

When God Says Wait

By Mary Ann Lind

You know who God's elect are in the last session of the Torrey conference [audience laughter], which is Friday at 10:30, separates the sheep from the goats [applause]. Even our friend Ron has gone off to Hawaii. When he comes back you get him!

Before I begin this morning let's give a hand not only to Ron in absentia but also to Cathy and Jennifer and so many who've done such a tireless job in putting all this together, they've been planning for over a year [applause]. Seriously I want to thank you for coming today because I know most of you have probably fulfilled your requirement towards how many times you have to be in a session, so I do commend you. And I know that in these three days or two and a half days, you've just heard so much. I've been to conferences and after a while you just sort of running on overload. And after a while it gets sort of hard to sort it all out. In fact you may have even heard things that almost seem contradictory. Last night in the question and answer time we were talking about how you hear one thing and then in the next session you hear something else. In the days and the weeks ahead to sort it all out for you. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Truth, I believe that everything that's been spoken this week is the truth, but ask the Holy Spirit to quicken those things that YOU need to know for YOUR life, for God's plan for your life.

This morning in particular the message that I want to speak on is one that I think we all struggle with at various times in our lives but I realize it is just that, it's various times in our lives.

Sometimes when you hear a message you think, well that's not for me right now in my life. Well,

it might be for the person that's sitting next to you. Or it might be something down the road for you. I once heard it said that everybody in the body of Christ is either being refined by God, they're in the Refiner's fire right now and wish they could get out; or they have just gotten out of the Refiner's fire and are awfully glad to be out; or they are about to go in and don't know it. So we're all at various phases. The Refiner's fire is not what I am talking about specifically today but I just want to use it as an example of the ways in which we go through these phases in our walk with the Lord, as we are gradually being transformed into the image of Christ. It's a process, it's a lifetime, and the particular phase that you are in right now is that God has brought you here to be a student at Biola University. Or perhaps you are a staff member or a faculty member. But for this season in your life this is where God has you. God had me here for 10 years. It was a season in my life - a wonderful season, but also a time of great learning.

What I want to talk about this morning is when God says "Wait." I don't know about you but I don't wait very well. I don't like being in lines; the grocery store, the bank. I don't like red lights. I don't even like being behind someone in the slow lane of traffic. I have to weave in and out and get ahead of them. There are all types and ways in our lives in which we are called upon to wait. To wait. We hear now about things like road rage, where people can't stand to be slow. They can't stand it when somebody cuts in front of them and they have to slow down. It's perhaps a byproduct of a society that's in too much of a hurry. We don't want to wait. We're in a society that's going somewhere, we don't even know where, we're just in a hurry to get there.

I was thinking last night um, when I moved to Los Angeles I really had to adjust to faster driving here. I remember the first time I missed an exit I just absolutely panicked, it never occurred to

me you could go to the next exit and come back and start over again. Well when I moved back to Colorado or when I went back to visit friends they'd all say "boy, we can tell you live in Los Angeles the way you drive." Well now that I've lived there for over a year and a half I'm thinking "Wow, these people drive so fast." When I first moved back there the top speed limit in the town where I live is 35mph. If you're over 35 you get a speeding ticket. I said are you kidding? In Los Angeles we back out of our driveways faster than that! [audience laughter] And I got two speeding tickets after I moved back to Colorado. I'm embarrassed to tell you, it's not very Christian is it? Well, anyway, I did. And so I really had to slow down. When I first moved back I had to put a little piece of masking tape on my steering wheel that said "Slow Down." Well now I've started to slow down, and now coming back out here I think "Woah, these people are all in a hurry!"

Well, God's not in a hurry. In fact He says Wait. I am convinced that waiting is one of the most important aspects of our Christian journey. It's where we learn so much, it's where God can do so much in our lives. It's one of the most important aspects in our lives and yet it's the one that we don't want to do.

Would you turn please, to Isaiah chapter 40. Isaiah chapter 40. This might be a familiar passage for you, and it's a little different in various translations. I am reading from the NIV translation. Isaiah 40 vs 31. We could even start with verse 30 since it's the beginning of that sentence: Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord - now that's what the NIV says but I think the King James and other versions says "they that wait

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upon the Lord" - will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. Let's pause for a moment of prayer.

