

ENRICHING DEVOTIONALS  
FROM THE PSALMS

ENTERING  
HIS  
COURTS

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ENTERING HIS COURTS:

*Enriching Devotionals from the Psalms*

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## INTRODUCTION

It was early in 2010 that I undertook one of the most enriching Bible studies I have ever done. That's when I tackled the nearly 2,500 verses of the book of Psalms. I began by going over each verse in at least a dozen translations and paraphrases and writing out those which stated the verse in the most compelling manner. This took nearly six months to accomplish.<sup>1</sup> Next I went all the way back to the beginning—Psalm One—and studied each psalm verse by verse through different commentaries, most notably Charles Spurgeon's excellent work, *The Treasury of David*.

The accumulative effect on my spiritual life was tremendous. There were many days that it seemed as if the very life of God was flowing into my inner being through the rich text I was studying. Some days I would literally spend hours in it—unable to pull myself away from it! It truly left a deep imprint upon my soul.

In my Bible study entitled, *He Leads Me Beside Still Waters*, I wrote the following regarding the book of Psalms:

Through it all one cannot escape the fact that the book of Psalms is an utterly candid compilation of the mental struggles of these different men; of their varying seasons of joy, anguish and despair; of their highest hopes and deepest

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<sup>1</sup> This compilation of various translations for each verse is available as *Selah! The Book of Psalms in the Richest Translations*.

fears; of their conflicts or even failures with sin; of their disgust for self-serving flatterers and their compassion for the needy; and most of all, for their overarching appreciation for the Lord's sovereign involvement in their lives.

The book of Psalms is a treasure chest of the most profound interactions between pious men and a loving, caring God. David, its most prominent writer, was called a man after God's own heart. What could be more beneficial and rewarding than to contemplate his times of intimate communion with a holy God?

As I soaked in this marvelous compilation of ancient prayers through various translations, I found myself uncovering new treasures at an astonishing rate. It's no wonder I had such a difficult time withdrawing from my study time—the thought that I might discover a new nugget of truth in the next verse kept me diligently searching.

I became so blessed by these many nuggets of truth that I began writing them down. I did this for the sheer enjoyment of it and never thought about it going any further than that. But someone suggested the truths I had discovered could make a wonderful devotional for other people. Well, I'll let you be the judge of that. All I can say is that I was greatly blessed in this undertaking and I hope you will be as well!

As you read the selections, you'll find at the end of each day several thought provoking and heart searching questions. I encourage you to take time to pray and meditate over these, allowing God to search your heart and to listening for His response to you. There are also pages inserted for you to write down your own thoughts and perhaps even prayers of commitment to Him. My prayer is that you will find yourself truly enriched by *Entering His Courts*.

*WEEK*

*ONE*

## *Week One: MONDAY*

### **They are Called “Devotions” For A Reason**

*“My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises! Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.” (Psalm 57:7-8)*

**D**avid was running for his life when he penned these words. It’s possible he felt that he needed to rouse himself up to maintain his devotional life, but his story clearly shows that for years before this he had already maintained a solid time with God every morning.

Generally speaking, American Christians have been able to get by without much of a connection with God. Life has been good in the United States. But I believe those days are coming to an end. When calamity is striking from every side is *not* the time to attempt to establish a solid devotional life. When times of distress come, a person who is not accustomed to a solid connection with God is going to come unraveled. It is so much wiser to get one’s devotional life in order during times of peace than to attempt to do it when “all hell is breaking loose” against believers!

The word “steadfast” in Psalm 57:7 (Heb. *kun*) is rendered “fixed” in some translations. This is a man who had determined—above all else—to have a time of worship, praise and prayer with God every morning. This kind of commitment is the key to establishing an important habit like prayer. In a certain sense, it is very comparable to quitting smoking. Making the resolute decision to stop the habit is half the battle. What makes the experience so unnecessarily miserable is when the person constantly waffles back and forth with his commitment.

