

“I know Pastor David Wong as a man (and former boss) who always wanted things done yesterday! For him, having to wait for anything must have been hard. Yet, in this book, he takes time to reflect on Biblical accounts of patient and often painful waiting. Through them we get to see more than sharp expository skills; if we look hard enough, we get to see in the author 70 years of a life lived out under the sovereign hand of a living God. A God who knows the times and seasons, a God for whom a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day. A God who carefully crafts time itself to do all things for the good of those who love Him.”

Rev Dr Dev Menon,

Discipleship Pastor, Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church

“In a world where efficiency has become an unquestioned virtue, the theme of Wong’s book will appear unpopular at first glance. But those who look beyond appearance and choose to be readers will soon strike gold. Woven into the fabric of Holy Scripture, the simple act of waiting, as Wong demonstrates with verve, is a core subject in God’s curriculum for life—the school in which faith is formed and the very posture of Christian hope. Here is spiritual food that will nourish both the novice and seasoned pilgrim. My concluding advice will have to be against the theme: stop waiting; go read it!”

Rev Dr Edwin Tay,

Vice-Principal, Trinity Theological College

“Waiting is an issue that challenges our default human nature. Yet the process of waiting could well mould our character and change our perspective of life. With insight and understanding, Rev Dr David Wong points us to people in the Bible whose lives God uniquely shaped for His purpose. All of them experienced different degrees of waiting, many finding it unbearable, feeling weary and lost. This devotional book will help you discover the meaning of waiting and appreciate the next time you need to wait!”

Sherena Loh,

Co-Founder & Executive Director, Muscular Dystrophy Association (Singapore)

Author, Shaped For A Purpose

“*Waiting* speaks to many life situations and heart conditions that prevail in our fast-paced society and worn-out people. Through inspiring passages of Scripture, David Wong seeks to give us hope, courage and faith to wait out the many different seasons of our lives. And to do so within the will of God, remaining faithful to God’s call till the end. Often our sights are clouded by the demands of the here-and-now, and the impetus to achieve results and outcomes. The direct and relevant examples in each devotion will speak to all. A must-read for busy people who need encouragement along the journey. *Waiting* comes with just the style suitable for such an audience.”

Peter B. K. Ong,
Former Head of Singapore Civil Service, Singapore

“Reading David Wong’s *Waiting* produced a cumulative effect of shaping my heart and mind toward a moment by moment posture of deepened dependence on and trust in God. Wong draws on biblical passages with forty manageable devotionals addressing the believer’s common struggle with impatience. He masterfully weaves in four extended expositional reflections on Mark 13 as the anchor passage on faithful waiting and watching. Wong’s view of waiting is not passive but creates a willing heart to follow Jesus wherever he leads now in light of eternity. My wife and I are eager to use *Waiting* as our next devotional.”

