

Series: "The Fruit of the Spirit"
"Patience"

When do you find it most difficult to be patient? Who is it who tries your patience the most?

This is a series of sermons where we're looking at the fruit of the Spirit. These are human qualities, character traits, that will be evident in our lives if the Holy Spirit is controlling us, rather than our sinful human nature. These are good markers to indicate how mature we are in the faith, how spiritual we are.

Today we look at patience. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience*" (Galatians 5:2). The dictionary defines patience as "the ability to endure pain, trouble, etc. without complaint; refusing to be provoked or angered when offended or insulted; steadiness in performing a task; the ability to wait calmly for something."

The New Testament has a number of words to express this whole quality of patience, endurance, steadfastness, long-suffering. The word used here is the Greek word μακροθυμία (macrothumia). It suggests being patient with *circumstances* that we encounter, but also patient with *people*. Let's look at this quality that's one of the fruits of the Spirit.

Behind our calling to be patient is the truth that ***God is patient with us!*** This same word (macrothumia) is used to describe *God's* patience.

Romans 9:22 in the New Living Translation says, "In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction." Even though God judges and holds us accountable, God is patient with us sinners. Simon Peter writes that the reason God has delayed the return of Christ is because God is patient, giving us more time to repent and believe: "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is *patient* with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The Apostle Paul can speak of Jesus' great patient with him: "But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his *immense patience* as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:16).

God is a patient God! All of our self-will and rebellion against God, all of the times we simply ignore God and do our own thing – yet God continues to care about us, and long for us to have the abundant life He offers in Christ! Martin Luther, one of the great leaders in the Protestant Reformation, once remarked that if he were God, he would have destroyed the world in anger long ago. How many times I've looked at myself and my sins and failures and thought, "How does God put up with me! I couldn't put up with me if I were God!"

God is a patient God! One of the prime reasons we are to be patient is because that's how God treats us! Jesus is a patient Savior. And when His Spirit lives in us and is operating in us we will be a more patient person.

For instance, we will be more patient with the circumstances that confront us. When I was

typing this sermon, immediately after I typed that sentence we had one of our neighborhood explosions. We live near a quarry, and at least once a week they set off a dynamite blast. Sometimes there's a whistle to warn us; other times the boom just comes without any warning, and you can feel the house shake. (It used to scare our dog Sadie big time). It's just one of those annoyances of life.

Life is filled with annoying things – big or little "explosions" – that disturb us, or frighten us, or make us shift our plans, or alter our life: physical ailments, serious illnesses, financial setbacks, devastating losses. The question is: How patient are we when this happens? How much endurance and perseverance do we show? Can we take life as it comes without complaining and becoming bitter? Can we endure hardship and loss without giving up or losing our trust in God?

This "patience" is not a weak thing – not passive resignation: "Oh well, I'll just have to put up with this...". It's a rugged endurance, a strong determination, a triumphant spirit, that comes from God. Romans 12:12 says, "Rejoice in hope, be *patient* in suffering, persevere in prayer."

When we have this fruit of the Spirit, patience, we will be more patient when life throws us some curves or roadblocks. ***We will also exhibit patience when it doesn't seem like God is keeping His promises***, when things aren't going well and it doesn't seem like God is doing anything about it. God seems silent. God isn't keeping His promises and helping us out.

The Bible addresses this issue. It gives us examples of people in the Bible who had to be patient and wait a while before they saw God's promises fulfilled. Hebrews, chapter 6, talks about these people, and says we can learn from them. Hebrews 6:12 says, "We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and *patience* inherit what was promised." It mentions Abraham as an example. Abraham was told that he would be the father of many nations, that he and his descendants would be blessed and be a blessing to the world. It didn't happen overnight! It took a long time. "And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised" (Hebrews 12:15). We wait. We become anxious and impatient.

But God doesn't usually fit His great eternal plans into our hurried time schedules! In fact, it may take more than this life, it may take eternity, to fully work out all that He has promised. Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor who created the 4 Presidents' faces on Mount Rushmore was once asked if he considered his work perfect in detail. He replied, "Not today. The nose of Washington is an inch too long. It's better that way, though. It will erode to be exactly right in 10,000 years."

