

The Unhurried Wait

Isaiah 40:27–31 (NRSV)

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God”? **28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. **29** He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. **30** Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; **31** but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Introduction. Do you ever become frustrated because it seems God isn't act quickly enough to right [situations of injustice in our world](#)? You may wonder why God does not intervene in cases where the innocent and powerless are taken advantage of by those with power and resources such as in the matter of human trafficking. Why doesn't God act to judge those who are guilty of inflicting harm on others? If you have these feelings, you are not alone. In Revelation 6 the picture is drawn of those who had been slain for their faith crying out to God – *"How long, Lord, until you judge the people of the earth and avenge our blood?"*

Perhaps you have been in circumstances where you were frustrated that [God did not act on your behalf and those you love in a timely manner](#). Maybe someone you love wrestles with an addiction that is destroying his life and wrecking your family – why doesn't God do something? Maybe you are in a job situation that stinks. You have prayed and prayed for God to do something but things seem to remain the same. Maybe you or a friend at school is the victim of bullying and you have asked God to intervene.

I don't know about you but I often grow frustrated in those types of situations. I want to fix them quickly. So I often move into action and leave God behind. If things are going as I want them to go here at church and there are issues that need corrected so we can live out our mission, I am so ready to shift into a lower gear, squeal the tires and get to moving doing something to address the matter. I am so ready to run ahead of God in those situations.

There are few chapters in the Bible that have ministered more the human soul than Isaiah 40. With the beginning message of *comfort* in verse 1 to the directions to *"wait upon the Lord"* in the last verse. (Waiting is seldom a comfortable thing. Sit in a waiting room at a hospital and observe the anxious body language of families waiting to hear how their loved one is fairing during surgery or in ICU.)

The biblical idea of *"waiting on the Lord"* is directly tied to our series theme of unhurrying our lives.

Judah's context.

During Isaiah's ministry, the nation of Judah was living in anxious times. Assyria was becoming a major empire and was swallowing up nation after nation. Early in Isaiah's season as a preacher, Judah's neighbors were threatening the nation's security. By the end of his ministry, Assyria was knocking at the door.

During this period of time a chorus of voices were crying out to God – *"God doesn't see us. God is not doing what is right for us."* They were not seeing the Lord act in a timely and decisive manner. It was a challenge for them to wait upon the Lord.

[During Isaiah's ministry, the actions of two of Judah's kings differ widely and can teach us much about waiting.](#)

During [King Ahaz' reign](#), three neighboring nations took up arms against Judah. Now Ahaz was not a person who was loyal to the Lord. He failed to practice any exercises that kept him connected to God. Isaiah came to him in the midst of his despair about warding off these invaders but he was not willing to listen to Isaiah or submit to the Lord. [Instead of turning to the Lord and waiting on the Lord, he turned to the mighty empire of Assyria for help.](#) He paid them the great treasures to protect his nation. While his actions gave some temporary relief, it did not solve the situation. *He had in essence invited the fox into the henhouse.* The next generation would be in greater peril because of his actions.

When he died, his son, Hezekiah, became king. [Hezekiah, unlike his father, was a man committed to the Lord and committed to spiritual disciplines that led him into a deeper relationship with God.](#) Fourteen years into his reign, Assyria began her assault on Judah. With few resources to slow the advance, things looked grim for the home team. [Taking a page from](#)

his father's playbook, Hezekiah attempted to pay the Assyrian king a ransom to stop the assault. Unfortunately, this action which was an act of throwing *red meat to the wolves* who once they devoured it kept stalking Judah.

When the massive Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem, it seemed all hope was gone. The Jews were trapped inside the city for quite some time. During that period of time, Hezekiah turned to the Lord and to Isaiah for support. God delivered them by the Assyrian general being called to return to Assyria because of some difficulties the king was facing. Once things were settled in the homeland the army returned. Hezekiah once again turned to the Lord. God brought deliverance by sending a plague that killed 180,000 Assyrian soldiers in one evening. The remaining army returned home – “those who wait upon the Lord, he will renew their strength.” (Those are amazing stories, aren't they?)

Waiting upon the Lord.

For many of us, waiting upon the Lord is contrary to our nature. When opportunities are before us that entice us, we often dive into them without really knowing if God has opened the doors or not. When challenges are around us, we want to act as quickly as possible to resolve them. When we feel like God is not acting quickly enough and is ignoring us, we tend to speed up our lives and fill it with more busyness and hurry. (Can you relate to what I am saying?)

