

Introduction

In 2009, CareerBuilder.com surveyed more than 8,000 people about being late for work. The results were disturbing. 20% said they were late for work once a week and 12% twice a week. 33% who were late blamed traffic. 24% blamed lack of sleep. And 10% blamed getting their kids ready for daycare or school. Other common excuses included public transportation problems, wardrobe issues, and dealing with pets.

Most of us aren't late for work. Everyone though is sometimes late for something. But as the birth of Jesus in Matthew 2:1, in conjunction with Galatians 4:4, makes clear, God never is and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

God Is Never Late

We begin with Matthew 2:1 and when Jesus was born. It was **"in the days of Herod the king."** This Herod was the governor of the Roman province that included Judea from 40 B.C. to his death in 4 B.C. Jesus was likely born during the last year of his life, which makes the most commonly accepted date of His birth 4 B.C.

That raises a question. Why was He born when He was? Or to ask it more precisely, why was He born so late in history? Since He came that people might be saved, we'd think the sooner the better. So, why didn't Father God make it centuries earlier than He did?

Paul's declaration in Galatians 4:4 tells us. Jesus was born **"when the fullness of time came."** That expression connotes when the time was right – when the circumstances were suitable enough for Him to achieve the purpose for which He was born, the salvation of man. Three circumstances in particular made 4 B.C. the right time.

One was what historians call the *Pax Romana* (the Roman peace) in the first and second centuries A.D. The centuries before Jesus were marked by ceaseless conflicts and wars that created social chaos. But by 4 B.C., the Roman Empire dominated most of the civilized world and

imposed a stabilizing peace on it that even conquered peoples valued.

A second circumstance made 4 B.C. the right time – a road system like the world had never seen. Roman roads extended from Britain to the Tigris-Euphrates river system and from the Danube River to Spain and northern Africa. The Romans built some 50,000 miles of hard surfaced highways, making travel faster, easier, and safer than it had ever been.

There was a third circumstance that made 4 B.C. the right time. The Greek language had become the lingua franca of the Roman Empire and along with Greek culture, unified it. They provided a commonality that drew its various people groups together linguistically and culturally.

Those three circumstances and others, together, created just the right setting for the coming of Jesus. They enabled the rapid dissemination of His gospel to **“the remotest part of the earth,”** to quote Acts 1:8. If He had come any earlier in history, His Great Commission, to make disciples of the nations, would have been virtually impossible to carry out.

We see then that Jesus was born in the fullness of time, that is, when the time was right. If He had been born earlier or even later in history, it would have been the wrong time.

Waiting

Now, this timing of Jesus' birth addresses an inescapable aspect of our existence, waiting. We want or need something, but there's a delay in getting it. That's waiting and it's a fact of life for us all.

Some forms of waiting are trivial in the overall scheme of things. One study, for instance, found that the average person spends six months of his or her life waiting at stoplights and five years waiting in lines. Those are ordinary forms of waiting that are common to us all.

But other forms of waiting are far graver than that. A single woman waits for that right man to marry. A childless couple waits for their first baby to be conceived. A plaintiff or defendant waits for the resolution of a lawsuit. A graduate waits for his or her first job. A terminally ill

person waits for his or her death. All of us have times when we have to wait for things that we seriously want or need. Lewis Smedes articulates it well: **“Waiting is our destiny as creatures who cannot by themselves bring about what they hope for. We wait in darkness for a flame we cannot light. We wait in fear for a happy ending we cannot write. We wait for a not yet that feels like a not ever. Waiting is the hardest work of hope.”** There’s no getting around it. Waiting is our lot in life.

But that doesn’t mean we have to like it and many of us don’t. You know the old prayer, **“Lord, give me patience and give it to me now.”** That’s really the way it is for many of us.

One of the reasons for that is the high tech, fast paced, **“instant”** culture in which we live. It’s one that’s totally committed to giving us what we want or need when we want it, which is now. I think of microwaves, Fed-Ex, fast foods, express lanes, instant rice, fax machines, e-mails, ATM machines, same day dry cleaning, and so on. All of those things reinforce and exacerbate our already natural aversion to waiting.

Notice something the next time you’re in heavy traffic – the number of times people honk at each other. In his book *A Geography of Time*, Robert Levine suggests that we create a new unit of time called the **“honko-second.”** He defines it as **“the time between when the light changes and the person behind you honks his horn.”** He goes on to say that it’s the smallest measure of time known to science.

The point is this. Many of us dislike waiting for anyone or anything. That includes God. When we want Him to give or do something, we expect Him to give or do it now. We want immediate gratification and perceive Him as One who gives it.

Maybe you heard about the investor who read and got all excited about 2 Peter 3:8, **“with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day.”** **“Lord,”** the investor asked, **“Is it true that a thousand years to us is like a minute to you?”** **“Yes,”** the Lord replied. **“Then a million dollars to us,”** the investor said,

“must be like a penny to you.” “Yes,” the Lord again replied.

