

# The Waiting Is the Hardest Part

## LESSON FROM A CHURCH PLANT FELLOWSHIP

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**T**ell someone you're going to be involved in planting a new church, and the most common response from others who have done it before is, "It will be the hardest work you ever do."

Even those who haven't done it before will tell you planting a church is not an easy road. Church planting is a little bit like becoming a parent. People in your life are excited for you; even people you don't know wish you well and share in the anticipation. There is no end to the unsolicited advice and encouragement.

My husband, Scott, and I never doubted the warnings of what we were in for when we joined the core group for a church plant here in North Lake County, Illinois (about an hour north of Chicago). But we could not fully understand what it would be like until we stepped into the adventure.

Our church plant is still a work in progress, we're not even technically a plant yet—only a "core fellowship group." At this time, we are uncertain of God's plan for our group and whether we will become an official church plant.

Currently, we are waiting for a new pastor and no longer hold worship services on Sunday mornings. We gather once a month now to share, pray, and eat together, seeking God's will. This has been a time of tremendous bless-

ing and time of spiritual growth and stretching.

Adjusting to a new way of doing things is always tricky. During the six months or so that we held services, we were one of ten families emptying the contents of a trailer each Sunday morning, plugging in the sound system, and creating areas for worship and children's ministry in a local school. In a group that small, everyone was needed. It is hard to quietly blend into the background when there isn't one.

Surprisingly, the hardest part about being part of a church plant hasn't been the physical labor of setting up chairs or meeting in cramped quarters. It has not been missing the comforts of our established church, where we enjoyed a loving church family and wonderful programs. It has not even been the disappointment of prayers being answered differently than we had expected. It's the work of the heart that has been toughest. God has used this church plant experience to soften my heart and begin to mold me.

The difficulties in church planting are no different than those anyone encounters living out their faith daily. God wants all of his people to know him better and to make us more like him. Scott and I see ourselves as missionaries in a sense, feeling a call to join with others to follow God's lead, which we think—we hope—will one day lead to a new Covenant church in our area. We recognize there are risks in this

adventure—what if it isn't a "success"? And yet there are risks for us all in the Christian walk. If we don't know all the details of God's plans, how can we judge success? We often don't see how God is working through us.

This experience has put us in a place where we recognize our need for God more than we had before, and he is changing our hearts. We are learning to wait on him and let him do the work in us that he wants. We are reminded again and again that we need to trust in God's good plans for us, and we are learning to surrender our will to him. We cannot know his plans or timing. The church plant setting is intense because we are all being stretched. It is a concentrated, undiluted opportunity to face the challenges and blessings of the Christian life.

Church planting involves a lot of waiting for God to provide the components we need to successfully begin and grow a new church. Waiting on the Lord is a struggle, because it requires that we be still and calm. It means listening for his voice, not drowning it out with the noise of our strategizing. We have to spend less time talking about it and more time praying about it. Waiting requires patience, being willing to live according to God's timeline and not our own.

In this season of waiting, we wonder if we're doing the right thing. The uncertainty is difficult and exhausting. We have to trust that God will take care



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of us. I once heard in a sermon that every lack of confidence is a departure from God, not trusting in him. Planting a church can feel very risky—there are questions about when, where, and how we will meet, and so many opportunities to make mistakes. But we have learned that the success of our plant may not be seen in a church building someday, but we know it will be seen in the way the lives of the people in our group are touched and changed by God.

If we had our way, our group would be a healthy, growing, full-fledged

church by now. But we cannot make it work by ourselves, even with flawless strategies and the best people skills. We can make a gymnasium into a sanctuary, we can call everyone we know and do everything right, but if it isn't God's plan, it's not going to work. We have to be willing to let God be in charge of the whole business.

For now, we keep asking God to show us what he wants us to be doing, and we still feel him pulling us together. Whether God is preparing us to grow a Covenant church here in our

community, or for other ministries, I know I have experienced an “in your face” kind of challenge to my faith. As we keep learning to wait, trust, and surrender for the kind of church life we once took for granted, we see how God is at work in each of our lives.

So, as it turns out, church planting really is hard work. It's work of the heart. This is the kind of work only God can do. □

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