

HOW TO HANDLE "WAITING"

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Scripture: Acts 1:4-5, 12-14, 23-25

A smattering of verses right through the first chapter of Acts.

Acts 1:4-5, 12-14, 23-25

"⁴ Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

²³ So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." ²⁶ And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles."

Last week when we looked at a part of this passage, we talked about the 40 days that we find consistently sprinkled through the Bible and said what those 40 days mean – that they're kind of a gestation period. They're a period that is from confinement possibly to birth, that God is doing something. Possibly, God gives you a dream or a vision, or He says that He wants to do something. But He always then has a kind of a cooling period, a gestation period where He brings you to the point where you're ready to birth that particular dream or vision. The interim period of waiting is a place where He is preparing you for what is to come.

I felt that we needed to press in a little bit more on this whole idea, because some of the most difficult moments in life are not when things are going wrong really, but when nothing seems to be happening at all. It's the period of waiting. You go for a job interview, and they say, "We'll get back to you." You write your exams, and then you wait for results. You take a medical test, and then you wait for the report. And in the waiting, life feels like it's on pause, because what comes next depends on what you're waiting for. You can't really move forward yet. You can't decide yet. You can't act yet. And so, you find yourself in a strange place, a kind of limbo.

Psychologically, waiting is not just about time passing by. It's about uncertainty. It's about lack of control. It's about anticipation. When we don't know what is coming, our minds try to fill in the gaps. When we don't have control, we feel vulnerable. And when we are anticipating an outcome, our emotions begin to rise and fall into every possibility that we can imagine.

So waiting becomes more than a delay. It becomes an internal struggle. And that combination does something to us. What does it do? Well, we start thinking: What if it doesn't work out? What if something is wrong? We replay scenarios. We imagine outcomes. We keep checking our phones to

see if things have come in that can change where we are. And because the human mind struggles with open loops, we have difficulty. We just can't handle that. We want closure. We want answers. And so, waiting becomes emotionally exhausting.

But when we come to scripture, waiting in the Bible is not avoided. In fact, it is everywhere. And one of the clearest moments is right after the resurrection. Jesus gathers His disciples. He gives them the great commission. "Go into all the world." And just when they're ready to obey that, He says something surprising. He says, "Don't leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift that My Father has promised."

There's a commission, but then a command to wait. After everything? Yes, because before they could act, they had to wait for something that God was going to do. So waiting here is not wasted. It's instructed. This was not accidental waiting. It was commanded waiting. Jesus didn't say, "Okay! Now that I've commissioned you, go out and figure it out, and do what you need to do." He said, "Wait!" There's something more that needs to happen, which means waiting.

Waiting can be part of God's will for you. You could be right in the center of His will as you wait. I think that changes everything, because we often think: if I'm waiting, something is wrong. Something hasn't clicked. Something hasn't fallen into place. But in scripture, waiting is often where God does His deepest work.

If you're honest, waiting exposes us. It reveals our need for control, our fear of the unknown. What will happen? Our impatience that something needs to move. Our tendency to assume the worst. This is it! This is the end! Many of us respond in familiar ways. We either try to distract ourselves with something; we overthink, or we withdraw, or we try to force outcomes.

But here's the thing. Scripture invites us into a different posture. Look at how the disciples waited. After Jesus ascends, they all joined together in prayer. They didn't scatter. They didn't panic. They didn't try to manufacture the next step. They just stayed together. They prayed. They waited. And where needed, they acted. They did what they needed to do.

And sometimes, that's what we need to do as we wait. When there's no clear direction that is coming from the Lord, the thing to do is to go through what you know has to be done. You get up in the morning. You spend time with Him. Pray. Be in the word. See what the word is telling you to do. Work on things that you didn't have time to work on before that will shape you. Those are the things that have to be done. When there's no forward direction or clear direction from the Lord, there are still things that you can do in your lives.

And that's what they did as well. What happened? After Judas' betrayal and death, the number of the twelve was incomplete. Why was it incomplete? Because Jesus chose twelve disciples to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. And now they had eleven.

