

**JUST WAIT
ANTICIPATION
DECEMBER 14, 2014**

Albert Einstein was asked by a reporter to explain the theory of relativity with regard to its implications for time.

It's pretty complex, but the short version is that

as you travel faster and faster, approaching the speed of light, time slows down.

Einstein put it this way for the reporter:

Five minutes in the dentist's chair can seem like an eternity.

Two hours with a pretty girl can go by like five seconds.

Time spent anticipating Christmas can seem, to a child, to pass by so slowly.

And yet at the same time the anticipation brings its own fun.

Every day she looks at the tree.

Under the Christmas tree are packages, packages, packages,

wrapped in all sorts of Christmas colors, with ribbons and bows,

all sizes and shapes of packages.

She's already noted which packages have her name on them.

When she was pretty sure Mom and Dad weren't looking,

she snuck in, picked up each of her gifts, felt their weight and shape,

shook them, and put them back.

What's in there?

What could it be?

I can hardly wait!

She just can't stand it.

The anticipation is too much.

But she doesn't dare unwrap them until the big day arrives.

Mom and Dad would be furious.

And besides, the anticipation is delicious.

Young children all around are feeling that anticipation.

In fact, some of us not-so-young kids are feeling it!

I can't wait to see what I *got*.

I can't wait to see the look on the faces of those to whom I'm *giving* something.

I can't wait.

Anticipation.

Anticipation is a universal human experience,

and not limited to pre-Christmas package examinations.

Back in 1971 Carly Simon wrote a song titled, "Anticipation."

It was about her thoughts

as she was waiting for Cat Stevens to pick her up for a date.

"Anticipation, Anticipation

Is making me late

Is keeping me waiting."

Anticipation for opening Christmas gifts,

anticipation for a big date with that special someone,

anticipation when you go car shopping,

anticipation for the baby to be born,

anticipation for the job promotion to come through,

anticipation for the wedding day,

anticipation for God to move.

Anticipation is looking *forward* to things that are to come in the *future*.

Looking *back* to the good things of the past is *nostalgia*.

And sometimes nostalgia causes our memories to be better than the reality was.

I had wonderful childhood memories of

eating those little cups of ice cream with a wooden spoon.

There was something special about that little wooden spoon that made it better.

I ran across those in the freezer case of a convenience store.

Oh, boy!

I just had to get one.

Oh, it's going to be so good!

I dipped in and took the first bite,

and it was....

nothing special.

Oh, it was decent ice cream.

But the spoon was rough, and...

It was nothing like I remembered it.

Sometimes nostalgia causes our memory of the past to be better than it really was.

In reality, the "good old days" weren't really all that good.

Maybe just old.

Like the good old days of Christian America,

when there were separate water fountains, bathrooms, and cafes

for blacks and whites.

Oh, there were certainly some good things about the good old days.

But maybe not everything.

Maybe not as much as we usually think.

Sort of like ice cream on a little wooden spoon.

Sometimes nostalgia causes our memory of the past to be better than it really was.

Looking *forward* to good things in the future is *anticipation*.

Anticipation has a wonderful taste to it.

It always carries that feel of,

"Oh, boy, I can hardly wait!"

But sometimes our *anticipation* of the future

may be disappointed by the *reality* when we *get* there.

The new car smell wears off.

The new job is... a job.

The big date with that special someone was not all you had dreamed of.

And how many Christmas gifts will be returned this year?

The wrong size, the wrong color, the wrong item altogether.

Sometimes anticipation is disappointed by reality.

But if our anticipation is for the coming of *God* and the things *God* will do,

we cannot imagine, we cannot dream, better than *God's* future.

Anticipation is the attitude of the soul

that believes in the *greatness* of *God's* will and work *yet to be done*.

Anticipation is sure his will and work **SHALL BE DONE**.

And it says, "Oh boy, I can hardly wait!"

The Bible is full of anticipation.

For instance, when he was not yet the king of Israel, but a boy, David faced a giant named Goliath.

Goliath had intimidated the entire army of Israelites,
and no one would step out to face him in a duel.

David heard the giant mocking God, and that was the last straw.

Young David volunteered to take on the big mouthed bully.

He anticipated that God would be with him and God would empower him.

"The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear,

He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1Sam.17:37)

He anticipated God doing good in the future based on what God did in the past.

If you know the stories of God in the Bible,
you have a foundation of his past goodness
upon which to base your future hope.

If you experienced God's forgiveness of your sins,
if you've seen your life changed by him for the better,
if you've ever had a prayer answered by God,
you have a foundation of his past goodness
upon which to base your future hope.

You stand in the same place as David when he faced Goliath.

And you can live with the same expectation,
the same anticipation,
that God is going to do something good.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote to the southern kingdom of Judah

to warn that God was going to punish them for their continued rejection of him and his ways.

They would be conquered and carried into exile in Babylon.

And it happened just as he'd said.