So it is with establishing a prayer life. Once a person has made a firm consecration to doing this—no matter what distractions the enemy might throw at him—he is halfway there! Notice David’s commitment: “I will sing... I will sing praises!... I will awaken the dawn.” I will! I will! I will! He expressed this same sentiment on another occasion when he said, “In the morning, O Lord, *You will* hear my voice; in the morning *I will* order *my prayer* to You and *eagerly* watch.” (Psalm 5:3)

It will take this kind of resolute determination to get one’s prayer life established. Someone once said, “Satan laughs at our toiling, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”<sup>1</sup> It is for this very reason that he and his minions do their utmost to discourage believers from praying. Watchman Nee wrote: “When we pray with such prayer, our prayer will shake up hell and affect Satan. For this reason, Satan will rise up to hinder such prayer. All prayers which come from God touch the powers of darkness. Here involves spiritual warfare. Perhaps our physical bodies, our families, or whatever pertains to us will be attacked by Satan. For whenever there is such prayer, it calls for Satanic assault. The enemy so attacks in order that our prayer might be discontinued.”<sup>2</sup>

We must be determined to overcome all the distractions and attacks the enemy will hurl our way. Once they see that you consider your devotional time to be inviolable, they will grow discouraged and give up.

Yes, there is a reason they are called “devotions.” You must be truly devoted to Christ to stay faithful to your daily devotions.

#### AND HOW ABOUT YOU?

- *Have you made this kind of commitment to spending quality time with the Lord? Do you faithfully seek His face every morning?*
- *Can He count on you to intercede for the lost?*
- *Does your daily life reveal a true devotion to Christ?*



*Week One: TUESDAY*

## **Preparing Your Heart**

*“My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises! Awake, my glory! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.” (Psalm 57:7-8)*

**I**n yesterday’s devotional, we took a brief glimpse at the word “steadfast” in Psalm 57:7 (Heb. *kun*). This Hebraic term is also used in the sense of preparation. For instance, of the Israelites who wandered in the wilderness with Moses for forty years, the psalmist said that they were “A stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart and whose spirit was not faithful to God.” (Psalm 78:8) In contradistinction to this wayward generation, King Hezekiah would later pronounce a special blessing on a certain group of Israelites: “May the good Lord pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God...” (2 Chronicles 30:18-19)

Elsewhere I wrote the following:

“The important position the heart occupies within a person can be seen in Scripture... People are told to ‘rend’ their hearts (Joel 2:12), seek God with all their hearts (Psalm 119:2, 10), and pour out their hearts before Him. (Psalm 62:8) We are told of those who deceive their own hearts (James 1:26), backslide in heart (Proverbs 14:14), spurn reproof in their hearts (Proverbs 5:12), and regard wickedness in their hearts. (Psalm 66:18) It’s no wonder then that we are admonished to, ‘Keep thy heart with

all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.’ (Proverbs 4:23 KJV) Surely it is true: ‘the inward thought and the heart of a man are deep.’” (Psalm 64:6)

Preparing one’s heart to meet with the Lord is an important aspect of maintaining a quality devotional life. The truth is that the heart of man has a natural propensity toward sin, selfishness and pride. Spiritual pursuits do not come naturally to us. We must prepare our hearts to seek the Lord.

The other interesting word found in today’s passage of Scripture is “glory.” Why would David be speaking of his own glory? The Hebrew word literally means “weighty.” From there it is used to describe someone of substantial character. Of course, this term is rightly used repeatedly of the Lord. I believe Spurgeon captured the right idea when he said the following about this phrase: “Let the noblest powers of my nature bestir themselves: the intellect which conceives thought, the tongue which expresses it, and the inspired imagination which beautifies it - let all be on the alert now that the hour for praise has come.”<sup>3</sup>

