

I want to start with a confession this morning. I'm a terrible at waiting. Really, I'm supremely impatient and waiting is one of my least favorite things to do. To give you a few examples, I did all of my Christmas shopping online this year. If there's traffic, I will take a longer route that may actually take more time by going around simply because I'd rather be in motion instead of sitting still. And very recently, I was confronted with an ironic and enlightening view of my disdain for waiting.

I was introducing my boys to pho, which is Vietnamese noodle soup. As we were standing in line, I was taking a minute to explain the menu when this guy behind us said "You mind if I jump in front of you? I won't be a minute." Why can't this guy just wait!? I looked, and there was no one at the register, so this dude had nowhere to go. But I'm a pastor, and I'm supposed to say yes to such things, so I let him go ahead of me. Within 15 seconds, I had explained all there was to explain about pho, I said (rather loudly) "Ok, let's order" because, when we walked up to the counter, there was still no one helping. Surely this guy would allow us back ahead of him in line, so I looked at him, *expecting* him to yield his place in line and return to our original order. Even though I knew he could feel me staring at him, he just wouldn't look back at me. As more time passed without anyone coming to take his order, my thoughts became less and less Christian, and I won't tell you what thoughts I had when he eventually got his food before we did. I really don't like waiting. And I really really don't like waiting in line behind someone who doesn't have the patience to wait!

I am sure I'm not alone in this. We live in a world of instantaneous fulfillment, an on-demand culture, and the idea that I don't get what I want as soon as I want it is more than some of us can bear. But here's the problem: In many ways, the Christian life asks us to wait. Spiritual growth takes time. God's changing of our heart, affections, and desires is a process. The God who answers all of our prayers often does so at a timing different than what we'd like, and in ways that are different than what we want. And maybe the greatest waiting challenge for us is that, for 2,000 years, the promise of Jesus' return is yet unfulfilled. Each and every one of us have seasons of waiting in our lives, and every Christian I have ever known has had to wait on God for something. The question before us this morning is what we're going to do with those times.

You see, waiting can be a time of incredible frustration or incredible growth. It can be a time that pushes us away from God or pulls us closer to him. It can be a time that erodes our readiness for God's call in our lives or prepares us to move when he does. It can be a time that is harried or a time that is holy, that God gives us seasons of waiting as a time set apart for a people set apart.

When Jesus is expected, there is opportunity in the waiting.

This morning we are going to read the story of a man who is an example of the spiritual practice of what I call holy waiting. His name is Simeon and he has been on the lookout for the Messiah for a long time. While *expecting* Jesus is a time of excitement and anticipation, it's also a time of waiting, a test of faith, and a season of preparation. And this morning we are going to see not only how he persevered during a time of waiting, but how it prepared him for the coming of Jesus and God's call in his life.

[Luke 2:22-24] ²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in

the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

As we have seen in previous weeks, Mary and Joseph showed themselves to be devout followers of Yahweh. If you wanted Jesus to be influenced by parents who faithfully followed the one true God, he had them in Mary and Joseph. This episode further illustrates this point. They have come to Jerusalem for three things: 1) Jesus’ circumcision, which occurred on the 8th day of his life, as instructed in Leviticus, 2) to present their firstborn son to the Lord, as God instructed in Exodus, and 3) for Mary’s purification, also required in the book of Leviticus. When they came to the temple to fulfill the Law, they encountered this man Simeon and were about to be blown away by the things he said.

[Luke 2:25-27a] ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple.

Before we get into what a season of waiting does, I want us to see how a season of waiting is prepared for. For a time of holy waiting to be productive for us, we must be fit spiritually. Otherwise, it can be like trying to run a marathon with no training or conditioning prior. You’ll collapse after the first mile. I also believe God will also use times of waiting to alert us to our unfit spiritual condition, and they can be catalytic times for spiritual growth. But for Simeon, I want you to see how the character of this man and his intimate relationship with the Lord allowed him to live and respond faithfully during this time of holy waiting.

Simeon is described as a righteous and devout man. To give you a sense of how that stacks up biblically, other characters with the same descriptors were Job, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and Cornelius, the Roman centurion who became a follower of Jesus. In three different ways we are told of his intimate relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was upon him, language used in the Old Testament about the Prophets (which we’ll see he is), he received special, direct revelation from the Holy Spirit, and he came in the Spirit into the temple. This was a man sold out for God, directed by his Spirit, and intimately connected with him. It’s out of this relationship and his devotion to God that he is able to wait.

Holy waiting allows us to trust in God’s timing.

Luke tells us that Simeon had been waiting for the consolation of Israel. I’ve always been fascinated by that phrase because you don’t see it used much in New Testament. The immediate connotation of consolation in my mind is the prize a loser wins. But at its root is the idea of consoling, of bringing comfort, and it’s no surprise that a devout Jew living under the oppression of Rome would be looking eagerly for this. He is looking for the fulfillment of God’s promises found in the Old Testament, particularly throughout Isaiah, including chapter 40 that begins “Comfort, comfort for my people, says your God.” He’s also trusting in the Holy Spirit’s special revelation given to him that he would not die until he saw the Christ. He lived expecting God to fulfill those promises, and waited patiently as he did.

The only explanation for this time of faithful waiting is Simeon's intimate relationship with God. He is close to God and **proximity produces peace**. The closer we are to God, the more we are equipped to wait. But to have trust in God's timing, you have to have confidence in God's character. And the only way to know someone's character is to know them personally and intimately. Trust is earned, and Simeon had encountered God and found him to be trustworthy.

