

When Waiting is Hard

Genesis 16:1-14

Victor Mughogho

Introductory Q&A:

Q: What do you love about Malawi?

A: What I love about Malawi is that it is the world's most beautiful nation. We are not at the World Cup, but we have our own cup back home. It is a lovely country. People have a smile on their face all the time. And it has beautiful mountains with natural resources God has given us. And people always have a dance. It is a really lovely country to be in. And the people that we work with, they are all a great delight. It has beautiful scenery, and amazing animals: hippos, elephants, you name it.

Q: If anyone this week felt a bit warm or anything, and has anyone noticed there was some sort of storm, Victor, a bit about how this climate change is affecting Malawi?

A: Climate change has impacted our nation in a big way, negatively as well. We have had gains in our development for a long time, but climate change means intense rainfall and flooding and even cyclones in the past seven years, that has led to, really, colossal destruction. The homes that we have had are not as strong - they were meant for good weather. But with the flooding, it means you lose your home. And those structures you would see, those are the majority way in which people live. If flooding comes, you lose them, and they lose their crops. Lives get lost as well.

We never used to have cyclones, but in the past seven years, we have had them almost every year. So, climate change has really changed our way of life, and also our people: their hopes and aspirations. You know, they get frustrated because they were hoping for a better life as time goes on.

Q: You work with this organisation called Eagles Relief and Development, which this church has supported for many years. Tell us, what makes Eagles' approach a bit different from other organisations, other NGOs, other charities?

A: I have been privileged to be part of Eagles for a very long time. And I did not know it then, but what we are doing is really unique. It is making a very unique difference to our country. Eagles' work has proven to be very transformational. It is recognised by government, and international development organisations that have been in the space for ages.

This year alone we had four international organisations, international directors from Ireland, from the UK, all of them saying, "We want to come and visit your communities." And one of them visited and what they said was "When we saw what we saw, how you interact with your communities, we had a full picture of how development should look like." And that has been recognised across many levels.

And communities are excited. You know how the moment you learn how to drive a vehicle for yourself, you get excited and every time you want to go on the road? For them, now that they see development happening, that they can actually do it. Their kids can have a better life, they are very excited. And that is what you find across all 28 districts in all regions, because our work covers the whole country as we speak.

There is a focus on helping communities recognise their own resources, what they do have. It is not dependent on outside aid. And it is about people, communities taking responsibility for solving their own problems. And then that brings about changes in relationships: changes in relationship between them and God, their internal relationships, in their families and communities, and with the environment.

Q: So, Victor, tell us what excites you at the moment about what God is doing through Eagles in Malawi?

A: I remember we just had a visit about two months ago, with another director for an Irish-based organisation, saying, "I have lost hope. I have been in development for a long time. I see the work with our partners. Things are not changing. We are pouring in the money. There is no lasting change happening." They came alongside us, and hear all the stories from the community, and none from the community asked for anything at all. No handouts, nothing. And the director, she said, "Now I see that there is hope," and she is from Kenya. And that is encouraging us as Eagles that the Lord has given us direction and the right approach, which is just truth-based: what the scriptures tell us. Believe in God and believe in the resources that God has given us, and join hands together. When you work together, you can accomplish so much more. And so that has been really exciting. And the staff who have been dedicated all the time, and that vision is transforming our communities.

It is amazing, and I am really struck. This little church, in this little parish, in this quite small country, working together with Eagles and supporting this work in Eagles has had this extraordinary impact. If you refer to slide-12 from the slides (which you can download from the ASW webpage https://www.allsaintsweston.org.uk/Articles/741621/6_When_waiting.aspx), you can see all the names of these international agencies, whom Eagles has been teaching how to do good development. And again, you just think of the global impact from this small organisation in this small country with support from this small church. It is amazing what God can do.

Q: So, tell us, Victor, what can we pray for, for you and for Eagles?

A: Yes, there are a few areas that require praising God for and also praying for. When you see the Bible says, "Do not despise the days of small beginnings." (Zechariah 4:10). And when you see that from what is little, great can happen. It can only be the hand of God. And so, one is just praising God, for he has been faithful all these years.

I am glad I am here in the UK. I forgot to mention that actually I have managed to visit the House of Commons here, albeit virtually, speaking to Members of Parliament. They wanted to hear from a partner in Africa and I was chosen to actually connect with them. That influence has gone on and on, working with the British government, the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, and it has just been incredible. So, as you said, from here, the support that you provided, God has expanded and multiplied it.

Pray for our staff in Malawi to keep on keeping on. Pray for our communities, because they are waiting and waiting and waiting for a better life. And waiting is not always easy. Waiting can be hard. But pray for their hopes and aspirations to come to pass.

