



Delays

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Rachel Yates

As an update, my family's work on our "flip house" continues. The tile is going in, as are the kitchen cabinets. I bought tub paint which – if past experience repeats itself as messily – will end up in a sermon someday. Last weekend, I lugged giant flagstones from behind the garage to the side yard to create a more attractive, albeit narrow path. Some of the stones were so heavy I had to roll them end on end to get them in place. Fortunately, I had company.



The neighbors with whom we share that side yard have three children. The two daughters, ages 4 and 2, regularly came by to check on my progress. The eldest commented, "This is taking a long time." I tried to explain that there were a lot of roots that I was also trying to dig out before I laid the rock down. "No, not the rocks," she said, "This *house* is taking a long time." Even kindergartners apparently know the timeline for a successful flip project, and we're clearly behind her schedule.

There are lots of reasons for the delay: finding available contractors, permitting, backordered building materials. We also enjoy taking time off on the weekends now and then. So, yes, it's going slower than it could.

In answer to my landscaping companion, I admitted the whole project *was* taking a long time. "But," I told her, "that's good. Once we sell the house, I won't be able to come over and see you anymore." I could tell she understood. In this moment, we have a connection: my funny Disney character face masks and her hula-hoop, my pondering about whether I could topple the tree in the alley by yanking hard enough on that big root and her commentary about shaking down crabapples from the tree in her front yard. The delay on the house gives us the space and opportunity to build a connection.

If only I could apply this lesson to other parts of my life. I wish I could see a long line at the hardware store as an opportunity for connection with others. If you're like me, we try to avoid delays, as if efficiency were the most important value. In our mission trips (remember those pre-pandemic days when we used to go on mission trips?!), we tended to focus on the work at hand, rather than the opportunity for holy relationship with the people who received us.

What if instead we put relationship first? Would delays become blessed gifts of time for connection? Would we lament when our order came on time or when the service was quick?

Nah. Probably not.

I'm never going to shake my striving for efficiency, but just maybe I'll learn to raise my head long enough from my flagstone path to appreciate those with me on the journey. In our Matthew 25 vision, we reach out to people who hunger: not as mission projects, but as people made in the image of God with whom we need to be in relationship. Sometimes delay is the tool Jesus uses to open our eyes and stop our labor. Thanks be to God!