

SESSION 5

WHEN A TIME OF INACTIVITY SLOWS YOU DOWN

Leader pages on pp. 148-151

THE POINT:
USE UNEXPECTED
DOWNTIME TO PREPARE
FOR WHAT'S NEXT.

ACTS 1:4-8,12-14; 2:1-4

¹⁻⁴ 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."**

MEMORY VERSE

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¹⁻¹² 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.

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²⁻¹ 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.

KEYWORDS

Baptism . . . Holy Spirit (v. 5)—In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit came temporarily upon individuals to enable them to fulfill specific God-given purposes. This baptism of the Spirit that Jesus promised would be a permanent indwelling of the Spirit in believers.

The Mt. of Olives (bold)—The location of Jesus's ascension.

Day of Pentecost (v. 1)—Pentecost was one of the major annual Jewish feasts, and it celebrated the completion of the grain harvest.

WHAT SHOULD BELIEVERS DO IN SEASONS OF WAITING?

You and I have an issue: 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 canned music song cycle again while on hold.
- Anticipating test results that seem to take forever and ever.

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,”²⁴ it would be the smallest measure of time known to man.

Those of us who want things in a “honko-second” find waiting annoying. Isn’t that why we enjoy fast food, microwaves, freeway express lanes, and Amazon Prime? But what if God has something in those gaps for us that we can’t learn any other way? Let’s not waste our waiting anymore. Jesus’s disciples were in a waiting room with lessons to show us how to wait well.

Heed God’s Instructions //

Acts 1:4-8

The crucifixion of Jesus had been devastating. In the days before His crucifixion, Jesus grew an enormous following. He was shaking up the established religious institution with authoritative teaching no one had ever heard. His miracles were electrifying, causing 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 on the cross. Their hope in Jesus was buried with His dead body. It was over.

Only it wasn’t. “What happened next is on the same order as the creation of the universe: God raised

Him from the dead (Acts 3:15) by the power of the Holy Spirit,”²⁵ wrote David Powlison. It’s impossible to overstate the impact of Jesus’s resurrection.

Jesus was there in the room with them—alive, with His wounds from the cross obvious, eating and teaching. From this first shocking experience, after He rose from the grave to His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples about what their priorities were to be for the rest of their lives. These men had been personally trained by Jesus Himself. He had commissioned them to carry on His cause. They were ready to lay down their lives for Him.



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During this time frame . All the truths He had revealed to them began to fall into place. An unshakeable confidence in Him took hold. The mission He started was to continue through them.

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 . . . Wait: Stay in Jerusalem."

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

1. "The Father's promise . . ." that brought glorious prophecies to pass, raising the anticipation (Joel 2:28; Ezek. 36:26-27).
2. "Which you have heard Me speak about." Jesus stirred memories of His teaching about another Counselor like Himself who will 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 plunged a repentant believer in water, so they would be immersed in the Holy Spirit by who they would be "empowered from on high" (Luke 24:47).

Regardless of this exciting promise from Jesus, the disciples still had tunnel vision about God's kingdom. During this forty-day period they had heard Jesus teach about the kingdom of God (v. 3). But they couldn't comprehend 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 thoughts of an earthly kingdom. He focused on 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 have understood at this point in time was that they must have the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit for their witness to bear fruit. Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to them (John 15:26; 16:7). But for now, they must wait. What does waiting teach the believer?

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

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOVING AHEAD OF GOD?



DIGGING DEEPER WAITING

For believers, waiting isn't a passive state but a powerful process where faith can be refined and deepened. Consider these verses:

1. **Waiting Produces Spiritual Maturity:** Waiting refines character and deepens dependence on God. James 1:3-4
2. **Active Waiting through Prayer and Worship:** Waiting doesn't mean inactivity. Instead, it's an invitation to seek God through prayer, worship, and meditation. Psalm 46:10
3. **Waiting as a Witness to the World:** The way Christians handle waiting can serve as a testimony to others. See 1 Peter 3:15
4. **The Cross as the Ultimate Example of Waiting Fulfilled:** The ultimate fulfillment of waiting is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For centuries, God's people anticipated the coming of the Messiah. John 3:16-17

How can we view periods of waiting as opportunities for God to work?



Seek God's Face // Acts 1:12-14

While growing up, my daughters loved Disney Princesses, their adventures, and magical ways. Their imaginations danced as they watched and sang with Tiana, Moana, Elsa, and Ariel. They were saddened when it seemed like things weren't going well for their beloved characters, but as in all Disney classics, there is always victory on the horizon for the main characters.

Though not a fairy tale, we can only imagine how unbelievable Jesus's death must have been for His disciples. Even more so, His resurrection and ascension must have been unreal like a disappearing act, with Him flying up to heaven with the promise of a return. The truth is far more shocking and important.

God exercised "the immeasurable greatness of His power" (Eph. 1:19-20). Free from the laws of space and time He created, Jesus stepped beyond this physical plane into eternity. His return to heaven was the necessary next step in His mission.

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

Prayer is the expression of our dependence on God and our trusting request 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; 13:2-3). Jesus's followers waited together. Their worship and prayer were a group experience, amplifying their praise and strengthening their fellowship.

HOW CAN PRAYING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS ENCOURAGE US DURING SEASONS OF WAITING?

When we turn waiting into worship along with others and set our hope in Jesus, God will work in us while He's preparing us for the awaited answer.

