

Divine Delays: A Season of Waiting | Ezra 4:17-24

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daly preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living.

We're delighted to share this sermon with you. All right. Well, good morning, everyone. Today, we are continuing our sermon series through the Book of Ezra.

We've been going through a wild ride. We've been going through verse by verse, line by line through this amazing and incredible Book of the Old Testament. This last week, we've been going over chapter 4 of Ezra.

And this is a heavier chapter. It is a time where there was so much movement that was happening. The exiles were returning to Jerusalem from their exiles in Babylonia, returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the altar and to rebuild the temple.

In chapter 4, we had found that the adversaries came in and they tried to infiltrate the progress that was being made from the people of God.

[1 : 11] The leaders, they stood firm. They said, no, thank you. They stood firm in their convictions and they rejected the attempt to infiltrate the project.

And when this happened, the adversaries, they decided they were going to continue trying to be against opposing the people of God.

They escalated things further. They frustrated and discouraged the people of God in the process. And eventually what happens is these adversaries went so far as to write a letter to the king accusing the people of God.

They were slandering the names. How many of us have been slandered before? Don't raise your hand. But they were playing dirty, so to speak.

And today we will see King Artaxerxes responding. We will see how sometimes earthly authorities will stop the progress of God's people temporarily.

[2 : 17] Sometimes there are people that have a hardened heart, evil intent, and they will try to stop you in the progress that you're making in the name of Christ.

And we'll see that when these evil people do terrible things that doesn't stop the will of God. And that may temporarily put a stop or put a halt to things.

But God's will will be done, amen. So let us pray before we go any further. And let's ask God to be with us at this time. Let's ask that truth is spoken here.

And that together we may all learn something and apply something to our lives. Let's pray together. Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, we thank you for giving us this time and this opportunity to come together as the body of Christ.

I pray today, Father, that you will give us guidance today. You will give us wisdom and insight. Let this message be preached in such a way that people will understand that their ears will be open, so to speak.

[3 : 25] We pray that you will lead and guide us as you always have. And Father, we pray that we can trust in you in your timing, knowing that even though man or people or even governments or kingdoms may try to stop what we are doing, we know that it's temporary because you God are in control.

Sometimes, Father, we realize and we recognize that there are seasons of trials and tribulations or storms that we face in our very lives. May we trust in you and your timing.

And even though we may not fully understand what is happening, may we rely on you. May you provide comfort and peace and understanding and wisdom and insight and even discernment at times, knowing that we are not alone and that we are not forsaken, but you are there with us.

It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we say together, can I get an amen? So we're gonna go ahead and turn to Ezra, if you haven't already.

It's page 461 in your Bibles. And so I'll go ahead and start reading here. So in verse 17, it says, the king sent an answer to Raham, the commander, and Shimshi, the scribe, and the rest of the associates who live in Samaria and the rest of the province beyond the river greeting.

[4 : 54] And now, the letter that you sent to us has been plainly read before me. And I made a decree and search has been made and it has been found that this city from of old has risen against kings and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it.

And mighty kings have been over Jerusalem who ruled over the whole province beyond the river, to whom tribute, custom, and toll were paid. Therefore, make a decree that these men be made to cease and that this city will not be rebuilt until a decree is made by me.

So basically it's gonna stop and he's not gonna say anything. He goes on in verse 22, and take care not to be slack in this matter.

Why should damage grow to the hurt of the king? Then, when the copy of King Artisirksi's letter was read before Raham and Shemshai, the scribe, and their associates, they went in haste to the Jews at Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease.

Then, the work of the house of God that is in Jerusalem, it stopped and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius, the king of Persia.

[6 : 16] These are our verses that we are going over. Let's start off with, we start off with the king's response. It's verses 17 through 19, right?

The king is responding. And from there, we have the king is decreeing to halt the work. And then because of this, there is the immediate effect upon the work.

