Waiting is unpopular, and usually considered a waste of time. “For many people, waiting is an awful desert between where they are and where they want to go.” (Henri Nouwen) Nouwen paints a picture where some well-meaning soul is trying to quietly wait on God, and where bystanders are complaining, “Get going! Show you are able to make a difference! Don’t just sit there…!” We live in a culture whose not-so-subtle assumption is that if you’re not producing – if you’re not doing something – that you’re useless. The corollary is that those who accomplish the most are the best and most valuable among us. It seems fairly obvious.

But from a Christian point of view, it’s messed up. In fact, Simone Weil makes waiting patiently in expectation “… the foundation of the spiritual life.” And many others agree with her.

So what would it mean to “wait patiently”, or in the words of the Psalmist, to “wait quietly before God?” In his article A Spirituality of Waiting*, Henri Nouwen answers this question by speaking about “patient waiting” as an approach to each day – waiting as a lifestyle:

**Waiting means living as though the moment is full, not empty.**

Nouwen challenges us “to be present fully to the moment” – the moment we’re in right now. We do this rather than dismissing it as insignificant or “empty.” It’s our nature to think God will do “the real thing” somewhere else, at some other time, or for someone else. In “active waiting” I trust that my moment is pregnant with possibility because God is ever at work. I stay where I am “… and live the situation out to the full in the belief that something hidden there will manifest itself….” The focus is on the present. Believing something can happen there – and looking for that – waiting for that.

This is more than “mindfulness.” It’s trusting that God is still at work creating, redeeming, sanctifying and revealing himself. It’s me learning to regularly ask myself, “What might God want to do right here, right now? The moment as I see it might be boring, frightening, confusing or just tediously routine – but what might God want to do in it anyway? Let me be open to that.

**Waiting means giving up all my [necessarily futile] attempts to control my world.**

In waiting we give up all our attempts to control our future. Instead of trying to manage everything so that (for instance) “This day will go as it should.”, we release everything to him, knowing that he has something better for us. (It’s not that we can control anything anyway, but that doesn’t keep us from trying, and we need to stop that.) As we wait this way, we take our rightful place as creatures, and as God’s children (loved and privileged but not his adviser). We leave what’s happening now, and what will happen later, to him – the one who loves us and works in all things for our good. Whatever he wants. We wait on him in the moment. He acts in
the moment. We accept what he does and embrace it. Isn’t this what the psalmist means when he says, “This is the day that he Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.”? Suddenly instead of being the inspiration for a Vacation Bible School ditty, the verse reflects a “very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.” Our days and our moments are full with possibility, because God is in control. Rather than fighting him for control, we can “be glad” and wait to see what things he will do – things which are “infinitely more than we might ask or think.”

**Waiting means practicing hope and letting go of wishes.**

If “waiting” is the foundation of the spiritual life (Weil), then hope is the foundation of waiting. Waiting rests upon hope. This is evident, for example, in Psalm 62:5, “Let all that I am wait quietly before God, *for my hope is in him.*” After 166 pages of a study on waiting, Ben Patterson concludes, “More basic than patience or perseverance are humility and hope.” In this regard, Nouwen warns against wishing. We wish for better weather, that our pain would stop, etc. We wish and wait because “We want the future to go in a very specific direction…”. Instead, Nouwen commends Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, [Simeon and Anna] to us as examples of how we must hope and not merely wish. “Hope is trusting that something will be fulfilled, but fulfilled according to the promises and not just according to our wishes.” Immediately after this, Nouwen says, “I have found it very important in my own life, to let go of my wishes and start hoping.” The statement almost seems comical, like an ironic Facebook post by a Christian hipster. But it’s not. It’s neither comical nor ironic. What Nouwen speaks of is very difficult, and very important.

The moment is full with possibility. We refuse to think that it’s best if we can control it. We let God do what he will do – avoiding any drama we might otherwise create, while we rest upon what is certain, true, and wonderful. In all this – in our difficult, counter intuitive, radical “waiting project”, we experience more rather than less of what God has for us as we cast aside our useless wishes, and hope in his promises.

Jesus suggested that each day we pray “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Why then, shouldn’t we expect kingdom power to enter the moments and circumstances of our “common” days “on earth?” Why wouldn’t the moments be full, when we know that God is answering this and innumerable other prayers of his people? Why wouldn’t the moments be full when his work of redeeming this planet of ours – and its people – continues? The Kingdom Of Promise is yet to come, but at the same time continues to arrive “in our midst” – on *this* day, in *this* place – where I am. And so I wait.

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*All quotes are from Henri Nouwen, “A Spirituality of Waiting” unless otherwise noted.

From http://downwardmobility.net/2013/02/25/henri-nouwen-waiting-on-god-as-a-lifestyle/