“Lord,” the investor then queried, **“would you give me one of those pennies?” “Yes,”** the Lord answered, **“in a minute.”**

The moral of the story is that we sometimes want God’s resources but not His timing. We want the penny but not the minute. We expect Him to give or do what we want when we want it, now. And when He doesn’t, we become impatient and doubt or even resent Him.

Make God’s Timing Our Own

That’s why we need to know and remember what the birth of Jesus teaches us. God always acts in the fullness of time. Directed by His infinite wisdom and knowledge, He always acts when the time is right. In that regard, He always knows when now is not the best time – when later is better than now. That implies several things. First, He’s utterly patient and thus, never early. He never acts prematurely, before the time is right, before the best opportunities arise. And second, He’s utterly wise and thus, never late. He never acts belatedly, after the time is right, after the best opportunities pass. God is never early or late, in other words, in doing what need to be done. His timing is always the best timing. That’s certainly true in history, as the birth of Jesus shows. It’s just as true in your personal life and mine as well.

Please grasp what that means. If we want God’s resources and help, we have to take His timing as well. Going back to the investor, if we want the penny, we have to take the minute as well. We must want His timing as much as we want His resources and help. We must want Him to give or do what we want in His time and not a second before. Or to say it another way, we must make God’s timing our own.

That’s the only way we can have the rest of the soul that we desire and need. The acclaimed preacher Phillips Brooks was noted for his patience and poise. But one day, a friend observed him pacing the floor feverishly like a caged lion, prompting him to ask, **“What’s the trouble Phillips?”** To which he replied, **“The trouble is that I’m in a hurry**

and God isn't." That's sometimes the case isn't it? We're in a hurry but God isn't, which makes us upset and resentful. If we want patience and poise in our waiting, we have to make God's timing our own.

How to Make God's Timing Our Own

There's only one way I know of to do that. It's to trust Him. To trust God means to be certain of two things. One is the goodness of His intentions. We're convinced that He always has the best interests of others and us in mind. The other thing is His ability to carry out His intentions. We're convinced that He has the limitless wisdom, knowledge, and power to accomplish them. We're certain, in other words, that He's utterly good and great. That's trust and the natural psychological consequence of it is patience and poise.

The problem is that trust, as I just defined it, isn't a direct freedom. We can't just choose to trust God and instantaneously do it. People think they can and try, but always fail. I know that as sure as I'm standing here today. Trust is an indirect freedom. We must choose to do two things first, which in turn generates trust in us.

The first thing we do is something I've assisted you with over the years. It's to build a purposeful, detailed, and thorough vision of God. We learn all of His attributes and the details about them that He reveals to us. We then apply good logic to those details and infer others from them. All of those details go together to make up our vision of Him. They make up what we know intellectually about Him – that He is utterly good and great.

The Bible reveals, for instance, that God is all-wise. He always sees the best and highest goal in every given situation and the surest means of attaining it. The Bible also reveals that He is all-good. He is always inclined to do what is best for everyone. Those are two details to which I apply logic and infer a third detail, and it's powerful. God always acts to achieve the highest possible good for the greatest number of people for the longest possible period of time. That's part of my vision of Him.

There's a second thing we do to generate trust in God. Routinely engage Him. He's omnipresent or everywhere present, which means He occupies the space immediately around us. So, we habitually direct our minds and bodies to Him. We act upon Him and interact with Him in ways I've explained before: solitude and silence, fasting, study, prayer, worship, thanksgiving, purposeful obedience, and practicing His presence to name a few. He in turn acts upon us and interacts with us as we do. The result is that we increasingly come to know personally the God that we know intellectually. We have a deep sense of His presence with us. We also experience Him moving and working in our lives and us.

Knowing God intellectually and personally, as I just explained it, is the most person and life defining of all human experiences. It profoundly impacts us in many ways, one of which is this. It generates trust. Over time, it makes us certain of two things: the goodness of His intentions and His ability to carry them out. That certainty in turn makes us patient and poised about the things we want Him to give or do.

There's something I want God to do. I know and love four people who are mentally ill. So, I routinely ask Him to touch and transform their neural pathways and brain tissue – to make their minds sound. It used to be five people, but God did what I wanted with regard to one of those. It's a remarkable story that I don't have time to tell. I'll just say that God did what I wanted. He healed him. What about the other four though? I don't know. I'm still waiting for Him to restore their minds. But I can tell you this. Because I know Him intellectually and personally, I trust Him. And because I trust Him, I'm patient and poised – not upset and resentful – about it.

Conclusion

I close with a question, **“What is it that you want God to give or do that He hasn't given or done?”** Whatever it is, trust Him. Be certain that He's good and great, and never late. You'll be patient and poised, not upset and resentful, if you do.