

## THE DISCIPLINE OF EXPECTATION

16 January 2026

### SUMMARY:

This week's message is part of our **21Days of Prayer and Consecration** for the year 2026, emphasizing a radical shift from asking God to bless our plans to surrendering the entire year to His will. Bruce Downes explores biblical expectation not as optimism or wishful thinking, but as a theological virtue, a posture of active waiting, attentiveness to God's initiative, and readiness to receive and respond without conditions. The message challenges believers to move from looking backward at past hopes to recognizing the present season of God's movement, drawing parallels between the disciples' journey and the contemporary church's calling. It emphasizes that expectation is formed through surrender, hiddenness, and faithfulness rather than visibility or certainty, and that preparation always precedes fulfillment in God's timing.

### KEY POINTS

- The 21 days are not about asking God to bless our year, but consecrating the year to God's will and purposes
- Biblical expectation is active waiting: attentiveness to God's initiative with readiness to receive and respond
- Expectation is confidence rooted not in outcomes but in God's character and faithfulness
- God forms expectation in us before fulfillment; this expands our heart, purifies our desire, and prepares us to carry what He entrusts
- The biblical pattern is: Promise, Preparation, Fulfillment and preparation is almost always longer than we choose
- Presence always comes before mission; formation comes before expansion; encounter comes before proclamation
- Expectation is both personal and corporate. We learn together as a spiritual house
- The 21 days is to prepare us to receive what God wants to do, not to prepare God to act
- Living expectantly means being faithful in hiddenness, guarding unity, and surrendering our deepest attachments
- Expectation doesn't guarantee success; it guarantees faithfulness, and faithfulness is what God always honors

### **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:**

- Luke 24:13-35 (The Road to Emmaus)
- Acts 1 (Jesus orders disciples to wait for the promise of the Father)
- Acts 2 (The outpouring of the Holy Spirit)
- Hebrews 11:1 (Faith as assurance of things hoped for)
- Habakkuk (Writing down the vision and waiting)
- Romans (Creation waiting in hope)
- Luke 1 (Mary and Zechariah's expectation)

### **QUOTES**

- Expectation in the scriptures is a people willing to receive what God desires to give them in His time and in His way with no conditions.
- Expectation is confidence rooted not in outcomes but in the character and the faithfulness of God.
- Waiting aligns human weakness with divine provision. You cannot do it yourself.
- Presence always comes before mission. His presence always comes before mission. Formation comes before expansion. And encounter comes before proclamation.
- A Christian lies down and says, walk on me. And it's hard. That is who a Christian is. A Christian turns up and gives when they don't want to give.
- The 21 days have not been about preparing God to act. They have been about preparing us to receive what he wants to do.
- Expectation doesn't guarantee success. Expectation guarantees faithfulness. And faithfulness is what God always honours.

## **THE DISCIPLINE OF EXPECTATION**

### **SMALL GROUP GUIDE**

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer.

#### **ICE BREAKER**

Question: When you think about the phrase "God, Your will be done" in your life, what is your honest first reaction? Is it excitement, fear, or something else? Why?

#### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

##### **1. Consecration vs. Asking for Blessing**

- Instead of asking God to bless our plans, we have consecrated 2026 to God, giving Him the year and asking for His will to be done
- This is terrifying because God often asks things we don't want to do
- True surrender means being willing to respond when God speaks

##### **2. Biblical Expectation Defined**

- Expectation is NOT excitement, optimism, or wishful thinking
- Biblical expectation is: Active waiting, attentiveness to God's initiative, readiness to receive and respond
- Expectation is confidence rooted in God's character, not in outcomes
- It is a posture of faith that positions us before God with no conditions

##### **3. The Biblical Pattern**

###### **Promise → Preparation → Fulfillment**

- God almost always forms expectation in us BEFORE fulfillment
- Preparation is usually longer than we would choose
- The 21 days were not about preparing God to act, but preparing US to receive

##### **4. The Road to Emmaus Lesson**

- The disciples' hope had transferred to the past: "We HAD hoped"
- They didn't recognize the season they were in
- Jesus restored their expectation through Scripture and His presence
- Their hearts were burning WITHIN them in the present moment

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

### **Section 1: Personal Surrender (15-20 minutes)**

1. Bruce Downes shared how God has asked him to resign jobs, sell homes, and put children second to ministry. What is the hardest thing God has ever asked you to do? Did you do it? Why or why not?
2. Read Acts 1:4 where Jesus tells disciples to "wait for the promise." Why do you think waiting is so difficult for us? How is waiting different from passivity?
3. The message stated: "Expectation expands our heart, purifies our desire, and prepares us to carry what God is about to entrust." Can you share a time when a season of waiting actually prepared you for something you couldn't have handled earlier?

### **Section 2: Recognizing the Season (15-20 minutes)**

4. The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus or the season they were in. What are signs that we might be "looking back" instead of recognizing what God is doing now?
5. Read Hebrews 11:1. The message described faith not as "something we have" but as "an orientation and direction." What is the difference? How does this change how we think about faith?
6. Bruce Downes said, "Presence always comes before mission. Formation comes before expansion. Encounter comes before proclamation." Which of these do you tend to skip over in your eagerness to "do something for God"?

### **Section 3: Community and Faithfulness (15-20 minutes)**

7. The message emphasized that Christians "lie down and say, walk on me," turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, giving more than asked. This is incredibly counter-cultural. How do we balance this teaching with healthy boundaries?
8. "Expectation means guarding unity when we could so easily divide over the silliest of things." What threatens unity in Christian communities? How can we guard against division while still being authentic about struggles?
9. Read the key statement: "Expectation doesn't guarantee success. Expectation guarantees faithfulness. And faithfulness is what God always honours." How does this free us from the pressure of results?

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

**This Week's Challenge:** Choose One

### **Option 1: The Daily Expectation Practice**

- Each morning this week, before checking your phone or starting your day, pray: "Lord, I give you this day. I am expectant for what You want to do. Help me recognize Your voice and be ready to respond."
- Journal briefly about moments when you sensed God's presence or prompting

### **Option 2: The "Looking Back" Inventory**

- Identify one area where you have transferred your hope to the past ("We HAD hoped...")
- Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal what season you are actually in
- Write down what God might be preparing you for through this current season

### **Option 3: The Surrender Exercise**

- Complete this sentence honestly: "God, I'll do whatever You ask, except..."
- Bring that exception to God in prayer throughout the week
- Ask Him to help you release control of that area

### **Option 4: The Community Check**

- Identify one person in your church or small group or family that you have been avoiding, judging, or feeling hurt by
- Take one step toward reconciliation this week (prayer, conversation, or extending grace)
- Remember: Christians choose to be walked on rather than divide

## **LOOKING AHEAD: THE FOUR "TRAPS"**

Bruce Downes shared IMPACTERS' vision for 2026:

1. Expanded social media outreach to find people globally
2. 20 new IMPACTERS sites around the world
3. Leadership training center (everything rises and falls on leadership)
4. Formation school bringing people from around the world for 8-week immersive training
5. IMPACTERS Care for pastoral care of people

Group Discussion: How might God be calling you to participate in this vision through prayer, giving, leadership, hospitality, or going?

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Pray together:

- For willingness to surrender to God's will, even when it is uncomfortable
- For eyes to recognize the season we are in
- For expectant hearts that actively wait for God's movement
- For faithfulness in the hidden, small things
- For unity in your community and in the global IMPACTERS family