Trust God's Timing // Acts 2:1-4

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). At Pentecost, the sound of the Spirit's coming was a storm.
- **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. Many biblical stories represent God and His work with fire (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 3:2; Heb. 12:18-21). The individualized 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 internationals in Jerusalem for Pentecost were mystified to hear Galileans "declaring the

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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.

Luke explains the supernatural phenomenon to us: "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." A new era had dawned in liberating 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. They were on hold for ten days before the Spirit was given. 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 lining up circumstances for His glory.

WHY IS IT CRITICAL THAT BELIEVERS FUNCTION IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND NOT THEIR OWN?

DID YOU KNOW?

Have you ever had to sit in a waiting room? Whether it's for a scheduled appointment or an emergency, the purpose of the waiting room is for those who are anticipating an action, encounter, or sometimes answers. Think about when you were in a waiting room full of anxiety or anxiousness in comparison to swiping through your phone or taking a call while you waited patiently. What was the difference in your attitude about waiting? Usually, our state of mind about waiting is directly related to our focus and trust in what is to come. Maverick City Music's popular worship song, "Wait on the Lord," was based on Isaiah 40:31 with the encouragement of being strengthened and renewed while you wait.

Biblical Truth: "The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the person who seeks him" (Lam. 3:25).

How can meditating on Isaiah 40:31 help you develop "waiting room" that builds your trust in God's promises and plans?

LIVE IT

How will you trust God's timing as you deal with waiting this week?

Today's culture focuses on getting what we want immediately. The microwave was created to avoid lengthy meal preparation. Instead of dinner in 30 minutes on a stove, meals are ready in 5 minutes, thanks to "nuking." Fast food restaurants make billions of dollars daily with drive-thru service. Waiting with God is living with what you know to be true about God when you don't know what's true about your life.²⁶ While waiting consider the following:

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- **Focus on Scripture.** Read Isaiah 40:31 and meditate on it. Commit this verse to memory this week. Hide God's Word in your heart for times in the future when you may find yourself waiting on the Lord.
- **Focus on Christ.** When you find yourself being forced to wait, intercept negative reactions by directing your thoughts to Jesus. Develop this response through repetition.
- **Focus on Building Community.** Ask God to help you find a believer(s) who you can share your heart with. Develop mutual trust by waiting together in prayerful hope.

DAILY READINGS

1. PREPARING FOR WHAT IS NEXT // ACTS 1:4-8

Waiting is the hardest thing to do. However, waiting during a timeout in basketball is full of activity. The players are gathering their strength and planning the next play for a victory. This applies to the disciples in Acts 1:4-8, where a time of inactivity is preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The disciples used this waiting period to pray, unify, and trust in God's instructions. As a basketball team prepares during a timeout, we can use our waiting seasons to seek God, study His word, and prepare for what is next.

Lord, help me stay focused on You during times of waiting. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

2. WHO'S IN YOUR CREW // ACTS 1:12-14

The saying, Teamwork makes the dream work," goes back to the New York Mets' 1986 World Championship song - "We got the teamwork. . . that makes the dream work!"²⁷ This song highlights the power of a team in achieving a goal. Having the right people on your team or in your crew makes a difference. Similarly, in Acts 1:12-14, the disciples, "along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers," were unified on their purpose of praying while waiting for the Holy Spirit. Follow the disciples' example and build a devoted community of believers where we can find strength and encouragement as we share the gospel.

Father, help me seek your presence and stay united with others as we wait for Your timing. In Jesus's Name. Amen.

3. PLANT! WAIT! TRUST! // ACTS 2:1-4

In the book *Blooming For Christ*, we discover that growth takes time.²⁸ You plant a seed, water it, give it sunlight, and wait. At first, nothing happens, but trust that with time, the seed will grow into something strong and beautiful. In Acts 2:1-4, the disciples waited, and they received something strong and beautiful: the Pentecost. It came like a rushing wind with tongues like flames of fire.

Their waiting was not in vain. The Holy Spirit gave them the power to speak boldly and share God's message. This wait was not long, yet we may wait years for a response from God. As we wait, trust God's timing and continue to minister to His people.

Wait . . . your patience will be rewarded with something strong, beautiful, and powerful. Amen.

4. LOOK WITH PURPOSE // PSALM 71:18

As believers, we are called to purposely look for disciples just like Jesus. In Acts 16, Paul and Timothy have a wonderful mentorship partnership. Paul meets a young disciple named Timothy, whose grandmother and mother, Lois and Eunice, were among his first converts from the Jewish community. Paul sees great potential in Timothy. Like Jesus taught his disciples, Paul teaches and guides Timothy and calls him his "true son in the faith." Together, their journeys impacted the world. As we journey, look with a spiritual purpose for someone we can mentor for the sake of the gospel.

Lord, strengthen me to go and make new disciples. In Jesus's name. Amen.

5. DESTINATION UNKNOWN // GALATIANS 6:9

I love traveling with my family, riding along, and enjoying the scenery as we get closer and closer to our destination. However, long trips can be challenging, and we start checking the time to see how long it will be until we arrive. Paul and Timothy are traveling as spiritual father and son on a mission to spread the gospel and build the early church. Parts of their mission trips were tiring and hard, for some places were hostile, and others were welcoming. However, they moved together based on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Can we travel without knowing our destination? Will we give up on our mission if the directions suddenly get changed?

Let's not lose faith but continue to do the work for the kingdom.