

December 11, 2022

The Story of Reality: CHRISTMAS (Week 2) Christmas Anticipated

As a child, was waiting for Christmas ever difficult for you? When I was a child, one year, I had asked for a pogo stick, and I was so excited I couldn't wait. So, I went looking ahead of time to see if I got one. I found it in my parent's closet—only one problem. It was already wrapped. The temptation just got bigger! Isn't that always how it is. Cross one line, and the next line is a bigger more dangerous temptation!!! My options... get in big trouble, or wait. Fortunately, this time I waited. I had one victory...I was getting a POGO STICK. Why jeopardize that!?! Right!?

Do you know what I learned from that? I didn't learn this then, but now, ...looking back on it. I was pinning my hopes for happiness on a pogo stick. I got what I'd hoped for, only to prove I had pinned my hopes on the wrong thing! A POGO STICK can only deliver a life that is UP and DOWN, UP and DOWN, fall, then UP and DOWN fall again. A pogo stick could not deliver an answer to my quest for happiness. Moral of the story: a pogo stick is just a parable ... for pinning my hope on the wrong thing!

Do you know what else I learned from my pogo stick memory? Waiting only gets harder as an adult!! I STILL HAVE DIFFICULTY WAITING!!!

- It was hard while waiting **9 years and 9 months** during our church relocation ordeal. I don't have time for that long story. But now on this side of it, **Waiting was totally worth it!! Here we are...debt free—totally a God story in his perfect timing.**
- Waiting for what I'm praying for was hard through the **pandemic**, and it is still hard **post pandemic**.

Is waiting hard for you?

- Maybe you're praying that God would
 - heal you ...
 - bring a loved one to Christ.
 - give you a job.
 - take your anxiety away, or depression,
 - save your marriage,
 - bring you a spouse
- Perhaps the longer you pray and wait the more you wonder, "**Where are you, God? Waiting is really hard.**"

QUESTION: WHY DOES GOD MAKE ME WAIT?

If you've ever felt like God is making you wait too long, you need to know you are not alone! Last week we focused on the **Promises, predictions, prophecies** through the centuries. Perhaps the hardest and longest period of waiting was through 400 silent

years. The Hebrews experienced this during their Egyptian bondage. The Israelites later experienced it again just before the coming of Jesus.

Through 400 silent years.

Did you know that between the Old and New Testament there was a 400 year period of silence where God revealed nothing through his prophets? Can you imagine waiting 400 years after all those prophecies?

That's a little more challenging than waiting a week for a pogo stick!!

My point? Waiting a long time is not unusual. Why is that!?

WHY DOES GOD MAKE US WAIT?

One particular kind of waiting makes us stronger.

Psalm 27:14 (NIV) Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

What can we learn here:

- Waiting is **NOT passive**;
Wait for the Lord; be strong
- Waiting is **active**.
Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart
- Waiting for the Lord **gives us courage**.
- Waiting for the Lord **makes us stronger**.
- We take heart **when we look to the Lord and actively trust him** while waiting.

Here is something ELSE to remember while you are waiting.

I. While you are WAITING, God is WORKING

Matthew 1:20–23 (NIV) But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

This was the moment **Isaiah 7:14** anticipated more than 700 years earlier!!

Why does God make us wait so long sometimes?

- **Why didn't God send an Angel to tell Joseph ahead of time like he did Mary?** That sure would have made it easier for Joseph!
- God's aim in all of this was not Joseph's comfort level, but his strength level.

- God knew that Joseph would look to Him in this difficulty and grow stronger for it.

There is a lesson here:

When God is silent, it does not mean He is absent.

While you are WAITING, God is WORKING.

- It may be behind the scenes.
- It may be a mystery to you.
- You may not see it.

But While you are WAITING, God is WORKING!

Galatians 4:4–5 (NIV) But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ^s to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.

- It's like history itself was pregnant with prophecy and finally ready to deliver!
- The perfect time had come.
- The fullness of time had arrived.
- All the work behind the scenes was finally perfectly complete.

What work behind the scenes?

What happened during those 400 silent years?

While they were waiting God was working!!

- **Alexander the Great conquered the world!** Why is this significant? For the first time in history since before the Tower of Babel, a common language united much of the world. That language was **GREEK**.
 - A COMMON LANGUAGE
 - The Old Testament was translated into GREEK (from Hebrew).
 - **The New Testament was written in GREEK**
- **Then the Romans Conquered the GREEKS.**
 - In a time of peace, the Romans developed roads and infrastructure for commerce.
- **Synagogues** (Jewish centers of worship) were established all over the Graeco-Roman world. **(already began in the late centuries B.C. during the exile as Jews were “hellenized”... became more Greek Speaking in a diverse culture.**
- **DIASPORA** The forced dispersion of the Jews...after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple...70 AD. Jews were forced to spread out throughout the ROMAN world and away from Jerusalem.
- **BEHIND THE SCENES...**
 - God prepared the world perfectly for the rapid GLOBAL expansion of the Gospel of Jesus and the explosion of the JESUS MOVEMENT!
 - Everyone could read the Bible!

- Everyone could travel and communicate the Good News cross culturally
- There were so many synagogues that Paul used these as launching pads in every community Gentile city to spread the Good News to Jews and Gentiles alike!

COINCIDENTAL?? No way!! Promised, prophesied, and working behind the scenes, then Fulfilled!

The next time you are wondering why you are waiting remember this:

When God is silent, it does not mean He is absent.

While you are waiting God is working!!

II. God's **DELAYS** are not necessarily God's **DENIALS**

Isaiah 64:4 (NIV) Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

If you're waiting, you're not alone.

- **God promised, but Abraham and Sarah** waited **25 years** to hold their baby **Isaac** (Genesis 12-21).
- **God gave Joseph a dream** (Genesis 37-50) **but it** took **13 years**, much of it while wrongfully imprisoned, before he saw it come to pass.
- **God promised the “Promised Land”**, the nation waited 500 years and most of it through slavery before they received it.
- **God promised the coming Messiah/Christ centuries early, and countless people waited their whole lives without seeing.**
- **WAITING FOR THE LORD**, requires faith, and savoring the promise, and fueling your faith by looking to the character of God's faithfulness.

Psalm 27:14 (NIV) Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

While you are waiting during a difficulty, there is an action step you can take. It was already stated earlier in the same Psalm.

Psalm 27:8 (NIV) My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, Lord, I will seek.

NEXT STEP

Lift your eyes from your problems and look to the Lord
and say this: *“Lord, I will seek your face.”*

Do you know what will happen when you take this step of trust?

- You may not immediately see God's final answer FOR YOU,
- BUT you will experience God doing something IN YOU!!

The Story of Reality-CHRISTMAS
(Week 2)
Christmas Anticipated

SMALL TALK

1. Has there ever been a time when you wondered whether God was actually at work in a season of waiting, only to later find out that He was? What happened?

VIEWPOINT

2. **READ Psalm 27.** Why was David able to trust God in the face of danger? (27:1-3; 5-6)
3. How was God's house a comfort to David? (27:4-5)
4. What gave David courage while he waited for God's deliverance? (27:13-14)

GETTING PERSONAL

5. When have difficult times strengthened your relationship with the Lord?
6. It's important to not waste our waiting. What do you think that looks like, practically?
7. Have you been waiting on something? What are some ways you can lean on God and trust what He's doing in the middle of your waiting?

MAKING PROGRESS (THIS WEEK)

8. How will you "seek his face" this week? (27:4, 8, 14)