

The Fruit of a God-Filled Life: Persistent Patience
April 20, 2008

*The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.
Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.*
Ecclesiastes 7:8-9

A truck driver sat down to eat at an all-night restaurant. The waitress had just served him his meal when three guys riding Harley's showed up and swaggered into the diner. One grabbed the man's hamburger; another took a fistful of his French Fries; and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it.

The trucker responded with great patience. He calmly got up from the table, picked up his check, walked to the front of the restaurant, put his money on the cash register, and headed out the door. The waitress watched as the big truck drove off into the night.

When she returned, one of the bikers said to her, "**He wasn't much of a man, was he?**" To which she replied, "**He's not much of a truck driver either. He just ran over three motorcycles out in the parking lot.**"

As we come to the fourth fruit of the spirit, I confess that **I really struggle with this one**. As I take a look at my heart and do an inventory of my life, many of my sins are linked to a lack of patience. **While I might not drive over motorcycles, sometimes I wish I could!**

We are always trying to figure out how to cram more and more things that need to be done into less and less time. We allow less and less time for things. We **don't want to waste time** because we feel the **pressure** of all we think we have to get done. The time crunch is felt by nearly everyone.

There is even a church in Florida that advertises a 22 minute service. That's right. They promise that 22 minutes after the service begins you will be dismissed. The music is fast. . . The prayers are quick. . . The sermons are only 8 minutes long. Now don't get your hopes up, it's not going to happen here!

Let's read the passage together. . .

*But the fruit of the Spirit is _____, _____, _____, **patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Against such things there is no law.*
Galatians 5:22-23

I. WHAT IS PATIENCE?

The word translated "patience" in Galatians 5 means literally, "**Slow to anger.**"

In other words it's the **opposite of a short fuse**. It's the idea of not getting mad over the little irritations that are so much a part of everyone's life. It's **hanging onto our emotions when we feel like letting the fur fly** over all those silly little things that so often get on our nerves.

Let's be honest, sometimes that can be a **real challenge** can't it?

Among other things, patience is difficult to develop because it's **contrary to our culture**. We don't live in a relaxed culture. Go to most **third world countries** today & you'll find a much different lifestyle. They're **more laid back**. They think, "Whatever happens, happens. It'll be all right." And they wonder why we're so uptight.

It's because we're on a **fast track, & in a rat race**. We're in a world of **fast food & quick print & expressways & 10-minute oil changes & instant cameras & microwaves**.

We like "**type A**" personalities, hard-charging people who get things done, & somehow impatience is seen as a virtue. How else could Donald Trump and Gordon Ramsey get their own TV shows? You hear people say, "Well, I may be impatient, but I get things done."

But listen to the Bible. Proverbs 14:29 says, "*A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.*"

Proverbs 15:18 says, "*A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.*"

A man noticed a lady in the grocery store with her year-old in her cart. The child asked for cookies. Her mother said no. The little girl began to cry loudly. The mother patiently said, "**Now Missy, we're half way done**, it won't be long." The same thing happened in the candy aisle. This time the little girl kicked and screamed. The mother said, "**There, there, Missy, only two more aisles** and then we'll be done." At the checkout counter, the child reached for the gum. When her mom said no she began to scream louder than ever. The mother said patiently, "**Missy, we'll be through this checkout stand in five minutes** and then we can go home and both have a nice nap." The man followed them out to the parking lot and complimented the woman. "I couldn't help noticing how patient you were with little Missy." The mother replied, "**Thank you, but, my little girl is Francine... Uh, I'm Missy.**"

Which leads to two definitions of patience that I think may be helpful:

Patience is the ability to put up with people you'd like to put down. Ulrike Ruffert

Patience is accepting a difficult situation without giving God a deadline to remove it.
Bill Gothard

II. WHERE DOES PATIENCE COME FROM?

"Patience is an inner calmness that comes from the knowledge that God is in control."

When you look at the stories of the Bible, you can easily see that **God operates on a totally different time table than we do**. We often find ourselves bent out of shape because things don't

happen as quickly as we would like them to happen. The truth of the matter is that God doesn't work at the speed we want Him to work.

The psalmist wasn't joking when he wrote that **a thousand years is like a day** to God and a day is like a thousand years. **We are ready for things to be done, yesterday**, while God's timetable is very different. **God never gets in a hurry**. Consider the following.

God appeared to Abraham when he was 75 and promised to make him a father. Now, it seems like God's already behind the curve! Very few fathers wait until they are 75 to begin a family, so you would expect God's promise to be fulfilled quickly, but you know the story. **Twenty five years passed before Abraham and Sarah had Isaac**. By the time the child was born, Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90. It is safe to say, God was patient, Abraham and Sarah were not.

