

A LIFE ABIDING

Waiting Well and Experiencing Abundance in Christ



GWEN SELLERS

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

It all started on Valentine's Day—February 14, 2023. Of course, “it” started before then, but that's the day we moved my dad into the nursing home. It was also the day I realized I wasn't using my strengths, and that was a huge problem. Thus began a journey of exploration, discovery, renewed passion, and a steadily growing desire to help other women know God, love him, wait faithfully on him, and experience a life of abiding in all its fullness.

Fittingly, one year later on February 15, I was invited to give a devotion on the theme of waiting to a group of women, which prompted thoughts of something more. That “something more” is the book you are holding in your hands today.

Ultimately, this book is an expression of my love for God because of his great love for me. It's also an expression of love for his people. My prayer is that this book will prompt you to know how deeply loved you are by God, to faithfully abide in him by the power of the Holy Spirit, to experience true fullness of life in Christ, and to yearn all the more deeply for final redemption.

*Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!*
PSALM 27:14

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt like you were waiting on everything and everyone? That describes my situation in 2023—2024. My dad was nearing the end of his journey with Huntington’s disease, and my place of work was going through organizational growing pains. God was stirring my mind and heart, pointing out burnout, reigniting former passions, and clarifying my purpose. I knew change was coming, but I didn’t know what it would look like or when it would happen.

To top it all off, it seemed like everywhere I went this theme of waiting kept coming up. My church did a “year of sabbath” in which we intentionally cleared the church calendar every seven weeks, except for an all-church worship night and a unique weekend service. This was to provide space to pause, connect with God in a different way, and connect with one another. The theme of waiting came up in several sermon series throughout the year as well as in podcasts and conversations with others in similar liminal spaces. Then I was asked to talk at a women’s group on their yearly theme—resting, trusting, waiting—using Psalm 27:14 as the foundation. Do you think God was communicating something to me?

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In his faithfulness, God refined that theme. It wasn't just about waiting, but about *abiding*. That word took on a special significance for me during an activity in a class I was taking. Then, as often seems to be the case, it just kept coming up.

Meanwhile, God was stirring my passion for leadership, design, and abundant life. Seeing my life of waiting within the grander narrative of redemptive history gave it more meaning. I began to see how I was not waiting for a particular end. Rather, life is about abiding in God—faithfully seeking his presence, longing for the fullness of his promises, and living fully present. I wanted to learn how to yearn for the completion of God's plan while being fully present in the ways he was currently working out that plan. In short, I wanted to abide—both in God and in his current plans for me. I wanted to be like the people in Hebrews 11 who lived by faith, hoping for better things, all the while obediently living out their part of God's plan.

This book will not jump too quickly or dive too deeply into talk of abundant life because God is teaching me to linger. To truly abide, we need to truly wait. Yes, this world is filled with goodness. There is abundance in Christ. Living out God's design of us, both by living his ways in general and by stewarding the unique things he has entrusted to us, touches the deepest longings of our hearts. There is rest and filling, even in this in-between as we await eternity. Yet, all too often, I (and perhaps you too) am eager to put a bow on things, to look at the joy without attending to the longings, to think only of completion instead of waiting. It may feel comfortable in the moment, but I'm finding that all it does is diminish our longings and dampen our appreciation of the depth of God's grace. It prompts us to settle for the things of the world as if they are the substance instead of the shadow. So, let's linger in the waiting and do the work of abiding. There is incredible joy in it, but we first need to simply be.

That is my hope for you in reading this book. I would love

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to sit down with you over coffee—to hear your story, to know the longings of your heart, to see the unique design God gave you, to share in your grief over the world’s brokenness, to rejoice with you in the glimpses of beauty and restoration, to long for final fullness, and to encourage you to confidently live a life of abiding in God. This life matters. *You matter*. God designed you for a purpose and placed you right where you are. He calls you to abide in him and live for him. Yes, it involves deep pain. And, yes, it involves incredible joy! We get to experience all of it, resting in him, waiting for him, and abiding in him as we abide in this life he has entrusted to us.

CHAPTER 1

PREPARATION FOR THE
JOURNEY



How are you at waiting? If you're anything like me, not always great. Something as simple as the grocery store reveals this to me. No matter how intellectually certain I am that the self-checkout lane takes longer than a regular lane when I have produce or coupons, I keep using it. For some reason, it just feels better to not wait—that is until I have to wait for the attendant to help me with whatever problem I run into! Am I the only one for whom this struggle is real?

