

February 9, 2025

Being Fruitful

“Patience”

Galatians 5:22-23

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

Intro:

We are not always very good with patience, are we? Sometimes we get it, but more often than not, at least for me, impatience seeps into the everyday parts of my life – driving, waiting in line at the grocery store, watching a pot of water boil... It doesn't help that we are increasingly becoming an “instant” culture. We don't have to wait for things today like we used to in years gone by. Information on anything is literally right at our fingertips via our smart phones. Texting and instant messaging has taken away the need to wait for someone to see and respond to an email. Heaven forbid we should have to go back to snail mail as the only method of written correspondence. We don't have to leave a message and wait for someone to call us back nearly as much as we used to before cell phones. I'm sure we all remember the days before answering machines. If someone wasn't home, we would just have to phone back later. How we watch TV has drastically changed too. Remember commercials? I remember when VCRs came onto the scene, and with them the ability to fast forward through commercials. Now, with streaming services, we don't even have to do that. Amazon Prime has all but removed the need to wait for distance-order items. What used to take weeks, or even months, to arrive from a catalogue order now comes the next day.

It used to be that we were used to waiting patiently for something, but now we don't know how. If you tell a kid to just wait patiently, their effort looks more like they are about to explode into a million pieces, than like calm waiting.

Yes, it can sometimes seem like patience is more a miracle than it is a virtue in our lives today.

Of course, patience would be a whole lot easier if there were a whole lot fewer people that we had to deal with.

In line with that thought, Chris Wright suggests that the first three fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, and peace — sound very Sunday-morning related – almost heavenly. Patience, however, pulls us right back to the everyday, rubber-meets-the-road of Monday. The spiritual fruit of patience firmly inserts itself into our daily lives and beyond the warm feelings of a Sunday morning gathering.

David DeSilva offers two ways that patience can be understood. The first is “gentleness in the face of others’ failures or slights, a slowness to take offense or, especially, vengeance.”¹ The second is to “speak about perseverance under hardship”.²

Both ideas of patience are present within the context of Scripture, with patience under hardship being a repeated theme of Paul and Peter in their letters, but it is the first understanding – gentleness in the face of others’ failures, that DeSilva suggests is the more likely understanding it in the context of Galatians 5:22-23. The way other versions translate the Greek word would give some weight to this thought. Often the Greek word for patience is translated as *forbearance*, basically meaning to “put up with”.

Wright agrees with DeSilva’s assessment, but he doesn’t completely push aside patience under hardship.

Wright suggests that in understanding how we are to live out the day-to-day fruit of patience, we need to remember (again) that it is the work of the Spirit in us that produces the fruit. The purpose is not that we become super spiritual, but that we can better reflect God and his character. As such, we need to recognize God’s character of patience, which is mostly seen in the Old Testament, and the

¹ David A. DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 467.

² DeSilva, 467.

patience of Jesus, which is primarily viewed in the New Testament. The Old Testament context lines up more with DeSilva's first definition (forbearance toward others), while the patience modeled by Jesus fits closer to his second definition (perseverance under hardship).

Patience of God:

When we look at patience as being a part of God's character, suffering under hardship doesn't come first to our mind. Instead, the concept of putting up with the weaknesses and "foibles" (as Wright phrases it) of others is more what we see from God in the Old Testament. Yes, there were times when His anger was aroused and punishment was given, but those times are also evidence of his patience, as He could have brought down much harsher punishments than He did in response to the blatant sins of the Israelites. A prime example is the situation with the golden calf in Exodus 32. You know the story: Moses went up to the top of Mount Sinai to chat with God and while he was up there, the Israelites decided they needed to worship something else and convinced Aaron to make a calf out of gold for them to worship. God's anger was justifiably great, but He was lenient in his punishment (that is, he didn't wipe them all out), because Moses interceded for them. Knowing that the Israelites would continue to complain and make bad decisions, God still determined to lead them through the wilderness and into the promised land. The story of Jonah also shows God exercising patience – both with the people of Ninevah, by giving them the opportunity to repent, and with Jonah, who argued that God was wrong to show compassion and grace to the Ninevites.

Patience of Jesus:

The patience that we learn from Jesus is the patience to endure under hardship. Throughout the Bible, and mostly in the New Testament, we are warned that following God will not be easy and that we should expect hardship and difficulty. Jesus faced hardships on levels we cannot imagine. He met and handled all those moments with patience and grace. He could have stopped the crucifixion proceedings with just a word to the armies of heaven, but he did not. He could have arranged it so that he did not get whipped or tortured. But he did not. He quietly endured scorn, disrespect and abuse with strength and patience, knowing

that victory was ultimately the Father's, and therefore also his. This is why Paul and Peter can confidently call followers of Jesus also to have patience in the face of suffering. Yes, it sucks right now in the moment. And yes, it is super hard. But, it is not forever and in the end, Jesus has the victory. As followers of Jesus, so do we, through Him.

Our Patience:

So how are we to put patience into practice? Patience requires strength, which is why we need to rely upon the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It is not our strength that will see us through, but God's. As we submit to his strength, and rely on it, His character of patience will be lived by us and seen in and through us.

Be patient. Be patient when suffering is part of your life. It's going to happen in some form at some point. As Christians we shouldn't be surprised by it. When it comes, we should not retaliate against those who bring it upon us. We should also not quit doing what God has called us to do, nor should we give up on God altogether. Suffering does not mean we have been abandoned by God; rather, it means we need to rely on Him even more.

Be patient. Be patient with one another. This is the forbearance part of patience – putting up with the things that people do (or don't do that you wish they would!). It is a posture of forgiveness. It is making an effort to look past the things that people do that annoy you, to find the things that don't. This kind of patience is helped when we adopt a posture of humility, recognizing that we are probably just as annoying to other people, and that ultimately God has been even more patient with us.

I'll close this morning with two Scriptures that help to frame and encourage this kind of patience:

Ephesians 4:1-2 "I urge you...be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." And

Colossians 3:13 “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

“Such is this tough but tender fruit of the Spirit.”³

Let’s Pray.

³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of The Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 81.