

Waiting for God – Psalm 27:14

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Waiting for God – No. 5

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*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage;
yes wait for the LORD (Psalm 27:14)*

Last month we saw that waiting for God requires certain character traits, namely integrity and uprightness. Two more essential attributes for those who wait for the Lord are strength and courage. If waiting for God were easy these two would not be necessary. They are the same attributes Joshua would need if he was to successfully lead Israel in their conquest of the Promised Land. Three times in four verses God commands Joshua to *“Be strong and courageous....be very strong and courageous....Be strong and courageous”* (Josh 1:6, 7, 9). In taking possession of the land of Canaan Joshua would not only have to deal with the cantankerous, stubborn, obstinate, unreliable, and unpredictable children of Israel, pagan armies who were intent on keeping their land, but also with his own heart. Fortunately for Joshua God is not telling him to draw on some indomitable and intrinsic inner reserve of strength and courage, He is not telling Joshua to overcome by the sheer force of his own will, but rather Joshua can be strong and courageous because God has assured him that *“I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you....Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go”* (Josh 1:5, 9). This same assurance of God’s constant presence is likewise the fountain from which all who wait for God draw their strength and courage.

Those who are constantly looking for some sort of spiritual high and ecstatic experiences need look no further than waiting on God. Waiting for the Lord will provide all the spiritual experiences you will want in a lifetime. In fact, people whose Christian experience consists of nothing more than bouncing from one ecstatic experience to another or one emotional high to another simply betray that they have never lived through waiting on God, but rather their faith consists of nothing more than mere emotionalism. Without the emotion there would be nothing to validate their faith, and a faith that is constantly dependent on emotional experiences is not a faith that could stand the strain of waiting on God. The emotions which usually dominate while waiting on God are fear, doubt, discouragement, and despair; they are emotions which the one who waits must regularly battle.

The verb *“be strong”* is an imperative, it denotes a command. The word itself has the idea of *“firm, resolute”* and is often used for strength in battle. It describes a determined, unwavering will which is committed to the task at hand. Such resolve requires a *courageous heart* – a heart that will not melt in the face of opposition, trials, discouragements, setbacks, intimidations, difficulties, and obstacles, or throw in the towel when circumstances appear hopeless. As David affirmed in the previous verse, a deficiency of either strength or courage will only lead to despair, *“I would have despaired unless I had believed I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living”* (Ps 27:13). Only his firm, tenacious trust in the nature and character of God, and his resolute confidence in God’s constant presence kept David from being overwhelmed with despair, a confidence he expresses throughout this psalm, *“The LORD is my*

light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?...Though a host encamp against me, my heart will not fear; though war arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident....For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up (27:1, 2, 10).

Does it not seem odd that these attributes which are usually connected with some enormous and seemingly impossible task far beyond the ability of human strength – such as conquering the land of Canaan – are attached to something as apparently benign and passive as waiting? Is waiting for God really so difficult as to require the same attributes as leading the stubborn and obstinate nation of Israel and dispossessing the pagan nations of Canaan? Does waiting for God necessitate the same admonition to *“be strong and let your heart take courage”* issued to Joshua and Israel as they prepared to do battle with brutal and militarily superior pagan armies (cf Dt 31:6)? Only those who have never truly waited for God will find it strange, and people who require constant validation of God’s presence will find waiting for God hopelessly despairing because they trust in their feelings and circumstances not the character of God. Fear, doubt, and despair will overwhelm them.

There are times in the life of every Christian when God seems far away; times when He seems to withdraw Himself and remove His hand and allows us to be overwhelmed by the storms and trials of life. The Puritans referred to these times as “the desertions”. Job certainly experienced this feeling, *“What is my strength that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should endure? Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze?...For He bruises me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause. He will not allow me to get my breath, but saturates me with bitterness....Why do You hide your face, and consider me Your enemy?”* (Jb 6:11, 12; 9:17, 18; 13:24). In Psalm 31:22 David wrote, *“As for me, I said in my alarm, “I am cut off from before Thine eyes” and the psalmist Asaph lamented “Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion”* (Ps 77:7-9)?

