

Voices: Learn to wait again: Lessons from Exodus

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This may make me sound like an old codger sitting on my front porch yelling at the neighborhood kids, but I think we are losing something integral to our faith when we forget what it means to wait on the Lord.

Waiting on the Lord can be extremely hard. We are not a patient people. In fact, everything about our surrounding culture and the technology infiltrating our lives mitigates against waiting patiently.

From our smartphones in our pockets to automated bill pay to Amazon Prime shipping anywhere in two days, we value convenience and speed above everything else.

There is no doubt there are huge benefits to this technology, but maybe there is a detriment to our spiritual lives, too. Maybe our hearts are being formed no longer to wait and to seek the Lord in our waiting.

Waiting in the book of Exodus

The book of Exodus, in many ways, is a book about waiting. The narrative begins with the people of Israel having been enslaved in Egypt for more than 400 years. They have waited for their deliverance and salvation generation after generation. When Moses leads the people of God out of their slavery and into their freedom, he also leads them into another period of waiting.

The book of Exodus ends with Israel wandering in the desert where they will be for 40 years.

One passage in particular struck me in my latest reading of Exodus. In Exodus 24:13-18, Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. The glory of the Lord descended. Verse 16 reads: “The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day, he called to Moses from the cloud.”

Moses went up the mountain to meet with God. God’s presence and glory descended on the mountain, and Moses waited for six full days until on the seventh God finally called from the cloud, and Moses entered into his presence to receive his commands.

Moses waited six days on the mountain before being called into God’s presence! We can’t even wait for six seconds before picking up our phones to fill the silence and awkwardness of having nothing to do or having to face actual inspection of our hearts.

Engage in active waiting

One of the ways we know God best is in our waiting on him, as we see in Psalm 46:10: “Be still and know that I am God.” However, in the tyranny of the urgent, we have lost the ability to wait on the Lord and have taken the mystery out of our relationship with God.

The waiting we see in Exodus is not a passive waiting. In the 400 years of slavery, God still was working. God called Moses. God equipped Moses. God sent Moses.

In the 40 years of the desert wandering, God established the laws of his people and the way for them to worship and know he is their God and they are his people. God called them to pursue justice and to seek his face as they wait.

They didn’t just sit around and twiddle their thumbs. They loved God and

neighbor, and they did so in the context of waiting.

When we wait on the Lord it does not mean we do nothing. We still seek to love God and neighbor. We still seek to worship God in spirit and in truth. We still seek to live out his call for justice.

Waiting on the Lord means we learn to live in silence and with tension. It means we become acquainted with awkwardness. It means we are willing to wait on the mountain for six days and wander the desert for 40 years sometimes before hearing God's call and receiving his promises.

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