

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, January 26, 2024, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: Delayed by God's Good Design – Time to Dream (III)

Today, we continue our new year's sermon series, "Time to Dream." This series can be broken down into six phases of faith. The first phase is receiving the dreams and visions God has given us, often through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As Christ-followers, we are called to "expect great things from God" and "attempt great things for God," just like William Carey, the great missionary to India in the late 18th century... Because of his unwavering dedication and faith, William Carey became known as "the father of modern missions," and his legacy continues to inspire Christians today to spread God's Word across the world in various ways.

Today, we reach the third phase of faith in our God-given dreams: Delay. Just as things happen in nature according to God's timing, fulfilling our God-given visions also takes time. Yes, our mighty God can instantly do miraculous things for us. However, in most cases, God has designed a waiting period for us—a time for us to grow into the maturity of Christ and develop His divine characteristics in our faith journeys.

We can find many examples in the Bible of godly dreamers who faced delays in their spiritual races. For example, Noah had to wait a long time for God's vision to come pass as he built the ark. Abraham and Sarah received the promise of a child, Isaac, but it took 25 years for that promise to be fulfilled. Moses spent nearly 40 years in the wilderness being trained before he could begin his ministry to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt.

In our children's video and Old Testament reading this morning, we saw how God led Joshua and the people of Israel through a delay. They faced an impossible challenge related to the conquest of the first territory in their God-given land. The difficulties they had to overcome were not only with the unbreakable walls of Jericho, but also the unchangeable circumstances of their enemies. The people of Jericho did not respond at all to the people of Israel. They simply hid behind their impenetrable fortress. Interestingly, God's strategy for Israel was to march around the city once every day for six days in silence. Then, on the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times, and on the final march, they were to shout together as the trumpets sounded. God's instructions were not a quick fix but a long, deliberate process—a delay designed by God. When the people followed these sacred directions with patience and faith, they saw the walls fall down. God's good, designed delay made their God-given dream of victory possible. Through their waiting on God, they were able to move forward into the Promised Land.

Similarly, before God's promises to Israel were fully established, they went through years of challenges. Many of us know that the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land in Canaan was only supposed to take about two weeks. But it took the people of Israel nearly 40 years to get there. Forty years! Can you believe it? That was a long delay. But during that time, God was working in them, testing them, teaching them to rely on Him, and shaping them into the people He wanted them to be before His promise was fully realized.

This morning, I want us to reflect on what we can do while waiting for our God-given dreams to come true on our faith journey. I also want us to apply these sacred principles to our spiritual adventure.

Firstly, God wants us not to fear when we are in a season of delay. We've learned that the phrase "fear not" is mentioned more than 360 times in Scripture. That is a powerful reminder that challenges are a part of our divine journeys. And that is why, according to the Word of God, we are encouraged not to fear but to trust fully in His hands, day by day.

In today's Gospel reading from Matthew, Jesus tells us not to worry about anything in life. He talks about our basic needs—things like food, drink, and clothing—and stresses that our lives and bodies are far more important than these things. And then, He reminds us how valuable we are in God's eyes. We, as human beings, are His masterpieces, created to "do good works"—in other words, to fulfill our God-given dreams, "which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

Please understand this: Jesus' advice to not be anxious does not mean we sit and do nothing, just waiting for God to work everything out for us. When we look at His illustration in this holy text, we see an example with birds, which actively fly around, search for food, and work diligently in their daily tasks. Just as the birds trust God as their Provider, we too are to trust Him as our Protector, while actively pursuing our God-given visions—even when we are in a season of waiting or delay. And then, Jesus assures us: "All these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33).

So, God's antidote to fear is not to ignore our concerns, but to stop worrying and start focusing on His presence with us. Even when we are in God's waiting room, our Promise Keeper is right there with us. Instead of stressing over the uncertainties of tomorrow, God invites us to enjoy His abundant blessings today—while doing our best to live out our God-given dreams in the present moment...

God wants us to live contentedly, courageously, and confidently, one day at a time. So, friends, what are we anxious about tomorrow? What are we worried about in this delay? Maybe it is a dream job, a dream partner, a dream marriage, a dream child, a dream house, or a dream retirement. We all have dreams. But let us remember our Creator—the Way Maker, the Promise Keeper, and the Miracle Worker—who values each of us more than anything in the world. Instead of fearing the shortages we might face, let us ask our Almighty Lord to provide for and protect the things we desire. And let us rest in the precious present moment, instead of worrying about tomorrow. As we keep our eyes on Christ and continue to pursue our God-given dreams, our Shepherd will provide everything we need for our faith journey and protect us from any danger in our spiritual race.

Secondly, God wants us not to faint when we are in a delay. In our Epistle reading, the Apostle Paul talks about God's principle of growth in nature. He uses the example of farmers sowing and reaping. If a farmer plants apple seeds, he knows he will eventually harvest apples. If he sows grape seeds, he will later harvest grapes. Spiritually, the same is true: when we invest in godly things, we will see godly fruit in our community. But, just like in farming, there is a period of time and specific steps between planting and harvesting. Farmers don't just plant and wait. They continue doing necessary tasks: watering, fertilizing, pruning, and cultivating their crops.

And while they work hard, God provides the things they need for growth—things like sunshine, rain, and wind. The whole process takes months, years, and sometimes even decades. Spiritually, it is the same. God’s timing is often slower than we would like, but remember it is always perfect.