Father God in this last session of this Torrey Conference we ask You now to speak truth to us.

Father we have come here this morning, we could have made other choices, we could have been elsewhere, but we have come here Lord, perhaps for a variety of reasons but Lord we do ask that now that You would speak to us through the power of Your word. And may it be a word that You speak to us that will carry us into those areas of our lives down the road where we will need to look back and draw from this word: They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Open our ears Lord to what You want us to hear this morning. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

I would like for you to use your imagination for a moment. You're going to have to picture this because we don't have any pictures of it, I can't use a powerpoint and say look up here on the screen. I want you to envision a huge group of people who are walking. They're not walking single file, they're walking double and triple and it is a line of people as far as the eye can see off into the horizon. And they're walking very slowly because they are Very tired. There are men, women, and children. They are dressed in long robes, except their robes are beginning to wear out. Their sandals are beginning to wear out. Some are on donkey, most are walking. They have their cattle and their goats and their sheep with them. They are slowly walking.

They are the children of Israel who are walking back from Babylon and their captivity to Jerusalem, and 70 years before they started their walk - there are almost 1 million of them walking - 70 years before they started their walk the prophet Isaiah wrote these words. He was

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writing them for them at that point. He was saying to them: They that wait upon the Lord they shall renew their strengths. He says even the youths are weary. And as they are trudging along they are remembering the words of the prophet Isaiah. They can no longer see Babylon with its glistening hanging gardens. One of the most magnificent cities of the world at the time, one of the 7 wonders of the world. They can't see Great Babylon anymore. But they can't yet see Jerusalem either. They don't know what's waiting for them. They don't know that when they get to Jerusalem they're going to see a city with its walls crumbled and wild animals running around it. You see, they can't see their point of departure anymore but they can't yet see their destination. They are what we might say in the middle part of the journey but they don't even know that.

You and I might be in the middle part of our journey but we don't know it. You see the challenge with waiting is you don't know how long you're gonna have to wait. You don't know God's fulfillment of His promise to you is going to take place tomorrow, or next month, or five years from now. And that's why he says wait on the Lord. I'm taking you at my pace. I know the destination and I know when you're going to get there, but the exasperation on our part is we don't know if we're at the beginning of the journey, the middle of the journey, or the end of the journey. And that's why it calls on such a level of faith when God tells us to wait, but that faith is exactly the thing that He wants to bring out in you.

I was thinking last night how ironic it is that it took them so long and we're not even sure exactly how long it took. I mean how long does it take over 1 million people to walk over 500miles? They did not walk a straight line as the crow flies. I mean you can't take a map of that part of the world and say Okay, they just zipped across here. They probably followed the Tigers and

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Euphrates rivers, they probably went up the Fertile Crescent and went down simply because it would have been a more pleasant climate. I was thinking last night about how ironic it is that right now it is entirely possible that Saddam Hussein can send a missile from Babylon, which he has rebuilt and where we think he's hiding his chemical and biological weapons. He could put one of those onto the end of a missile and he could send one of those to Jerusalem in a few minutes. That's a frightening thought, except we know also who God's chosen people are. But isn't it ironic that that capacity exists today and here are these people on a long journey back. And the prophet Isaiah is speaking words of hope to them.

I want to say to you this morning that when God said "wait," whether it's wait to get married, wait to graduate, wait for whatever it is He's saying "Wait" in your life, it is His way of saying "I love you. I love you and I have a better plan for your life." It is God's way of saying, "I love you so much that I want to mature you. I want to bring you to a level of faith so that when I do answer your prayer you will be able to handle it." You see, if we get in a hurry we will bypass that level of maturity that God needs us to have so that His perfect plan in our life will be worked out.

