

DEBBIE BARR

# *The Mystery of Waiting*

How God Works While We Wait



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AspirePress

*The Mystery of Waiting:  
How God Works While We Wait*

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## *Introduction*

# Waiting

WAITING IS HARD.

No one is a fan of waiting. Yet, waiting is a universal experience. We've all waited. We've waited for big things: for the baby to be born, for the chemotherapy to end, to find out—*did I get the job?*, for the soldier to come home, for the house to sell, for the prodigal to return, for answers to our prayers. We've all waited for little things too: for fish to bite, for the plane to take off, for our turn in the checkout line, for the traffic jam to clear.

Though no one likes to wait, waiting is just part of life. More importantly, it's also part of God's plan for

every life. That's why waiting is a bit of a mystery. *Why does God make us wait? Why, when it would be so easy for God to just say "yes," does he instead so often say "wait"?* *What can waiting teach us about God? Can the experience of waiting change us?* You'll find answers to these questions—and plenty to think about—on the pages ahead. The truth is, whenever you are in a season of waiting, God is working in ways you can't see.

If this book could have a soundtrack, it would be the song "Waiting Here for You." This beautiful song about waiting on God is a fitting prelude to the chapters ahead. If you search for this song on YouTube, you'll find inspiring performances by Christy Nockels, Melodie Malone, and other gifted vocalists. Listen and be blessed.



## *Chapter 1*

# In the Waiting Room

*WAITING.* IT SOUNDS SO SIMPLE, EVEN RELAXING, doesn't it? Just sitting in a comfy chair, maybe flipping through a magazine, until the thing you're waiting for happens. If you're waiting for your hair appointment or getting your tires rotated, that's a pretty good definition of waiting. But if you've ever spent a day anxiously awaiting updates in a surgical waiting room or trying to renew your driver's license at the DMV without an appointment, you know that not all waiting experiences are relaxing. Depending on what you're waiting for, even one day of waiting can seem unbearably long and emotionally draining (*They haven't updated me for two hours! What if the*

*surgery isn't going well?*). And if the waiting room is overcrowded and hot, you might be physically uncomfortable too, especially if you got there after all the comfy chairs were taken.

While spending the day in a waiting room is no one's idea of fun, it's an easy assignment compared to situations that keep us waiting for weeks, months, or even years. Prolonged waiting can try one's patience as nothing else can. It's like sitting at a traffic light that seems to be permanently stuck on red. You want to get on with things! But you cannot. You're "on hold," unable to change your circumstances. Despite your best efforts, you can't close the gap between your present reality and the change you yearn for.

*Welcome to the waiting room.*



## What Does the Bible Say About Waiting?

You might be surprised to know that the Bible has a lot to say about waiting. In most translations, the words *wait*, *waited*, or *waiting* appear more than one hundred times. Waiting is encouraged and modeled for us in dozens of verses and mentioned over and over in different contexts. The sheer number of times the Bible mentions waiting flags it as something important, something God wants us to pay special attention to.

In newer translations of the Bible, Psalm 27:14 tells us to “wait *for* the Lord.” In the King James and other older versions, this verse tells us to wait *on* the Lord. Whether we think of it as waiting *on*, waiting *for*, or even waiting *upon* the Lord, the idea is that we’re depending on him to guide us while we’re in the waiting room.

“The LORD is good to those who wait for him,  
to the soul who seeks him.”

LAMENTATIONS 3:25 ESV

## What Does It Mean to Wait on God?

Waiting for the Lord is different from other kinds of waiting, like waiting to be seated at a restaurant or waiting to feel a tug on your fishing line. When we think of waiting on God, we typically think in terms of waiting for him to answer our prayers. As God's

Waiting on God means we seek his perfect timing and guidance before making big decisions or big commitments.

children, we speak to our Father in prayer, telling him our desires and our problems, and making our requests. Then we wait, trusting that he will respond. This, most definitely, is waiting on God, and it is our privilege

as God's children to do so. However, when we tell God our wants and needs and ask him to meet them, what matters most to him is the attitude of our heart.

For some people, waiting on God is like waiting for an Amazon delivery: they place an order and expect God to fill it. Their plan, not God's plan, is most in focus. This is not what it means to wait on God!

Waiting on God means we come to him as our Father, not just asking for what we want, but asking him what *he* wants *for us*. It means asking him to fulfill

our desires and solve our problems, not according to our short-sighted human plans, but in ways that fulfill his perfect plan for our lives. Waiting on God means we seek his perfect timing and guidance before making big decisions or big commitments. Bottom line, waiting on God means that we really believe that his plan for our lives is best—and that his best is worth waiting for.

