



Central Peninsula Church

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What To Do While You Wait

SERIES: *Acts: The Rest of the Story*

How many of you enjoy waiting? Not very many! Nobody likes to wait. But we spend a fair amount of time waiting, don't we? Think about all the time you spent waiting this week. We wait in traffic. We wait in line. We wait for a package to arrive. We wait for a job offer. We wait for a raise. We wait for a letter of acceptance into a university. We wait for God to bring the right person to us so we can get married. We wait for a baby. We wait for change in someone we love.

Whether we like it or not, we spend a lot of time waiting. When you think about it, waiting seems to be a major part of God's program. The Jews waited for the Messiah to come. Finally, he came, but he was only here for about 30 years. Now we wait for him to come back. God seems to like the idea of his people waiting.

Waiting is hard because usually it means that we're not in control. Waiting is hard because sometimes we don't know the outcome. It's hard because we want to do something. Waiting is hard because we want God to do something and we wonder, "Has something gone wrong? Am I really on the right track here?"

We're like the little girl whose parents sat her down and explained the value of money: how to save and how to deposit money in a bank so that it might draw interest. She seemed to understand and couldn't wait to open a savings account by herself. They called their banker and told him their daughter was on her way to open her savings account. She ended up getting the president of the bank himself to wait on her. She handed over her savings, and he gave her a receipt and thanked her for her business. But she wouldn't leave. She just stood there like she was waiting on something else. "Is there anything else that I can help you with?" he asked. "Yes," she said, "I want my interest."

I think the disciples of Jesus must have felt that way. They had deposited three years of their life into following Jesus, and now they wanted their interest. But last week, as we began our study of Acts, we saw that right before he was taken up to heaven Jesus told them to go back to Jerusalem and wait for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They didn't know how long they would have to wait for and there was nothing they could really do to make it happen. They just had to wait.

It's interesting, God didn't have to do it that way. He could have sent the Holy Spirit right away. Then they could have gotten started on their work immediately, but instead he made them wait for 10 days. He's always

making his people wait. Why does he do this?

It seems clear to me that God made them wait and he makes us wait because he does something in us while we wait. We think we're ready for whatever it is we're waiting for, but we're not. Through the waiting, God does something in us; he prepares us. Sometimes we can see HOW he's preparing us, but at other times we can't. But God is at work in these times. God does things in our waiting that can't happen in any other way.

The second half of Acts 1 shows the disciples waiting for the Holy Spirit, but as they wait they're doing some things that reveal to us how God prepares us through waiting.

I. A time for obedience.

We see first of all that this was a time to practice obedience. Look at v.12. "**Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.**" If we compare this with v.4 we find that the disciples returned to Jerusalem in obedience to what Jesus had commanded.

I don't think that would have been easy for them. We might think, "Well, what else are they going to do? Going back to Jerusalem seems like the sensible thing to do." I mean, it wasn't that far; a Sabbath's day journey was only about 1/2 mile away. But, in fact, there were many things they could have done and there were many places they could have gone. In one sense, Jerusalem was the last place they would want to go because that's where Jesus had been killed just over a month earlier. After the crucifixion, they had scattered to their own homes. The Emmaus disciples were on their way back to Emmaus. Others were on their way back to Galilee. They had work to get back to. Several of them were fishermen; one was a tax collector. They probably thought, "I've used up all my time off. I need to get back to work."

No, I don't think this would have been easy for them. Perhaps some of them were more spiritual about it. Some of them might have thought, "Jesus just gave us our marching orders. He told us to be his witnesses not just here but throughout Judea and Samaria and even beyond. We need to get with it. We need to get to work. We need to reach the lost. Why should we wait in Jerusalem?"

But, instead they obeyed. I think sometimes God makes us wait to teach us obedience. And the situations

in which we learn obedience the most are those in which it doesn't seem to make sense. If we always have to know exactly WHY we're being asked to do something, we're not really learning obedience. What we're really doing is trusting our ability to reason things out. We're doing what we're doing because we can see that it's the best thing to do. Now there is nothing wrong with trying to see the reason for doing something God tells us to do. But our obedience must not hinge upon our ability to figure out why.

I talk to couples all the time who are living together before marriage. They come to me and want me to marry them. I tell them that not only do I want them to be abstinate but I want them to live separately, not just in separate bedrooms but in separate houses. Usually they're okay with the abstinence part (at least they say they are), but the moving out part just doesn't make any sense. I mean, financially, this can present a real problem. I know that and I usually try to help one of them find a place to stay. But this is where the rubber meets the road in our obedience. When it doesn't make much sense.

If you're going through a time of waiting, ask yourself, "What am I learning about simple obedience during this time? Is there something he's told me to do that I need to just do rather than wait for a reason?"

II. A time for prayer.

Once they all got to Jerusalem, we see that they didn't just sit on their thumbs. Look what they did.

"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. 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" (vv.13-14).

