

Session 5



When a Time of Inactivity Slows You Down

THE POINT

Use unexpected downtime to prepare for what's next.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

You and I face a dilemma: we hate waiting, yet we are forced to do it a lot. Think about how much of your life is spent . . .

- Standing in a grocery store check-out line
- Growing older in a traffic jam
- Listening to that terrible song cycle again while on hold
- Anticipating test results that seem to take forever

One UCLA professor humorously suggested the creation of a new unit of time called “the honko-second,” defined as “the time between when the light changes and the person behind you honks his horn.” It would be the smallest measure of time known to man.¹

Those of us who want things in a “honko-second” find waiting maddening. But what if God has something in those gaps for us that we can’t receive any other way?

Let’s not waste our waiting anymore. Jesus’s disciples were in a waiting room with lessons to help us wait well.

QUESTION 1:

How do you like to occupy your time when you’re forced to wait?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ACTS 1:4-8

⁴ While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days." ⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The crucifixion of Jesus had been crushing. In the days before it, Jesus had gained an enormous following. He was shaking up the establishment with authoritative teaching no one had ever heard. His miracles were electrifying, prompting rumors that He was the prophesied Messiah. All that momentum was shattered in a single afternoon when Jesus was nailed to a cross. The disciples had been shaken to the core by His death. It was over.

Only it wasn't. It's impossible to overstate the impact of Jesus's resurrection. Jesus was there in the room with them—alive, eating and teaching, with His wounds from the cross obvious. From this first shocking post-resurrection experience to His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples about what their priorities were to be for the rest of their lives. So, what was the first thing Jesus ordered them to do?

We might expect the risen Son of God to give a mighty, "Go out in My name!" Instead, it was "Ready . . . Set . . ."—Stay in Jerusalem and wait.

Wait for what? Jesus explains this waiting from three angles:

1. **"The Father's promise . . ."** a promise that brought magnificent prophecies forward, raising anticipation (Joel 2:28; Ezek. 36:26-27).
2. **"Which you have heard Me speak about."**² Jesus sparked memories of His teaching about another Counselor, like Himself, who would be given to them.
3. **Jesus then compared John the Baptist's water baptism to what He was about to give: baptism with the Holy Spirit.** Just as John immersed a repentant believer in water, so they would be immersed in the Holy Spirit, by whom they would be "empowered from on high" (Luke 24:49).

Despite this thrilling promise from Jesus, the disciples still had tunnel vision about God's kingdom. During this forty-day period, they heard Jesus teach about the kingdom of God

(v. 3), but they still couldn't conceive of it being any bigger than a Jewish kingdom. "Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" (v. 6). Jesus didn't ignore their question or correct their notion of an earthly kingdom. Instead, He addressed their sense of timing and desire to figure things out, then called them back to the pressing issue: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you." What the disciples could not understand at this point in time was that they *would need* the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit for their witness to bear fruit. But for now, they had to wait.

Ever wonder why Jesus made them wait? Or why He makes us wait so often?

- We need reminding that Jesus said, "you can do nothing without Me" (John 15:5).
- It is "not by strength or by might, but by My

Spirit" that we will accomplish His mission (Zech. 4:6).

- Waiting tunes our lives to God's timing. He knows best and will give us what we need at the right time.
- Waiting offers us a gap where our focus on Him can be developed.

QUESTION 2:

When have you experienced a season of waiting on the Lord?

ACTS 1:12-14

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day's journey away. ¹³ When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Unencumbered by the laws of space and time He had created, Jesus stepped beyond the physical plane into eternity. His return to heaven was the necessary next step in His mission.

- **Crowned as King.** Daniel's Messianic vision foretold the triumphant Son of Man coming "with the clouds of heaven" to God's throne where He is given dominion and honor over an eternal kingdom (Dan. 7:13-14). Jesus's

ascension was His victory coronation as the Messianic King. He is now seated at God's right hand—His reign has already begun.³

- **Mediates as our Great High Priest.** Israel's annual Day of Atonement involved the high priest walking through a cloud of incense into the holy of holies with the blood of an innocent sacrifice for Israel's sins, then returning to the people (Lev. 16). Jesus

ascended to heaven as our high priest, entering “a tabernacle not made with hands,” with His own blood to atone for our sins (Heb. 9:11-14). He continually advocates (1 John 2:1) and intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25) and will return one day.

- **Opens a Link.** Jesus’s ascension gave all believers instant access to Him. If you wanted to talk with Jesus while He was on earth, you had to travel to where He was. Since His ascension, every believer can commune with Him anytime through the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:5-27; 16:13-14).