Who do you trust more to get you to the airport safely and on time? The Uber driver you've never met or a loved one whom you've known for years? Don't ask Martha that. She'll pick the Uber driver over me. Or in business, would you rather do a deal with a long-term partner you've had a lot of success with over the years or a newcomer with no track record and no relationship with you? It's the same way with God. The more we know him, the more we trust his character.

If you don't know or don't trust in God's character, you will struggle to wait on his timing, and you will miss out on what he wants to do in you during a time of holy waiting. It's like taking a dish out of the oven too soon. It's still raw in the middle, and it won't taste very good. God may still be cooking you! One of the most well-known stories in the Bible of not waiting on God's timing is Sarah and Abraham. They were promised they would have a child in their old age but struggled to trust in God's timing, so they tried to take care of it themselves. That resulted in the birth of a child whose offspring are still rivals of the nation of Israel today.

Where are you struggling to trust in God's character and wait on his timing? Where are you wrestling with the idea that, if you don't make it happen yourself, it won't happen. Is it something with your job? Have you jumped into a relationship that is not in alignment with God's standards? Are you rushing a big decision? The more intimately we know God, the more we will know his character, and the more we will be equipped to wait.

Holy waiting allows us to recognize and respond to God's movement. One of the great challenges in a time of waiting is choosing where to put our focus; on ourselves, or on God.

[Luke 2:27b-35] And when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, ²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; ³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation ³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." ³³ And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

While Luke doesn't give us the details, you can imagine the look of joy on Simeon's face as he saw the baby Jesus and knew exactly who he was. He recognized the baby because he knew the Lord. Strangers don't recognize each other. Family and friends do. God had delivered on his promise, and Simeon recognized it because his eyes stayed focused on the Lord while he waited. But this moment goes beyond recognition. It's also a moment of readiness. Simeon sees that God has moved and he moves with him.

He is doing the work God has called him to and prepared him for. Simeon offers a hymn of praise. He is a worship leader. Simeon declares the truth God has revealed to him. He is a prophet. Simeon proclaims the Gospel, that this child is God's salvation, born in plain sight for all to see, who has come to save both the Jews, who have been waiting for him, and the Gentiles, who will be part of this baby's saving work. He is a preacher. Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph while compassionately telling her of the pain that is about to come her way. He is a pastor. Simeon is also a representative of Israel and the entire world as he receives the Savior. The consolation of Israel had come, and Simeon was ready to receive him. His time of waiting was over, and the God he had faithfully waited on had stayed true to his word.

Waiting is a test of our faith. Had Simeon been focused on God taking his sweet time to send Jesus, the outcome may have been different. Impatience has the power to distract us. It moves our focus internally to what we're not getting, to what is not happening, and it takes our attention away from observing where God may be at work and where he wants us to join him.

Some of you may know the name Lenny Harris. He is Major League Baseball's all-time leader in pinch hits. He made a career out of coming off the bench and delivering when called upon. The key to his success was staying ready and alert for when his opportunity came. If he was distracted by not being a starter, more focused on what he was not getting rather than patiently waiting for his turn, he would not have been prepared to move when his opportunity came.

For us to recognize and respond to God, our focus must be on the right thing. If we focus on what we don't have or what isn't happening, we run the risk of missing God. But if, as Hebrews says, we fix our eyes on Jesus, not only will we recognize him when we see him, we'll be ready to move when he says "go" and live out our God-given purpose in him.

Holy waiting allows us to live (and die) in God's peace.

We don't get a lot of backstory on Simeon, but you gather he lived his life in peace. Someone as righteous, devout, and Spirit-led as he was is someone who knows God's peace. But I want to take us back to verse 29 where Simeon utters a magnificent and monumental sentiment that should be a refrain for all believers. "Now, you are letting your servant depart in peace."

Simeon could depart because God fulfilled his promise. He was no longer waiting, because Jesus had come. Simeon was satisfied in the Lord and secure in his promises. The character of God that Simeon trusted was confirmed when God kept his promise. Simeon could now die in peace knowing God has kept his promise.

Now, I know you may be thinking "Kurt, this subject isn't very Christmasy", and I acknowledge that it is heavy and an interesting time. But I'd also suggest Christmas may be the perfect time to discuss this. Jesus came in the flesh, was born to a virgin, to accomplish God's will so that we may have life and have it both abundantly and eternally. In John 11, Jesus said [**John 11:25-26**]
²⁵ **"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,** ²⁶ **and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."**

I had a wonderful conversation with someone in our congregation who has had a tough year with his health, and it's gotten especially bad recently, but he has encountered God in a new way in this time of waiting. This week, he told me "I'm not afraid to die. I know where I'm going." That is someone departing in peace.

When you have experienced the faithfulness of God in your waiting, you can trust him when it's time to go. God has fulfilled his promise of sending a Savior, and if we believe in him, we know our eternity is secure. The God who paid the price for your sin on the cross and was raised three days later is the same one who promised that he goes to prepare a place for you and will come back to take you to himself. So while we wait, we trust in peace.

We can sometimes get cynical about the commercialization of Christmas, though I'd agree it detracts from the real reason for the season. But there is a powerful lesson in the ramp up to December 25. My kids are starting to get antsy. They know there is a moment coming, a moment of joy, a moment of receiving what they have been looking forward to. But it's a moment they've had to wait on, and if they do so faithfully, there is an echo of an eternal truth they are experiencing. You and I know there is a moment coming, a moment based on the promises of God that we are certain will come. It's not based on a date circled on the calendar, but it is based on the character of the God who promised it. One day, the consolation of all creation will return. I can't wait!