And pray, as I have said, for the communities. Pray for the country in general, Malawi. These climate change impacts. Pray that the Lord will grant us the rains that we need, but the wisdom to make use of those resources that God is giving us.

I am also passionate about children, so please pray that the children of Malawi will achieve their hopes and aspirations. I would not say pray for Malawi to go to the World Cup (that would have been great). But just pray that their hopes and aspirations will materialise with the help of God.

Sermon: When waiting is hard

Well, good morning once again. It is good to see friends and people whom we met eight years ago. Some of you we are meeting for the first time. Nonetheless, it is a great joy to be here. All Saints is very well known in our circles in Malawi by the whole church, and they really appreciate your fellowship, your prayers, your support. We are profoundly grateful. So, it is a great honour and privilege to be given this space to be able to share some thoughts and reflections on a Sunday like this one. I would normally be in Malawi now and sitting down, maybe listening to a sermon by one of our bishops there. But today God has so planned that we can be here and share the word. Thanks for the reading and thanks for the time we have had thus far.

Normally, when I go out to certain meetings and conferences, many of them for young people, I ask, "What is the topic we are talking about?" I have also been a teacher, so it's important that they understand what we will be talking about. But you already know what we are going to talk about because it has been on the programme for some time. And then it is also on the screen. In the churches I come to, we do not have screens like this. So, you just have to believe whatever you have been told.

But here we are talking about when waiting is hard. And what a relevant topic it is. I think every human being can relate to that. Everyone has tried to wait in some queues at some moment, and in traffic you are meant to wait sometimes, and the question is: what is my attitude and mood when I am waiting in those spaces?

Waiting can be hard. It is not easy.

Many of you may have heard that 'somebody is supposed to come from Malawi, but in between his coming and his arrival, he needs a visa'. Do you remember that? And then you were praying. The waiting was not easy for me. Waiting for that word from the immigration officials, it was hard to wait for a visa. When I heard stories that friends around the world have been denied the same visas, it was hard.

And how can you wait when the waiting is hard? And the only way you can do that is actually, as you wait for what you are hoping for, you have to wait with God. Do not wait alone. And it took prayer and waiting upon God. I was told people here were praying, and in Malawi we were praying there. By Tuesday night it was difficult for me to sleep, and so I had to wake up in the night, went into the lounge, in the sitting room, and just continued to pray.

As you wait for what you are hoping for, you have to wait with God and not wait alone. Because they that wait upon the Lord renew their strength. Because waiting requires strength. Waiting requires you not to lose hope. Waiting requires that you keep believing that what you are waiting for is worth the wait.

I was reflecting on this amazing topic, why waiting can be difficult and hard. Oftentimes, in the space of waiting, you are forced to make choices. And some of those can be difficult choices, and then they can have serious consequences.

Did you know that all of us are products of waiting? Mothers would understand that. It takes nine months of waiting for a child to actually arrive in this world, to be born. That period of waiting between conception and actually a child being born, it takes waiting. But every woman, every mother knows it is not an easy time. It is hard. Amen. You know it is hard. But on the human level, all of us are products of waiting. That is why we are here. Someone had to wait for that entire period. But then also others had to wait even to conceive. In the story we have heard today, Sarah could not even conceive. But they had waited and waited and waited for a very long time.

We do not have McDonald's in Malawi. We have KFC in Malawi. It is there right now. And then as I thought about it, I realised that without waiting, there is no McDonald's. You will understand. Without waiting, there is no KFC. What do I mean by that? Do you realise that the chicken a hero, I can tell you right now. The mother hen is incredible. Because, you know what, for that chick to come forth out from the egg is because of waiting. A chicken has to brood her eggs over twenty-one days. She has to change her lifestyle, behaviour and habits for that chick to come forth. She has a choice. Either she disrupts the waiting period and breaks the egg and forces the chick out on day number two or four or seven. If you break the egg, you lose the chick. You lose it. She has to wait a full twenty-one days. And I learned as I researched that actually, for the mother hen, she only leaves her nest once a day or twice a day during those twenty-one days. So, she loses all her friends. She is no longer partying out there. She is in absolute seclusion. She disappears from the world alone, waiting upon her dream to raise the next generation, the next chickens, to come forth. It takes waiting. And then I was shocked to learn that the last three days, she is fasting. There is no eating. There is no leaving the place. It is total dedication for her to see the chicks come forth.

So, if you disrupt the pattern, you disrupt the process, you lose the outcome.

And in this story, we all know what happened for Abraham and Sarah. As a married man, I am instructed many times to obey your wife. That she is always right, even when she is wrong. She is always right. And we need discernment from God. At what point can I discern God's voice versus man's voice and therefore make the right choices? Because waiting was so hard. They had waited for so long for that child. Up until then, it was not the right time yet, and God had not forgotten them.