Dr Mark Dalbey,
President, Covenant Seminary, St Louis, USA

WAITING

A Necessary Pause in Time

DAVID W. F. WONG

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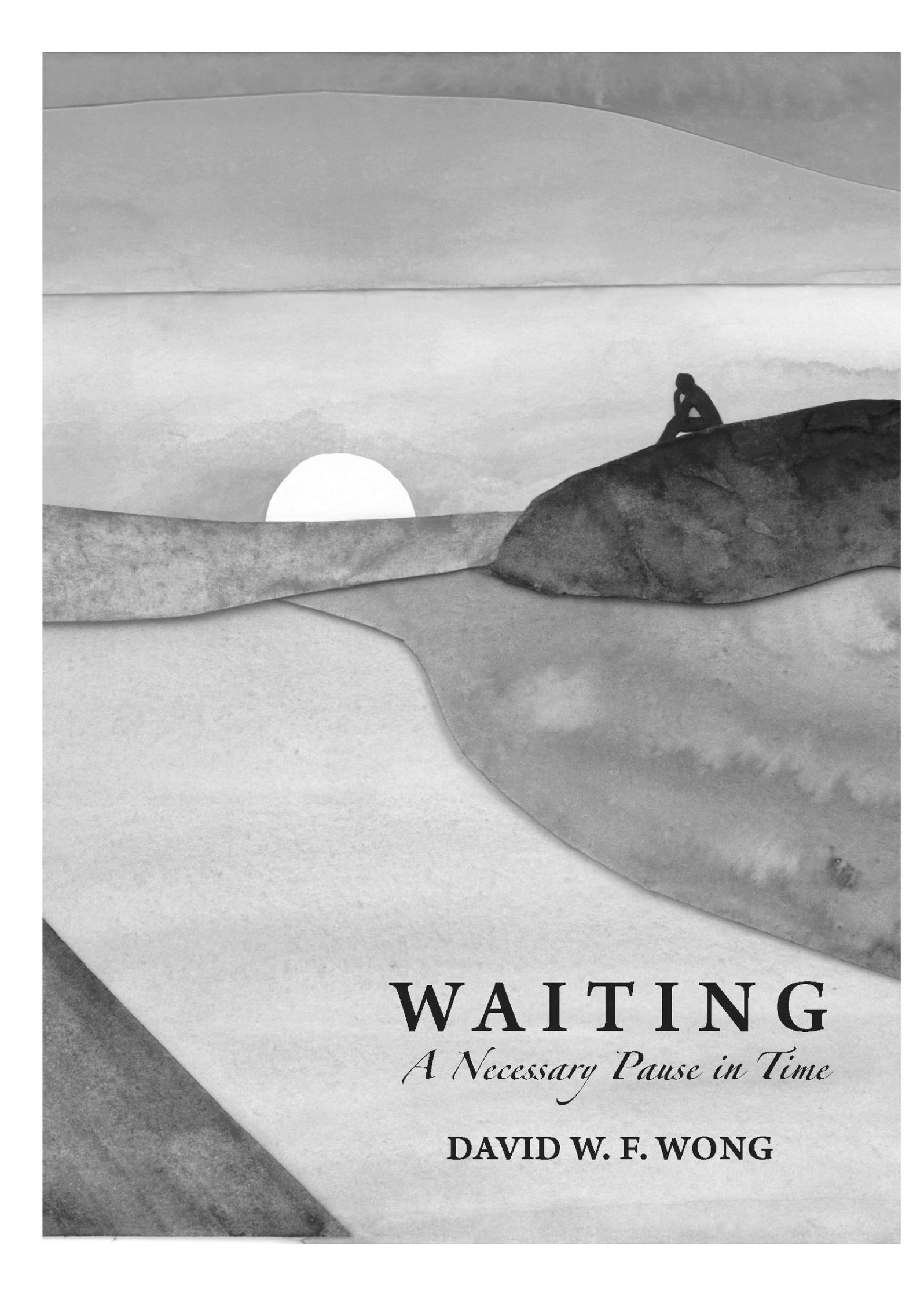
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WAITING
A Necessary Pause in Time

DAVID W. F. WONG

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Opening Words

Waiting is hard. We fidget, we pace up and down, we mutter under our breath. We become restless, impatient. When is he coming? When will it be my turn? How long more?

The Bible is full of people who could not wait. Abraham could not wait for a son from Sarah. Aaron could not wait for Moses to come down from the mountain. Saul could not wait for Samuel to show up. Absalom could not wait to be king.

The disciples could not wait with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul could not wait for Mark to grow up. The Corinthians could not wait for one another at their meal. The prodigal son could not wait to get his share of the inheritance.

Thankfully, there were those who waited. Joseph waited for his dreams to come true. Jacob waited to marry the one he loved.

David waited to be king. Ruth waited for an answer from Boaz. Simeon and Anna waited for the Messiah. Martha and Mary waited for Jesus.

What makes waiting so hard, for them and for us? We can think of two reasons, one internal and the other external. Firstly, most of us are impatient by nature. I had thought that as I grow older, I would become more patient. The pace of life has slowed down for me even as the level of energy has declined. But patience does not come naturally with age. Older folks see things more clearly from the hindsight of their years. Hence, they form opinions quickly and demand prompt action.

I won't make too much of a judgement on younger people. I think they, too, want things fast. Perhaps, we are impatient because we are basically self-centred. We want things done the way we want it and the time we want it, by our wish and by our schedule.

Not only does our human nature drive us to impatience, our environment aggravates it. Technology has drastically changed our way of life. It has cut back waiting time. What used to take half an hour or more at the bank for a transaction now takes a minute or so on our phone. Writing and sending a letter used to take many steps, from finding writing paper, envelopes and stamps, to dropping the finished product at the local post office. Email reduces that process to swift taps and swipes on a screen.