Jesus’s exit certainly left the apostles stunned (v. 9-11). So now, the waiting began, and the eleven apostles show us how to do this well. They didn’t waste their waiting by complaining or worrying about what they couldn’t control. Instead, their waiting was filled with:

- **Worship, great joy, and continual praise (Luke 24:52-53).** They had no idea how long the waiting would take. They weren’t fixated on or questioning the delay. They were adoring Jesus. Worship like that happens when He is more important to us than getting what we want.

- **Continual prayer (Acts 1:14).** Prayer is the expression of our dependence on God and our trusting petition to Him. It positions our hearts for what He wills to do in His time. This became a habit for believers in Acts. “It is striking that at almost every important turning point in the narrative of God’s redemptive action in Acts we find a mention of prayer (1:24; 8:14-17; 9:11-12; 10:4,9,30).”⁴
- **True fellowship.** Jesus’s followers waited together. Their worship and prayer were a group experience, amplifying their praise and strengthening their fellowship.

When we turn waiting into worship, together with others, and set our hope in Jesus, God will work in us while He prepares us for the longed-for answer.

QUESTION 3:

How does prayer help us during seasons of waiting?

ACTS 2:1-4

¹ When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. ³ They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. ⁴ Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.

Engage

SEASONS OF WAITING

Circle the area of your life where you sense that God has placed you in a season of waiting. Then pray and ask God to draw you closer to Him and increase your faith in His timing and will.

Finances

Family

Vocation

Serving

Leading

Relationships

My Prayer:

The Jewish holiday called “Fifty” (in Greek: Pentecost) was calendared fifty days after Passover each year. Pentecost was a time of worship, feasting, and family reunions. Ten days of prayerful waiting had passed for Jesus’s disciples. Then, on Pentecost, the waiting was over. Their prayer meeting was suddenly interrupted with three sensory experiences that signaled the Spirit’s outpouring.

- **Sound.** First came the roaring noise of a violent wind inside the house. Wind was often associated with God’s Spirit in the Scriptures (Ps. 33:6; Ezek. 1:4; 37:9-14), emphasizing His power, freedom, and mysterious ways (John 3:8).
- **Sight.** Fire came next, appearing as a single blaze, then dividing into little fires that rested over their heads. The fire gave light without heat or smoke. The flames separating over each disciple signaled that the Holy Spirit had been given to each believer.
- **Speech.** What followed moved the supernatural evidence of the Spirit’s coming from observation to participation. The disciples were suddenly able to speak languages they never learned. The internationals in Jerusalem for Pentecost were confounded to hear Galileans “declaring the magnificent acts of God in our own tongues” (v. 11). Fifteen different language groups are named in verses 9-11, each hearing their own native language from people who had a reputation for being uncultured.

This was a redeeming of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), where humanity sought to build a temple for man’s glory and God confounded them by causing them to speak in different

languages. With the Spirit’s coming, God made His people the temple and bridged the language barrier to gather a new people for Himself from among the nations.

Luke explains the supernatural phenomenon to us: “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 4). A new era had dawned in redemptive history. God gave the Holy Spirit to every believer, not just in Jerusalem on Pentecost, but in every age to follow. Through the empowered, multi-cultural witness of Spirit-filled disciples, thousands were saved by faith in Jesus Christ and baptized to form the church in Jerusalem.

The disciples had prayed and praised God as they waited, not knowing how long that would take. Some of us have been waiting and praying for years. “How long, O Lord?” The question is found often in the Bible, and our hearts cry out that prayer as well. God calls us to wait worshipfully, trusting in Him through our uncertainty, delays, pain, and powerlessness. We can be confident that God wants to work in us while aligning circumstances for His glory.

QUESTION 4:

What difficulties have you experienced in waiting for and trusting God’s timing?

QUESTION 5:

When have you been amazed at God showing up and showing out in your life?

LIVE IT OUT

Use unexpected downtime to prepare for what's next. Choose one of the following applications:

- **Focus on Scripture.** Read Isaiah 40:31 and meditate on these words. Commit this verse to memory this week. Hide God's Word in your heart for those times in the future when you will once again find yourself waiting on the Lord and trusting in Him.
- **Focus on Christ.** When you find yourself in a situation when you are forced to wait, intercept negative reactions by directing your thoughts to Christ. Develop this response through repetition. Open your mind and heart to Him instead of swimming in the circumstances.
- **Build a Cohort.** Ask God to help you find a believer(s) with whom you can share your heart. Develop mutual trust by waiting together in prayerful hope.



1. Robert Levine, quoted in *The Geography of Time* (Oxford: OneWorld Publications, 2006), 152.
2. Luke 12:11–12; 24:49; John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:7–14; 20:21–23.
3. Matthew 26:64; John 20:17; Colossians 3:1; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:11–15, 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Acts 7:55–56.
4. Thomas Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 291.