The idea of **becoming a great nation** was going to take an even longer time. After **400 years in Egypt**, the people would wander in the **wilderness for 40 years**. Then, they would enter the promised land, where they would remain a weak immature nation for many years. You can read about the instability of the young nation in the book of Judges. **In reality Israel didn't become a great nation for 900 years**.

Most of us find it difficult to be kept waiting an hour, but God works at His own speed, not ours. I'm reminded of the words of Isaiah 40:31:

But those who wait on the LORD will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (NLT)

If you want to FLY, RUN, and WALK you must learn to wait on God. (Wade Hughes)

III. HOW DO WE DEVELOP PATIENCE?

Well, are you convinced that we need to develop the virtue of patience? But how do we do it? Let me give you some suggestions.

A. The first suggestion is the same with every one of these virtues. **"Abide in Christ."** "How do we develop love? How do we develop joy? How do we develop peace? How do we develop patience?" The answer is always the same, **"Get close to Jesus, and stay there."**

Jesus, in John 15:5 says, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man abides in me & I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

So it is important to receive the nourishment that only Jesus Christ can give. We cannot produce patience unless we're walking in His steps, unless we're reading His Word, unless we're growing in our prayer life, unless we're spending quality time worshiping & fellowshiping with brothers & sisters in Christ.

B. There are other things that we can do. For example, we can **SLOW DOWN**.

Has it struck you strange that the company that advertises, "You deserve a break today" is a fast food restaurant? "Come on in! Let's see how fast you can take a break today, & then get out on the road again."

The Lord came up with the idea of a **sabbath** day - a day to worship & rest.

"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. Exodus 20:8-10 (NLT)

Our bodies need it, our minds need it, our spirits need it. We need time just to sit & reflect on God & what He's doing, & absorb His teaching. So take a walk. Spend some time in the park. Watch children play, & listen to birds sing. Read a book. Plant a flower & watch it grow.

C. LOOK AT ANNOYING PEOPLE THROUGH THE EYES OF JESUS. When you're following a **slow driver**, instead of trying to punish him by tailgating, try to deliberately **imagine this person as someone's grandfather**. If you can do this, then you'll quickly realize that you don't blow up at a grandpa, you love him.

Philippians 2:3: *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves."*

If we could just see people like Jesus does, we'd be much less impatient and much more tolerant. **Instead of putting others in their place, try putting yourself in their place.**

D. APPRENTICE YOURSELF TO PATIENT PEOPLE. Anger is contagious. When you get it out, others pick it up.

Proverbs 22:24-25: *"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared."*

If we can learn how to be angry by hanging out with angry people, then we can learn patience by spending time with those who are long-suffering.

E. RELEASE YOUR ANGER APPROPRIATELY.

Ephesians 4:26 says, *"In your anger do not sin."* That means that there are right ways and wrong ways to process anger. It's possible to be angry and not sin and it's also possible to be "torqued" and transgress.

There are three possible options in responding to anger, and the first two don't work.

- **Suppress it.** That's when we ignore it or stuff it. This is not good because the number one cause of depression is suppression, or anger turned within.

- **Express it.** Many psychologists today suggest that each of us **have a bucket full of anger** that we just need to dump. Once we **get rid of it by blowing up** then we'll be fine. Some refer to it as "venting" or practicing the "Primal Scream." This is a myth because instead of having a bucket of anger **we've got an internal factory of fury** with unlimited production capacity. Proverbs 29:11: *"A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control."*

• Confess it. When you're angry, admit it to yourself, **own it before God**, and then **confess it to the person you're mad at**. Meet with the person and say something like this, "I'm hurt and feel myself getting angry but I care enough about our relationship to deal with the issues that are bothering me."

James 5:16 (NLT) *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

F. RECOGNIZE GOD'S TRAINING IN OUR TROUBLES

A young Christian went to an older Christian for help. "Will you **please pray for me that I may be more patient?**" he asked. So they knelt together & the old man began to pray. "**Lord, send this young man tribulation in the morning; send this young man tribulation in the afternoon; send this young man...**"

At that point the young Christian blurted out, "**No, no**, I didn't ask you to pray for tribulation. I wanted you to pray for patience." "Ah," responded the wise old Christian, "**it's through tribulation that we learn patience.**"

This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 5 -

And we also have joy with our troubles because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope. And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts. Romans 5:3 (NCV)

I had to smile when I read the words of a pastor's wife by the name of Liz Reynolds. She said. . . "It wouldn't be hard to be patient if it weren't for other people." (Liz Reynolds)

This week, in order to develop a more patient heart, I will... (choose one of the above):

- Abide in Christ
- Slow down
- Look at annoying people through the eyes of Jesus
- Apprentice myself to a more patient person
- Practice releasing my anger appropriately
- Look for God's hand, training me in my troubles

PRAY