

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.