

***Question: When I was growing up, my mother was always on to me for “putting things off.” It seems to me there are times when it is best to delay things. What would Jesus do?***

I believe Jesus would urge us to weigh both the advantages and disadvantages of either taking immediate action in some specific situations or patiently delaying some actions. On one hand, we must not put off doing those things we know we should and can do. Because there is so much uncertainty about the future, that delaying often allows our only opportunities to pass us by.

For example, the book of Proverbs warns: “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth” (Proverbs 27:1); and “Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Come back later; I’ll give it tomorrow’-- when you now have it with you” (Proverbs 3:27-28). The writer of Ecclesiastes adds, “When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow” (Ecclesiastes 5:4). The New Testament says: “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (James 4:13-17).

On the other hand, a wise person will patiently wait for the Lord’s guidance when matters not clear to us at the present. It is better to wait than to take the wrong actions. The apostle Paul urged his brothers in Christ to “be patient with everyone” (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The Proverbs add that “a patient man has great understanding.” (Proverbs 14:29). We should be especially patient in waiting on our Lord to work things out in his wise timing. Therefore, we are told, “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7). To explain why our Lord has put some things off until later, the apostle Peter said: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but

everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Also, the Psalmist criticized Israel’s impatience, saying, “But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel” (Psalm 106:13).

Through his inspired word, our Lord has clearly made known right and wrong on the most important matters (2 Timothy 3:16-17). To delay when we know what is right or wrong can show a lack of faith in God. When we do not see clear teachings in scripture, we should pray for the guidance of our Lord’s Spirit and wait patiently until the way becomes clear (James 1:5; Romans 8:26-28; 12:2). In addition, we must consider not only what is right or wrong in any given situation but also the timing of our actions. Even the right things done at the wrong time can be harmful. However, if we patiently wait on the Lord, he will open the way for us at the right time.

In light of what the Bible says, I believe Jesus would have us understand that there is a time for action and that there is also a time to delay. If we sincerely and prayerfully seek his guidance, the Lord will help us to know what action to take.

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