to her chest, watches eagerly and anxiously as an arriving ship is secured.

Her eyes strain to catch a glimpse of her husband among the fishermen returning home. Full of eagerness and anticipation, she rises to her tiptoes. Finally, she spots him.

"There he is. There's Daddy. He's home," she says to the babe in arms. No killing time there. No muttering about inefficiency. No, it's a different feeling.

That is how we should wait on God. We may experience anxiety, but it's mixed with anticipation, not apathy. We survive that "not there yet" feeling by relying on God with eager anticipation. And we receive that eager anticipation when we ask for it daily in prayer.

The story is told of an explorer whose crew decided to bring home some native birds from the arctic region where they had been sailing. During the trip, one of the birds escaped and began to fly away from the ship. The crew was certain the bird would die trying to reach land. The ship was miles from shore.

To their surprise, after quite a bit of time had passed, they saw a speck way off in the horizon. As they watched, the speck grew larger and larger and finally collapsed in a heap on the deck of the ship. The prodigal bird had returned home. The ship that was

once seen as a prison was now viewed as a safe haven. It was now a place of refuge. It was now a place worth waiting around for.

Living through a time when we are "not there yet" can sometimes feel like a prison. But thankfully, we can cross the ocean of life if we are daily strengthened by God.

We renew that strength when we remember that Christ is the anchor that holds us in the storm. Ancient seafarers, when they hit troubled waters, would let the anchor down. Dragging the heavy anchor kept the ship from capsizing.

Jesus Christ serves as our anchor as we go through our troubled waters. And when we wait on him, he will renew our strength so that we can soar with the wings of an eagle (Isaiah 40:31).

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Have you heard any of the following phrases?

. "Excellent health and divine prosperity are the rights of every Christian. As Christians we are God's children, the King's Kids - so, whatever you want from God, just name it and claim it."

. "The Bible is a book of laws and principles. Find them and apply them, and you will automatically be blessed, for God is duty bound to keep His promises."

. "Being poor or sick is simply a lack of faith. If you are not well, it's your fault, for God promises healing in His Word."

These dogmas, and others like them, are basic tenets of what is known as the Gospel of Health and Wealth or the Success Gospel. The Success Gospel focuses on personal well-being and prosperity.

It reasons as follows: God has promised to bless His people (Psalm 1; Philippians 4:19). A loving God, goes the argument, would therefore want His people to be prosperous and physically well.

New Testament scholar Gordon D. Fee adds, "In its more brazen forms... it simply says, 'Serve God and get rich (or be healthy)'" (The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels). Even on Christian radio and television programs, it is hard to avoid being bombarded by tapes, newsletters, seminars and slick pamphlets that promise a life of leisure and luxury if we'll just follow certain simple steps. All of this is an offshoot of the Success Gospel.

The problem is that these teachings have a veneer of truth: God is loving and generous, and He does want the best for us. But Success Gospel teachers will try to give their own pseudo-Christian spin to this self-evident truth. The Bible, they say, is a book of laws. To

be successful, simply apply the laws that guarantee health, wealth and happiness, and - presto! - what you want will be yours.

But the Bible does not endorse this oversimplified approach to the Christian life. Scripture is emphatic: God's blessings are primarily spiritual (Ephesians 1:3).

Furthermore, Jesus Christ is not a means to our selfish ends. Rather than justifying an ego trip or promising "Cadillac Christianity," Jesus brought the message of the cross. He brought a message of service and self-sacrifice.

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?'" (Mark 8:34-36).

Jesus lived the opposite of the Success Gospel. He promised great spiritual blessings and satisfactions from a life spent in his service, through a life of testing, trial and adversity. He himself, in his own person, refuted the tenets of the Success Gospel - for he was the Suffering Servant of the prophecies:

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.... He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:3,5).

Who would dare accuse Jesus of lack of faith or being outside the will of God? Yet few have suffered more in God's service.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection are a living rebuke to the Success Gospel. Jesus was on the side of the less, the least and the lost.

Let's get back to the true gospel of Jesus Christ, a message that promises faith even in our darkest trials.

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