I would like to suggest to you this morning that some of the greatest saints in the Bible and elsewhere have had to wait. Think of Abraham. God comes to him - we don't know, I was talking about this yesterday afternoon in the session about hearing God's voice - we don't know if God came in an audible booming voice to these patriarchs in the Old Testament. When we read the words "And God said..." we don't know if it was like, you know in the movie Ten Commandments when [inaudible] hears this booming voice, or if it was that still small voice

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inside them, but it was so strong and so persistent that Abraham knew, this is the Almighty God talking to me. And God says to him, "I have a promise for you. Your descendants will be as the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky." And Abraham waited 25 years! You're not even that old yet, most of you. He waited 25 years! And he didn't have any child. And he's thinking, "My descendants are going to be like the stars in the sky? I guess I better have a child." And you know the story about Ishmael. And God comes to him and says, "He's not the one. My promise is still for you but it's for the son of promise and Ishmael is not the one." And so Abraham was to wait another 13 years before Isaac was born.

Now hear what I'm saying this morning dear students. DO NOT accept an Ishmael when God has an Isaac for you. Do not get in a hurry and bring forth an Ishmael when God has an Isaac for you. When God has the best for you and you settle for simply the good. Now it's not as if God is going to punish you for that. God didn't punish Abraham, but it brought great sorrow into Abraham's life when he had to send Ishmael and Hagar out into the desert. I believed he loved Ishmael with all of his heart. He'd spent 13 years with this boy. His heart is attached to that little boy. And Abraham says, "Oh God, please. Isn't there a promise for him?" And so God gives a promise to the descendant of Ishmael. But do not get in a hurry and accept what you think "This looks good. This is nice." If you don't have peace about it, it's because the Holy Spirit is saying to you "Wait! Wait! Wait!"

I was sharing with the students on Wednesday afternoon, we were talking about being single, about being proposed to to get married and I didn't have peace about it and I knew deep down inside, "If I do this, this is going to be a disaster!" And looking back on it now I am so grateful to

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God that I didn't accept second best, because the life that he's brought me through and the plans that He had for me have been so much better than I ever would have thought.

There was Moses. Moses is out in the desert and he has murdered an Egyptian. The possibility exists that if he ever shows his face again he's going to be killed. And so he goes out into the desert. He does not know how long he's going to be out there. And God appears to him in a burning bush and says "You're the one. I've chosen you to lead my people." And as you know he starts arguing with God, "Oh I'm not, I'm not eloquent, I can't speak," but Moses didn't know how long his training period was going to be. And yet we read later on that Moses was God's friend.

And then there was David, can you imagine David - a teenager, a shepherd boy - and Samuel comes to him. Samuel pours oil on him and anoints him and says, "You're the future king of Israel. Now go back and take care of your sheep," [audience laughter]. I suppose there were times when David thought "What? I'm the future king of Israel and here I am taking care of these sheep, they smell awful! Is this any way to treat the future king of Israel?" Or maybe he even forgot about it! Or maybe he thought, "Did I dream that? Did I just imagine that? Did I just eat the wrong thing and have this dream that I was anointed to be the king of Israel? And I woke up the next morning and I keep remembering that dream? Or did this really happen?" But God had to make that young man wait just as He's making you wait in your life.

I remember when I taught here at Biola and students would come into my office and say, "I think that God is calling me to do this," or "I feel that God has a great work for me," or "I feel that God

is leading me in this direction." And I would always say to them, "What's God calling you to do today? Just be faithful today. You got an assignment due Friday." Just be faithful in what God is calling you to do today and He'll take care of that down the road.

There was Zachariah and Elizabeth in the New Testament, and they had prayed for a baby. By the time we read about them Zachariah is in the temple, he's an old man. And an angel comes to him and says, "Zachariah, your prayer has been answered!" My guess is Zachariah was inclined to say, "What? What prayer?" "Your wife is going to have a baby." I'm thinking Zachariah and his wife Elizabeth probably thought, are you kidding? We prayed that prayer 50 years ago! Oh THAT prayer, oh, woah. But God remembered. He just needed to have them wait because it would be all the more miraculous.