So he's responding, the king, King Artisirksi's is responding to the adversaries and he means business. He did not ignore the letter, he responded accordingly.

The letter has been read before him. He made a decree to search out the matter. He did this because the adversaries were saying, search the records and you'll see that Jerusalem was a wicked city.

And he found that in searching in the records that, yes, Jerusalem was the wicked city, but what was happening was that it was a misunderstanding because what happened before the Jewish people were exiled, there was evil that was happening within the city.

[7 : 16] So they're placing the blame in other words on the Jewish people, on the people of God. And they're saying it's your fault. That's what's happening here. And so King Artisirksi's, he's finding the records here and he's saying, well, it must be, these must be the wicked people that the adversaries are talking about.

And so he found the record, he recognizes the accusation that the adversaries made. He's confirming, yes, Jerusalem is a wicked city. Again, it's not mentioning the people of God, it's mentioning what had happened within the city.

Blame was cast upon the people regarding the destruction of the temple and the city. The king recognizes, right, he searched through the records. That's what he's saying here. We then go into the king's decree to halt the work.

Right, we see in here that King recognized that Jerusalem was once a powerful city. If you go into, what is that? Verse 20, mighty kings have been over Jerusalem who ruled over the whole province to whom tribute, custom and toll were paid.

So in other words, Jerusalem, they paid their taxes, right? They paid their fair share or they paid their tribute. Whatever you want to call it at that point. This is very significant to King Artisirxes.

[8 : 32] He didn't want to lose their income. Because you have to remember the adversaries were saying that if this city is rebuilt, they're going to rebel against you. They're going to do things on their own. They're not going to pay their tribute.

They're not going to pay their taxes as it were. And so because of this, look, King Artisirxes realized that Jerusalem is of great importance to the king.

And so in verse 21, right? He made a decree that these men be made to cease. He's saying you need to stop and you need to stop now. Stop a building of this work immediately.

The people of God, they are going to face a situation where they'll have to stop what they're doing based upon this decree. It goes into verse 22 where it says, and take care not to be slack in this matter, right?

He's saying, don't be lazy, right? Don't be slow in this. Be fast in this to respond. Why should damage go to the hurt of the king? This has got to be taken care of now. I don't want to see this destruction.

[9 : 33] This damage to continue much longer. So the king is basically putting pressure on these adversaries. You've made your point. Now you need to go out and stop them. And then we see on here the immediate effect of the work, right, which is those last two verses.

And this is significant here. This is where the immediate effect, right? Of stopping the rebuilding of the temple happens. It says here that the copy of the letter was read before Raham and Shem Shai, the scribe and their associates.

And what did they do? Did they walk really slowly? No, they went in haste to the Jews at Jerusalem and by force and by power they made them see.

So it's one thing, and I think of this analogy, right? It's almost like you get the letter from the king and it's like you're ready to go walk in and say, hey, you got to stop immediately.

That's not what happened. They had their letter as it were, and they used force and power to stop. So if you can imagine that kind of imagery of what's happening at the project site, at the temple site, what I'm sure you guys have imaginations, right?

[10 : 39] You can think of what that would look like. And so that letter was read. The adversaries immediately, they got what they needed to stop the people of God. And so again, they use that physical force and that's what's happening here.

That's the seriousness of what we can see happening. And I can imagine this would be extremely discouraging, disheartening to the people of God.

Just think about it, after 70 years of exile, they came back, they rebuilt the altar, they started praising the Lord with their burnt sacrifices. They started observing their ceremonial times, right? They got back in the groove of things and yet it stopped again. What's going on here? We see in verse 24, then it goes on.

It says, then the work of the house of God that is in Jerusalem stopped. And it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius, the king of Persia.

[11 : 41] It started out as infiltration. And I want you to take for a moment, the adversaries tactics, it started by simple infiltration.

Saying, hey, we want to work with you, we worship God as you do, but the leader said no. They kept escalating it, discouraging the people of God by bribing the counselors.