But yet God has promised to never leave us or forsake us. Asaph correctly identified the reason for his feelings of despair, *“Then I said, ‘It is my grief, that the hand of the Most High has changed”*” (Ps 77:10). The psalmist realized his view of God was being influenced by his circumstances rather than interpreting his circumstances in light of God’s promises and character. It was the psalmist’s *perception* of God that had changed, not God Himself, therefore his perception needed to be brought back into line so as to correspond with God’s revelation of Himself. How did he do this? By reflecting on God’s nature revealed in Scripture, *“I shall surely remember the deeds of the LORD; surely I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate on all Thy work, and muse on all Thy deeds. Thy way, O God, is holy; what god is great like our God? Thou art the God who workest wonders; Thou hast made known Thy strength among the peoples. Thou hast by Thy power redeemed Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph”* (Ps 77:11-15). The strength and courage to wait for God comes from trusting in the nature and character of God and the dependability of His promises. God has always shown Himself faithful in the past so there is no reason to doubt His faithfulness for the future – but yet, too often we do.

In times like these our hearts and minds are vulnerable. Many substitutes will vie for our trust. Many adulterers will try to woo our affections and tempt us to rely on something or someone other than Jesus and His promises. It requires strength and courage to persist in waiting for God, to watch over our own heart that nothing steal in to divert our reliance from God alone. It happened to the Galatians. Having begun by the Spirit they reverted back to the

flesh (Gal 3:3). They had trusted only Jesus for salvation but were bewitched by others (3:1) into thinking their own righteousness could be trusted to be as efficacious as the righteousness of Christ. Their defection drew a severe rebuke from the Apostle Paul and he clearly demonstrated how utterly foolish and senseless they had been to try and trust in their own works, or to think their own efforts could provide the same or better assurance than the promises of God. Yet how many professing Christians still base their assurance on their own good works and emotional experiences rather than on a tenacious trust in the nature and character of God? How many ministries start out trusting only God but then revert to the flesh – to human wisdom, gimmickry, and pandering to carnal desires. How many Christians find themselves despairing when they come to the end of their own strength and courage; how many give up or resort to worldly means when their expectations are not realized, or their plans are not progressing as quickly as they think they should?

There are numerous advantages from temptations which the experienced Christian, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, may derive use, not the least of which is we are brought to know ourselves. Hidden sins are discovered that we knew nothing of before. Traits we once considered our greatest strengths are revealed to be malignant tumors on our souls. What we at one time considered to be love, devotion, and service to God is exposed as prideful self-ambition. What we thought was faith turns out to be no more than presumption and trusting in our own ideas, abilities, and idols. And any stores of strength and courage we might have thought to possess when we began to wait for God will be quickly bankrupt and soon give way to fear, doubt, and despair. Waiting on God, just like conquering Canaan, requires supernatural stores of strength and courage drawn not from emotional and ecstatic experiences or self-confident trust in our own abilities, but from trusting in the promise of God's constant presence to help and to guide. If in anything then we find ourselves distressed and despairing, the fault lies with us; we have failed to trust in His character, His attributes, and His promises. Indeed, this is the great sin of believers; that they do not make use of God's precious and magnificent promises nor trust in His nature and character, therefore they lack the strength and courage to wait on God.

