

Lesson Eight

Patience – Know when ripe, don't pick too early, Large crop every other year wait for His timing

Some days I just wake up wanting pancakes. And in late July after the strawberries and blueberries are long gone, my mouth starts watering for fresh blackberries. Depending on the weather, the blackberries might not be ready yet. If we've had a cool dry summer, they may need another week or so. I can pick them early, but the flavor won't be as sweet. They may be too seedy or not fit to eat at all. There's also the cyclical nature of how the blackberries themselves reproduce. You see, blackberries grow on canes and the first year a cane sprouts from the ground, it produces very few blackberries because it's spending its energy on growth and maturity. Even though our bramble has been there for years, the canes go through a period of growth and renewal. During this time, the amount of berries produced will not be as high as the year following. So even though I may have a craving for fresh syrup and jam, there just may not be enough berries to fill all my sweets-centered dreams.

Abram and Sarai were promised a son, an heir to the great wealth the Lord had given to them. God had also promised that He would build a great nation from Abram and his descendants and the entire world would be blessed through him. But Sarai was old, well past the age of child-bearing, and to their human understanding God's promise seemed impossible. Sarai even blames God for needing to solve this problem for Him in Genesis 16:2 when she says, "The Lord has kept me from having children." So Sarai devised a plan to help

God keep his promise to Abram. She tells Abram to sleep with her servant girl, Hagar, so they can build a family through her. After Hagar conceives, the real trouble begins and the effects of this decision are still felt within the Middle East today.

There are similar poor choices made throughout the Bible, decisions made without consulting the Lord. Genesis 19:30-38 tells the tale of Lot's daughters who had the mistaken belief that the only way to preserve their family line was through incest with their father.

The Israelites made a treaty with the Gibeonites because they did not consult the Lord (Joshua 9:14) in direct violation of God's command to them in Deuteronomy 7:1-6.

Each situation was not entered into with the intent of direct disobedience to God; however, they illustrate the influence of pride in our lives. Sarai assumed she needed to solve God's problem of an unfulfilled promise. She believed her solution was something God had not considered. God needed her help to solve the dilemma. Lot's daughters saw the problem of the extinguishment of their father's line and instead of trusting in the Lord to provide husbands for them, they did what was best in their own eyes believing they found a solution unknown to God. The Israelites examined the Gibeonites' evidence and felt they were qualified to make the decision to enter into a treaty. They did not need God's advice; they could handle their own affairs.

In all of these instances, there are consequences to the poor decision made. Ishmael's descendants became nations that lived in hostility toward all the tribes related to them (Genesis 25:18), and Lot's daughters' sons became the nations of Moab and the Ammonites.

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt your prayers were unanswered and all of your tears were unnoticed by God? Has His silence pushed you to the brink of despair? To us, immediate resolution is needed and the lack of God's intervention can seem to be an invitation for us to rush in and save the day. Psalm 46:10 implores us to "be still, and know that I am God." As we grow closer to Him and learn His Word, we will begin to recognize His voice (John 10:27) and it becomes easier to discern where God wants us to get involved and where He wants us to wait. I've heard that God is never late, but He seldom misses opportunities to be early! It is in these periods of waiting that God works miracles. The hardest thing for me to remember is that the tough situation I may find myself in isn't always about me. God may want me to delay action while He works in the minds and hearts of others. God knows that I am anxiously waiting in the wings as the dutiful understudy ready to hit the spotlight. But the situation may be focused on someone else, someone who needs to call out to Him in their distress. If I rush in too early, they may not know He sent me. They may not recognize that God provided me as an answer to their prayer if my intervention comes before they have a chance to submit their request. God may need to bring another crisis in the person's life and put roadblocks in my way to prevent my interference. Saul/Paul had been suffering from blindness for three days after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus when God sends Ananias to cure him (Acts 10-19). Saul/Paul fasted during that time while Jesus worked on his heart and in his mind. Maybe that's how long it took Paul to cry out to Jesus that he needed Him. Ananias arrives just in time to assure Paul his prayers have been answered and he is forgiven.

Another area where I need to frequently rein in my enthusiasm is volunteering. As a child in class, my hand was the first to shoot up in response to a question. As an adult, not much has changed. When the church expresses a need, I am immediately looking for the sign-up sheet. As you can imagine, my eagerness to help has caused me to overcommit. I have frequently had to disappoint others by admitting I am overextended. The cure for me finally came when I realized that by committing to help in an area that I was later unable to fulfill, I had actually robbed someone else of the blessing to get involved. Someone who may have been more talented in the area needed and would have lived up to the commitment.

Dear sister, God does not need our help. This does not mean that He does not have work for us to do, but it is in His timing and not ours. Those of us who have been forgiven much are eager to show Him our gratitude. Sometimes waiting for the call can be the hardest part.

Assessment and Further Thought

Are there instances in your life where your pride gets in the way of waiting for the Lord?

Do you feel compelled to help God solve a difficult problem in your life?

Why do you think your solution is better than God's?

Do you most relate to the eager understudy or the reluctant advisor? Are there ways you can incorporate aspects of both to become a patient, but enthusiastic helper?

Verses for study and encouragement

Psalm 130:5-6 - I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

Ephesians 4:15 - Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church

2Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Galatians 6:1-2 - Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ²Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Prayer time

Dear Jesus, please help me to wait for You and Your timing before rushing in with my own solutions. Save me from pride that deceives me into thinking that You need my help to devise an answer to a problem. Prevent me from intervening too soon. Remind me to seek You and Your counsel before I intrude in a situation and possibly make matters worse. Help me to curb my good intentions until I have sought and receive Your direction. Amen

Additional items for prayer