But what if we're not really sure about all of this? How can we wait on God if we're not sure he really has the power to answer our prayers or cares enough to intervene in our lives?



## The Sovereignty of God

How confidently we wait on God—or whether we wait on him at all—hinges upon what we believe about his sovereignty.

We know that Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, Simeon, Gideon, and the martyrs in the book of Revelation all believed that God is sovereign. We know this because when they spoke to him, they called him Sovereign Lord. The word *sovereign* means, as the psalmist described, that God “does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths” (Psalm 135:6). There is no higher authority, no more ultimate power than our sovereign God. Yet this highest authority tenderly loves and deeply cares for people, which inspires awe and gratitude in those who know him, as is evident in this verse:

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD,  
and he said: “Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and  
what is my family, that you have brought me this  
far?... How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is  
no one like you, and there is no God but you.”

2 SAMUEL 7:18, 22

Because the Lord is sovereign and all-knowing (omniscient), his knowledge of you is perfect. He foreknew every day of your life before even one of them had occurred (Psalm 139:16). This means he also foresaw the needs and problems that make you pray or cry, and the reasons for your waiting now. There's no circumstance or problem you're facing, or will ever face, that will cause him to say, "Wow, I didn't see *that* coming!" If the thought of that makes you laugh, then you recognize God's sovereignty. He's sovereign over the universe and everything in it, including world events, nature, and everything that touches your life. Here's the point: no matter what you may be waiting for, no matter who or what is blocking your progress or keeping you stuck, it is ultimately God you are waiting upon. To consider this another way, if you're "on hold" waiting for something, *pay attention* because God is at work in your life. Your waiting season is not happenstance; it's part of how God is growing you or changing something about you or your circumstances. But that doesn't mean you'll enjoy being in the waiting room! If there is one area of life that we chafe under and

If you're "on hold" waiting for something, pay attention because God is at work in your life.

rebel against, it is waiting. We don't want to wait, but God clearly *does* want us to wait. How do we really know that? All we have to do is look thoughtfully at the natural world around us.

### **Nature Waits.**

God has woven a time of waiting into nearly every aspect of the natural world. A garden is one example. After you plant seeds in the ground, no matter how excited you are to see the rewards of your work, you won't be harvesting anything the next day or even in the next few weeks. On the surface, for a long time it looks like your garden is a failure. You wait and wait but nothing is happening. But something actually is happening! Below the ground, where you cannot see it, nature is unfolding just the way it is supposed to. The seed coats are splitting open, moisture is causing the seeds to germinate, and they are beginning to grow. And then one day, green shoots pop through the earth! The seeds you planted are slowly turning into the vegetables or beautiful flowers you waited so long to see. And you realize that the time you spent waiting wasn't wasted; it was necessary.

Beyond the garden, the earth itself makes us wait. If you missed your chance to relax on the beach during the first low tide today, you'll have to coordinate your

schedule with the ocean and try again later. If you missed today's sunrise or sunset, you'll have to wait a day to see the next one. If your busy schedule kept you from hiking amidst the autumn leaves this year, you'll have to put it on your calendar for next year.



Waiting is also part of the natural unfolding of human life. When a woman discovers that she is pregnant, no matter how excited she is to meet her baby, no fully developed baby will be in her arms the next day. Instead, she'll have to wait months until the birth day. For all of us, there's a long wait before we reach our full maturity. It takes years to grow from embryo to newborn to child to mature adult. Even after we're old enough to enter the work force, parts of our bodies are still maturing. The human brain,

for example, is not fully mature until a person is in their mid to late twenties. Our bones don't reach their peak mass until we're twenty-five to thirty years old. Emotional maturity and spiritual growth take time as well. And so does learning. It takes time to learn to read and do math. It takes time, and sometimes years of practice, to perfect our skills and develop our natural talents.

Like the world around us, the micro-world within our bodies proceeds as if on a timer: the circadian rhythms that govern our sleeping and waking; ovulation; respiration; the beating of our hearts. We grow and develop and live our whole lives according to the mysterious inner biological clock God has placed within each of us.

### **We Are Bound by Time.**

Waiting is an inevitable fact of life because, like all of nature, we are constrained to operate within the boundaries of time. By God's design, time literally forces us into periods of waiting. The most famous Bible passage about time is found in Ecclesiastes. You may know it as the lyrics to "Turn, Turn, Turn," a 1965 song by The Byrds. Except for the title, which repeats, and the last two lines of the song, the lyrics closely mirror Ecclesiastes 3.

There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

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 scatter stones and a time to  
gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain  
from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be 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 3:1-8