

Lake Cities Community Church
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Bible Numbers – Making Them Count

FORTY – A Long Time to Wait

Most people hate to wait. At least that is the conclusion of researcher David Maister, former Harvard Business School professor, and author of the book, “The Psychology of Waiting in Line.” Dr. Maister consults with businesses arguing that how they handle the issue of “waiting” impacts the bottom line (whether is it a doctor’s office, a restaurant, grocery store, or place of business). He says: “Waiting is frustrating, demoralizing, agonizing, aggravating, annoying, time consuming, incredibly expensive and leaves a bitter taste.” (The Psychology of Waiting in Lines, 1985).

A recent Associated Press Poll (2006) discovered that the average American expects service after either 5 minutes on the phone, or 15 minute in a line. 60% of us, after waiting 15 minutes will experience the emotion of anger. One in five will resort to verbal abuse of the slow service provider, and to make matters worse, our impatience, according to the survey, gets worse with age.

And so Warren Weirsbe was so right when he wrote, “The ability to calm your soul and wait before God is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. Our old nature is restless...the world around us is frantically in a hurry.”

But God is not in a hurry, and maybe some of you this morning find yourselves in God’s divine waiting room. I know some of you are unemployed waiting for God to open the door for your next job. Some of you are employed but considering a major change, but don’t

know when that will happen. Some of you are single waiting for God to bring you a spouse. Others of you are waiting, but you have not idea what you are waiting for! You just know you are not where God ultimately wants you to be. You have been called to wait.

This morning we conclude our study on the theology of Bible numbers with the great **number forty**. And we are going see how God has used this number to teach us many lessons, one of which is that he often calls us to wait on Him. First, we are going to first briefly look at the life of Moses. If Moses was on his church's softball team, he would have to be given the number 40, as it is an important number in his life story. And then - from his story, we look at six ways God works through times of waiting – all associated with the number 40.

Life of Moses

Many people have observed that the number forty dominates the life of Moses. You will recall that Moses was adopted by the Pharaoh of Egypt and raised as a prince for forty years. Then, **Acts 7:23 When Moses was approaching the age of 40, it entered his mind to visit his brethren.** After forty years he went back to his people and there discovered their abuse and in response he killed a man and fled to the desert where he became a shepherd until **After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness...in a burning thorn bush. (Acts 7:30).** After forty years in Midian at 80 years old, God enlisted Moses to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt, which of course he did. After that, along the way at Mt. Saini: **"It came about at the end of forty days and nights that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone" (Deut 9:11).** Moses gets the law and finally they came to the Promised

Land and twelve spies were sent out to survey the land. You will recall, **They returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days. (Numbers 13:25)**. But in that period, the majority decided the enemy was too strong and out of fear they did not go receive God's promise. And so, quite angry, God said, **For each of the 40 days you spied out the land you shall bear your guilt a year, even forty years, and you will know my opposition. Numbers 14:33**. And Israel, still led by Moses, goes into forty years of wilderness wandering before they come back to the Promised Land. Moses dies as an old man - 120 years old. 40 years in the palace, 40 years with the sheep and 40 years in the wilderness; and I'm pretty sure that as the angels took his soul to heaven, he was wondering, "What's up with the number 40?" It was the number that marked his life.

Preview

Paul said of that time -- **1Cor. 10:11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction**. As I studied the number 40 and these stories over these past weeks and considered that they were written for our instruction I saw six lessons. And the first lesson is the reality of waiting.

Waiting – Be Patient

As we have been discussing waiting was certainly a major activity in the life of Moses. For 40 years Moses watched his father-in-law's sheep, like a side-lined quarterback, wondering if he was going to ever get back in the game. At Mt Sinai, he waited 40 days before God gave the 10 commandments; he waited another 40 days for the spies to return, and then spent 40 years in the wilderness waiting for God's punishment to conclude.