Technology has raised a generation of impatient people. We want everything quick. Prompt answers. Fast service. Swift action. Instant response. Waiting is not an option, at least not for long; not when we don't know how long it will take. Give

me a number, take down my name, tell me how long, and I will come back. Don't make me sit, stand and wait.

This little book is for those who have to wait. It could be a short wait or a long one. From a few minutes to several hours. From days to years, even decades. A student waiting for exam results. A job-seeker waiting for an interview. A patient waiting for the result to say *malignant* or *benign*. Another patient waiting for the day of surgery. A contractor waiting for approval from the authorities. A couple waiting for a baby. Parents waiting to be grandparents.

The list continues. Praying, waiting for an answer. Alone, waiting for a true friend. Depressed, waiting for relief. Sleepless, waiting for dawn. Restless, waiting for direction. In grief, waiting for solace. In pain, waiting for death.

While you wait, may these meditations, or devotions, from the pages of Holy Scriptures keep you company and help you converse with your soul. However long or short your wait, know that you are not the only one waiting. Down the ages, others have waited. Perhaps, we have something to learn from each of them—while we are waiting.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

This book is written for people who cannot wait. People who are short of time or patience, or both. Also, for readers who are used to reading tweets, short blogs and literary sound-bites. Hence, each devotion is crafted in 500 words, more or less. You can read it in a few minutes, though I hope you will follow up with the suggested prayer and a time of personal reflection.

In addition to the 40 short devotions, I have included four longer ones. Based on the study of Mark's Gospel chapter 13, they were first published some 25 years ago. The call to *Watch* is as needed today as the call to *Wait*.

You may read this book in the conventional way, a devotion a day for 40 days. But feel free to skip about, since each devotion is complete in itself. Though the longer devotions are scattered throughout the book, you can read all four, at one go, first or last. I hope the buffet-style variety and the bite-sized morsels whet your appetite and nourish your soul. Since there is no queue, go ahead and dig in!

COMPANY OF
THE WAITING

You are not alone, definitely not the only one waiting. Many have waited. We meet them in the Bible. Some waited and got what they waited for. Some gave up waiting and got something else.

Saul could not wait for Samuel to come. Aaron could not wait for Moses to come down from the mountain. But David waited to become king. Joseph of Arimathea waited for the kingdom of God, and Simeon for the consolation of Israel. Jacob waited to marry Rachel. Joseph waited for his dreams to come true.

Are you waiting? Are you about to give up waiting? Join the company of the waiting and see if they have something to teach us.

LATE IN COMING

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

I SAMUEL 13:7-10

Saul the king had a problem. Samuel the prophet-priest had arranged to meet him, but he didn't show up. Meanwhile, the troops waiting with Saul were getting restless, and ready to leave him. What was Saul to do? There was a battle to be fought against the Philistines. There were offerings to be sacrificed before they went off to battle. But where was Samuel, the one anointed by God to offer sacrifices and pray for victory?

Saul decided to take things into his own hands and offered the sacrifices himself. As he finished, Samuel showed up. He was not that late after all! We can sympathise with Saul. Surely, what he did was understandable and even excusable. But let's consider a similar situation today. A Prime Minister is to be sworn into office. The Chief Justice is to swear him in. But he is late. The people gathered for the swearing-in ceremony are getting restless. So the Prime Minister decides to swear himself in. Not only would the ceremony violate the Constitution and be declared null and void, but the integrity of the Prime Minister would be called into question.

So it was with Saul. Even though he was king, he had no authority

to offer sacrifices. That was the prerogative of the priests. When Samuel arrived on the scene, the ensuing conversation underscored the gravity of Saul's bad decision. "What have you done?" asked Samuel, the tone of his voice clearly one of rebuke. "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time," Saul replied, "I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." (1 Samuel 13:11-12) Saul had violated both the office of the priest and the word of the prophet.

"You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure...because you have not kept the LORD's command." (1 Samuel 13:13-14) Saul had shown himself to be unworthy of the kingship vested in him. He had chosen to act contrary to God's clear instructions given through His prophet. Had Saul acted out of fear because the soldiers were leaving him? Had he acted out of pride, that as king, he could do anything? Whether through fear or pride or both, Saul paid a high price for his impatience.

Had Saul acted out of fear because the soldiers were leaving him? Had he acted out of pride, that as king, he could do anything?

