

Empowering Healthy Leaders for Missional Impact

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Waiting in a New Year Waiting Part Two

As we enter a new year it is a common practice to look back and look ahead. Magazines, newspapers and television news stories are devoted to the top 10 lists in categories ranging from the biggest news stories to the worst fashion moments by celebrities. We remember the best and worst of movies, sports, books and many others. Forecasters and futurists tell us what they believe we will encounter in the New Year. Will there be new jobs in our state? Will we pay more in taxes? Will gasoline prices continue upward? Will there be medical and other technological breakthroughs? Will our computers do more – and what will we need to learn in order for them to work?

In a similar way the Bible is filled with REMEMBERING and ANTICIPATING. **If you don't have a Bible reading plan for the coming year, may I suggest reading through the Bible and making a list of all of the examples of remembering and anticipating?**

Here are a few examples to get you started:

Remembering: 2 Corinthians 1:10 – “He delivered us”; 2 Timothy 1:4, 5, 6; 2:8, 14

Anticipating: 2 Corinthians 1:10 – “He will deliver us”; 2 Timothy 1:4, 12; 2:11-12; 4:8, 18

In “Waiting for Christmas” I reflected on how the opportunity for waiting sets our attention on God's promises. Waiting is a gap between God's promises and our experience. Waiting becomes a teachable faith moment – where I hold to God's promises with a heart longing to see God keep His word.

But HOW do we wait?

What actually occupies our thoughts as we wait?

What do we say and do while we wait?

Let's begin by reminding ourselves where we want to end up. Here are some questions to help us shape our waiting experiences.

What is GOOD waiting?

What is my goal *in* my waiting?

What “fruit” does God yield when we wait?

To have a heart filled with faith, hope and love is God's goal. And that is not just the goal for waiting – it is THE goal God has for me. God wants to use every circumstance and relationship in my life to grow the capacity of my heart to have an outlook and choices that place faith, hope and love on

display. I like to visualize the heart change God is intending as moving from having a heart the size of one of those tiny Valentine conversation heart candies to a heart the size of a large red box of Russell Stover's chocolates. At new birth the seeds of faith, hope and love come alive and begin to germinate. To mature we tend the soil of the heart so that the fruit trees of faith, hope and love spring up and increase. So if this level of heart surgery is God's goal how do I partner with Him in that process?

REMEMBERING and ANTICIPATING are spiritual exercises God engineers during seasons of waiting, to help the heart grow capacity for faith, hope and love.

These two exercises are very powerful, high octane gasoline. Let me also remind us that REMEMBERING and ANTICIPATING, because they are so powerful, can be used in a wrong way. Remembering and Anticipating can be used to strengthen my worship of an idol as well as aiming my heart at the true God and His promises.

Remembering, at its biblical best, recalls the past to invigorate a confident trust in God in the present moment. In the middle of a discussion on our family budget Pandora, my wife, often says, "Well God has provided in so many ways over the past 30 years of our marriage – I am sure He won't let us down this time." That is remembering that fuels a confident faith, an enduring hope, and a giving love! But remembering can also fall into making the past an idol. Remembering can be an attempt to live in the past as a safe escape from a scary uncertain present. Remembering can be a way of attempting to freeze time so I don't have to face changes. Remembering can become a worship of what was instead of fuel for present faith. A spiritual exercise such as remembering can be a help in worship but the object of the worship may be an idol or the true triune God.

Anticipating is also a spiritual exercise. Running headlong into our greatest fears, refusing to surrender to despair, and doing good with joy, despite great personal sacrifice and loss, come from anticipating what God WILL do. When we pray – "YOUR KINGDOM COME" we acknowledge that all of time is flowing toward creation being completely restored under the rule of our King. Jesus introduced what we call the Great Commission by declaring His reign over everything when he said, "I have been given ALL authority in heaven and earth." His reign is conquering human heart after human heart receiving their bowing of the knee to the loving merciful King. The history of the world is the story of a failed coup where the true King returns to destroy, judge, condemn and bless in an absolute, unquestioned, glorious kingdom.

Remember the third book in Tolkien's trilogy – THE RETURN OF THE KING? All that the creatures of Middle Earth had longed to see came to fruition. The enemies were put down, broken, cast away – the greatest battle in their history was won by the rightful heir to the throne. And even the soil

responded with new life and fruitfulness. The curse was broken and the power was restored to one worthy to wield it in grace and selfless blessing.

But even with a compelling kingdom vision to anticipate the exercise of anticipating can be used in idol worship? Which of us has not turned our forecasted plans of a day, next week, or next semester into a false god named, "MY CONTROL." Who among us has not at times used our anticipating capacity to go into a fantasy escape from a pain-filled present?

If my exercises of remembering or anticipating are moving my heart away from responding to God in the present moment – **STOP!** Think again. Have my remembering and anticipating bowed my knee before an idol, a false god, who in reality is powerless? Idols can never redeem the past – but a merciful God whose shed blood is grace greater than every failure and sin is always able. Idols cast a false shadow of power to influence, change, or control the future. When we turn the lights up and really see the idol as it truly is, and not just the long shadow it casts, we almost laugh by how puny and weak it truly is. (Psalm 2)

Remembering and Anticipating are spiritual disciplines that grow our heart's capacity to respond to God in faith and hope. 2 Corinthians 5 reminds us we walk by faith not by sight.

A good definition of the Christian life could be – it is a waiting life punctuated by samples of God letting us taste what will be.

Have you ever been to Sam's Warehouse when they offer free food samples? Why do they pass out free food? They're encouraging you to step out by **faith**, believing the large frozen bag will be just as good as the tasty sample. Still holding your tooth pick and napkin you load up your shopping cart, acting on **hope**, that your purchases will be just as tasty as the sample when shared around your dining room table.

Does the Bible give us examples of how to exercise remembering and anticipating?

Composing a song and singing it – alone and with fellow believers is one way. (Exodus 15, Luke 2)

Crying out in honest prayer – and even writing out those prayers in a journal can be another exercise. (Psalms, Habakkuk)

Retelling the stories of God's faithfulness and goodness is a common practice. (Romans 4, Hebrews 11)

All of these are ways to "sample" the goodness of God's promises.

But can remembering and anticipating also grow our capacity for loving?

Watch for Part 3 in February – the conclusion to our reflection on waiting.

You can find "Waiting for Christmas" (Waiting Part One) by visiting <http://www.ciu.edu/alumni/articles/waiting-on-christmas.php>

or at www.royking.org

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