Not only was this waiting period a time to learn obedience, it was also a time for prayer. They go to the upper room, which might have been the same upper room where they had the last supper with Jesus.

And Luke want us to know who was there. First, he lists off the 11 apostles, with Peter heading the list as usual. Then he mentions "the women." I'm sure that he was thinking of the women he had mentioned back in chapter 8 of his gospel: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and others. Then he specifically mentions "the mother of Jesus." This is the last time Mary is mentioned in the New Testament. She seems to have been an honored but normal part

of the fellowship. She certainly wasn't a perpetual virgin as the Catholic church claims because we're told next that Jesus' brothers were there too. We know from Matt.13:55 that there was at least four of them. This is a bit of a surprise because John's gospel says his brothers didn't believe in him (Jn.7:5). But here we see that somehow they changed their mind. We know that the risen Jesus had appeared to his brother James, and perhaps that accounts for the change. I'm sure there were many others there too because v.15 says that 120 were there. I'll bet Mary, Martha and Lazarus were there. I'll bet Nicodemus was there along with Joseph of Arimathea. How about some of the folks Jesus had healed like blind Bartimeaus and the paralytic who had been lowered through the roof?

All these were there in Jerusalem waiting, but while they waited they prayed. I wonder what they prayed about? Did they praise and thank God for sending Jesus to die for their sins? Did they confess their sins, since many of them had failed miserably to stand by Jesus in his hour of need? Did they pray that they would be faithful to the marching orders he had given them? Did they pray for open doors? Did they pray for protection? Did they pray for the Holy Spirit to come? Luke doesn't tell us but I think they probably prayed for all of these things.

But there are two things he does tell us about their prayers. First, he tells us they were unified. That means they were unified not only in their activity of praying, but they were also unified in what they prayed for. That's amazing when you consider all the different personalities in that room. But that's not all. Second, he says they were devoted. The idea is that they persevered in their prayer. It strikes me here that even though they had this great promise that the Holy Spirit would come, they were still committed to prayer while they waited. God's promises do not make prayer needless. On the contrary, his promises give us confidence in prayer. They motivate us to pray, knowing he will hear and answer.

Sometimes God makes us wait to teach us to pray. A married couple waits for their rebellious son to come home, and they learn how to pray together as a couple. A family waits for the test result of a biopsy on one of the children, and they learn how to pray together as a family. A small Bible study group is looking for an opportunity to minister outside of themselves, so they learn to pray as they ask God to open a door. A church body waits for enough resources to start another church and so that church learns to pray. It's not just prayer we're called to; it's united prayer and it's persevering prayer.

III. A time for the choice and recognition of leadership.

Sometime during those next 10 days, perhaps while they were praying, something occurred to the Peter. You know that Peter wasn't known to sit on a thought for long! So he stands up and begins to speak to the group. Here we see a third thing that took place in this waiting

period. Not only was it a time of obedience and prayer, it was also a time to deal with some leadership issues. In their case, it involved Judas' betrayal and death, which created a vacancy in the apostolate that needed to be filled. Look at what Peter says in v.16.

"Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 'For he was counted among us and received his share in this ministry.' (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness, and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO ONE DWELL IN IT'; and, 'LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE HIS OFFICE.' Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us--beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us--one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection" (vv. 16–22).

It's interesting that Peter is the one who addresses the issue of a fallen leader. Remember that it wasn't all that long ago that Peter himself had stumbled badly. He'd denied Christ three times. It was only after the risen Christ had found him and restored him that a broken Peter had ventured back into ministry. Perhaps because of that Peter was the most qualified to speak—he himself had been there.

In these past few weeks we've also witnessed the fall of an important evangelical leader. Ted Haggard was pastor of a church not unlike this one, only about seven times as large. He was also the President of the National Association of Evangelicals. We don't know the whole story, but it appears that he's been involved with male prostitutes and the use of methamphetamines. We can't help but wonder how one who has been used by the Lord in such powerful ways could do such things and cover them up for years. But this is a reminder that spiritual leaders are made of the same stuff that all of us are. It doesn't matter who you are, or how much the Lord has used you, or how closely you've walked with him; we all have something within us that left unguarded, will go on a rampage. Someone has said, "Within each of us there is a herd of wild horses wanting to run loose." And so, we shouldn't be surprised. And this shouldn't cause us to stumble in our own faith. Ultimately, our trust is in the King, not his subjects.

We should understand that people like Ted Haggard, who lead huge organizations and movements, have to be even more careful. Surely the enemy knows the fallout from someone like that going astray will be huge, so

they become his targets. And perhaps the drive that propels some leaders to greater and greater achievements is the same drive that leads them in the wrong direction. As Gordon MacDonald wrote, "Like a river that breaks its levy, that drive often strays into areas of excitement and risk that can be dangerous and destructive." We need to pray for him and his wife and his five children. We need to pray for his church. They've taken the right steps to remove him from leadership. Leaders are never perfect, but they earn the right to lead by the character they display. We hope and pray that over time there will be repentance and forgiveness and healing. But that can't be rushed.

