

# Those who wait upon the Lord...

by Sue Palmer



31 But those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.  
Isaiah 40:31 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Who likes waiting? Most of us do not enjoy waiting. Being made to wait is often an every-day occurrence that we are forced to endure whether we like it or not. We wait in traffic, in holding patterns, in grocery stores, for the doctor, at the drive thru and the list goes on. How many meetings have you felt trapped in while a colleague is relentlessly illustrating some meaningless point about something totally irrelevant? Waiting can seem like such a waste of time! All those lost hours of waiting! How much more productive would life be if all of our waiting time was magically removed?

But those who wait upon the Lord...

At the time of his writing, Isaiah wanted to remind the Israelites that God is still with them. It was during a time when the Israelites were feeling rejected by God and their strength was sapped. They had little hope left. They were being told that Exile and captivity was God's punishment to them. God must surely have abandoned them. Perhaps they started to say things like, "God doesn't really care about us! How can he? Look at all the bad things that are happening all around us. He's not really in charge of things at all!"

You see what's happening here? The Israelites began to see their problems as being bigger than God himself. They forgot their Creator. They were so afraid that they had given up on God helping them if they turned to Him in their time of fear and panic.

Rather than depending on God, they stopped trusting God. This meant that they exchanged their faith in God for a kind of 'do-it-yourself' attitude.

In chapter 40, these words of hope from Isaiah gave encouragement to the Israelites to hang in there. To not give up, but to wait on the Lord. If they could remain faithful in their waiting, God would bless them.

The Israelites were not the best at being a waiting kind of people. Remember what happened when Moses disappeared into the Sinai Mountain? It didn't take them long to build their own golden God. Rather than wait patiently, they took things into their own hands.

And remember Abram who didn't wait. God gave him an angel with news that his wife was to bear a son and that his children would be numberless. But instead of waiting for God to perform what God promised, Abram took matters into his own hands with one of his handmaidens and voila! To the world was born Ishmael.

There seems to be a running theme throughout scripture which points to the need to wait for God. Perhaps today we could refer to waiting on the Lord as a spiritual practice.

Perhaps in our Mission prayer we could add, Lord where will your spirit lead today? Let us be fully awake and ready to respond, even in our waiting time.

I was thinking of an illustration of waiting as a spiritual practice and remembered a couple of weeks ago that our friend Amanda had mentioned when she had seen Bill and Betty Gillard at the local shops. Bill was sitting patiently waiting for Betty who getting her hair done. In my mind's eye I could see Bill sitting waiting, and, knowing Bill and Betty as I do, it reminded me of what love looks like. Waiting can be very Godly. It is an expression of love and trust. Waiting says, 'you are important to me. I will give up what I think is important and wait.' Waiting also says, 'I trust you.' If I wait on God, then I am showing my trust in God's direction and purpose in my life.

The spiritual practise of waiting means exercising an expectation, a wondering, a trusting, in what God is doing in my life.

Waiting as a spiritual practise is caught up in the scripture that challenges us to 'be still, and know that I am God.'

In his book, 'If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get out of the Boat', John Ortberg describes the three methods that ornithologists say birds have of flight. The first is flapping. Flapping is when the wings are kept in constant motion to counteract gravity. Like a hummingbird, it keeps them in the air but it is a lot of work. When we try to live a life of 'flapping' in constant motion, being in control and busy, busy, busy, we run the risk of becoming exhausted and burnt out.

The second method is gliding. Here the bird builds up enough speed to then be able to coast a while. While it is much more graceful and less work than flapping, it does not get the bird very far. Gravity does set in eventually. Gliding through life can be easier than flapping but will not sustain you long term.

The third way is to soar. Some birds such as eagles can soar. Their wings are able to catch the currents of rising air and without any effort they can soar on invisible columns of air to great heights without much effort at all. Some eagles have been clocked at 80mph doing just this!

God wants us to soar! Are we willing to wait patiently on the Lord?

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