

INTRODUCTION

40 years ago, J.B. Phillips wrote a celebrated book titled *Your God Is Too Small*. He contends in it that most Christians have a vision of God that is beneath Him. That they see Him as a lesser God than He actually is. The God of most Christians, in other words, is too small.

But He's also too fast. That's how author Richard Mouw sees it at least. He argues that the book that is most needed today would be titled *Your God Is Too Fast*. There's a great deal of truth in what he says and that's what I'm going to preach about today. Your God is too fast. Turn to the wonderful Psalm that I read and that all of us can relate to, Psalm 6, and let's learn what it teaches us about that.

WAITING

The circumstances behind this Psalm are more likely than not the same ones that are behind Psalm 3. King David's own son, Absalom, led a rebellion that drove him from the throne. He is now, as a result, an enemy and fugitive of the very state that he once ruled.

With that in mind, notice David's question to God in verse 3, ***"But You, O Lord – how long?"*** That question implies a prayer. David had prayed and asked God to deliver him from Absalom and restore him to the throne. But it hasn't happened yet. God delays and He has to wait.

All of us can empathize can't we because we've been there and done that? The hard fact is that waiting is part of life for us all.

Some forms of waiting are trivial in the overall scheme of things. One study, for instance, found that the average person spends six months of his or her life waiting at stoplights and five years waiting in lines. Those are ordinary forms of waiting that are common to us all.

But other forms of waiting, like David's here, are far more grave than that. A single woman waits for that right man to marry. A childless couple waits for their first baby. A plaintiff or defendant waits for the resolution of his lawsuit. A graduate waits for her first job. An elderly

or ill person waits for his death, and so on. All of us come to defining junctures in our lives when we have to wait for things that we seriously want or need.

Lewis Smedes articulates it well. He writes: *“Waiting is our destiny as creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hope for. We wait in darkness for a flame we cannot light. We wait in fear for a happy ending we cannot write. We wait for a not yet that feels like a not ever. Waiting is the hardest work of hope.”* He’s right. Waiting is the destiny of us all.

DON’T LIKE WAITING

But that doesn’t mean that we like it. David certainly didn’t. Notice the revealing statements that he makes here. His soul is greatly dismayed (verse 3). He is weary with sighing and cries night and day (verse 6). And his eye wastes away with grief and he feels old as a result (verse 7). David didn’t like waiting on God and you know what, neither do we. We want Him to give or do what we ask – now! You know the old prayer, *“Lord, give me patience and give it to me now.”* That’s the way that it really is with most of us.

One of the reasons for that is the high tech fast paced culture in which we live. It’s a culture that’s totally committed to giving us what we want or need now. I think of microwaves, Fed-Ex, fast-foods, express lanes, instant rice, fax machines, e-mails, ATM machines, same day dry cleaning, 10 minute oil changes, and on and on it goes. All of those things reinforce and exacerbate our already natural aversion to waiting.

My wife, for instance, drives that way that we should, safely. But most people don’t like that because they’re in a hurry and someone driving safely slows them down. So, they’re always honking at her.

That reminds me of a book titled *A Geography of Time* by Robert Levine. He suggests in it that we create a new unit of time called the *honko-second*. He defines it as *“the time between when the light changes and the person behind you honks his horn.”* He then goes

on to claim that it's the smallest measure of time known to science. Spend enough time driving on Route 224 and you'll probably agree.

My point is this. We dislike waiting for anyone or anything *including* or maybe even *especially* God. When we ask Him to give or do something, we want or even demand that He give or do it now. We demand that because we've created a God in our minds who is too fast. We want immediate gratification and perceive Him as One who gives it. We envision Him moving at the same frantic pace that we move. As author John Ortberg says it, ***"We are too often double espresso followers of a decaf Sovereign."*** Our God is too fast!

That's problematic though because it creates in us the same feelings that it did in David. We've all felt like he felt here. We prayed and asked God to give or do something. But He didn't give or do it quickly enough. So, we became impatient and began to doubt or maybe even resent Him.

MAKE GOD'S TIMING OUR OWN

But notice something in verses 8-10. What David thinks and feels suddenly changes. He asked in verse 3 ***"How long?"*** and God apparently gave him an answering touch when he did. He now believes as a result that God knows what He's doing and thus, makes God's timing his own. He wants God to answer his prayer in His time and not a second before.

And so should we!