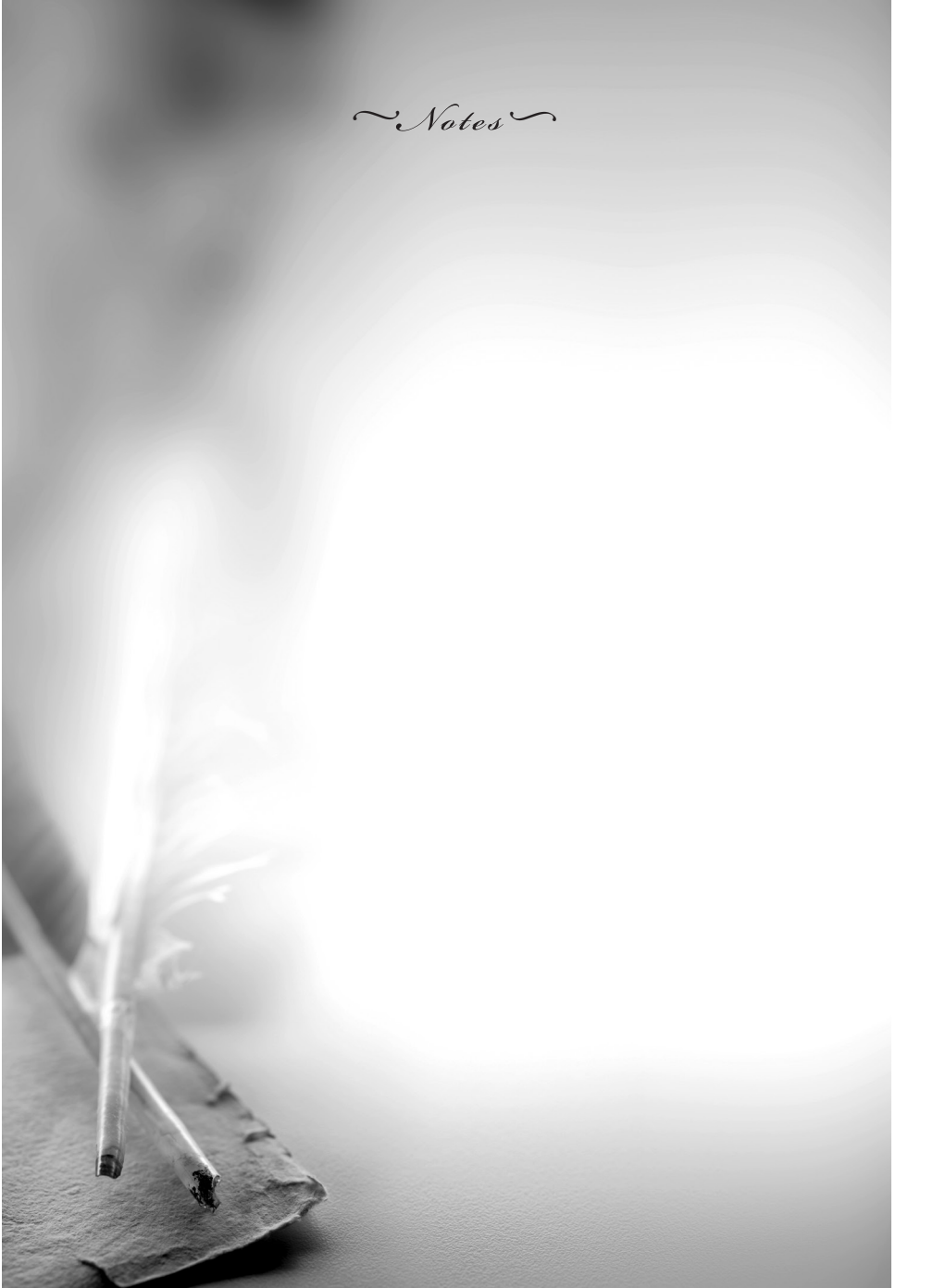
#### **AND HOW ABOUT YOU?**

- *Do you consider your relationship with God valuable enough to prepare your heart to meet with Him?*
- *Does He mean enough to you that you will gather together all of your most noble aspirations to praise His name?*

Notes



*Notes*



*Week One: WEDNESDAY*

## **Stern Correction**

*“The Lord has corrected me sternly, but He has not abandoned me to destruction.” (Psalm 118:18 Har)*

**I**t should go without saying that the Lord handles newborn Christians with “kid gloves.” They cannot handle much so the Lord tends to shield them from overwhelming difficulties. A boxing manager would not throw his new fighter into the ring with a seasoned veteran; a mother would not send her toddler across a busy thoroughfare by himself; and the Lord doesn’t put His baby believers into situations they are not yet prepared to handle.