So in that waiting period, Peter stands up among the believers and takes initiative. There's something that we can do while we're waiting. Peter doesn't panic, but he doesn't remain passive either. He turns to scripture and says that what happened to Judas had already been foretold and that this place needed to be filled.

So they set criteria. Someone who had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry through to the resurrection. And two men fitted that bill. Then they did something very important. They prayed. They said, "Lord, You know everyone's heart. show us which one You have chosen." And then they cast lots. And the lot, as you know, fell on Matthias.

So, even in their waiting, they were not idle.

- They were attentive to scripture.
- They were responsive to what needed to be done.
- They were dependent on God to guide the outcome.

Waiting doesn't need to be passive. It needs to be active, but not anxious.

Biblical waiting is quite different from worldly waiting.

Worldly Waiting: The world would say:

- Distract yourself.
- Do something else.
- Control what you can.
- Prepare for the worst.

Biblical Waiting: Here's what the Scripture says about waiting.

Psalm 27:14

“Wait for the Lord;
Be strong and let your heart take courage;
Yes, wait for the Lord.”

Waiting is not empty. It is trust stretched over time.

Isaiah 40:31 “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.”

So waiting is not resignation; it is anticipation.

Psalm 37:7 “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.” Waiting is not restless; it is restful.

Lamentations 3:25 “The Lord is good to those who wait for Him.” Waiting positions us in God's goodness.

What is God doing while we wait? Because that is the real question if you're in that period. What's happening while nothing seems to be happening? And the answer, if we look at scripture, is a lot. Let's look at a couple of examples.

- David is anointed king in 1 Samuel 16. A promise is spoken over his life. but he's not immediately crowned. He's anointed but not yet appointed. And what follows is years of waiting. Instead of a crown, he gets conflict. Instead of a palace, he lives in caves. Instead of affirmation, he's hunted by Saul.

And yet, what is remarkable is not just that David waited, but how he waited. He remained faithful where he was. He refused to shortcut the process, though he had opportunities to do so. He entrusted timing to God, and he poured his heart out to God. And how he poured his heart out to God! We read the Psalms and it's just full of: “Lord, where are you? What are you doing? Do this for me.” it's just so guttural.

When you read the Psalms, you realize that you can come to God as you are. You don't need to refine yourself. You don't need to say: Okay, I need to be in this particular kind of way. Lord, this is what's going on in my life, and I'm bringing it to you. I'm disappointed. I'm distressed. I'm anxious. I'm concerned. I'm hurt. I'm angry. I've been let down, Lord. this is what's going on in my life.

And this kind of guttural response to the situations that he found himself in is what we see in the Psalms that lets us know that God is big enough to handle everything that you and I can take to Him as well.

So maybe it's time to stop saying, "Lord, please bless me. please help me." and say, "Lord, I'm hurting. I don't see any future. I don't know what's going on in my life, Lord. I don't know where You are in my life." it's okay to speak to God like that. God, I think, is big enough to handle everything that we can bring to Him. In fact, He would want it. David poured his heart out to God, and he was strengthened in the waiting. And David is not alone.

- Abraham waited for the son God had promised, trusting through years of delay before Isaac was born, except for that little blemish with 'you know'.
- Joseph waited through betrayal, slavery, and prison, remaining faithful until God raised him up to leadership.
- Moses waited 40 years in the wilderness, being shaped from impulsiveness into humility before leading Israel.
- Hannah waited, pouring out her heart in prayer through deep sorrow until God gave her Samuel.

Different stories, but the same pattern. They didn't just wait for something to happen. they allowed God to shape who they were becoming.

That is exactly what is happening with the disciples in Acts 1. A promise is given, but fulfillment is not yet visible. Just like David, Abraham, Joseph, God is not doing nothing. He's preparing them.

And if that is how God works with His people through scripture, then perhaps that is how He is working in you and me as well. When nothing seems to be happening on the outside, God is at work on the inside. He is doing something in you. What is He doing? How is He doing it. Let me give you three or four ideas about that.

