

Delays Are Not Denials

When Mary and Martha sent news to Jesus that their brother, Lazarus, was about to die, Jesus didn't respond the way his friends expected. He actually snubbed their request. The Bible says when Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, "He then stayed two days longer in the place where He was" (John 11:6, NASB).

For those two anxious women, that was a very, very, very long time. Doubts tormented them. They thought: *What kind of friend is Jesus, anyway? Why didn't He rush to our aid?* Mary was especially troubled by Jesus' seemingly insensitive delay.

When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany, everybody in the village was mourning. And Mary's faith was as cold as Lazarus' corpse.

She didn't even want to talk to Jesus. She stayed in the house while her sister went to ask Jesus why He took so long (see v. 20). Most likely Mary was sulking, maybe even struggling with feelings of anger toward Jesus because He was so late.

Many of us get stuck in this place of disappointment. We get upset and confused when God doesn't work according to our timetable.

Perhaps you have been asking Jesus to intervene in your crisis. You may need Him to rescue a wayward child, restore a broken relationship, heal your body (or someone else's) or salvage a dream that is on its deathbed. It may seem that Jesus is so busy meeting the needs of others that He dropped you from His priority list.

Like Mary of Bethany, you may feel that Jesus waited too long. Your problem seems so serious, and your dream so lifeless, that now Jesus can't help you. It's over.

When we face these frustrating delays, we automatically assume

that He is denying us, neglecting us or rejecting us. So we throw a childish pity party. We go in our rooms, close our doors, shut out the pain and stay as far away from Jesus as possible.

We find it difficult to pray when we are in a faith crisis. The devil tells us that Jesus doesn't care, that our prayers are meaningless and that there is no reward for believing in Him. Some of us, if we have melancholy tendencies, also beat ourselves up with the classic "I guess I just don't have enough faith" line.

Thankfully Mary did not stay in her self-made prison of discouragement. The Bible says that when Jesus arrived at Lazarus' tomb, Mary ran to him and knelt at His feet—the place where she began her journey of discipleship (see Luke 10:39). After all her moping, she returned to the only place where life's struggles make sense. She stopped asking *why*. She focused on *Who*.

She knelt in His presence, not to ask Him why He let Lazarus die but simply to gain strength from being with Him. She left behind the whining immaturity that demands Jesus must act a certain way. She chose to grow up.

When she surrendered her life to Him that day, she was saying that she would follow Him not only in the good times but also on the dark days when she couldn't see His love through the clouds of grief, suffering and pain.

There, at Jesus' feet, Mary caught a glimpse of Jesus like she'd never seen Him before. He wept for Lazarus, and then He commanded his lifeless body to come to life. Mary would have missed the miracle if she'd stayed in seclusion. She needed to see that God's delays are not denials—and that Jesus' timing is perfect.

Have you been sinking into despair because your dream has died—and you think Jesus doesn't care? Run back to Him and

take your place at His feet.

True disciples know that life operates on God's schedule, not ours. Press through your doubts, surrender your deadlines, renounce your impatience and renew your trust in Jesus, who is the sovereign Lord over your circumstances.

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