

# **The** *Bible & Life* Bible Teaching Newsletter

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## **Learning to Wait Upon the Lord**

By David Dunlap

*“And Patience was willing to wait...”*

—from *Pilgrim’s Progress*, John Bunyan

In the classic book *Pilgrim’s Progress* the author John Bunyan wrote, “And Patience was willing to wait.”<sup>1</sup> One of the most important aspects of divine guidance is the principle of waiting upon the Lord. In the Psalms, Proverbs, and many other books of the Bible, we find commands to wait on the Lord, such as: “Wait on the LORD: Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: Wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14 KJV). Many modern translations use the phrase “wait for the Lord.” To English readers, the idea of waiting on the Lord might seem like a passive exercise, but a closer study reveals that it’s nothing of the sort.

Patient, confident trust in the Lord is the central idea of the exhortation to wait on the Lord. The entire Psalm 27 is a prayer to God for help. King David beautifully illustrates the meaning of waiting on the Lord. Throughout the Psalm’s eloquent lines, he expresses authentic faith and courageous trust in God, based on his confident expectation that the Lord will rescue and save him in his time of trouble.

### **Trusting in the Lord**

First, we see that we can wait on the Lord by trusting in Him. King David expressed great confidence in the Lord, who was his light, salvation, and stronghold (Psalm 27:1–2). We must acknowledge that God is in control of even the most intimate details of our lives. In this regard respected Bible commentator the late Dr. John Phillips (1927-2010) so aptly commented,

*“Our times are in his hands. God is never in a hurry. This is one thing that King Saul could not do. His failure cost him his crown. What God has promised He will perform. The great thing is to be patient and wait. Wait on the Lord and be of good courage.”*<sup>2</sup>

This kind of dynamic trust dispels fear and despair: “When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;

***“Our times are in his hands. God is never in a hurry. This is one thing that King Saul could not do. His failure cost him his crown. What God has promised He will perform. The great thing is to be patient and wait.”***

**John Phillips  
(1927-2010)**

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***“God does not always do for us immediately what we ask. We are not only to wait on the Lord but we are to wait for the Lord. Wait His own time. But now notice that thirteenth verse, ‘I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.’”***

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**H.A. Ironside**  
(1876-1951)

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though war break out against me, even then I will be confident” (Psalm 27 - verses 2–3).

### **Seeking the Lord**

Secondly, we can wait on the Lord by seeking Him with all our hearts. Seeking the Lord means seeking his “face”. To be before his face is to be in his presence. This is the Hebraic way of having access to God. David conveyed his trust in the Lord by longing to be with Him, to commune in God’s presence and worship in His temple: “One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple” (Psalm 27:4). In God’s dwelling place, praising and worshiping the Lord, David felt safe and secure: “For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD” (verses 5–6).

### **Waiting Upon the Lord in Prayer**

Thirdly, we can wait on the Lord *through prayer*, as David did in eager expectation of deliverance (Psalm 27:7–14). David prays over 300 times in the psalms. David asked God for wisdom, direction (verse 11), and protection (verse 12), wholly believing he would “see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living” (verse 13). Those who wait on the Lord can fully expect Him to fulfill their hope: “Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame” (Psalm 25:3).

### **Waiting with Confident Expectation**

Additionally, waiting on the Lord involves the confident expectation of a positive result in which we place a great hope. This expectation is based on knowledge of and trust in God. Those who do not know the Lord will not wait on Him; neither will those who fail to trust Him. We must be confident of who God is and what He can do. Those who wait on the Lord do not lose heart in their prayers: “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14). Waiting on the Lord renews our strength (Isaiah 40:31).

The beloved expositor Dr. H. A Ironside (1876-1951), adds,

*“God does not always do for us immediately what we ask. We are not only to wait on the Lord but we are to wait for the Lord. Wait His own time. But now notice that thirteenth verse, ‘I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.’ What a tragedy it would have been if I had not believed, what a blunder...David is saying, Oh, the tragedy if I had not known the Lord! But I do know the Lord and now my soul is at peace, and I can wait on Him.”* 3

Waiting on the Lord by trusting, seeking, and praying establishes our faith and brings serenity and stability: “I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in him” (Psalm 40:1–3). As this passage affirms, waiting on the Lord is also a testimony to others who will see our faith and, as a result, put their trust in God.

### **Conclusion—Waiting for Blessing**

Finally, waiting on the Lord brings God’s blessings: “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him” (Isaiah 64:4; see also 1 Corinthians 1:7). Sometimes we might feel as though the Lord does not see or hear us—that He’s not answering our prayers. During these moments, we can put our complete faith and trust in the living God. We can wait on the Lord in eager anticipation, knowing that He is with us and in control of our lives. He will do what He has promised. He will rescue and save us. He is always working for our good, even when we don’t feel Him (Romans 8:28). The devotional author of *Streams in the Desert*, Mrs. Charles Cowman (1870-1960), knew something of what it was to wait on the Lord. She writes:

*“Did you ever hear of any one being used much for Christ who did not have some special waiting time, some complete upset of all his or her plans. Consider St. Paul being sent off into the desert of Arabia for three years, when he must have been boiling over with the glad tidings. It has been rightly said that there are seasons when to be still demand immeasurably more strength than to act.”<sup>4</sup>*

Through patient, courageous, active trusting, seeking, and prayer, we can learn to wait on the Lord.

### **Endnotes**

1. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (New York: Barnes and Nobles Books, 2005), p. 38
2. John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms, Vol. 1*, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1987), p. 207
3. H. A. Ironside, *Psalms*, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1952), p. 165-166
4. Mrs. Charles Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*, (Los Angeles, CA: Oriental Missionary Society, 1925), p. 114

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**Mrs. Charles Cowman  
(1870-1960)**

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