1. He's shaping character.

In the waiting, God often deals with what we tend to avoid when life moves quickly. He exposes impatience, pride, self-reliance, and our need to control outcomes. When nothing is happening outwardly, the He gets the chance to begin to refine inwardly our responses, our attitudes, our integrity.

James writes in 1:3-4 that testing of your faith produces perseverance, so that you may mature and be complete.

You may notice this when you're forced to slow down, when delays irritate you, or when you realize how much you want things on your own terms. That is God shaping you, not just what you will receive from Him, from what you're asking, but what God wants to do in and through you.

2. He adjusts expectations.

Sometimes we enter a waiting season with a very clear picture of what we want God to do and how we want God to do it. "Here's what I want, Lord, and here's how I want You to do it." But in the waiting, God gently reshapes that picture. He helps us release timelines, outcomes, and even desires that are not aligned with His will.

A well-known familiar verse, that is so potent.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

We can say this verse so glibly, and yet the key is not to lean on your own understanding.

And so often, the first part is lost while we try to do the second part.

And yet, when God is adjusting expectations, you may sense that things that you were once desperate for begin to loosen its grip on you. Or when you start saying, “Lord, I want what You want,” instead of insisting on your own plan.

3. He’s strengthening faith in you.

Waiting stretches faith because it forces you to trust God without visible evidence of anything. It forces you to trust God. You don’t see movement, but you choose to believe anyway.

And over time, your faith will move from being dependent on circumstances to being anchored in God’s character. “Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11)

So, when we keep praying, even when answers are delayed, our faith is getting strengthened and God is working in that center. When you hold on to God’s promises, even when nothing around you is confirming it, you just hold on.

4. He’s preparing us for what is coming next.

Often, what we’re asking for requires a version of us that we have not yet become. The waiting season becomes a training ground, developing wisdom, resilience, discernment, and capacity so that when the opportunity comes, we can sustain it.

Psalm 19 talks about Joseph. It says, “until what he foretold came to pass, the word of the Lord tested him.”

You may see this when you realize that what once overwhelmed you now feels manageable. And you know God is working.

So, while we are waiting for something to happen, something is happening to us.

And while all that is true, I want to just say this: There is another side to waiting that we must not miss. Because not all waiting is the same. Some waiting draws us closer to God, but some waiting can quietly take us nowhere.

There’s a well-known play by Samuel Beckett, and some of you may know it. “Waiting for Godot.” In this play, two men stand by a tree waiting for someone named Godot to come. They don’t know who he is. They don’t know when he will come. But they wait. They talk. They argue. They distract themselves. And at the end of the day, he never comes. And the play ends where it began – still waiting. That’s a daunting picture, because it tells us that it is possible to wait for something that is never going to happen.

So, the question is not just “Am I waiting?” The question is: “Am I waiting on God? Am I being obedient to God? Is there something He is asking of me that I’m running from, pretending not to hear, and doing what I want while acting like I’m waiting?” sometimes we say, “We are waiting,” but what we are really doing could be avoiding – avoiding obedience, avoiding decisions, avoiding movement.

Scripture:

- Take Jonah. God says, “Go to Nineveh.” Jonah ran away from the Lord. Running.

- Take Moses. God calls him. He keeps pushing back. “Please send someone else.” Hesitation.
- The servant in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25 – he hides what he was given, avoiding the Lord. Avoiding responsibility.

So, sometimes what we call waiting is, actually, delay on our part. delay in obeying what God has already made clear to us. delay in stepping into what he has already asked us to do. And that, beloved, is not faithful waiting. That is stalled living. It’s the exact waiting for Godot story that is happening.

Faithful waiting listens and responds. Futile waiting delays and avoids.

So the question is not just “Am I waiting? but, “How am I waiting? and what is this waiting doing in me? Not just: Lord, when will You do this, but Lord is this what You are doing?

In waiting:

- Paul discovered sustaining grace.
- David found strength to rise and worship.
- Joseph was prepared for leadership. Abraham grew deeper in faith.

So, faith is not insisting on a specific outcome. Faith is trusting God for the outcome. Move from “Lord, give me what I want,” to “Lord, give me what You know is best for me.” Because sometimes the greatest answer to prayer is not a changed situation, but a changed and transformed heart. that’s why the season of waiting matters.