However, correction is as much a part of the Christian maturing process as it is for the young child. Solomon could have been talking about the Lord’s dealings with His people when he wrote, “If you refuse to discipline your son, it proves you don’t love him; for if you love him, you will be prompt to punish him... A youngster’s heart is filled with rebellion, but punishment will drive it out of him.” (Proverbs 13:24; 22:15 LB) And, as the writer of Hebrews later pointed out: “If God doesn’t punish you when you need it, as other fathers punish their sons, then it means that you aren’t really God’s son at all—that you don’t really belong in his family.” (Hebrews 12:8 LB)

As members of a race of rebels, there is much within us that must be corrected. If we are left to ourselves, we will nearly always tend to think, speak and act in a way that characterizes the fallen nature. The very

fact that it comes so “naturally” points out the need to have our mindset continually adjusted. The Lord uses different tools to accomplish this, but, by and large, the most effective means He has to help us to acquire the mind of Christ is through various forms of discipline.

There are those times that we are disciplined because we have committed some outright sin. But just as often, we must “go out to the woodshed” simply as part of the maturing process. Sometimes those bouts of discipline can be very severe. While we fragile humans can’t handle too much adversity, the Lord knows far better than we how powerfully effective such times are in changing our natures. There are some times when the Vinekeeper must prune the branch all the way back to the Vine. And yet, it is this very kind of severe pruning that always produces the most bountiful crop.

While there are those occasions when the discipline seems to be so overwhelming that the person despairs of life itself, there is an inherent promise found in the psalmist’s testimony: “Yes, the Lord has disciplined me severely, *but* He will never allow me to be destroyed by it.” In fact, it could easily be argued that His desire to save us from destruction is one of His primary reasons for allowing the discipline in the first place.

As difficult as the Christian life can be at times, what is the alternative? I would rather the Lord thrash me to an inch of my life; nay, I would rather He allowed me to die a violent death, than for Him to allow me to destroy myself through sin and rebellion.

#### AND HOW ABOUT YOU?

- *How do you respond when the Lord brings correction into your life?*
- *Have you learned to see the value of it, or are you still at an early developmental stage of resisting the process?*

*Week One: THURSDAY*

## **A Blueprint For Worship**

*“O God in Zion, we wait before you in silent praise, and thus fulfill our vow. How greatly to be envied are those you have chosen to come and live with you within the holy tabernacle courts! What joys await us among all the good things there.” (Psalm 65:1, 4 LB)*

It's Sunday morning and the home of Jim and Janet Smith is a picture of bustling activity. Having gotten ready for church, they turn their attention to the needs of their three children—getting them showered, dressed and fed. Eventually, the family is making their harried drive to church. The scene at their house of worship is amazingly similar to home. Kids are running around the foyer, playing and frolicking. Women huddle together gabbing about their kids, while their husbands discuss the plight of their favorite sports team. The music emerging from the sanctuary brings the conversations to a forced conclusion and, having retrieved their children, they make their way to their seats.

Allow me to present for your consideration a typical Sunday morning service at Pure Life Ministries (PLM). The seventy or so men in the residential program are required to be in the sanctuary 30-60 minutes before the service begins. There they sit in absolute silence until the worship service begins. This routine is a wonderful discipline to men who have allowed their lives to spiral out of control to the point of engaging in illicit sexual behavior. To be required to resist the natural tendency to talk, joke and laugh before service is an entirely new discipline for these men.

While this restraint provides its own benefits, there are other reasons for this practice. First, there is a great gulf between singing hymns and choruses by rote and truly worshiping God from the heart. “God is spirit,” said Jesus, “and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24) If we are going to go through the motions of worshiping God, we *must* do it in the Spirit (as opposed to the flesh) and in truth (as opposed to contrived and insincere devotion). Realistically, the only way such worship can take place is for a person to quiet himself; to subdue his flesh so that he can be properly prepared to offer sincere, Spirit-led worship to God.