Please don't get me wrong. Ted Haggard is not Judas! It's not an exact parallel. But Judas is a reminder that leaders fall. Peter says several things about Judas. He says that Judas acted in fulfillment of Scripture. Peter says "the Scripture had to be fulfilled." Judas' treachery didn't take God by surprise. Not even Judas, or Satan, could undermine God's purpose. The Holy Spirit had spoke about it back in the Psalms. Peter is thinking of Psalm 41:9, **"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."** Peter also says that Judas must be replaced, and that he took from Psalm 109:8. Perhaps Peter also remembered how Jesus had said that the 12 apostles would sit on thrones in his kingdom and judge the 12 tribes of Israel. Peter is thinking, "Hey, if we're going to do that, we'd better get that throne Judas left vacant filled!" Finally, Peter says that Judas' replacement has to meet certain qualifications. He has to be someone who was an eyewitness of Jesus' life from the time of John the Baptist and he had to have seen the resurrected Christ. That's why we can be so confident in our New Testament, because it was written by eyewitnesses.

So they select two men who met these qualifications. Look at vv.23–26.

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

Matthias and Barsabbas are selected. They all pray for the Lord's direction. They start by talking to God about God: **"Lord, you know the hearts of all men..."** That's a good reminder, isn't it? WE don't always know the hearts of men. We can be fooled. Sooner or later, it usually becomes obvious, but we can't always know. Then they ask, "Show which one of these you've chosen." What a great request! It's not,

“Show us who to choose,” but rather, “Show us who you’ve already chosen.” And then they draw lots. What are lots? The two names would be written on stone and placed in an urn, shaken and spilled out like dice. The one that fell out first, in this case Matthias, was the Lord’s choice. This is kind of strange, isn’t it? It’s like the apostles go to Vegas! A lot of people think that this was wrong, and they never should have tried to choose a twelfth guy in the first place because that place belonged to Paul. But this was the common OT method for determining God’s will (Josh. 7:14;14:2;1Sam.10:20). Listen to Prov.16:33, **“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”** Remember, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given and until then this was a legitimate way to know God’s will. Not only that, Paul would have never met these requirements, because he wasn’t with Jesus in his earthly life.

Actually, this whole process gives us some good principles for making decisions in general, particularly decisions about leadership. We see how important it is to rely on Scripture, as Peter did. This whole thing started because Peter had been studying his Bible. But sometimes Bible doesn’t specifically tell us what to do. There was no Scripture that said to choose Matthias. So, sometimes we have to use some common sense. That’s what they did when they came up with these qualifications. What they came up with makes sense. In other words, when you have to make a decision, use your head! But we also see the importance of prayer. They committed the whole decision to God. They asked for his direction, as we should. Finally, they looked for specific guidance on who his choice was. There are some decisions where we can look for specific guidance. I don’t believe this is true with every decision. There are many times in life that we should look at Scripture, pray, use our heads and then just make a decision. But in a decision as important as this we can look for specific direction. We don’t have to cast lots because we have the Holy Spirit and he can show us.

The way this works for us elders at CPC is that we ask him to show all of us, not just one of us. That’s a safeguard for us. In too many churches God only seems to speak to one man who has some kind of special anointing. You don’t see that here in Acts 1. It says **“they put forward two men...”** and **“they prayed...”** and **“they drew lots...”** The apostles were acting in one accord.

But let’s step back and look at this as a whole. Why does God make us wait? Well, sometimes he makes us wait because we’re not ready for what we’re praying for. Our house is not in order. In this case, the

right leadership wasn’t in place. Sometimes God makes us wait so that we can see the need for leadership and take steps to supply it. I think about this as it relates to our vision to see a revival here on the Peninsula. We pray for that. Our vision statement is very simple: to make and mature more followers of Christ. But one of the questions we’ve had to ask ourselves is, are we ready for it? What would we do if God brought 5,000 more people into this church? Where would we meet? How would we disciple all those people? We realized that we need to get our own house in order to be ready for that. We need to be prepared to develop new sites along the Peninsula for us to meet. We don’t have to all meet here. We have to think about how to retire the debt on this building. We have to think about developing leadership. That’s why God so often makes us wait.

CONCLUSION

I hope you can see that waiting is not a waste of time. You know, it’s like a good steak. When you BBQ a steak, and you take it off the grill, you have to let it sit for a few minutes. You should never serve it right away. This waiting is essential to insure that the juices get redistributed throughout the meat. We, too, go through periods where we need to sit. In those times the God is distributing into our lives the qualities that will make us most effective and useful for him. We learn obedience. We learn to pray. And we learn to ask ourselves, “Are we really ready? What do we need to do to get our house in order?”

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