

Wait!

On Sunday, we concluded our sermon series called “Wow! Woe! Want! Wait! – Four Essential Elements of Prayer” by exploring Prayers of Waiting.

1. Warm-up question: Most of us hate to wait. Tell us about a time in recent weeks when you’ve found yourself being impatient.
2. Romans 1:20 says, “Ever since the creation of the world, God’s eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made.” In other words, we can learn a lot about God, and the reality in which we find ourselves, by observing nature.
 - a. Jeff gave the example of the Grand Canyon, which was created by water erosion from the Colorado River. Scientists estimate that the Grand Canyon formed at the rate of 1 inch every 100 years! What does that teach us about God?
 - b. Early in the Old Testament, the prophet Balaam looked into the future and foresaw the coming Messiah. He said, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near – a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.” In other words, by Balaam’s time God had already decided to send Jesus. So why did it take another 1,300 years for Jesus to appear? Why so slow? What are the possible explanations?
 - c. When Jesus ascended back into heaven, an angel told his followers that Jesus would return. That was 1,985 years ago and we’re still waiting. Why? What are the possible explanations? Why is God so slow?
 - d. Clearly, time doesn’t mean the same thing to God as it does to us. God is incredibly patient; we are not. In your own life right now, what’s something you find yourself waiting for? What one word best describes how you feel about your wait?
3. Our primary Scripture reading on Sunday was a song written by King David at a time he found himself frustrated with waiting for good things to happen. Let’s read the lyrics of his song, found in Psalm 37:1-11.
 - a. Based on what’s said in our reading, what was happening that David wanted to see changed? (Point to the words that give rise to your answer.)
 - b. How was David tempted to react to what was happening? (Point to the words that give rise to your answer.)
 - c. What inspired advice did God give David for how he should respond to what was happening?

4. Again and again, in many different places, the Bible invites us to discover the power of prayerful waiting. Jeff suggested that prayers of waiting take three different forms – all of which are needed if we're going to wait well. First of all, waiting with God in prayer means **Prayerful Watching**. Jeff compared this to a "Where's Waldo?" puzzle. The idea is to believe that God is constantly present in every situation in powerful ways and to get in the habit of watching for signs of that presence.
 - a. Why is it so important to watch for signs of God's presence in our times of waiting? Why does it help us so much to actively watch for those signs?
 - b. The story behind the song "I Can Only Imagine" reminds us that circumstances that make no sense when happening often become much clearer with hindsight. With hindsight, we can see how God used each difficult turn in Bart Millard's life to bring him to his place of great effectiveness. Looking back on your life, where's a time when you can see the hand of God clearly at work?
 - c. In your current situation of waiting that you mentioned in Question 2d, have you seen any telltale signs of God's presence?
5. Waiting with God in prayer also means **Prayerful Listening**. The idea is that our times of waiting are meant to create the space and motivation for us to ask ourselves deep reflective questions and to listen for God's input on those questions.
 - a. Jeff suggested that sometimes God may have to put us into a holding pattern in life because we're not yet ready for what's next. Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - b. Read Chess Master Bruce Pandolfini's quote on the next page. What insights do you draw from his words?
 - c. Read Eugene Peterson's quote on the next page. What insights do you draw from his words?
6. Waiting with God in prayer also means continuing to engage in a particular kind of faith-filled action that Jeff described as "**Keep-On-Keeping-On.**" In other words, during our times of waiting, we shouldn't give up, sit on our hands, and expect God to do it all for us. We need to keep doing what we can to make things better, faithfully and prayerfully putting one foot in front of the other even when we're tempted to give up. The recent CNN story about Walter Carr offers a perfect example, as he left his house at midnight to walk 20 miles to his new job.
 - a. What would (and wouldn't) have happened if Walter hadn't forced himself to put one foot in front of the other and keep walking?
 - b. In your current situation of waiting that you mentioned in Question 2d, what does it look like for you to "Keep-On-Keeping-On"?

Key Quotes

Chess Master Bruce Pandolfini, quoted in Fast Company Magazine

“My lessons [with students] consist of a lot of silence. I listen to other teachers and they’re always talking. . . . I let my students think. If I do ask a question and I don’t get the right answer, I’ll rephrase the question – and wait. I never give the answer. Most of us really don’t appreciate the power of silence. Some of the most effective communication between student and teacher . . . takes place during silent periods.”

Eugene Peterson, creator of *The Message Bible*

“In prayer, we are aware that God is in action and that when the circumstances are ready, when others are in the right place, and when our hearts are prepared, God will call us into the action. Waiting in prayer is a disciplined refusal to act before God acts.”