Much of our lives, also, are spent waiting. And one of the lessons of the number forty is that God can have us wait a very long time. Not 1 or 2 days, but 40. Not 1 or 2 years, but 40 years. Are you and I prepared to wait for years if necessary for God's work in our life, or in our church?

Here is an interesting and perhaps providential fact. LCCC was started in April of 2007, and so this month we are 40 months old! That is a significant amount of time we have been worshiping together - kids have grown up, some have left for college, jobs have been lost and gained, new families have joined us and we have said goodbye to many as well. At our prayer meeting someone in our group was praying for the Lord to provide us a location (which we have been waiting on the Lord), and He prayed, "Lord we only have to wait 40 months we wait and not 40 years for a building!" Amen to that!

For each of the six elements of waiting, I want to give you an exhortation. For waiting in general God's call to us is the same one we have over and over in Scripture. We must "be patient" as we wait. We cannot speed up time God's timetable.

Preparing us. Be Ready

The second element of our study is that while we wait God is preparing us for what comes next. Our time is not wasted for God uses every chapter in our life to prepare us for the next. Moses' time in the Palace prepared him to stand before Pharaoh. His time shepherding in Midian prepared him to shepherd God's people.

The problem with the lesson of preparing is that we don't realize God is preparing us - because we don't see the connection. Moses argued with God at the burning bush that he was not ready, when he was specially trained for the task.

I think of Lance Ward. As he worked as a hospice chaplain and prior to that as a pastor, he had no idea God was preparing him to his job at Pastor of Congregational Care where he both shepherds people and cares for the elderly. As you wait on the Lord that time is not wasted – God is preparing you through your current circumstances for what is coming next in your life.

As we wait God calls us to be patient, and as he is preparing us he wants us to then be ready to accept his new assignment when it comes, and not to be like Moses and argue with him.

Testing – Be Faithful

The third lesson of the number 40 is that it represents a time of testing. And when your faith is tested – you may respond in two ways, either with fear or faith.

As the spies scouted out the promised-land God was testing their faith. They responded with fear. During the 40 years in the wilderness God was testing them: [Deut. 8:2](#) “God has led you in the wilderness these **forty years**, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart.

You may recall that Goliath **the Philistine came forward morning and evening for forty days and took his stand. - 1 Sam 17:16.** He mocked and taunted Israel, and this was a test of Israel’s faith. They responded with fear, and then David with faith.

And of course Jesus faced his own period of testing; [Mark 1:13](#) **And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan.** And he responded with perfect faith.

And it could be right now that God is testing your faith. Are you going through a difficult time? Will you respond with fear or faith? The Spurgeon said in a sermon: YOUR

FAITH WILL BE TRIED SURELY. You may rest assured of that. If every earthly prop were knocked away, could you stand? God may not send you this or that trial, but He will send you a sufficient amount of trial to see whether your faith is truth or talk.

We can learn from the number 40 that when waiting we are to be patient. As God is preparing us we are to be ready, and when He is testing us, our exhortation is to be found faithful.

Purifying - Be Broken

The fourth lesson from the number forty is that as we are waiting God is also purifying us from sin, and rooting out sin.

The rain God sent in Genesis with Noah's ark was a purifying rain. **I will send rain on the earth forty days and forty nights; and I will blot out from the face of the land every living thing that I have made" (Gen 7:4).** God purified the world of the great evil that had exploded.

Sampson was needed in the book of Judges because **the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, so that the LORD gave them into the hands of the Philistines forty years. Judges 13:1.** God was punishing them in order to get their attention that they might repent of their sins, return to Him and be purified of their sin.

The purpose of the Israel wandering in the Wilderness for 40 years was also to purify the people of their sinful attitudes. **Num. 32:13 "He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD was destroyed.**

If you are in a period of waiting ask yourself the question whether God is trying to get your attention regarding some sin in your life? God's command for us in the purification process is to be broken over our sin. "[Psa. 51:17](#) The sacrifices of God are a **broken** spirit; A **broken** and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.

There is nothing more beautiful than someone broken over their sin – because after brokenness comes; grace, compassion, hope and love.

