

# QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry  
for the Christian community*

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## THE CHALLENGE OF WAITING

Acts 1 v 4 “Jesus gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised.’”

### Introduction

1. They were to wait for the gift from Father, in this case the Holy Spirit. They did not know how long they were to wait.
2. For us on a personal, church, or collective level, the areas of God’s provision that we might be waiting for could include:
  - a) Spiritual. An anointing, an answer to prayer, a loved one’s salvation, renewal, revival, deeper faith, etc.
  - b) Material. Physical needs of everyday life, finances, health issues, buying or selling a home, changing jobs, etc.
  - c) Intellectual. Understanding what God is saying, clarity in guidance, theological understanding, etc.
3. Having to wait is a great challenge, as we find this so difficult. For example, the opening words of Psalm 40 state: “I waited patiently for the Lord” and the closing words of the same Psalm state: “Oh my God, do not delay” (my paraphrase: “Lord, give me patience, but hurry”). Waiting is part of the discipline of the Christian life. Like a chrysalis, there is internal change while outward circumstances may not seem to change. There are many examples in Scripture: Job (waiting for a reason for his suffering); Abraham (waiting for an heir); Moses (useful life didn’t begin until 80); David (early signs of the Lord’s provision, then many years of waiting); Paul (possibly 15 years between conversion and his first missionary journey), etc.

### How the disciples responded to the challenge to wait in Acts 1 v 4

They understood the nature of the unique word that Jesus used here, translated as “wait”. This is the only place in the New Testament where the Greek word “perimeno” is used, and there is no Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament. The word means literally “to stay in the circle”, “to stick around”. While other words translated “wait” denote attitude (patiently, joyfully, etc), this word alone denotes position. It touches the principle throughout scripture that God’s people are to meet literally in a circle with Him in the centre. The word qahal (assembly) in the Old Testament, and the word ekklesia (church) in the New Testament, both mean “the circle of worshippers”. All phases of worship show this circular idea.

1. Mount Sinai. The first recorded collective gathering around God since the Fall. The people encircled the mountain of God.
2. The Tabernacle. Placed in the middle of the camp of God’s people with God’s presence on the Ark in the Holy of Holies.
3. The Temple. The House of God, seen as the centre of national life, with the whole nation “going up” to Jerusalem.
4. Jesus in Person. Immanuel, God with us. He was always the centre of attention. He even occupied the middle cross.
5. The Spirit and the Word. The Church era foretold by Jesus in John 4 v 24 (spirit and truth). Thus, the anointed teaching of the Word is the principal means whereby God’s presence is revealed in this era and it must be central. Prayer, praise, and Communion do not primarily represent God’s presence; they constitute our response. This is why, post-Reformation, the nonconformist churches have done away with the altar, putting the pulpit in the centre, where Spirit-filled preaching of the Bible represents the presence of the living Word, and we gather around to hear it.

6. The Millennial “Temple”. Jesus reigns over His Kingdom on earth centrally from Jerusalem (e.g., Isaiah 2 v 2 – 3).
7. The New Jerusalem. God will be forever with His people, in the midst of them (Revelation 21 v 3, 22 & 23).

Interestingly, the idea that our lives move in circles has spread into general language usage: “family circles”, “circles of friends”, “social circles in which we move”, etc. In other words, the Lord is saying that when we come to a time of waiting for God we are to stay in the circles (e.g., church, family, social, work, etc) where we find ourselves, until He is ready to move us on. The best word to describe what He is saying is “faithfulness”, faithfulness to the place, people, or position where He has placed us, while we wait, and not to wander off. This is exactly how the disciples responded in Acts 1:

- V12 They all went back to the city.
- V13 They all based themselves in the room where they could be found.
- V14 They all constantly prayed.
- V15 They all kept together in fellowship (about 120 altogether).
- V16 They all sought scriptural guidance.