This may hit home for a lot of us in reading this, especially with, let's face it, what happened a few years ago when a great pause button was pushed with the work that we were doing in ministry. And maybe you can identify with the people of God. Maybe you were working, doing great things in the name of Christ. And you had to stop. We can see here that this is nothing new.

And this is something that has happened before and you might have experienced that as well. And in the word of God, there are times when people who have power or influence over us will use their power for evil.

[12 : 48] That's a big reason why it is so important for us to pray for our political leaders, those who are in the government for that matter, those in state, local, national, even international, we pray that the heart of the King will be softened.

And in this circumstance, we find that there's so many lessons, so many truths that we can see here. And I realize this is a very heavy lesson for us, but it's truth nonetheless.

So we have to think here for a moment, okay, well, what are the lessons here? What can we learn from this? Well, we start off by the power of political authority is the first one.

Political authority can impact God's work, but ultimately it is under God's, His control. These verses, they show us how political authority can have a significant influence or impact on the work of God's people.

This can be done for good or it can be done for evil. And in this case, it's not being done for good. We can think about, we can very easily think about politicians in our own lives.

[14 : 06] They have a position of power that they can use for good or evil. And hopefully we pray that those who are in those positions that they do the right thing, that they do good and not evil.

They can use their power for good and not evil. That's a prayer we should have. And in this situation, we can see that people manipulated those in power for evil. King Artisirsis wrote the letter.

He made a decree saying that he's going to use his power and his influence to stop the people of God. So these adversaries, they made their case to say, hey, look, King, this is what's going on. And how easily that can happen even today. There is spiritual significance in this. From the King's side, he's just putting an end to this. He's just saying, you guys got to stop. But for the people of God, it's a time of trial. It's a season of waiting and it's even a testing of their faith. It's at moments like this where it requires patience and waiting upon the Lord and his provision and his promises and situations like this can happen in our own lives.

[15:18] Some of us can relate. Some of us more than others. We're on a good trajectory. We're doing great things in the name of Christ. We're proud of what's happening.

And then it just stops. A lot of you can relate to that. And sometimes that great pause button, if you can imagine, you probably watch those game shows where you have like a red button that you push, right?

I think Family Feud and all these game shows, you push the big button. But it's like a great pause button on life has happened. And sometimes people will try to interfere and to do evil.

And even though they may win temporarily, we must remember that God's plan will never fail for God is in control.

And even though we may not see it at the moment, God is outside of time and space. And again, I cannot emphasize this enough.

[16:21] Even though it's temporary, God is still in control. And we will see when we go into chapter five and even beyond in these chapters, that just because what's happening in chapter four doesn't mean that the project will be completed.

I want you to keep that in mind. You have to look at the big picture in that. I want you to think about Proverbs 21, which mentions that the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will. God's hand will be in all of this. Isaiah 14, 27 says, for the Lord of hosts has purposed and who can annul it?

His hand is stretched out and who will turn it back? So if you can imagine God's hand being stretched out, who can move God's hand as it were? And even with the interference of man or people or evil people, God's will will be done.

And we wait upon the Lord. The next one is the role of patience and faith. That patience and faith are essential during those seasons of delays and fulfilling God's promises.

[17:37] There is a role and there's an importance of being patient and waiting upon the Lord and remaining rooted in Christ. We have the testing of faith where it's almost as though you have this forced stop, that great pause of the rebuilding of the temple.

That's something the people of God, look, they had to stop a project. Like I said, after 70 years of being in exile, they returned to the Holy land and then it's great pause button was just pushed by adversaries.

Don't you think they were discouraged? Do you think they were depressed? Thinking, well, why did the King overstep his bounds? Why did these adversaries come in? They required the people to trust in their Lord and God's timing.

Think about how often we have moments where our faith is tested. There are times where we have to wait for something. We have to wait upon the Lord. And there are times where we will even go through trials or tribulations, the testing of our faith.