Leading - Be Courageous

The fifth lesson of the number 40 is leading. When Israel was in captivity in Egypt, [Acts 7:36](#) "This man (Moses) led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years.

In the opening video, you saw that the reigns of Saul, David, Solomon and other Kings were 40 years in length. And in this sense the number forty often is the number that refers to a generation. When Saul was done, the next generation came to power, when David finished, the next generation arose.

What will we do in our generation? We don't have much time in this life to make a difference. You only get one generation to accomplish what God has for you. Between your childhood and your decline in health, you may be at your peak for about 40 years, perhaps 50. As I have done ministry with the elderly I have found it to be either very joyful or very sad. Joyful are those who accomplished God's call for their life, and are ready for their reward. Sad are those who come to the end of their lives with regret. I got to know one elderly man once who shared regret after regret. He was not faithful to his wife and lost his

marriage. He always wanted to be in the ministry but never was able to. He looked at me once and said, "Craig don't make the same mistakes."

In our waiting we are to be patient, in preparing to be ready, in testing to be faithful, in purifying to be broken, then in the call of leading we are to be courageous. Leadership is hard; it is extremely hard to lead people – whether it be your family, a church or a company.

Providing – Be Thankful

Finally, the sixth lesson of the number 40 is that as we are waiting and God is preparing testing purifying and leading us, he also is providing for us.

Even though Israel's 40 years in the wilderness was a rough in many ways, the Holy Spirit has emphasized God's gracious provision to His people. [Deut. 2:7](#) "For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These **forty years** the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing." [Deut. 8:4](#) "Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these **forty years**. [Deut. 29:5](#) "I have led you **forty years** in the wilderness...and your sandal has not worn out on your foot.' [Ex. 16:35](#) The sons of Israel ate the manna **forty years**, until they came to an inhabited land.

Being tested, purified and even leading is hard work; but that difficulty is eased when we count our blessings and realize how well and abundantly God provides for us in every way.

We have learned six lessons from the number forty. In times of waiting, be patient; in times of preparing, be ready; in times of testing, be found faithful; in times of purifying,

be broken over your sin. In times of leading, be courageous and when God provides, be thankful.

Closing Poem

The wandering Israelites, Moses and every person in periods of waiting would have related to this poem called Waiting by Russell Kelfer which I share in closing:

I pled and I wept for a clue to my fate.
And the Master so gently said, "Child, you must wait."

"Wait! You say wait!" my indignant reply,
Lord, I need answers - I need to know why.

Is Your hand shortened, or have You not heard'
By faith I have asked, and I'm claiming Your word."

My future and all to which I can relate,
Hangs in the balance and You tell me 'wait'

I'm needing a 'yes'—a go ahead sign,
Or at least a 'no' to which I can resign.

And Lord, I've been asking and this is my cry,
I'm weary of asking, I need a reply,

Then quietly, softly I learned of my fate,
As my Master replied, once again, "You must wait."

So I slumped in my chair, defeated and taut.
And I grumbled to God—"So I'm waiting, for what?"

He seemed then to kneel and His eyes met with mine,
And He tenderly said, "I could give you a sign."

"I could shake the heavens, darken the sun,
Raise up the dead, cause the mountain to run.

All you seek, I could give and pleased you would be.
You would have what you want, but you wouldn't know Me."

"You'd not know the depth of My love for each saint.

You'd not know the power that I give to the faint.

You'd not learn to see through clouds of despair.
You'd not learn to trust just by knowing I'm there."

"You'd not know the joy of resting in Me.
When darkness and silence was all you could see.

You'd never experience that fullness of love,
As the peace of my Spirit descends like a dove."

The glow of My comfort, late in the night,
The faith that I give when you walk without sight,

And you never would know should your pain quickly flee,
What it means that, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

So be silent my child and in time you will see
That the greatest of gifts is to get to know Me.

And though oft may My answers seem terribly late
That My most precious answer of all is still... 'wait'."

- by Russell Kelfer