After they'd been exiled and were sitting in utter despair,

Jeremiah again wrote them,
this time offering words of hope from God.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord,
thoughts of peace and not of evil,
to give you a future and a hope."

(Je.29:11)

And they began to anticipate,
to watch for what God would do for them.
Their anticipation kept their faith alive.

And one day, after many years in exile, their anticipation was satisfied.

God DID bring them back home.

The New Testament tells us a lot about the life of Jesus and the history of the early church,
all wonderful things from the past.

But do you realize how much of the New Testament is an expression of anticipation of the future?

Paul told the church in Corinth,

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man
the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
Good things coming!

(1Cor.2:9)

He offered some good advice to the church in Philippi,

"But one thing I do:
Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

I press on toward the goal to win the prize
for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Phil.3:13-14)

No nostalgia for the good old days, no glamorizing the past.

Look to the future,
to the things God has promised,
to the blessings that are our sure inheritance.

It's all about anticipation.

Paul was anticipating the good things that God will do IN him.

"He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion
until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phlp.1:6)

God has done good things in you,
and you can anticipate that he will do MORE good things in you,
changing you over time
so you become more Christ-like in character and action.

You might spend some time pondering
what God wants to work on next in your life.
You might come up with something new to anticipate!
I'm going to be more loving!
Less selfish!
More patient!
Less cynical and sarcastic!
More helpful!

What might you anticipate God doing in your life?

Do you have any idea how many times

the New Testament points to the inheritance we have in Christ?

The good things we do not yet have but can anticipate?

Let me give you a small sampling.

"And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace,
a message that is able to build you up
and to give you *the inheritance* among all who are sanctified." (Ac.20:32)

"In Christ we have also obtained an *inheritance*." (Ep.1:11)

"This is the pledge of our *inheritance* toward redemption as God's own people,
to the praise of his glory." (Ep.1:14)

"With the eyes of your heart enlightened,
you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,
what are the riches of his *glorious inheritance* among the saints." (Ep.1:18)

"The Father has enabled you to share in the *inheritance* of the saints in the light." (Col.1:12)

"Since you know that from the Lord you will receive the *inheritance* as your reward;
you serve the Lord Christ." (Col.3:24)

"For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant,
so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal *inheritance*." (He.9:15)

"In God's great mercy he has given us an *inheritance* that is
imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." (1Pe.1:4)

And, of course, though the word is not used,
that great inheritance is indicated in the concluding words of the 23rd Psalm.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps.23:6)

I will dwell in the house of the Lord... forever.

An inheritance.

You know it's set aside for you.

You know it is promised.
 You know it's wonderful beyond words.
 You know one day it will be yours.
 But not yet.

Just wait.

That anticipation can add energy to every single day.

Even while my mom fades away with lung cancer,
 and it is so incredibly difficult to watch,
 there is anticipation of what is ahead for her.

Right now we're living in anticipation of Christmas day, of giving and getting gifts.

And that's OK.

But keep in mind there is one Christmas gift, long-anticipated, that does not disappoint.

That first Christmas morning so long ago also created an air of anticipation and mystery at such a gift,
 so simply wrapped and presented:

God's own Son was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger
 because there was no room for them in the inn.

The wrapping was in dull earth tones.

His presentation was as simple as one could ever imagine,
 surrounded by the animals in a stable,
 wrapped in simple cloths,
 and placed in a wooden feed trough that did not come from Ikea!

No fancy wrapping, no fanfare welcomed Him to the world,

and yet there was anticipation among so many
 as they wondered just what this tiny baby would become
 and how He would affect their world.

Little did they really know!

They could not imagine, they could not dream,
 anything as wonderful as what God had in mind.

What was this unimaginable gift given to humanity?

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,
 that whoever believes in Him
 should not perish but have everlasting life.”

(Jn.3:16)

The baby given to the world,
 the life given on the cross as payment for sin.
 Forgiveness, reconciliation with God, adoption into the family of God,
 new life, eternal life.

Wonderful things we experience now and more that we can anticipate.

That first Christmas, the greatest gift, however simply presented,
 was a gift of pure love from God's own heart to our hearts.

This year, as we both give and receive gifts,
 no matter how elegantly or how simply they are wrapped and presented,
 nothing under the tree will come close to
 what God gave us on that first Christmas.

And what was given on that first Christmas is not finished.

Unlike other Christmas gifts,
 it didn't get used up, broken, or returned.

Oh, he was crucified, alright.

But he was raised again, and is alive today,
 and still comes to bring blessing to his creation.

And he will come again, and he will reign forever and ever.
So today, even as we can celebrate the reality of that first Christmas in the past,
we also live in anticipation of his blessings which are yet to unfold.
And there is so much energy that flows from that anticipation!
Oh, boy, I can hardly wait!
But I guess I have to.... For now.
Just wait.

How is your anticipation level today?

How positive are you about the future?

About your future? The future of the world?

Do you have hope that sees beyond current circumstances?

Are you living in anticipation of the future?

Do you sometimes feel like,

“Oh, boy, I can hardly wait”?