And it is in times like this where we focus on Christ. We trust in Him and we wait upon the Lord because God is constant. We, human beings, are we constant?

[18:55] I know we try to be, but we tend to change our minds very often, but God remains the same yesterday, today and forever. It may even be a time for you to grow spiritually.

I know there's the great joke that we can think about is when we pray to God, hey, God, I think I need some patience in my life. God, I want some patience now. And you see the problem with that prayer.

If you're asking for patience, you're not gonna ask for it now. And very often you'll even have those situations where you will have to wait for something. For some of us, it might be waiting for an answer for college application.

For others, it might be waiting for God's timing on when will a family member ever turn to Christ? It could be waiting upon, I can think of a whole bunch of things and we can go on and on about that, but I'm sure you have your own, you've had your moments where you've had to wait.

And look at that as an opportunity for you to grow spiritually. James chapter one, verses three to four says, you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, right?

[20 : 10] Let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. And it's in those times and waiting where we're being molded.

It's very difficult for us to think about, difficult language, but it's very true. Patience is an opportunity to be molded more in God. Romans chapter five, verses three to five says that, and these are very difficult verses, right?

Rejoicing in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance. And it goes on, endurance produces character, character produces hope. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Isaiah 40, 31 saying that, I love this verse, Isaiah 40, 31, they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.

They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. Psalm 27, 14, wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage.

[21 : 10] Wait for the Lord. It's a call for us to remain rooted and wait upon him. Consider for a moment, God's divine timing. When things are delayed or we wait upon the Lord, we have to think that God's hand is in this.

God has a greater plan despite what things people can do. And just because man tried to stop the will and the work of God doesn't mean that it won't be completed.

We wait on the Lord and God will teach us patience in the process. And in all of this, I want you to be encouraged to. Trust in him.

Maybe you are going through a season where you're waiting upon the Lord. Trust in him and know that he will never abandon you. Right? Just like that famous verse in scripture, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are there with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Think about that. And with all of this, God's plan will come to fruition at the appropriate time and Habakkuk, which is a book that a lot of us often skip over, right?

[22 : 29] Habakkuk two, three says, for still the vision awaits its appointed time. It's a point in time, right? It's talking about a vision. It hastens to the end. It will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it.

It will surely come. It will not delay. And in the context, it's talking about the vision. Wait for the vision to come. But we can see that even here, it may seem slow into its fruition, but it will happen one way or another.

And I know for a lot of us, I know I think it was either last Sunday or the Sunday before, I mentioned instant ramen noodles, right? How many of us love top ramen, right? You cook it for a few minutes and you're just ready to go, right?

Well, or even our subscriptions, right? We get instant gratification. We all love that. And I think very often in our culture of text messages and social media and the bombardment of the endless stream of scrolling, we tend to forget the importance of waiting for something.

I can think of how my father used to always tell me very often, and it's not every time, when you're rushed, very often there's a margin of error that can happen. It's much greater.

[23 : 51] A personal story I'll tell you real quick. I had a guy, I was at a gas station, and this guy was very, very well dressed. He drove a very, very nice car, came up to me, and he gave me or was going, trying to give me a bunch of gifts.

And he said it was the will of God that I give you all these gifts. I'm going to give you a new MacBook Pro, a new iPhone, and he had this ring on.

He's like, this is a \$2,000 golden ring. I want to give all of these to you for free. And at first I thought, oh man, I can't wait to have a brand new computer and a new iPhone and a golden ring.

I don't know if it's my size, but I was thinking for a moment, and I thought, why? Why are you doing this? And I ended up, the Holy Spirit.

No, don't take those things. And I ended up saying no, thank you. And the guy got very upset that I didn't take these gifts. So later on I called my dad, so my dad used to work in the police force.

[24 : 56] And he told me, oh, that's a scam. In fact, though, very commonly when that happens, they're stolen items. And they might have stolen it, and they want you to get in trouble.