Whether God changes the situation, or changes us in the situation, He is always working. The disciples waited 10 days, and then Pentecost happened, and everything changed, and God had been preparing them for that. some of you are waiting today – for a job, for healing, for clarity, for a breakthrough. And it feels like nothing is happening. But beloved, your waiting is not empty. It’s preparation. It’s formation. It’s positioning.

For some of you, God is preparing to move, and your call in this season is to remain expectant, to remain hopeful, to trust His timing. But what does that actually look like? Well, to say expectant means you don’t let disappointment shut down your anticipation. You keep bringing that request to God in prayer, not mechanically, but relationally. You keep saying, “Lord, I still believe You’re at work.”

Luke 18:1 reminds us to always pray and not give up. To stay hopeful. It means to anchor your heart not in circumstances but in God’s character. When nothing around you changes, remind yourself of who His is – faithful, good, and trustworthy.

Return to His word, not just for information but for reassurance. “This I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. They’re new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness.” – Lamentations.

So, to trust His timing means you resist the urge to force outcomes. You do what is in your hands, but then you leave what is in God’s hands with Him. You choose obedience over urgency.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 reminds us that He makes all things beautiful in its time.

So, you keep praying, you keep trusting, you keep walking faithfully in what is already clear.

But for others, this could be a different moment. God may be inviting you to release what you’ve been holding on to. And that’s not going to be easy, because when you’ve held on to something for a long time – a desire, a plan, a hope – it becomes part of you. And letting go feels like loss. It feels like

giving up. It feels even like failure. But, Biblical surrender is not giving up on life. it's giving over to God.

So then, how do you release it?

- Release it honestly. Come before God and say, "Lord, this is what I've been holding on to. This is what I wanted. This is what I thought would happen. but today I place it in Your hands. I give it to You – all my aspirations, all my plans, everything I hand over to You."

"Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." The best part of that verse is the second half: because He cares for you. He's that kind of a God; He doesn't want you to stay in anxious thoughts.

- Replace that grip with trust. Instead of holding tightly to the outcome, hold tightly to God. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. yes, you may still feel a little anxious about it, a little diffident. What if I let go and nothing comes in its place. What if I release this and lose everything?

Here's the truth. When God asks you to release something, it is never to leave you empty. When God asks you to release something, He's going to fill that void. Look at some of the verses:

"Beauty, for ashes. Oil of joy, for mourning." Always there is an exchange. He takes something that you don't need to be carrying, and He gives you something for the journey, something beautiful. God's way is exchange, not emptiness.

So, wherever you find yourself, whether holding on in faith for something to happen, or learning to let go in surrender to something that you've held on to, the invitation is the same. Stay with Him because He is faithful in both situations. Some of you need to keep holding on in faith, and some of you need to start letting go in trust. Wisdom is knowing the difference between the two.

Even as I say that you may be thinking: It sounds wonderful, but how do I get that wisdom? James 1:5 would give us the answer. "If any of you lack wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault."

So maybe beloved, this is your moment not to figure everything out on your own but just to say, "Lord, would You give me wisdom to know what is the right path to take. I hand over everything Lord, to You. You give back to me what's in perfect accordance with Your will. Give me the wisdom to know when to hold on and what to let go. And beloved, I believe with all my heart that He will give you the wisdom. He will guide you. He will show you the path that is ahead.

I love when we land in moments like this and the Lord's table waits for us because there's such a beauty, such a tenderness in our spirit, in our hearts, in our souls when we come to this table. Like nothing else! You cannot come to this memorial that symbolizes the love of Jesus without being tenderized yourself, without being softened. And it is in this softened state that we can hear Him most clearly. So, I want to invite you as you come to the Lord's table this morning, that you would come just with open hands saying, "Lord, here are all my plans, the things that I have held on to that I think I'm waiting for. Lord, You show me. You give me the wisdom to know whether to hold on to it in faith or to release it in trust. You give me the wisdom.
