

# In Painful Season of Delay, Hold On!

I've tried my best to keep a good attitude during this pandemic season, but God knows I've complained too much—about masks, vaccine mandates, changing health policies, closed schools, online church services and travel restrictions. But what I've hated most are the delays. Everything is moving slower these days.

It's almost as if God pushed a pause button on the world. We've been waiting to go back to "normal" for over two years, but it feels like we are stuck in one of those weird *Groundhog Day* scenarios. Will this nightmare ever end?

Waiting is painful. What helps me is reading about different people in the Bible who waited a long time for God's promises to be fulfilled:

- Sarah waited 25 years from the time God told Abraham he and his wife would have a son until the day Isaac was born;
- Moses waited 40 years in the wilderness before God called him to deliver Israel from the Egyptians;
- Caleb waited 45 years from the time God promised him that Israel would take Canaan until the moment he received Hebron as his personal inheritance;
- Hannah endured unspecified years of barrenness waiting for her baby, Samuel. Then, after he was born, she had five more children.

David waited at least 15 years from the time he was anointed to be a leader until he became king. He wrote these words sometime during his long delay: "I waited patiently and expectantly for the Lord; and He inclined to me and heard my cry" (Ps. 40:1, AMP).

God gives us a promise—that's the easy part. Then He reveals His strategies, works miracles and sends provision. Working with God is exhilarating when these things happen. But faith is also warfare. The devil hurls doubts and obstacles in our direction. There are battles and, sometimes, casualties. And there are always, always delays. It is during painful times of waiting when we are most tempted to quit.

Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two men commissioned to rebuild Solomon's temple, struggled with intense discouragement as they looked at Jerusalem's ruins. The task was overwhelming, the cost was prohibitive, the workers were dismayed and their enemies were fierce. They started the work in earnest, but they heard a familiar voice that whispered, "You'll never finish this. God is going to abandon you in the middle of this project." Fortunately, just when Zerubbabel and Joshua were about to throw in the towel, the prophet Haggai showed up with a refreshing announcement. He told them: "'But now take courage ... and work; for I am with you,' declares the Lord" (Hag. 2:4, NASB). The Lord also promised He would see the building project to completion.

Those prophetic promises propelled Zerubbabel and Joshua forward. The words invigorated their weary faith and steeled their determination. Their passion was refueled. Their hands grew strong again and they returned to their work. God's glorious house arose from an ash heap.

This is God's promise to all who are called to labor with Him. He doesn't tell you to begin something and then abandon you halfway through it. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. He finishes what He starts.

The apostle Paul knew this when he wrote: "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6, MEV). The Message Bible says it this way: "There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great

work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears.”

Many of God’s servants today are weary. Budgets are tight, resistance is strong and people seem distracted and disunified in these politically polarizing times. The devil is busy trying to abort God’s promises. You may have been tempted even this week to resign from your assignment. But I want to encourage you with the words of Haggai: “Take courage! The Lord is with you!”

Regardless of what you lack, the Lord’s mighty presence is all you need to finish the task. Hang on to Him and keep believing.

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## **Hard-won Lessons From the Lockdown Season**

Since the launch of Freedom City Church six years ago, we have fasted the last 21 days of January each year. This January, as I was seeking God for a fresh word for our work in our urban church planning model, I felt two words strongly—“recalibrate” and “establish.” “Calibrate” means to measure against the standard. “Recalibrate” means it is time to put things back in their proper place against the standard. “Establish” means to create something firm that will last a long time and cause it to grow and multiply.

Systems can gradually drift off course. We periodically need a fresh point of reference to recalibrate. 2022 is a year of recalibrating and establishing, a time to get back to fundamental spiritual habits: prayer, fasting, evangelism, solitude, quieting our spirits to create space for encounters

with God. Our standard remains Christ, His Word and the basic Christian disciplines.

In April of 2020, Missouri Gov. Parson issued his lockdown order, "Stay at Home Missouri." From April 6-24, we stayed home. After years of working 60-70 hours each week, planting our church and recovery homes, I was forced to stay home with my family. It was awesome. I noticed how my 4-year-old daughter became affectionate and loving toward me. My relationships with my wife and kids grew deeper.

Relationships require time together to grow in intimacy. It's the same with our relationship with God. We often focus on His great promises and lose sight of the promiser in the process. I was building a home without intimacy with my family while growing a great ministry, but I let myself get too busy to spend time at the feet of Jesus. The lockdowns taught me to get back to basics, to the place where all I wanted was God.

At the end of 2021, it looked as though we could lose our building as the \$643,000 balloon note came due. COVID had hurt us financially. My wife and I knew God had given us that building, so I called my leadership team together to fast and pray for 21 days. We separated ourselves to seek God for favor and breakthrough. I reached out to everyone I knew, including the pastor of the nearby megachurch we used to attend. He felt led by God to take up an offering for us at their next service. The church raised over \$1 million to pay off our building, hire a staff, replace our HVAC and even purchase another home for women. Standing ovations and shouts erupted at all their campuses as people gave generously to our church. This was indeed an 11th-hour miracle. Again, time alone in intimacy with the promiser is the only way we will realize His promises.

I believe the stage is being set for massive new revival, and before 2030 we will see that revival hit the USA as in the days of the Argentine Revival, Azusa Street and Brownsville.

An army of 11th-hour revivalists will arise to make ready the bride for the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Revival starts with us. First, we need to revive the fire of our love for and intimacy with God through much time in His presence. Spiritual disciplines will lead us into a more intimate walk with Jesus. Seek the reviver, not the revival. Second, passion for souls is the key to a sustained revival that will impact the nations. Jonathan Edwards, a leader in the First Great Awakening, said, "If a revival ceases to be about souls—it will cease." God is passionate about souls. The mission of our Lord Jesus centered on the lost. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

This next—and possibly the final—great revival before Jesus returns will be marked by the presence of God and a wave of evangelism such as this world has never seen. Revival will start in us, and God will then move in the church and make Himself known in our communities.

Oh, God, "that You would rend the heavens and come down" (Isa. 64:1a), that the dews of heaven would become a torrential downpour, bringing many sons and daughters to glory.