Or they give them to you, and they want you to give them money. Oh, you know what, now that I gave you, how about \$3,000 or whatever it is? We live in this culture of instant gratification.

I can't imagine, if I had taken those items, I would have been in a lot of trouble. I even went to the local police department, and I said, so what if they gave them to me? What could I keep those things? I was just curious. He said, no, you'd have to give them back. I'm like, all right. So even if I thought I'd get it temporarily, I still would have had to give it back. And this is just one example.

We have to be mindful in our decisions. There are times we have to wait. And in that situation, in the heat of the moment, I'm like, I don't know what you're doing, but I had to wait.

[25 : 55] And so kind of going back, I want to share with you Isaiah 55, 8 through 9. This is a beautiful verse. The Lord is saying, my thoughts are not your thoughts.

Neither are your ways, my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher, and my thoughts are higher than yours. It is all saying that God's ways are higher.

So when we're in those seasons of waiting, we trust in Him because God's way is higher. Psalm 37.7 says, be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.

Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in His way, over the man who carries out evil desires. Sometimes when we see somebody who seems to be winning by doing evil, we may get, we may fret over it.

But the Lord here is saying, don't fret yourself over the man who carries out evil desires. So be patient in the Lord. We trust in Him and to the ones who do evil, they will reap what they sow.

[27 : 02] We then go into spiritual and emotional strain. Delays can cause strain. There are opportunities for spiritual growth. When we have to wait, when we go through that season of trial, or tribulation of testing or waiting, that puts a strain on our lives.

Spiritually or even emotionally. Many of us have experienced seasons of waiting. Seasons where people did bad things and it affected us on an emotional level.

And we remember those things. Just consider the discouragement among the people of God at that time after waiting 70 years. They had hopes and dreams of finishing the temple, and yet they were stopped by political influence.

There was frustration and uneasiness and discouragement. It shows that there are challenges that come with setbacks. Right? And it just requires us to continue in the Lord.

When we are down, when we are discouraged, when we are facing emotional or spiritual strain, seek God and His comfort. Think of the imagery of streams of living water.

[28 : 10] That there's comfort in Him. When you're going through a trial or tribulation, the last thing you want to do is to not go to the Lord, or to go away from the Lord.

It's in times where we are vulnerable, where we seek God and His comfort. Can you imagine if you do not seek God and His comfort when you're going through a trial?

The feeling of no one being there? That's why we seek God. Knowing that He's there for us, that He is with us, He knows what's going on.

In going to the Lord, you can find comfort and peace and safety and security instead of feeling alone, separated or hopeless. God provides for us even in those times of trials and tribulation.

Psalm 42.5 says, Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God, for I say again, praise Him, my salvation and my God.

[29 : 12] 2 Corinthians 4.8-9 says, We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed.

Romans 8.28 says, We know that for those who love God, all things were worked together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. Hebrews 10.36.

You have the need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what is promised. It's all connected here. During those season, it's a time for you to grow in the Lord.

You continue in the Lord, no matter what happens in your life, the good, the bad, or let's face it, even the ugly, we remain in Christ like roots that are planted deeply into the ground.

How many of us have made the same mistake? Maybe been at a house where there's a giant tree that provides shade, right? It's grounded in there. So too should our faith be like that.

[30 : 13] Rooted in Christ. We remain in Christ and we seek the higher things. We continue progressing toward Christ and having Him mold us into who we are meant to be. And even though man may try to stop you in what you are doing, you keep going, you never give up.

You stand firm, you don't abandon what you're doing. You remain in Him. James 1-2-4, count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds.

Know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, right? That's a verse that I read before, Hebrews 12-11. From the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

It says though you're going, it says though you're being disciplined in those times, that's very difficult. Even I struggle with that, those kind of verses. We are a work in progress, my friends, that God is going to continue to work in and through your lives.