“Deliver me, Lord, from fear and pride while waiting. Guard me, lest in my impatience, I violate the boundaries You have set for me.”

LONG IN COMING

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

EXODUS 32:1

The people could not wait. Moses had been gone for over a month. They were not sure if he was coming back. So they came to his brother Aaron and asked him for another god or gods to worship and lead them. Thus far, they had followed Moses and the God he worshipped. Despite all that the people had seen this God do—in Egypt and through the wilderness—they wanted something else. How could such a change of heart happen? How credible is the account?

We need to bear in mind a few things from the narrative. Firstly, a “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38, ESV) left Egypt, which means among the people were Egyptians and other foreigners who were used to worshipping idols. Secondly, not everyone agreed with what was requested, as seen later in how the Levites and others rallied to Moses when he returned (Exodus 32:26). Finally, we must reckon with man’s inborn predisposition to idolatry. We are created in the image of God and naturally desire to worship our Creator. But we are fallen in our sin and naturally desire to worship Self. Idolatry fulfils both desires by turning our Creator into something we create, so that we can worship both.

Foolishly, Aaron acquiesced to the people’s demand. He called

for the golden articles they had brought out from Egypt, melted them and fashioned a calf out of the molten gold. This was likely to be *Apis*, the chief deity the Egyptians worshipped in the form of a young ox with a triangular white mark on its forehead. Its image appeared on monuments and its form was carried on men's shoulders in festive processions. Some Bible commentators think the people were still worshipping Moses' God, but they wanted it in a visible form, thereby breaking the second commandment (not to make God into an image) but not the first (not to have any other god). But considering the severe punishment they suffered, this is unlikely.

Thus, riches can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how we use them.

The golden calf episode exposes the dangers we all face. It was not wrong for the people to take the gold from the Egyptians when they left Egypt. God had instructed them to do it, perhaps as back pay for years of free labour (Exodus 3:22). But it was wrong for them to turn the gold into an idol and worship it. Thus, riches can be a blessing or a curse, depending on how we use them. Another danger we face is to allow time to make us forget. Being forgetful is a small step from being ungrateful. Ultimately, what went wrong was the people's impatience; they could not wait for Moses to return.

“Protect me, Lord, from impatience, forgetfulness and ingratitude. How easily any of these could lead me to sin against You and bring dire consequences upon myself.”

WAITING TO BE KING

When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands.

I SAMUEL 24:19-20

Saul knew that young David would one day succeed him as king. Yet he was out with his soldiers to hunt David down. There in the desert of En Gedi, David and his men were hiding in one of the many limestone caves. By a strange coincidence, Saul stopped by and entered the cave to relieve himself. David's men saw it as a God-given opportunity for David to strike Saul down and take over his throne. Instead, David sneaked up to where Saul had laid his robe and cut off a piece from it.

David was instantly conscience-stricken, saying to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him, for he is the anointed of the LORD." (1 Samuel 24:6) When Saul had exited the cave and was standing at a safe distance, probably on the other side of a ravine, David called out to him, holding the piece of Saul's robe. He addressed him as "My lord and king" and "my father" (since David had married Saul's daughter), asking him not to believe those who said he was a threat to Saul. Moved by the sparing of his life, Saul uttered words of remorse, conceding that David was a better man for the throne.

Why did David spare Saul, someone who had not shown himself

worthy of the kingship vested in him? On several occasions, Saul had disobeyed the LORD, and Samuel the prophet-priest had told him that another, a man after God's own heart, would be found to serve in his place. Samuel had gone on to anoint David in secret, and David knew he would be king one day. Why then did David not take advantage of the opportunity to kill Saul and fulfil his destiny? The reason is that David knew something about waiting. He knew he had to wait for God's time. He would not take things into his own hands and act out of time.

**Let us, like David,
wait for God's time,
rejecting short-cuts
that violate the
conscience and the
will of God.**

This became clear in the second instance when he spared Saul's life, refusing to strike him when he had the opportunity, saying, "The LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish" (1 Samuel 26:10). Let us, like David, wait for God's time, rejecting short-cuts that violate the conscience and the will of God. We may get what we want, but we would have missed out on what God had for us in His time.

“Teach me to wait, Lord. Forbid that I should take things into my own hands and miss out on Your perfect will and time for me.”