While I could grow in my daily patience, that is not the type of waiting I have in mind when asking the question. I'm thinking more about things like relational reconciliation, physical healing, direction for a new life season, an unsaved loved one to come to know the Lord, deliverance from a challenging circumstance, a longing to be emotionally fulfilled, and even spiritual growth. Really, I'm thinking about eternity. What is it like for you to live in this time of in-between, where Christ has come and yet we await his return, where redemption is real and yet the fullness of God's plans is not yet complete? Do you find your soul longing for something you can't quite describe? We desire so much, but we often find ourselves waiting.

Waiting is hard! It comes with all sorts of emotions and reactions. Perhaps you feel alone, anxious, uncertain, tempted to force things, willing to settle for less, confused, frustrated, or helpless. In contrast, maybe you feel hopeful and excited to see what God will do. Perhaps it's a time when you are so dependent on God that you're feeling spiritually alive and growing. Or maybe you feel all of those things at once. I know I have.

What are we to do with all this waiting? If you read the introduction or even just the title of the book, you know what I think the answer is: abide. If you didn't read the introduction, go back; I'll wait ...

So, what is abiding? How is it related to waiting? And why does it matter? This is the journey I'd like you to join me on. It's a journey of discovering God's redemptive plan for all of humanity and how your life fits into it. Really, it's a journey of discovering God, of learning to dwell with him in the present and yearning for the time when "the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God" (Revelation 21:3). It's a journey of grief, longing, joy, hopefulness, peace, and even exhilaration.

DEFINITIONS

Before we begin our journey, let's establish a few basics. Every good conversation is built on a foundation of shared understanding. So, let's start with some definitions. When defining words in the Bible, it's useful to look at the original Hebrew and Greek roots.

Wait

Psalms 27:14 is a new favorite verse for me; it's the one that comes to mind when I think about waiting. It says, "Wait for

the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" Isn't that so encouraging?

The Hebrew root word for *wait* in this verse is *qāwâh*. Strong's defines it partially with words like "expect, look, patiently, tarry, wait (for, on, upon)."¹ Romans 8:25 uses the Greek root word *apekdéchomai*, which Strong's defines with words like, "to expect fully; look (wait) for."²

When we're talking about waiting, we're talking about eager expectation. It requires patience, but it is something we are actively looking for. My nephews are a wonderful illustration of this concept. We have a family vacation about once a year, and it seems like every time I'm with them I learn something about God. One year, at about age five, one of my nephews wanted to put on a show for any of the adults willing to watch. We told him we'd be out in about twenty minutes. He happily ran outside to set up, eager to entertain us, and more than willing to wait. He did not get distracted, nor did he leave his stage until we came. Why would a child wait that long? Because he knew we would be true to our word, and he genuinely wanted to share his skill with us. So, he patiently looked for us to come.

Another time, when another nephew was three, he wanted to go outside to wait for his dad to come home from work. Again, the wait would be about twenty minutes. I was incredulous that a toddler could make it that long, but he sat on the sidewalk, happy as could be, looking for his dad's car to come down the road. Why? Because he knew his dad would come and that he would get a special ride in the car.

1. "H6960 - qāwâ - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (esv)." Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6960/esv/wlc/0-1/>.

2. "G553 - apekdéchomai - Strong's Greek Lexicon (esv)." Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g553/esv/mgnt/0-1/>.

He looked patiently for his dad because he wanted to be with him, and he knew he would come.

This is what I have in mind when talking about waiting on God. We are eagerly looking for him because we know he is true to his word and that he comes. We wait with patience and expectation.

Abide

Psalms 91:1 says, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." The Hebrew root word linked to *abide* in this verse is *yāshab*, which Strong's defines, in part, as, "to sit down; by implication, to dwell, to remain; to settle, to marry" and gives words like "abide, continue, dwell, ease self, endure, establish, habitation, haunt, inhabit, remain, return, tarry."³

John 15:1–17 is one of my favorite passages, and the word *abide*, from the Greek *ménō*, is prominent. The same word is used numerous times throughout the New Testament. One is in 1 John 2:28, which says, "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming." A partial definition from Strong's includes: "to stay (in a given place, state, relation, or expectancy)" and "abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand, tarry."⁴

Abiding can be as simple as inhabiting a certain physical space and as deep as truly dwelling, enduring, and remaining. Jesus' illustration in John 15 is related to a vine and branches. A branch is not merely connected to the vine; it

3. "H3427 - yāshab - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (esv)." Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3427/esv/wlc/0-1/>.