Secondly, it is proper to approach the Most High God with a reverential attitude. I believe that one of the reasons sin is running rampant in the Church is that people have increasingly become familiar with holy things. It’s not uncommon anymore to hear the Lord spoken of disrespectfully, *e.g.*, “Jesus is my bud!” How much better it is to approach God with the holy fear that befits the situation.

Having been in at least a thousand such meetings at PLM, I can testify that when we begin to worship the Lord, it is real, it is meaningful and it is sincere. Visitors are amazed at how God’s presence is so tangible in the Pure Life chapel. Is it because we are better than others? No, I believe it simply because we approach the Lord with the respect He is due.

#### **AND HOW ABOUT YOU?**

- *Can you see how it would help your walk with God to quiet yourself before going to church?*
- *Are you willing to commit yourself to approaching future worship times with a quiet spirit, a loving heart and a reverential attitude?*



## *Week One: FRIDAY*

### **Secret of the Lord**

*“Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him. With them alone he shares the secrets of his promises.”*

*(Psalm 25:14 LB)*

For those who understand ancient Middle Eastern culture, there is a clear picture being presented in David’s statement above. Before we present that image, we must briefly consider the life of royalty.

Typically speaking, the common man would only see his nation’s king in controlled settings. It is possible that he would catch a glimpse of him as he traveled through town surrounded by his aides and bodyguards, but he would be more likely to see the king on his throne. Everything surrounding him in that regal setting is meant to convey the idea that this is a special person. The last thing the king’s assistants want is for the commoners to enter that room and see the king on their own level.

The point in all this pageantry is to exalt the king—not so he can somehow feel better about himself—but so his subjects will respect his authority. The average citizen will never see his king under circumstances other than these.

However, every monarch has those close confidants to whom he can share his heart. He has his “joint chiefs of staff,” the military leaders whose job it is to defend the country. He also has economic advisors, political consultants and those who specialize in foreign affairs. Each of these people have access to the nation’s leader that the common man will never enjoy.

But then there are those with whom the king shares his deepest secrets: his perspectives and attitudes about other leaders, the long-range purposes he holds for his kingdom, the way he handles the great variety of issues of the day he faces.

This is also true in God's kingdom. He too has His favorites. However, there is an amazing difference between an earthly leader and the Almighty. While a president or king confides in old friends and gifted advisors, God opens the door for any commoner to enter that level of intimacy with Him. He leaves it completely up to us: we can have as little or as much fellowship with Him as we desire.

Another difference in the two situations is the quality of people desiring attendance in these two throne rooms. One of the greatest challenges an earthly monarch faces is the difficulty in discerning a person's motives for wanting to be near him. Too often, crafty, ambitious men adept at using flattery and feigned devotion are the ones to gain a position of trust.

This is not the case with our God! Not only does He have personal knowledge of each and every citizen in His kingdom, but He can see past a person's outward show and right into the very motives and attitudes of the heart. As the Lord told Samuel, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

So God can flawlessly choose the ones with whom He wishes to share that level of intimacy. Not only can we rest assured that only those who belong in such a place of honor will be awarded it, but that door is open to all! Every citizen of God's kingdom has the right to such a position if he will only prove it through his reverential devotion to the Lord.

AND HOW ABOUT YOU?

- *Where do you see yourself in God's circle of friends?*
- *Are you willing to consecrate yourself to His kingdom in such a way that He could call you friend?*

*Notes*



## Week One: SATURDAY

### The Shepherd

*“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.” (Psalm 23:1-3)*

**T**he beautiful passage above presents two persons: the Shepherd/- Lord and the sheep/believer.

Jesus Christ would later use and amplify this illustration to describe His role with His followers. “I am the good shepherd,” He said, “and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father...” (John 10:14-15) For Jesus to say that His followers would know Him in the same way the Father does is an extraordinary statement. There is nothing superficial in their relationship. It speaks of a deep intimacy and a meaningful submission of One to the Other.

