

Recently the HOA of our small community made the decision to change the exterior paint color of each building from a cheery yellow to a soft neutral that would be celebrated by HGTV. Painting, we were told, would commence January 2nd and be completed in a month.

However, it's now the beginning of March, and, from our side of the street, there are only sunny yellow buildings as far as the eye can see. There is no sign of new paint.

Unless, of course, you had drone or a bird's eye view of our circle...(or if you drove down the other side of the neighborhood)...then you would see that about half the buildings are painted and that our home will probably receive its makeover very, very soon. It might be taking a little longer than I expected, but change is coming.

I can't help but think that this is so much like life...especially as someone whom the Lord keeps patiently teaching the need to, the importance of, and the joy that's possible when I wait on Him.

It's so easy to forget in this world that prizes instantaneous gratification and feeling good that God doesn't operate in the same way. A thousand years are as a day for our dear Lord (as II Peter 3:8 reminds us), and He is working things together for the good of those that love Him (Romans 8:28). Time is necessary for me to learn the lessons He wants for me to learn—as He gently, kindly sanctifies me (wanting me to be holy and without blemish (like it says in Ephesians 5:27)--, making me more of the person He has for me to be. It sounds beautiful, but waiting is hard. Waiting is L-O-N-G. Waiting can be humiliating or scary...making you feel like you're in an airplane stuck in an endless holding pattern, never able to come in for a landing.

Yet the Bible is chock full of people who've had to wait long and through hard times for the Lord to answer.

During one period of waiting, the story of Joseph became crucial to me. God used this story to teach me a very important lesson several years ago, when my husband was suddenly laid off. For weeks, we went about faithfully trusting the Lord. My husband started a rather lengthy job interview process with one company, going through five interviews, when the hiring manager abruptly stopped the process. And at that point, very unlike Joseph, I lost hope. My eyes, much like Peter when walking on water, were on my circumstances, not my God. I didn't really know what we were going to do. Sure, Matthew 6 ("Don't worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will take care of itself..."), was playing in my head...but I was focusing on all my worry instead of the Word.

And then God, in His faithful way, taught me an important truth. It took Joseph *twenty* years—TWENTY—to escape slavery and jail. However, God did not leave him high and dry. Not even a little bit. God granted Joseph such favor during those decades. He may have been a slave, but as a slave, he was made in charge of all of Potiphar's household.

Genesis 39:2 explains that the Lord made Joseph a “successful” man. Joseph “found favor” with Potiphar. Potiphar enjoyed such prosperity because of the success that God gave Joseph....and then, of course, Potiphar’s wife happened. And poor Joseph wound up in jail for a crime that he did not commit, BUT 39:21 declares that God “showed Joseph steadfast love” and gave him favor in the sight of the prison guard. Pretty soon, just like Potiphar’s house, Joseph found himself in charge again...Because “whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed,” (as that same verse tells us).

I don’t think that being head slave or head prisoner was exactly where Joseph dreamed to be. I don’t think these were the big answers—or what I’ve come to think of as capital A Answers to prayer--that he was looking for. This is confirmed, I think, when Joseph asked the cupbearer to remember him to Pharaoh-- “to get me out of this house” he said in 40:12. Clearly, he’s not looking to ride out life in prison, no matter how high he’d gotten in the chain of command. He’s still a slave, still a prisoner.

No, God was giving Joseph what I’ve come to think of as little “a” answers to the prayers that he was praying. The Lord was showing Joseph steadfast love, favor, and success in everything that Joseph was doing—but He’s still not answering the BIG prayer of freeing Joseph.

God was giving little “a” answers while He was preparing the way to give that capital A answer in such a big and perfect way. Everything had to line up. There had to be the “fullness” of time that God often talks about in His Word.

I can imagine, although I don’t know it to be the case, that Joseph would have been so excited when God gave him the interpretation to the cupbearer’s dream. I can imagine that he would have thought to himself that finally, finally, God was going to answer his prayers with that capital A answer. I imagine this because I know that I would have thought that the cupbearer was my answer. I would have gotten so excited as I tried to write the story for God—assumed I knew what He was doing.

The Bible explicitly states that 2 whole years went by before the cupbearer finally remembered Joseph. Psalm 105:19 explains that “the word of the LORD tested and refined” Joseph, leading me to believe that although he might have had his hard days, Joseph remained faithful to the Lord. And then, after working it all together so that Joseph would be ready and able to save Egypt and the known world, so that he could be eventually reunited with his brothers and father...God had a more amazing capital A answer than any of us could ask or imagine. All those lowercase “a” answers were laying the groundwork for this amazing capital A answer...they were gentle reminders of God’s great love and favor for Joseph.

I began to see how these little a answers can be seen throughout Scripture...and they are met with varying responses. So, I could choose. I could be like the Israelites in the desert,

balking at manna and quail because what I really want is my land of milk and honey, or I could be like Joseph—faithful and steady.

And from that instant, I started praying for eyes to see the little “a” answers as we waited for the capital A answers we needed. And, oh my goodness, they were everywhere. I got a tutoring job out of the blue and the person paid me for the whole summer ahead of time! That never happens. But it happened just then when we needed it.

Fast forward...and my husband got a great job...the very job that he'd been told he wasn't getting. The hiring manager suddenly realized he was perfect for it. And he is. God has given him such favor in this position, and it's blessed our family greatly.

God always has that bird's eye view that sees the whole circle. He exists outside of our finite understanding, He inhabits eternity, as we read this week. He knows the end from the beginning. We beg, we plead, and may even mistakenly, like the Israelites in Isaiah 51, think that God is asleep. But He's not. He never sleeps, He never slumbers. He's holding us in the palm of His hand, He's singing over us in love. And, in His great grace and sweet mercy, He gives us loads of little “a” answers while we wait for His fullness of time and the capital A answers He lovingly gives us, His beloved children who are precious in His eyes.

And sometimes those capital A answers aren't seen until heaven...we know this is true for certain people in the Bible, for people in our lives...but we know that the capital A answer of complete salvation...of heaven and the presence of our Lord is perfect. All of this life, basically, is a time of waiting, but we can rest assured that the best, fullest, most complete capital A is yet to come: “for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (II Corinthians 4: 17)