Maybe you heard about the investor who read and got all excited about 2 Peter 3:8, ***"with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."*** ***"Lord,"*** the investor asked, ***"Is it true that a thousand years to us is like a minute to you?"*** ***"Yes,"*** the Lord replied. ***"Then a million dollars to us,"*** the investor said, ***"must be like a penny to you."*** ***"Yes,"*** the Lord again replied. ***"Lord,"*** the investor then asked, ***"would you give me one of those pennies?"*** To which the Lord replied, ***"Yes, in a minute."***

The moral of the story is this. We far too often want the God's

resources when we pray but not His timing. We want the penny but not the minute. Psalm 6 teaches us though that it doesn't work that way. If we want God's resources, we have to take His timing as well. If we want the penny, we have to take the minute as well. Or to say it another way, we must make God's timing our own. We must want His timing as much as we want His resources. We must want Him to answer our prayers in His time and not a second before.

Now, there's something that we have to believe in order to do that. It's that God knows what He's doing. If He gives or does what we ask later instead of now, it's because it's necessary or best that He do so. If we don't believe that, we won't make His timing our own. If we do believe it, we most likely will. It's as simple as that.

Remember though what I've said over and over again. We can't just choose to believe something. But we can choose to understand. God then gives us the gift of faith or belief as a result of understanding. So that's what we need to do. We need to understand.

What we need to understand are God's delays. That's what I've been talking about today isn't it. We pray and ask God to give or do something and He says "yes" but delays. He doesn't give or do it now. He gives or does it later. Those are God's delays and we absolutely must understand what the Bible teaches us about them. It's two things.

MATURINGS OF THE PERSON

First, according to verses like Psalm 119:67, God's delays are maturings of the person. Let me ask you two questions in that regard.

First, what is your primary objective when you pray? If you're like most Christians it's getting what you've asked for.

I knew a single Christian years ago who prayed and asked God to help her meet the right man to marry. But eight years and hundreds of prayers later, she complained quite bitterly to me that He hadn't. Her complaining that day made crystal clear what her primary objective in praying was. It was to get what she asked for – the right man to marry.

Most of us are that way. We direct our desires mainly to the subject matter of our prayers. Our primary objective is getting what we ask.

But that isn't God's primary objective, which leads me to the second question. What is God's primary objective when we pray? The answer is to form and transform the person that we are.

Dallas Willard explains this well in *The Divine Conspiracy*. God instituted prayer for a specific reason. It's that we might learn how to reign or govern with Him in His kingdom, now in this life and forever in the life to come. Prayer is, above all, a means for forming the character necessary for that. That's why it requires committed and continuous effort. That's also why it involves waiting. Willard explains it this way: *"And a major element in this training (to reign) is experience in waiting for God to move, not leaping ahead and taking things into our own hands. Out of this waiting experience there comes a form of character that is priceless to God, a character that can be empowered to do as one chooses."*

I know that's true because I've experienced it. Consider these four delays. I asked God to help us adopt a hard to place child and He did – four years later. I asked Him to give my son a good job and He did – three years later. I asked Him to help me sell my house and He did – two years later. I asked Him to either heal my mother or take her home and He did – three years later. Those are the delays and I can honestly say this. I'm a far better person and am far better prepared to reign because of them.

God's delays are maturings of the person (who is praying). When the person is right, in other words, He answers our prayers.

MATURINGS OF THE TIME

The Bible, in passages like Psalm 37, teaches us that God's delays are a second thing. They're maturings of the time.

Listen carefully to what I'm going to say. We always pray in a larger context that we do not see. In that unseen context, God's answer

to our prayer sometimes involves changes in other people. Or it sometimes involves changes in a complicated set of circumstances. Or it sometimes involves conflicts in a spiritual realm that lie completely outside of human affairs, as in Daniel 10. What we ask God to give or do often involves one or more of those three and when it does, the answer takes time. Then when the people change or the circumstances become right or the conflict is resolved, God acts to give or do what we ask. When the time is right, in other words, He answers our prayer.

The Bible uses two phrases that express this reality. Those phrases are "the fullness of time" in Galatians 4:4 and "the proper time" in Titus 1:3. We pray and ask God to give or do something. Then in the fullness of time or at the proper time, He gives or does it.

Here's an example of what I mean. I once asked God to give a niece of mine a teaching position and He did – five years later. I realize now, after talking with her about it, why it took Him so long to do it. She had two serious character flaws that were unknown to me and that would likely have gotten her fired. And once she was fired, she would never have gotten a teaching position again. So, God waited until she matured and overcame those flaws to answer my prayer.

The bottom line is this. Because my niece needed to change, God didn't answer my prayer when I prayed it. But in the fullness of time, after she changed, He answered it.

CONCLUSION

That then is what God's delays are. They're maturings of the person and of the time. When the person and time are right, He answers our prayers. That means that God's delays are not necessarily God's denials. He may not be saying "no" to you. He may be saying "yes, but wait" instead.

So, wait. Make His timing your own. Want His timing as much as you want His resources. You're safe in wanting that and here's why in closing. It's because God is never too fast or slow!