4. "G3306 - ménō - Strong's Greek Lexicon (esv)." Blue Letter Bible, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3306/esv/mgnt/0-2/#lexResults>.

receives its life from the vine. We abide when we are fully present, intimately linked.

The English definition of *abide* is too good not to share. It includes concepts like bearing patiently, enduring, waiting for, remaining stable, and sojourning.⁵ I love the link between abiding and waiting. The idea of “bearing patiently” or “tolerating” makes me laugh. Isn’t that what our waiting often feels like?

Abundant Life

In John 10:10 Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” The word abundantly describes the type of life Jesus gives. It is “over and above, more than is necessary, superadded” or “exceedingly abundantly, supremely.”⁶ As the author of life, God gives that which is truly life. Jesus isn’t talking about just keeping our hearts beating but about us being fully alive as intended. This is about living out our design as image-bearers (Genesis 1:27), living the life-giving ways of God (John 15:10–11; 1 John 5:1–5), and living out our particular purpose in any given season (Psalm 139; 1 Peter 4:10–11).

We will experience the fullness of this abundant life in eternity (Revelation 21–22), but even now we can experience abundant life in Christ. “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4), and he is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). This abundance does not mean lack of hardship; in fact, sometimes living God’s way leads directly to suffering (John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12). But it does mean living with purpose as active participants in God’s

5. “abide – Merriam Webster.” Merriam-Webster, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abide>.

6. “G4053 - perissos - Strong’s Greek Lexicon (esv).” Blue Letter Bible, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4053/esv/mgnt/0-1/>.

work in the world (Genesis 1:28; 9:7; John 15:12–17; 1 Peter 1:3–25). As we abide in God in the in-between, waiting for completion, we can experience abundance.

Grander redemptive arc

Our understanding of our own lives and of abiding is intricately linked to our recognition of God's redemptive plan for all of humanity. What is this grander redemptive arc of history? It's the incredible journey from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. It's the reality that God created humanity in his image and for his glory, for relationship with him and with each other, and with purpose in the world (Genesis 1–2). It's the heartbreak of sin (going against God's ways) that led to death and brokenness being an insidious reality in our world (Genesis 3). God promises to provide salvation and his patience in unfolding that plan. It's the old covenant and the new covenant (see the New Testament book of Hebrews). It's Jesus' life, death, and resurrection—his victory over sin and death. It's his promised return to bring final judgment and to make all things new (Revelation 19–22). If you're unfamiliar with this story, or if you just need a refresher, check out the Appendix for more.

We live in the in-between. The promised Savior of the Old Testament has come, and yet we await Jesus' return. Romans 8:23–25 explains, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." Second Peter 3:9–11 encourages us, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord

PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness.”

When I refer to redemptive history or the grander redemptive arc, this is what I mean. Where do we fit into God’s overall plan? How does knowing his work from creation to final restoration affect our lives today? What does this mean for our abiding and waiting? As we’ll discover, it makes a huge difference!

THE PATH FOR OUR JOURNEY

With these definitions in place, we’re almost set to begin our journey of discovery. The route may feel a bit odd at times, but I’ll do my best to provide a linear way forward, even though waiting doesn’t always feel linear. There is usually no set end date and often no set destination. Our destination is simply to know, love, and trust God more. I’m going to be offering some thoughts, but how you get there will ultimately be about you and God engaging in this together. I’d suggest you invite some friends along the way too. Even for introverts like me, the journey is usually richer together!

We’ll start by getting a solid foundation on waiting as a general concept. Then we’ll explore how we can look to the past, yearn for the future, and live in the present, using Psalm 27 as a loose guide. I’ll touch on the realities of grief and transition. Then I’ll provide some thoughts and practical tips about what it means to abide, using John 15 to guide us. In all of this, we’ll do our best to settle in and wait expectantly for what God reveals. May you be encouraged to abide in him and know that whatever the final destination looks like in your life, if you’re with him, it will be good!