There is of course the story in the life of Christ. Of course Christ waited 30 years for His ministry. We have the story of Lazarus. He hears about his close friend being sick, and he takes his sweet time, probably up to five days before he even gets there. And Mary comes running out and says, "Jesus! If only you had been here my brother wouldn't have died." But Jesus knows that the reason for His tarrying is to give glory to His Father. I believe Jesus knew all along He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He was divine, He knew all things, He knew that Lazarus has died. And there was Jarius' daughter. Jesus was in a throng of people and they come running up to him, Jarius comes running up and says "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" And Jesus take His sweet time. In fact, He stops and attends to the woman who has the issue of blood and says, "who touched me?" And I'm sure Jairus is saying, "Jesus, a lot of people, don't worry about it, come on, come on, my daughter is sick!"

I think of others. I think of missionaries who had to wait to go to the mission field. I know of several missionaries who waited so long till they were so old that the mission boards would no longer accept them and they had to go out on their own. In my lifetime I've had the great privilege - twice - of spending time with Mother Theresa in Calcutta. She had a very profound effect on my life. Now because of my interest in Mother Theresa, because of the great joy of spending time with her, I read a lot about her life story. And one of the interesting things is how long she had to wait for her ministry to begin. Not only until she went to Calcutta to become a nun, but also that after she was so touched with the great need of the homeless people in Calcutta and applied to Rome to start a new order of missionaries and she had to wait year after year after year. And meanwhile she saw these people dying, she saw these people desperate. She saw these abandoned babies on garbage piles. But she had to wait. But it was worth the wait. What a wonderful world-wide ministry that has been.

Why does God tell us to wait? I wanna suggest to you this morning that there are five reasons. I'm going to go over these very quickly because I know the hour is getting late and you've been in the Torrey Conference a long time. Let me say first of all, God calls us to wait because number 1, He wants us to know Him better. I am sure that many of you have said "I just want to know God. I wanna know Him better." I've heard that many times here at Biola. I want to know God better. One of life's greatest purposes - I would say it is THE greatest purpose of our lives - is to know God. I believe that we will spend all eternity knowing God. That one facet of His character and His love will be unveiled to us after another. It will be an infinite, infinite

knowledge of God that will go on through eternity. But God wants us to start now, and so He says "just slow down, wait. I want you to get to know Me."

If you are establishing a relationship with someone at first you get to know them. It's very slow at first, as you sort of tenderly ask certain questions; where are you from? How long have you been here? What's your major? What dorm do you live in? You're just slowly establishing a sort of introductory phase of your relationship. And then if you see this person everyday, let's say you sit next to them in a class. You begin to ask them more and more questions and then you say, "Hey, would you like a cup of coffee at the Eagle's Nest?" So with each layer you're getting more and more acquainted. And then at the end of four years or five years this might be a person that you will know the rest of your life. And you get to a point where when they call you, you immediately recognize their voice on the telephone. They don't even have to say this is so and so.

I see one of my former students standing back there, Dan. I've known Dan for how long? Five years? Six years? Dan's now a graduate student at Talbot. But the other day I was standing in a group and I heard Dan's voice and as soon as I heard his voice, I thought "Oh, Dan is here!" And I turned around and that's because Dan and I got to know each other. He'd come into my office, we would chat, he was in many of my classes. We established a relationship. That's what God wants with you, He says "Wait! I want you to get to know Me!"

Number two. The reason why God calls us to wait as this passage in Isaiah says, it renews our strength. It renews our strength. On Wednesday when I arrived on campus and I was just waiting out here I overheard some students saying "man I'm so tired." I know you're tired. This is that

time of the semester. And it will get worse between now and December [audience laughter]. But God says wait in a spiritual sense because He wants to renew our strength. You know in football and basketball and most other sports - but especially football and basketball because they're so fast-moving and guys are running all the time. Now have you noticed that the coach will take one of the Best players and take him out and put him on the bench for a while. I've seen football games where a guy has just had a touchdown, or he's just carried the ball for 20 or 30 yards, and the next thing you see he's on the bench. He's got his helmet on. He's got a towel over his head. He's drinking Gatorade. Why? Because the coach knows that he expended a huge amount of energy in that ball-carrying and so he needs to rest for a while.

