

A time to wait

By [James Sledge](#)

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I've been doing a lot of spiritual wrestling of late. A few months into a new position, I feel like I should be "doing" more, helping the church take bold, new steps, that sort of thing. But I don't have much clarity about what steps to take or in what direction.

The one thing I've felt convinced of from the beginning has to do with helping us become a more spiritual place. I don't say this because of some serious spiritual deficiency I witnessed on my arrival. Rather, this was a strong component of my original sensing a call to ordained ministry. Twenty years ago, I felt that the work and ministry of the church needed to be more deeply grounded in God, needed to flow from God.

In my own struggles to keep my ministry grounded in and flowing from God, I have discovered a number of spiritual practices that were not part of my upbringing and do not come naturally to me. I have gained a deep appreciation for centering and contemplative prayer, lectio divina, spiritual direction, and other practices. And I have tried to let my experience with these seep into my "work" as a pastor.

However, I sometimes worry that I have done so badly. In trying to encourage committees and governing boards and congregations to think more about what God wants us to do, I fear that I have inadvertently stereotyped spirituality as a style. I may have given the impression that spirituality is about candles and meditation, about a "smells and bells" approach rather than an integral part of our Christian life.

And so it seemed providential to me to find the opening of Acts as a daily lectionary reading last week. The disciples in the passage must have been struggling with some of my questions about what they were going to do and how they were going to do it. The risen Jesus had told them that they were going to be his witnesses throughout the world. He had promised they would be empowered by the Spirit, but none of them knew quite what that meant. And so they waited, and they prayed.

I don't know if they used incense or centering prayer, chant or lectio divina. I do not know if they sat cross-legged, stood, had eyes open, or had them closed. Perhaps

some did one thing and another something completely different. We don't know because the Bible seems unconcerned with the spiritual style they employed. It is clear, however, that they waited and prayed. They prayed together, and surely the prayed alone. And they continued to wait until God showed them the way.

I am not terribly good at waiting. I tend to be impatient by nature, and I am the product of a culture that values getting things done. But before I convince the leadership here to embrace some bold new thing that I want to do, how do we wait and listen to be sure (at least as sure as we can be) that it is what God wants? And before I or anyone else tosses aside some new or strange sounding idea that seems to make no sense, how do we stop and wait to determine if it is from God?

It seems to me that to hear God's call, we need to know how to wait. We cannot be too quick to say "Yes" nor too quick to say "No," because our quick "Yes" and "No" are probably more apt to come from our own biases, preferences, habits, and expectations than they are from God. So perhaps right now is not a time for Yes or No, but a time to wait.

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