

Waiting at the Stoplights of Life

Experiencing one miscarriage after another felt like a series of stoplights in my life, but as I turned to the Lord, I found that each loss was accompanied by peace, perspective, and growth.





By Marianne von Bracht

My fingers clenched the steering wheel as I stared anxiously at the red light. When it finally changed to green, I sped forward only to wait at another seemingly endless stoplight. I was still 10 minutes away from the lesson with the sister missionaries that was supposed to have started 5 minutes ago. If I had been a wiser mother, I would have predicted the 15-minute tantrum my almost-three-year-old daughter erupted into as we headed out the door, but I hadn't. Yes, the world would go on if I was late, but since I was trying to do something good, didn't I deserve at least *some* of the traffic lights to work in my favor? As I waited impatiently at yet another stoplight, I could feel my frustration tightening into anger. "I'm trying to do something good; trying my best! Where is the help I need?"

Twenty months earlier, I had found myself asking parallel questions in a parallel situation, only in a place with all the peace and serenity that my stoplight moment lacked.

In the Sacred Grove, in Palmyra, New York, the leaves were barely budding on the brown branches surrounding me. The newly green shrubbery sprinkling the ground seemed to breathe life into the air. Only the rustles of a gentle breeze, our stroller, and my footsteps reached my ears—no cars, no roads, no loud conversations. Yet despite the serenity, my mind swayed with questions and uncertainty. My husband, Lance, and I had been waiting 72 painstaking hours for my doctor to call with results of a last-minute ultrasound and blood test. I was desperate for answers and consolation.

Receiving Comfort

"The Lord did visit them with his Spirit, and said unto them: Be comforted. And they were comforted" (Alma 17:10).

I found myself staring at the winter-worn flower beds outside the Palmyra New York Temple. My mind fully articulated the questions weighing on it: "If I lose this pregnancy, why? What then?" As gentle as the spring breeze around me, the Lord spoke to my mind the comfort I had been yearning for. I no longer needed the doctor to let me know; I knew I would lose this pregnancy, but I suddenly understood that this tiny soul was in the perfect, loving hands of Heavenly Father. All at once, the desperation that had consumed me was replaced with a reassuring peace that sustained me through the following weeks and months.

Waiting for the Green Light

"I have been thankful for the many ways the Lord has visited me with the Comforter when I needed peace. Yet our Father in Heaven is concerned not just about our comfort but even more about our upward progress."¹ —President Henry B. Eyring

Several days after visiting Palmyra, I experienced a traumatic miscarriage. Although a sense of peace continued to sustain me, I felt physically and emotionally weak from the loss and unprepared for the waiting that followed. I first waited for lab results, which indicated a rare, partial molar pregnancy. I then waited for blood tests weekly, biweekly, and finally monthly to ensure no signs of a possible resultant cancer. Even through the long months of waiting, Lance and I could easily see the Lord's hand comforting and reassuring us through that time. The partial molar pregnancy had no lasting effects, and after only six months my doctor said we could try to have another baby. I was back on the path to progress in my life; the light had finally changed from red to green.

But just under three months and several blood tests later, I miscarried again—this time only a week before Christmas. Another three months passed and my hopes soared after another positive pregnancy test, only to miscarry a week later—yet another stoplight.

Putting Faith to the Test

"Even if we have strong faith, many mountains will not be moved. . . . If all opposition were curtailed, if all maladies were removed, then the primary purposes of the Father's plan would be frustrated."² —Elder David A. Bednar

I got pregnant again, and my next due date was going to land right around the following Christmas. I had a good feeling about this

pregnancy. We had seen the heartbeat on an early ultrasound and knew that family members were praying for us. While we were sitting in an endowment session in the temple one day, I had a distinct stream of thoughts: "If I were to lose this pregnancy, would my faith hold up? Of course it would. But of course I won't have another miscarriage because this time I am ready to accept the Lord's will no matter what."

Despite my positive attitude, several weeks later I saw the signs, went in for the ultrasounds, and began the painful process that I felt all too familiar with. My faith did not hold up quite like I had expected. The answers that had sustained me through my previous miscarriages no longer seemed adequate. A wave of depression set in. I felt broken, empty, and even slightly betrayed. My husband and I weren't the only ones waiting on the Lord; our daughter frequently told us how much she wanted a baby brother or sister. Our hearts ached for her as well. As I turned my vulnerable emotions over to the Lord in fervent prayer, I again received a clear witness that Heavenly Father was very aware of my pain and circumstances and that He loved me. Although my circumstances remained the same, this sweet and simple experience miraculously lightened the burden I felt and gave me the ability to cope and even feel happy as I continued through my day-to-day life. Whatever the future held, I would be OK.

When genetic testing came back several months later with no answers, we again felt confused about the purpose of these setbacks in our lives. I tried my best to set my own desires aside and align my will with the Lord's, but during the difficult moments my heart would cry out, "What am I supposed to learn from this? I'm trying to do something good! Where is the help I need?"





Changing My Reaction

“Hard is the constant! We all have challenges. The variable is our reaction to the hard.”³ —Elder Stanley G. Ellis

Eight months after my fourth miscarriage and just several weeks after my stressful drive to meet the sister missionaries, I was peacefully waiting at a stoplight on my way home when my answers came. As I watched the cars stopped next to me and the cars making their way down the road ahead of me, I caught an eternal perspective of my life. I suddenly realized that all that mattered in my journey was that I stay on the path that would take me back to my heavenly home. How many “stoplights” I waited at would have no effect on my destination. How I responded to them would.

I began to cherish every stoplight in my life, both metaphorical and literal. Instead of wasted time, each became an opportunity to acquire patience and to gain perspective that comes only through waiting. Just as every red traffic light is paired with a green light in a different direction, I found that every stoplight in my life opened an avenue for growth, just not necessarily in the way I had been planning to grow right then. Instead of dwelling on the disappointments, I began to delight in the opportunity for progress that every unexpected turn of events provided.

Focusing on the Savior

“A critical question to ponder is ‘Where do we place our faith?’ Is our faith focused on simply wanting to be relieved of pain and suffering, or is it firmly centered on God the Father and His holy plan and in Jesus the Christ and His Atonement?”⁴ —Elder Donald L. Hallstrom

Two long years after my first miscarriage, I gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby boy. In the time leading up to that joyful day for our family, I came to realize that Jesus Christ did not suffer for me in order to remove all suffering from my life. Rather, He suffered so that I could be strengthened through and grow from the challenges I face. Although the heartbreaking moments of loss and the long months of waiting are still painful to remember, they have become a treasure in my life. In those sacred moments, I came to understand how individually the Savior knows my suffering. He succored me in a way that only one who knows my personal sorrows could succor. While the opposition in our lives often seems to thwart our plans for progress, as we turn to the Lord, that opposition can function as the friction that propels us to a higher end: knowing and abiding in the Savior’s perfect love. ■

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NOTES

1. Henry B. Eyring, “My Peace I Leave with You,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2017, 17.
2. David A. Bednar, “Accepting the Lord’s Will and Timing,” *Ensign*, Aug. 2016, 34; *Liahona*, Aug. 2016, 22.
3. Stanley G. Ellis, “Do We Trust Him? Hard Is Good,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 113.
4. Donald L. Hallstrom, “Has the Day of Miracles Ceased?” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2017, 90.