In the Psalms it says "You will hide me in Your pavilion." Do you know what the pavilion was? It was a tent toward the back of the battlefield. And when a general or commanding officer would see that the soldiers are wearing themselves out, he would say to the guys on the front lines, "Go back to the pavilion. Rest for a while." He will hide me in His pavilion. And the commanding officer would put the fresh soldiers back out into the front. It happens in the military today. Guys come back on furlough. A friend of mine just said goodbye to her son. He's gone to Afghanistan. I said how long? For a year. But then he'll be back. There are guys coming and going right now to Afghanistan all the time, because commanding officers know you can't leave them out there all the time. And so God says, "I want to renew your strength.

Number three. It gives God time to mature us. We're like a plant that needs to grow up so it can bear fruit. I live in Colorado, and one of the great things about Colorado is the spectacular mountains! Sometimes so exquisite when they have snow on the top and the sky is so blue

because of the altitude it just takes your breath away. It does take your breath away when you get out there in the high altitude [audience laughter]. There are 52 mountains in Colorado that are over 14,000ft. Consequently, one of the highest highways in the world is in Colorado. It's called Trail Ridge Road? Has anybody here ever driven Trail Ridge Road? Okay. It's a white-knuckled drive isn't it? I took Dr. Carol Taylor, the Vice Provost here, I took her up Trail Ridge Road and I think her eyes were closed much of the time because it's scary.

But when you get up to the top there are no longer any trees because you are above timber line. All there are are these scraggy little plants that are about four/five inches high. And they just look kinda scruffy looking and in the spring they have flowers on them. And when you go into the visitor's center at the top of that road they have a sort of [inaudible] view of those plants so that you can see their root system. They are these little plants that weather the storm of winter, they're covered with snow right now that road is closed. They will be covered with snow until about May, and the wind blows and they're frozen. And yet in the Spring when the snow melts away they blossom. You know why? Because they have a root system that's about 5ft long. These scruffy little plants have this enormous root system, that goes down so deep that it feeds them and produces those flowers. Do you want to bear fruit in your life? Then allow God during the waiting periods of your life to cause your roots to go down deep. It takes time.

Number four. The reason God causes us to wait is because He wants to refine and purify our desires. He wants to refine and purify our desires. The Bible says our God is a consuming fire. There is something about God when He comes like a fire to purify us, to turn us into that gold.

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But sometimes that purification process requires waiting, waiting, waiting on God. It sharpens our desires. The longer you wait the more you know what you want.

Have you ever been really really hungry, but you knew you couldn't eat yet because you didn't have access to food? And so at first when you feel hungry you just say to yourself, Oh, I'm hungry. But the more you wait the more you start thinking specifically about what you're hungry for. I know many of you have been on mission trips. I remember when I was on the mission field and then also when I've been on mission trips or away from the United States. At first I think, oh I miss European food. But the longer I'm gone the more I start thinking oh man, I miss, now I'm thinking of a certain restaurant, and I think of a certain menu that they have and I think of a certain dish. And it gets more and more precise, more and more real to me the longer I have to wait. That's the way it is with God. He wants to purify your desires. He wants to get you to a point where you really really REALLY know what you want. Because He says "Delight yourself in me and I will give you the desires of your heart." That verse doesn't mean if you delight yourself in Him there will be a brand new red Porsche out there in your driveway. What it means is He will put the desires in your heart that need to be there in order for His plan to be accomplished in your life.

Number five. It deepens our prayer life. It deepens our prayer life. I'm always somewhat dismayed when I hear people say "Well. Let's just pray." Ohh, my goodness, it's not "just pray" [audience laughter]. Prayer is the most powerful weapon you have at your disposal. Do you know that when our founding fathers were writing the constitution and they were deadlocked, Benjamin Franklin - who wasn't even a Christian, he was an agnostic - he got up and he said,

"Gentlemen, perhaps we ought to pray." True story. Now this is a man who didn't have a relationship with God. But he realize somehow there's power in prayer. The longer you wait the more you'll pray. And the more you pray, the more God is pleased with it, and the more He's pleased with it and the more He refines your prayer, the more specific your prayers become. And that's exactly what God wants. He wants you to have a carpet experience.