I’ve heard a humorous story about praying for patience. People often ask God to make them patient—but they want God to provide that virtue as soon as possible! That is part of our human nature, isn’t it? We want to grow, but we want it to happen quickly. Do you remember the story of the Chinese bamboo tree? Some of us may be in a similar “hidden development” period. In the spiritual realm, there is an unseen battle happening all the time. While we wait for God’s answers, we must not faint. We must not give in to the attacks of our spiritual enemy, Satan. Whether we realize it or not, the devil tries to discourage us and make us give up on the God-given dreams in our hearts. One of the lies he whispers in our ear is the word “never.” We might hear things like: “You will never make it. Your loved one will never change. They will never get through their difficulties. The dream you have had will never come true.” Spiritually, these negative thoughts are meant to cause us to doubt God’s love and His power. But when we face delays, we must remember that God is the One who has placed these dreams in our hearts. He is the One who is working—even when we cannot see it.

Are we in a hurry to see these dreams fulfilled? It is okay to be in God’s waiting room. It is okay to rest and relax, knowing that God is at work behind the scenes. God knows what is best for us, and He wants to fulfill our dreams more than we do. So instead of growing weary, God calls us to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1). As we do, we must fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We must “strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees” (Hebrews 12:12) and keep moving forward, trusting in His plan. Friends, I am confident that as we continue to walk in obedience—doing the work God has called us to do—we will see our God-given visions come true in His perfect time and in His supernatural way. The Bible assures us of the songs of joy we will have when we “sow with tears” or “go out weeping, carrying seed to sow,” (Psalm 126:5-6). We will receive a joyful harvest at the proper time if we do not give up and continue pursuing our God-given dreams before the Lord (Galatians 6:9-10).

Thirdly, God wants us not to forget what He has done when we are in a delay. Remembering God’s presence, provision, and protection is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. In today’s Psalm, the Psalmist reflects on how forgetful the people of Israel were during their time in the wilderness. God performed mighty miracles for them, like the ten plagues. Yet, the people “gave no thought” or “thanks” to God for what He had done (Psalm 106:7). As the people of Israel journeyed toward the Promised Land, they faced dangers on all sides. Pharaoh’s army pursued them, and the Red Sea threatened to drown them. But God protected them. Then, in the desert, when they went hungry and thirsty, God faithfully provided manna and water. And yet, in the midst of these miraculous provisions and protections, the people continued to complain. The Psalmist emphasizes this—they forgot God’s “many kindness” (Psalm 106:7,13).

As people of faith, we often criticize the people of Israel for their lack of belief, their ungratefulness, and their forgetfulness. But before we judge them, let us pause and ask ourselves: Do we do the same thing? If we are honest, sometimes we forget God’s past faithfulness—especially when we face unexpected challenges. We may start thinking, speaking, and acting as if God has never worked in our lives. And when things get tough, we might try to

solve problems on our own first. But later, we find ourselves returning to God, asking for his mercy and guidance—just like the people of Israel did.

There is a story about a long-distance swimmer named Florence Chadwick... She later shared that she had learned the true meaning of faith, as described in Hebrews 11:1: Faith is “the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.” In life, we can feel like Florence Chadwick, struggling through the fog of uncertainty. But in those moments, we need to remember to focus on God’s promise for our divine visions to be realized in our day.

Now, think about this: Do you know how heavy the human brain is at birth? It is about 14 ounces. By maturity, it weighs about 46 ounces—just under three pounds. Scientists tell us we use only about 10% of our brain’s capacity. With such limited captivity for understanding, we cannot fully comprehend God’s thoughts and ways. But in times of delays, we must remember that our Creator is capable of giving us far more than we can imagine. We may not understand all that is happening, but we can trust in His wisdom and timing. That is why the Psalmist chooses to remember God’s past faithfulness and praise Him for it: “Many times He delivered them... for their sake He remembered His covenant, and out of His great love He relented. Save us, LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to Your holy name and glory in Your praise...” (106:43-48).

So, friends, what have we forgotten about God? It can be easy to forget what God has done in our lives when we are in a season of delay. Forgetting God’s presence leads to misery and discouragement. Instead, we must remember His promises and the incredible things He has already done... What are we waiting for God to do—in our community, in our church, in the lives of our loved ones, or in our own lives? Know this—God has not forgotten any of us. Instead of focusing on the challenges we face, let us remember the mighty things God has done in the past, what He is doing right now, and what He will continue do in the future.

In conclusion, as God’s people, we may experience many different spiritual delays throughout our faith journey. But God uses these detours to help us become more like Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit. His ways and thoughts are always the best, and He is working in every moment for the good of those who love Him. Remember, the Lord, our Alpha and Omega, sees every tear we’ve shed and every effort we’ve made under His guidance. He is the Sovereign God, in control of every situation. Our Way Maker will create a path for us—even when there seems to be no way. Our Promise Keeper will fulfill His Word. Our Miracle Worker will work miracles for us and our loved ones. The Lord will bring our God-given dreams to life— and the dreams of those we love too—when we continue pursuing these visions, praying, and trusting in His timing. We must not fear, because of God’s provision. We must not faint, because of God’s protection. We must not forget, because of God’s presence. We will see His promises fulfilled. So, may God bless each of us to grow into more mature disciples of Jesus Christ through our spiritual delays!

**In preparing this sermon, I’ve been inspired by various sermons series, including Rick Warren’s teachings on God’s Dream and David Jeremiah’s book, Forward, drawing from texts like Joshua 6:1-7; Psalm 106:1-13, 43-48; Matthew 6:25-34; Galatians 6:7-10.*