To digress for a moment, one practical consequence of all this comes as we consider the importance of these circles in human psychology. Every person needs a sense of belonging to one or more circles, be it tribal, family, neighbourhood, social, work, etc. As humans we readily create circles, and even like to develop and apply the rules of that particular group. (Trouble sometimes arises in our church circles when the rules become more important than the Word.) Our difficulty in evangelism today arises because our various Christian circles appear to be so far removed from the experience and needs of ordinary folk. It is not often a case of people being hostile towards us, but rather our apparent irrelevance, especially following the demise of people’s early participation in our circles such as Sunday schools and youth organisations, etc. Also, the world offers so many competing social circles. One of the most effective ways of reaching out to the unevangelised in our society is to create appropriate circles that they can identify with, which is exactly what John Wesley did with his “societies”. This, I guess, helps explain the success of programmes such as Alpha and Christianity Explored. The best form of outreach is to create a sense of identity and belonging, even if it is only a discussion group, coffee morning, or some form of social and physical activity with a time of sharing, leading to an effective evangelistic witness.

### The effect of the waiting on three people

1. Judas – total rebellion (v18 – 19). Like the rest of the disciples and followers he thought Jesus was going to bring about the fullness of the messianic rule then and there, and when Jesus showed no sign of doing that, Judas just would not wait to see what Jesus was actually going to do. Judas therefore abandoned the circle of Jesus’ followers, made a pact with the enemy and precipitated the whole crisis. When we are called upon to wait, we might not engage in total rebellion like Judas, but we can develop traces of a rebellious attitude towards God in our hearts. We rebel against the whole idea of having to wait, and this can lead to indiscipline, division, loss of faith, backsliding, etc.
2. Mary – complete submission (v14). This is the last reference to Mary in scripture. She has no part to play in the New Testament after this, and thus no part in the theology of the New Testament. This is why Protestants have not accepted a theology of Mary; it is not biblical and therefore has no God-given authority. We do not detract from the amazing way in which Mary discharged her responsibility as the earthly mother of Jesus, entrusted with His upbringing and therefore a very special person. But here she blended into the background while she also waited with the rest, happy to have played her part. She did not demand any further special treatment. For us, the waiting does not entitle us to special treatment when the Lord does eventually move in our circumstances, but it requires submission to His revealed will.
3. Peter – edgy impatience (v20 – 26). Peter found waiting very difficult (e.g., his excited outburst on the Mount of Transfiguration). Here he rightly discerned that there was to be a vacancy, which would one day be filled (v20). But he then decided: “It is necessary” (v21). Who said? Jesus did not. At Peter’s instigation Matthias was chosen by an Old Testament method (v26), which should have had no place in the New Testament. Peter was impatient to do something while they waited. The problem he caused was that as there were only meant to be 12 leading apostles (Matthew 19 v 28 and Revelation 21 v 14), Paul’s eventual claim to be that replacement twelfth apostle was continually challenged, and this caused confusion. Paul had to argue the point with the Corinthians (chapter 15 v 9 - 11 of the first epistle and chapters 10 to 12 of the second), and also felt it necessary to preface most of his epistles with his claim to have apostolic authority. Sometimes we can become impatient while we wait, and then do something, which later we wish we had not.

## Postscript

One element of their waiting was unfulfilled in their lifetimes, and is part of our waiting, too. In v11 we read: “This same Jesus...will come back”. We wait for the Lord’s return, and we should be busy in the circles where He has placed us should He suddenly return in our lifetime (Matthew 24 v 46). But even while we wait for the Lord’s return, Jesus is also waiting (Matthew 24 v 36). Yes, in this sense Jesus has to wait too! If Jesus is waiting, is He true to his own principles? Is He also waiting in the circle where He has been placed? Why, yes, of course: “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them [in the middle]” (Matthew 18 v 20). And of this we can be absolutely certain, He has faithfully remained in the circle of His people throughout the church age, whatever we have done to Him and His Name. He has not wandered off and abandoned us and is completely faithful to us as He waits (Hebrews 13 v 5).