I can never remember a time - and I was here at Biola University for ten years, when we were not on our knees praying for something. And I think that one of the reasons why God has allowed Biola University to go through so many storms and so many tests and trials, is because He wants to keep this institution on its knees. Because through that there is growth and blessing from the Lord.

Now often times during the waiting period we make the mistake of comparing ourselves with others. Don't compare yourself with others. You might look at somebody else's life and think "Well, good grief, I've been praying for the same thing, look what happens to them!" Why is God blessing them? Why is God answering their prayer and not mine? You know there was a time when Peter was talking to Jesus and Jesus was telling him something and Peter turned and pointed toward John and said, "Well, what about him?" Do you remember what Jesus said? He said, "What is that to you? Follow me." Don't look at somebody else's life and say, "God, I don't understand it. I tithe, I do all the right things and I don't see any blessing in my life, but look what's happening to them. Man, I've been waiting for four years to have a date here at Biola, and look at her, all these guys line up. What's going on here?" God says, "What is that to you? Follow me." God has a perfect plan for your life and He says Wait. Don't make the mistake of

comparing yourself with someone else. It's a Dead End Street, that will only lead you to bitterness and unhappiness and self-pity.

God is never in a hurry, and yet He's always on time. He's never late. He's a God who does not dwell in the aspect of time. He is neither in space nor time. He's not in a hurry. He knows exactly your beginning and your end. He knows how much time He has with you. And if you wait upon Him, He'll bring it forth. What God starts He finishes. He is a God of closure. He is a God of completion. We read that in Revelation. "I am Alpha and Omega." The beginning and the end. So what God has started in your life He is going to bring to completion. Has He given you a vision for your life? Has He given you something that you have focused upon down the road? God will bring it to completion, in His timing, and His perfection.

Meanwhile, what can we learn? I used to always say to Biola students, in every situation - every roommate problems, or problems with their grades or whatever, I'd always say: You know what? You cannot change another human being. You may not even be able to change the circumstance. There are two things you can always do, in any situation, and it includes waiting on God. You can say God, what Do you want me to learn about myself in this situation? And secondly what do you want me to learn about you in this situation? And those will always be the two nuggets that you can carry away in every situation.

Has your heart been broken in a relationship? You broke up with your boyfriend/girlfriend? Perhaps you've lost a loved one? Perhaps you've lost a job, or didn't get a job that you hoped to get? Maybe you wanted to go on a mission trip and you couldn't raise the money for it. God says

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"Wait. I wanna teach you something about My character, and I wanna teach you something about yourself in the midst of this." What are you waiting for this morning? You know we sometimes hear somebody say, almost sarcastically, "Well what are you waiting for?" But I would ask it in a very sacred sense: What does God have you waiting for now in your life?

Would you bow your heads for a moment this morning? Let's contemplate in silence: God, what do you have me waiting for? Father in the silence of this moment we ask your Holy Spirit to speak to us [pause]. Father the thing that we've been waiting for, been hoping for, want to happen. We each have something. Lord, what are you saying to us this morning? [Pause]. Father we know that when You say wait, it's Your way of saying, "I love you, and I have a better plan for you." Precious Father, my heart has been so moved again this week by seeing Biola students. Lord, I just bless You for every precious student here. Father, I rejoice at the incredible plans that You have for each student. Father, I pray Your protection upon every Biola student. Put a hedge of protection around them that no harm might come to them.

I pray Father that You would meet each one of these precious students in a very personal and loving way. Father, that their full potential would be realized. And that at last when each of us stand before You, we will hear those words: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Father, thank You so much for these two and a half days. For all the speakers, the musicians, for all those who participated. Father I pray that Your Kingdom has been advanced this week, that Jesus Christ has been lifted up and glorified, and that in the days and weeks and months ahead, we will all be able to look back on this Torrey week and say, "I learned this. I carried this away with me." So Father, as we are dismissed now and we end this time that we have anticipated for so

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long, may it be a sense of gratefulness to You and hearts that go forth and glorify Jesus in whose name we pray, amen [Applause]

[End of Recording].