Psalm 42 records the cry of a soul in despair, "*Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me*" (42:5a)? This is the cry of so many within the church today. People resort to all sorts of superficial means in an attempt to overcome their sense of despair. They look to fill the void with material things or relationships, with success and influence, with religious activity and programs. But how does the psalmist deal with his despair? What is his solution? Where does he find solace? Surprisingly he encourages himself by telling himself to wait for God, "*Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence*" (42:5b; cf. 42:11; 43:5). "Hope" is the Hebrew word *yachal* and carries the idea of "*hope, tarry, wait for, trust, confident expectation*". It describes a hope and trust that results in patient waiting with a sense of expectation. This *yachal* "hope" is not a self-delusional refusal to face reality, it is not wishful thinking or blind optimism rather it is a tenacious trust in God Himself, in the help of His promised presence, and the confident expectation that God will bless faithfulness to His word. Drawing from Psalm 42 the greatest expository preacher of the Twentieth Century, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, observed:

The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: 'Why art thou cast down' – what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn to yourself, upbraid

yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: 'Hope thou in God' – instead of muttering in this depressed and unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: 'I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is the health of my countenance and my God'. – *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure*, (21).

It requires spiritual strength and courage to defy yourself, other people, the devil and the world while patiently waiting and hoping for God. It was the promise of Jesus' constant presence from which the Apostle Paul drew his strength and courage to defy himself, other people, the devil and the world while he persistently preached the truth in Corinth, even in the face of overwhelming opposition and the constant threat of physical violence: *"And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them (Acts 18:9 -11)*. Knowing that the Lord had pledged His constant presence was all Paul needed to stop being fearful and to exude the strength and courage necessary for waiting on God to accomplish whatsoever He desired.

Paul devoted his life to proclaiming the gospel and poured himself into so many lives, but in the hour of his greatest need there were none to support him. In spite of this heartbreaking disappointment it was the assurance of God's constant presence which strengthened and encouraged Paul in the days shortly before his Roman execution, *"At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen"* (2 Tm 4:16-18). It is the promise of His constant presence which Jesus attaches to what is known as The Great Commission that imbues the gospel with its power and provides the strength and courage to fulfill the charge Jesus lays on all His disciples and to wait for the seeds we sow to bear fruit; *"and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* (cf. Mt 28:20).

Waiting for God is not for the faint of heart rather we are instructed that our heart is to take courage. It requires strength and courage not to capitulate to the culture, to not resort to worldly and carnal means, to not be led astray by aberrant teachings that pander to the flesh, to remain steadfast in the face of adversity, and to continue trusting God even when circumstances seem crushing and insurmountable. It takes strength and courage to face what waiting on God will reveal about our own hearts. Superficial emotional and ecstatic experiences can't hold a candle to the experience of waiting on God; they are cheap and tawdry substitutes for experimental Christianity and are absolutely worthless in helping us to wait on God. It requires no strength and courage to fabricate an emotional high, but you can only live off emotion for so long before needing another experience. But when we trust in God's constant, personal presence our hearts are insured of a continual supply of strength and courage to wait for God. Every true Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and every Christian is given the same bountiful measure of the Spirit at their conversion *"whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior"* (Tit 3:6). God has given us His eternal promises, His eternal Spirit, and His eternal presence, nothing is lacking on His part. If we lack strength and courage, if we are

depressed and in despair it is no fault of God's. We simply lack the trust to appropriate what God has already given. To again quote Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

The ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is unbelief...The essence of this matter is to understand that this self of ours, this other man within us, has got to be handled. Do not listen to him; turn on; speak to him; condemn him; upbraid him; exhort him; encourage him; remind him of what you know, instead of listening placidly to him and allowing him to drag you down and depress you...The devil takes hold of self and uses it in order to depress us. We must stand up as this man did and say: 'Why art thou cast down? Why art thou disquieted within me?' Stop being so! 'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance' ... - *Spiritual Depression*, (20, 21)

Joshua could not lead Israel into the Promised Land without the assurance of God's constant presence. Both David and Joshua were completely dependent on God for the strength and courage they would need as they waited for God. All their self-effort would be futile, as is all of ours. David's father and mother forsook him (Ps 27:10), Paul's friends deserted him, but both drew strength and courage from the fact that "*the LORD will take me up*". When we cease from self-effort, yield ourselves to God, and trust in God's promise of His continual presence and remind ourselves of who God is and what He has promised, we too can say to ourselves – *Wait for the LORD; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the LORD.*