

God's Delays Are Not Denials

Do you trust

God's timing? The path to spiritual maturity requires us to surrender our selfish deadlines.

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 Mary and

Martha, those were two very long days.

"When we face frustrating delays, we automatically assume that Jesus 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 Him as possible."

Doubts tormented

them. What kind of friend was Jesus, anyway? Why did He ignore their urgent plea? Why didn't He drop everything and rush to their aid? Mary was especially frustrated and distraught about Jesus' seemingly insensitive delay.

When Jesus finally arrived in Bethany—four days after Lazarus died—a shroud of gloom covered the village. Everybody was in mourning. Mary was overwhelmed by grief and disappointment. Her faith was as cold as Lazarus' corpse.

Mary didn't even want to talk to Jesus. This woman who was known as a passionate disciple of the Lord stayed in the house when her sister went outside to ask Jesus why He took so long (see v. 20). We don't know exactly what Mary was doing in the house.

Most likely she was sulking, maybe even struggling with feelings of anger toward Jesus because He didn't come when she called.

You may relate to Mary. Many of us get stuck in this same place of disillusionment. 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, heal your body, provide for a financial need, restore a broken relationship or salvage a dream that is on its deathbed. It may seem that Jesus missed His golden opportunity—or that He was so busy meeting the needs of others that He just dropped you from His priority list.

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

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 too difficult to pray when we are in a faith crisis. The enemy of our souls 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 familiar "I guess I just don't have enough faith" line.

Thankfully Mary did not stay in her self-made prison of depression. The Bible says that when Jesus came to her house and got close enough to Lazarus' tomb to smell the stench, Mary ran to him and knelt at His feet—the place where she began her journey of discipleship (see Luke 10:39). After all the moping, she set aside the blame games and returned to the only place where life's struggles make sense.

She knelt in His presence, not to ask Him why He let Lazarus die but simply to gain strength from being with Him.

She decided to grow up. She left behind the whining immaturity that demands Jesus must act a certain way. She put her trust in Him afresh, letting go of selfish

expectations. 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 darkest days when she couldn't see His love through the clouds of death, suffering and pain.

There, at Jesus' feet, Mary caught a glimpse of Jesus like she'd never seen Him before. He wept for His friend Lazarus, and then He commanded his lifeless body to come out of the tomb. Mary would have missed the miracle if she had stayed in seclusion. She needed to see with her own eyes that God's delays are not denials—and that Jesus' timing is perfect even when it seems He has forgotten us.

Do you feel as if Jesus has ignored your request? Does it seem as if your message to Him was intercepted? Have you been sinking into discouragement because your dream has died—and 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 the Lord, who is the sovereign Lord over your circumstances.

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