That's why first and foremost, you come to Jesus Christ, believe in Him, believe in the Lord and be saved beyond a path of growing in Him and being moved to do good in His holy name.

[31 : 24] And understand that look, when you believe in Jesus Christ, it's not the end, it's the beginning, the beginning of a wonderful journey in Christ being that work in progress.

And so the question then comes up is, how can I apply and live these out? The first thing is responding to governmental authority. This is a very difficult one. It's submitting to authority while trusting in God's sovereignty.

It's going to be very difficult for us, right? There are going to be times when people in positions of power, they might restrict you or they might see you. They might restrict you or they might see to it that they stop the work that you're doing.

We stand firm in the Word, we deal in love, we stand firm together, we even speak out at times. But we also, there's this balance that has to happen, even when it comes to submission to authority.

There are times where we do have to trust in God's sovereignty and God's divine plan. That's what the people of God had to do. The whole accusation was that these people are rebellious.

[32 : 23] And that when they rebel, they're going to overthrow the king. So it wasn't a cut and dry situation. It is in the waiting. That doesn't mean that we abandon the mission of Christ.

It doesn't mean that we retreat. It means that we stand firm while we patiently wait upon the Lord. It's a time for us that we seek God's wisdom in navigating these kinds of challenges.

And I realized that this is just one of many examples in scripture. How we respond to, or how you respond to your own unique situation might be different. Some of you may be facing a situation where someone is trying to stop you, or someone has stopped you in the trajectory that you have in Christ.

Consider this might be a time for you to pray for those that do evil against you. Consider it might be a time for you to focus on your efforts to grow in that season, the season of waiting to rely on the Lord and his promises.

It's very difficult for me even to say this. I think of how often I want to fight back. But the word of God is very clear here. It's difficult, but true.

[33 : 34] You cannot stop the will of God. Daniel 2 21 says he changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings.

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. I think of Proverbs 16 9. The heart of the man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

We pray for everyone. Even those who are in high positions. One very good verse to think of is 1 Timothy 2 1 through 2. Prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving.

Let it be made for all people. And then it goes on saying for kings and those in high positions that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

It shows in the word of God how important it is for us to pray for our leaders. When's the last time you have prayed for your mayor? When's the last time you've prayed for your governor? Right.

[34 : 32] Those who serve in any sort of leadership capacity. The next one is trusting in God during periods of delay. Use delays to deepen your trust in God's perfect timing. When you encounter a delay, a trial or a tribulation, this is a time and an opportunity for you to deepen your relationship with the living God engage in prayer, seek his will, grow in the Lord and trust in his divine timing.

And even in his intervention, because God intervenes as well. Remember that just because you have to wait doesn't mean that God is saying no. Many of you have heard that before. Sometimes God will say yes, no, or not yet in seasons of waiting.

It's certainly a not yet. Just wait and see what will happen. You might be waiting. You might be in that season. And in those times, just know that God will deliver.

Instead of being anxious or worried or impatient, this is a time for you to lean on and rely on the Lord and maybe consider what can you learn in this season of waiting?

Psalms 37, seven again, be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. Galatians six, nine, let us not grow weary of doing good for in due season.

[35 : 53] We will reap if we do not give up. There's a great treasure that we receive in heaven. We believe in the Lord, right? We are saved. We grow in the Lord and we do good in the name of Christ.

We don't ever give up. We keep moving forward in the things of God and letting God mold us. The next one here is persevering in the face of opposition, right?

It's showing faithfulness to God. Some people are going to oppose you no matter what you do, right? If you're a student or if you're not a student, if you're employed or unemployed, there's going to be people who are going to oppose you.

Even if you're a banker or a farmer, whatever it is, we will face opposition in our lives, right?

Especially when we're considering our walk with the Lord. It's just going to happen and quite frankly, it's, it will happen even in our spiritual walk in the Lord.