The psalmist said, "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him" (Psalm 37:7). Be patient. God isn't done yet. He keeps His promises. Trust Him!

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience*..." (Galatians 5:22). When the Holy Spirit is in us and in control we will be more patient with the curves and obstacles life throws at us...and ***we will also be more patient with people***. This word, *macrothumia*, describes a quality of being patient with people. Back to the questions I asked at the beginning of the message:

When do you find it most difficult to be patient? Who is it who tries your patience the most? Can you guess when I find it most difficult to be patient? *When I'm driving!* I am not a patient driver. (Just ask Nancy). I've often said, I'll know I'm sanctified, I've reached a higher level of holiness, when I can drive more calmly and patiently!

Patience is needed in the home and family. A father was pushing a stroller down the street, and the child in the stroller was screaming and howling. The young dad seemed unperturbed: "Easy now, Jeffrey, keep calm." The kid screamed even louder. "Now, now, Jeffrey" he said quietly. "Be patient, don't lose your temper." A lady passed by and remarked, "I'm so impressed. You know just how to talk to your little one calmly and gently." She patted the little tyke on his head and said, "What's the matter, Jeffrey? What's the problem?" "Oh no," the father said, "his name is Shawn. I'm Jeffrey!" Patience – to understand tiny tots and teenagers.

I've been in many prayer and sharing groups where we pray for each other's needs. Usually if young mothers are in the group, they often ask the group to pray that they can be more patient with their children, or a particular child! Patience in the family also includes having teenagers possess the patience to try to understand their mom and dad! When moms and dads are patient with each other's faults, think how better a marriage can be!

Patience is needed in the world at large. People are unkind to us sometimes, as we are to others. People annoy us, hurt us. How much better, instead of *reacting* with anger or revenge, if we just kind of let it bounce off of us and we move on.

Patience with each other is certainly needed in the church. We can be impatient with the pastor or a staff member. Pastors and staff members can be impatient with those in the congregation. We can be impatient with church members who are hard to get along with, or act immaturely, or don't seem to be growing at all in their faith. Some years back when I was a young pastor, a wise Christian woman said this to me, "Harry, you're young. You're not very patient." She suggested that more patience on my part would strengthen my ministry. Well, that stung. But she was right. The Apostle Paul wrote to those in the church in Thessalonica: "We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, *be patient with everyone*" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

The Bible stresses the need for us to be patient. If we're followers of Jesus, it's part of our calling: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with *patience*, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2).

I think we all recognize in a very impatient world how much better life can be when we are patient with one another. *We want people to be patient with us, don't we?*

The world needs love, and the Bible says patience is one of the qualities of being a loving person: "Love is patient" (1 Corinthians 13:4).

So, how can we be more patient Well, patience is a fruit of the Spirit. It comes as a by-product of being filled with the Spirit. So seek the Spirit's fullness in your life. Pray for the Spirit to fill you.

What about praying for patience? Just asking God to make you more patient? Of course we can pray for that. That's a prayer God wants to answer. *But I have to say something here!* I'm always a little bit hesitant to advise someone to pray for patience! I'm a little timid about praying for that for myself! (Tongue-in-cheek here). Because the Bible says that one of the ways we become more patient is to go through suffering and hardships and trials! James 1: 2-3 in the New King James Version says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience." (Other translations use the word *endurance*. But the idea is the same). It's like if you pray for patience, look out! God will send all kinds of bad things your way so you can grow to be more patient!

Well, I'm not saying don't pray for patience. But just be a little bit careful! The bottom line is, most of us need God's help in making us a more patient person. And God wants to give us that quality. It's a fruit of the Spirit

Just a couple quick suggestions on how we can grow in being more patient. Count to 10 before you react to something you don't like. Better yet, count to 100,000!

And also, remember, God is patient with you. God is patient with me. Jesus is patient with you and me. We should treat others as God has treated us!

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