

Hang On! Don't Let Delays Weaken Your Faith

Here's a trivia question: Which building project took the longest to complete? 1) The construction of the Pentagon, 2) the carving of Mount Rushmore, 3) the digging of the Panama Canal, 4) the building of the Empire State Building or 5) the carving and assembling of the Statue of Liberty.

The answer is No. 3. It took 31 years to dig the Panama Canal, mainly because that superhuman task was started and stopped several times due to floods, mudslides, unexpected costs (the total bill for the United States was \$375 million in 1914) and a horrific death toll (20,000 French workers and 6,000 Americans died on the job site.) The moral of that story: Expect delays when you cut a 50-mile-long canal to connect two oceans.

I'm not attempting to move millions of tons of earth to make room for cargo ships. My ministry assignment is different. But I still feel overwhelmed at times by the task.

God calls each of us to join Him in His work, but accomplishing anything spiritual—such as building a church, engaging in missions work or influencing secular culture for Christ—is impossible in human terms. We can't accomplish anything for God without faith.

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. And it is in those painful times of waiting when we are most tempted to quit.

The Bible is full of stories of men and women who waited and waited for God's promises to be fulfilled. Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years for Isaac's birth. Hannah endured years of barrenness waiting for her baby. David spent years in the wilderness before he became king.

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. He said: "The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former ... and in this place I will give peace" (v. 9).

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 the 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 leave you halfway through it. God is a wise builder and an expert craftsman. He 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. 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.