Delays and being patient and waiting upon the Lord is another aspect of it. It's a time to remain rooted in Christ just as a tree, right? When I gave you that imagery of a tree, it will go through storms.

[36 : 58] The leaves and branches will be moving to and fro. But yet it's still remaining rooted, right? It's still standing firm. Many of us, we can think of storms where things are just flying all over the place, right?

Or a windstorm or whatever it is that's happening. But trees remain firm. Now I know, granted, some trees get uprooted. I get that, but you get the idea though. First Corinthians 15:58, therefore my, my beloved brothers be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord, your labor is not in vain.

Everything you do for the Lord is going to matter. And in considering persevering and standing firm in the Lord, we remain in God's truth. God recognizes that the next one is encouraging one another in times of waiting, supporting and encourage one another during times of delay.

This is something that's very important because when we're going through a trial or tribulation, it's an opportunity for us to comfort one another, to pray for one another, to be present.

There is a ministry of listening and being present. Sometimes people say, I don't know what to say if someone's going through a trial, just be there with them, just sit next to them.

[38 : 19] You can just do that. You can pray with them immediately. Just say, you can say, Father, I don't have the words to say, but I know you are in control and I know you are there with whoever it is.

Sitting next to somebody, being present, that is part of our ministry. That is part of the care of the saints, right? That we build up one another. You can encourage someone in the season of waiting. And help one another when they're going through a trial. We build up one another. If you're experiencing a season of delay or trial or tribulation, do not be afraid to reach out to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

That is something that is so profoundly beautiful about the church. Is that knowing we are there to encourage one another, to celebrate one another? And in those, in all seasons, we have God at the center of our lives.

We are there to help one another, to be united in Christ, to love one another, just as Christ has loved us. Encourage one another in times of waiting. And I want all of us to keep in mind that be encouraged to trust in the living God and his divine plan for your life.

[39 : 37] Even when man tries to stop you. Yes, those are things that are outside of our control. But I believe in a God that is more powerful than what any man will try to do to me.

That is how strong our faith should be in Christ. When things happen, we trust in the living God, knowing that he will deliver on his promises.

God will remain victorious. That's why he offers his arms openly to come to him, to come and see. Well, that's why we have our Bible, knowing that in these dark seasons and times that God is still there.

And that God will be victorious at the end. If you've ever read the end of the book, right? Knowing that God will be victorious. We are stronger together.

Just like I've mentioned this analogy before, the bundle of sticks, we are stronger together. We believe in the Lord, we trust in him, and we encourage one another in the building of the saints. [40 : 39] Are you trusting in God, the great shepherd? Perhaps this is a time for you to believe in the living God. Perhaps this is a time for you to return to him, or maybe if you're going through that trial or that tribulation or that season of waiting, perhaps it's a time for you to trust in him more fully.

I think of the one verse that says, be reminded of this imagery that I look to the hills. Where does my help come from? It comes from God.

It comes from God alone. I know there's many different variations of that. Look at the mountains and look at the sun that's shining down on us. Just because there are clouds that are in our way, doesn't mean that the sun doesn't exist.

Because the love and the light and the truth of Christ still shines, even in dark days, even when clouds and storms are seems to be all around us, the light, love and truth of Christ is still there. It comes from God alone, knowing that he's there with us in every season of life. Let's pray together. And dear Lord and Heavenly Father, we thank you for once again this time and this opportunity to allow us to gather together.

[41 : 56] We pray that in seasons of waiting, when man interferes with what good we are doing, when it seems like there's a great pause that has happened, we pray that we can rely on you and trust in you more fully in every season of life.

We pray that we can find strength in you, comfort in you, peace from you, joy in you and patience during times of delays. May we trust in you and your timing, even though we may not see what's going on.

May we fully rely on you, Father, for we know that you're working behind the scenes and we pray that we as a church, we can support one another in this faith that we have. And it's all in all of these things we say in the name of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of our faith, and we all say together, can I get an amen?

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May God's blessings be with you.