All the while our hurried lives feed our addiction to busyness thus hindering our ability to “wait” on the Lord. We tend to wait like a “cat on a hot tin roof.” We can't get to a place where we are OK and are able to breathe. This type of living wears us out and exhausts us. In this state, we can't soar like an eagle, run like a marathon runner or walk through those courses of life without being depleted.

Let's pause for a moment and reflect on what it means to “wait upon the Lord.” In large part, waiting is pushing the pause button to allow God to act, God to give us direction on how we are to act and to fill our heart, mind and mouth with the words to speak.

The Hebrew word for waiting here has as its origin a “spider's web.” Think of that imagine for a moment. The spider weaves her web in a strategic location where she hopes to capture a tasty meal or two. Once her masterpiece is complete, she waits for her prey to come to her snare. She does not get on the web and do a dance to attract a fly. Rather she waits for the fly to wander into her web. Then when the fly is stuck, the waiting spider knows what to do. What if she grows impatient and moves to another location to spin a web and a fly is trapped on the original one?

The idea of waiting has this tension of pausing with a sense of hope. I wait for God to act in this situation.

The idea of waiting feels like a passive activity. Is waiting upon the Lord passive? I would say that it is seldom passive.

In our times of waiting, we still are to act upon those things we know we feel God is moving us to do. Hezekiah had conversations with his leadership team during the days of waiting. He sought the counsel of Isaiah. He prayed. During times of waiting, we take active steps to become active listeners to God – we quiet our souls, we read the Word, we talk with mature people of faith. During times of waiting, we continue on with normal life – we change the baby's diaper, we show up for work, we cook meals and cleanup the kitchen.

There is a real sense that we learn to wait during the times of crisis or opportunity by practicing waiting in our everyday ordinary life. We can devote ourselves to spiritual exercises that slow us down and become antidotes to our busyness. We can develop a rhythm for these exercises that quiet our souls. If we commit to these rhythms in our normal lives, waiting on God during the big times comes much easier.

By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, religious Jews had developed a rhythm of praying three times a day – morning, noon and evening. It was built into their day. It was intended as a way to spend time with the God.

Spending time with God daily is central to our decluttering our lives. Spending some time routinely with God in listening and praying is vital. Reading scripture as a part of that discipline is a key way to hear from the Lord. You may think, “*Dwight, there is no way I can carve those three times with God into my normal day.*” I don’t always do three times either. Mine are morning and just as I lay down for the evening. You have to figure out when you can. Do you drive more than 10 minutes to work or school? If so, turn off the news and music and talk with Jesus, get an audio version of the Bible to listen to. Can you arrive at your office or classroom before everyone else? Take 5-10 minutes to spend with the Lord before you open your emails or check your texts? These mini-times of waiting for the Lord or waiting with the Lord will fuel your soul. Developing other practices such as solitude, silence and Sabbath teaches our souls to wait.

I believe not only in the importance of a daily rhythm but also a weekly rhythm. Making corporate worship and engagement with small group is vital to our souls. It is not a matter of keeping your soul out of hell but keeping hell out of your soul.

All of these exercises not only declutter our lives from our addictive hurry but they also prepare us for those crisis and opportunity times of waiting. When Hezekiah learned the extent of the threat of the Assyrian army, he turned to prayer and through it received assurance God was in control and was going to act.

The Good News.

Isaiah gives amazing good news to his readers, good news we need to hear as well.

The prophet reminds us of who God truly is – God is everlasting, who created all the earth and does not tire out. You see, God is one who cares about his creation, including you and God will be here through the end. He will not grow tired of being there for us.

When we wait on God, He brings renewal – reviving the exhausted and giving strength to those who are powerless. What does that look like?

In the 1960’s and 70’s, two Stanford professors conducted a series of experiments called the Marshmallow Experiments with preschool children designed around the children waiting for delayed gratification. Please watch some contemporary footage of this type of experiment. (Show video.)

Several years later, the professors did follow up on these subjects and found some interesting correlations. Those children who were able to delay their gratification scored higher on SAT scores, overall educational scores and other social behaviors.

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength:

- *They shall mount up with wings like eagles* – If we wait for the wind of God to blow, there will be those times when we can spread our wings and soar on the currents of God.
- *They shall run and not be weary* – If we wait upon the Lord, God will make the way and goals clear to us and we can run after it with God’s stamina within
- *They shall walk and not faint* – If we wait upon the Lord, there will be those times when God gives us just enough vision to take one step and then the next. But even then we don’t grow frustrated and weary.

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary. Dare we wait upon such a God as this?