This is the very characteristic that stands out in the respective roles of the Shepherd and sheep in the Psalm 23 illustration. The Shepherd clearly takes the leading role in the relationship. He leads His sheep into green pastures, alongside quiet waters, down paths of righteousness and ultimately, “through the valley of the shadow of death.”

What makes these people follow Him? Is it a religious system they are following? Is it a popular movement they are joining? Are they following a set of rules in the hopes of avoiding hell and going to heaven? No! It is a Person they are following!

Jesus offers a clear explanation of their motivation: “the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not

follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” (John 10:4-5)

Christians don't obey biblical commandments so that they might be considered good enough to inherit God's kingdom. They obey the Lord because they truly love Him and want to please Him. They follow Him, they obey Him and they emulate Him. They have a spiritual connection to God that enables them to discern His will for their daily lives. This is how they know when it is time to get refreshed by the quiet waters or when it is time to hit the trail again!

Psalms 23 offers the different aspects of the believer's life. First and foremost, he must have regular, meaningful times sitting in God's presence. Eating the lush vegetation represents the place Scriptures hold in our lives. The word for “green pastures” (Heb. *deshe*) literally refers to the tender shoots of new grass. It is the most delectable food a sheep can find. This is an apt description of what the Word of God is to the hungry believer.

The “quiet waters” describes the refreshment that comes from spending quality time in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Believers facing the conflicts of life sense their great need for the revitalizing effects of prayer.

The time spent with God is what enables the believer to get back on the path of righteousness. Sometimes it is a lonely path. It is a path fraught with dangers. Around any bend one might encounter some alluring temptress or some savage assault. But as he follows his great Shepherd, he will always have the assurance of being kept on the “straight and narrow.”

#### AND HOW ABOUT YOU?

- *Are you allowing the Lord to lead and direct the affairs of your life, the decisions you make, the direction you are going? Or are you the master of your own ship?*
- *Do you spend quality time with Him so that you can get His leading on your life?*

## *Week One: SUNDAY*

### **God's Waiter**

*"Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He is gracious to us." (Psalm 123:2)*

In 1995 a friend and I were traveling throughout Turkey visiting the ruins of various New Testament cities. One day we stopped for lunch in a Turkish town lying adjacent to ancient Thyatira. Being the only guests in the restaurant that day, our young waiter was able to focus all of his attention upon our needs. I have never seen such a display of attentiveness in all my many years of dining out. He stood at a respectful distance away, but there was no question that he was utterly alert to the slightest gesture we might make to signal some need.

If this can be true with a modern waiter, how much more so for a servant in biblical times whose very life depended upon his master's favor. It is this vivid picture the psalmist paints to convey to his readers what it means to wait upon the Lord.

God has created a dynamic in life whereby any human who so wishes may enter into a covenantal relationship with Him. This pact holds benefits and responsibilities for both parties.

As our master, the Lord has a right to expect our total dedication to His cause, His great purposes and His specific wishes. As His servants, we are expected to fulfill His commands, obey Him implicitly and give Him heartfelt devotion. This relationship is far deeper and more comprehensive

than the superficial obedience that pseudo-Christianity suggests. We don't serve a master who lives in a faraway place; one who only expects us to perform our duties nominally. No, we live in the Master's home and are in His presence continually.

This Turkish waiter was one of the few I have ever seen who actually live up to the name of their occupation. He waited. He waited for us to convey our wishes. He waited with the utmost attentiveness. What's more, he waited with an attitude of great respect. This is the proper attitude we should hold of the Most High God.

To "wait upon the Lord" has the sense of quietly sitting in expectation of His word. As the Master, the Lord has the right to choose when He wishes something to be done. As our Commander, He has the right to pick the right time to tell us to move forward. As our heavenly Father, He has the right to respond to our requests in His timing. If we will "watch and pray," God will direct us, lead us and fulfill all of our petitions; and His timing will be perfect. "Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes shall find so doing!" (Matthew 24:46 WNT)

#### **AND HOW ABOUT YOU?**

- *Do you see yourself as God's "waiter?" Or do you see Him as being the one who should serve you?*
- *Have you learned to truly wait on the Lord?*

END OF EXCERPT