Every time you are in that waiting state, what voices are you hearing in that particular state?

And that is why my message is: **as you wait, do not wait alone, wait with God.**

And I was reminded of many stories in the Bible. Joseph, the young man, has a dream, but that dream takes a long time. And the Bible says, even in prison, in Potiphar's house, wherever he was, it said, God was with him. So, what I learned was really: as you wait for what you are hoping for, you can only wait with the strength of God. You must wait upon God for your strength to be renewed.

And I want to take you back to Malawi. For the farmers, they are involved in waiting. They wait for a harvest. Sometimes that does not come. They wait season upon season upon season. In one season alone, because of the flooding, they plant their crops three times. They plant the first time, the flooding comes, they lose it. They never give up hope. They plant again and they are still waiting for that harvest that does not come. Until the third time, they plant again. And hopefully, by the grace of God, they can harvest. This year, they waited until March. The harvest looked good. Then, from nowhere, the cyclone hit in March. There was so much flooding. A lot of farmers lost their crops. And how long have they been waiting for a better life? How long have they been waiting for their children's dream to come to pass and say, "I want my child to be the president or a minister or a teacher or a police officer, just to have a better life"? They have been waiting all along.

At Eagles, our focus has been a connection between church and community. Why is that important? Because development is not just material, it is spiritual. You have to have hope. You have to have faith while you are waiting. You have to have values. Because if you do not have those values and identity, what happens? Communities resort to shortcuts. Then they go into negative coping mechanisms.

What are negative coping mechanisms? Where children are involved and women go into transactional sex, selling their bodies because they are waiting for food, waiting for money. The waiting is so hard that if they do not have the values and the faith to hold on to. If they do not have a God to hold on to, they cannot survive. They cannot make it to the finishing line. But we are seeing true transformation happen only when they wait with God. When they wait with that hope and the value system deep inside them, that God has said it, he will fulfil it. And in his time, the Bible says, God makes all things beautiful.

And so, throughout the Bible you see that we only get to the finishing line when we wait. But we wait in Christ and we wait in God who strengthens us. Philippians 4:13 says:

Philippians 4:13

¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Look at the whole world as we are here today. Do you know what we are all doing right now? We are waiting for the coming of Christ. Amen. Now the promise was made a long time ago. Has waiting been easy? No. It is getting harder by the day. Now we have got AI that has decided to come into the picture, artificial intelligence. And then we have all the social media and commotion that is going on. You discover that the temptations and the face of temptation is changing over time. The waiting is getting harder.

And the more that is happening, the more the church and believers must go before the presence of God and wait for special outpouring of strength, from God, to strengthen us. And also, to introduce our children to Christ and to God because they will have to do the waiting themselves as well as time goes on.

And therefore, we also are waiting, all of us. In Malawi, they are waiting. We are waiting for the return of Christ. And therefore, it takes us to wait with the strength that God alone can provide. So that we do not break the egg before the twenty-one days, and then the chicks never come out. But if we wait for the entire process in silence, like the hen does, the mother hen does, in silence, in hope, in faith, in God, we are able to get to the finishing line.

Therefore, I wanted to encourage all of us. And I realise every one of us is involved in some form of waiting. Sometimes it is waiting over a physical ailment, and we want God to come and give us rest and relief. There is hope in God. If we pray to him, he will strengthen us in that space.

The World Cup is going on, it is true, the hopes of an entire nation. I am aware for England; waiting since 1966. I know that. And I know the waiting has been hard. But what is profound is that we can do all things through Christ. When we come in Christ and wait upon him and say, "God, renew my strength, I cannot do this on my own," God will strengthen us. And one day Joseph becomes the prince. One day Joseph's dream comes to pass. One day Joseph is able to save an entire nation.

For Malawians, the churches have been holding on. The communities have learned to wait with God. And then the harvest comes. It has been taking years. Now they see that by being persistent, the truth really brings about transformation.

So, I wanted us to just pray as you are there. Pray for that move of God. Pray for that breakthrough. Pray for the hopes of our children as parents of a nation, even hope for world peace and transformation.

Closing Prayer

Lord, may you strengthen. May you visit. May you revive. May you just transform their hopes and let their hopes rise again. That, God, you are faithful. Our Father and our God, we are grateful that, actually, we are not waiting alone. You are praying for us. You are with us. You are Emmanuel, God with us. And with you, Lord, we can do all things. May you strengthen the All Saints Weston Church, strengthen the parents, strengthen the children, strengthen the leaders, and strengthen us because we have a promise from above that you will make all things beautiful in your time. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.



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