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## Getting a Handle on Patience

This morning is beautiful. Winter has set in, and we are coming in from the cold into a nice, warm building. So, we are very grateful for the furnaces and things that keep us warm in the winter. But we're here today to once again learn to walk in the Spirit and how the Spirit works fruit into our lives.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control against such things or against such there is no law." Gal. 5:22, 23

When we think about it today, we've looked at the big idea of love; everything under this is part of love. The fruit itself is singular. So, it comes in a package where all these things are part of it. So, we come today to the idea of patience or long-suffering. Highlight the word in Greek; it the word is, "μακροθυμία" mak-roth-oo-mee'-ah patience, long-suffering. And the idea of patience that I like to share today is one: it's withholding any recompense or revenge, anger, or anything like that. But it's also doing something else.

Now, look at Psalm 27:14. Wait on the Lord; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord! NKJV

Psalm 37:7, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass." NKJV

And then turn with me to Psalm 40:1-3. "I waited patiently, intently, patiently for the Lord and he reached out to me and he heard my cry and he brought me up out of the pit, wasteland (of underworld, destruction,) out of the mud and he set my feet on a rock, making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord." NASB

So, when we think about patience in the fruit of the Spirit, we're willing to take the long view. Waiting on the Lord, sometimes it's not just that our answered prayer happens then, but as we go through, whatever we're going through, we're gonna trust God through the whole thing. And that's the idea of patience in the sense that we're taking a longer view of, you know, life. We're taking a longer view of even an answered prayer. We're taking a longer view of recovering from an illness. We're taking a longer view regarding raising our children. We're taking a longer view in dealing with others in the body of Christ.

We're willing to be patient as we look for the Lord working in our lives, and we're not gonna jump, you know, on somebody's back and be harsh with them. We're going to actually give them time for the Lord to work in their life. We're patient. Okay, we're patient. So that's the idea of the fruit being worked in our life. Let's look at the Scriptures, where this talks about the ideas of the fruit of the Spirit.

James chapter 1-3, "Because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance."

So here we have another idea of patience, endurance, taking the long view, and knowing that life is a marathon, not a sprint. We're in it for the long haul. When you have a child, you're in that relationship as a parent, directly helping that child from infancy all the way up to 20. According to modern psychiatry, adolescence sometimes extends to age 29. But we need patience and endurance to help our children.

James 5:10: "As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name." Okay, you know, the prophets had patience."

Sometimes, the Lord had to work through them to make them patient, but they were patient in their dealings with God and with people. And often, they would intercede for the people. They took up the idea of patience.

Ephesians 4:2, "With all humility and gentleness, with patience, putting up with one another in love."

Hey, we come in all shapes and sizes in this Church. In the body we are made up of individuals who are different. And, you know, Paul is telling us here that we need to put up with one another. People don't change their personalities. They may change their walk where they're depending on the Lord, but they don't change their personalities. We need to put up with people who are different than us. And again, we need to enjoy those differences and just, you know, be patient. Okay, and you know, that's a very good quality.

Colossians 3:12 says, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience."

Notice here another list, similar to Galatians 5:22, but it includes these fruits of mercy, kindness, and humility. Now, I don't know how to be humble. I think the only way to be humble is to serve people where you're trying to help them and benefit them. And by doing so, you're demonstrating humility. I don't know any other way, you know. But gentleness, ooh, that goes right along with

patience. That's our path. We're not to be harsh. We're to be gentle. Okay, and patient. Okay, taking a long view.

2 Timothy 4 2, "Preach the message. Be ready whether it is convenient or not. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and instruction."

Now, as a teacher, as a preacher, as a, you know, instructor, you know, there is the element of reproof, rebuking, exhorting, building up, but yet we're to do it with patience, taking a long view, you know. We're not to scold people. We're to show them how God gives truth to help them to live. And, you know, you put that truth about what God says, how to live up against your life, well, some of your life may fall a little short. I know it does with me. So there is the need for reproof, rebuking, building up people, and explaining how it all works. But, you know, by showing the how and the why, that's the structure of Ephesians. That's the structure of Colossians. Paul gives you the why, then tells you how, and Romans does the same thing. So, it's important to do that.

1 Timothy 1 16, "But here is why I was treated with mercy, so that in me, as the worse, Christ Jesus could demonstrate his utmost patience as example for those who are going to believe in him for eternal life."

God was patient with Paul, and Paul is an example of God's patience. You know, he started out persecuting the Church. God was patient with Paul, and he revealed himself to Paul, and Paul made a change. On that Damascus road, Paul made a change as the Lord confronted him. Then the Lord taught him for three years, re-educated this brilliant fellow, and showed great patience towards him. In the same way, that's an example for you, me, and others who believe in him for eternal life. You know, because Paul was treated with patience, he did the same thing. His example is what works in our life. God is patient with us. Pretty cool.

2 Peter 3:15, "And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our dear brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him."

God is patient, therefore we should be patient. And, you know, love. Remember what Jesus said, "Love as I love."<sup>1</sup> Put that principle in relationship to patience because patience is part of the fruit of the Spirit, which is love. So, as the Lord is patient, you be patient. You know, that works.

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<sup>1</sup> Jn. 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; **as I have loved you, that you also love one another.** 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

1 Timothy 6 11, "But you as a person dedicated to God keep away from all that instead pursue righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, endurance, gentleness."

Now, the idea here is, as we take the long view with the word "endurance," another concept comes along related to that, and it's called the doctrine of perseverance. Perseverance is taking the long view of demonstrating our faith that we will. Our goal is to walk with God all of our lives. That's the doctrine of perseverance. Things happen in life. We live longer today, and because we live longer, more of us are going to experience the dynamic where the brain no longer works like it has. It might have dementia in it, might have some other kind of mental, actual physical, mental problem. It isn't imaginary; it actually happens in the brain, affects our behavior, and even could affect our outward statement of belief. We're fragile, and some people may lose so much of their mind that they become a different kind of person, you know, and might start swearing, or they might start yelling, or they might start doing other things because of their condition. There's all kinds of dementia, by the way, but they're doing that, and people are living longer.

If you were to observe their behavior and their speech, because of these various diseases, and there are other diseases that affect how people actually live it out, you might assume that they're not Christian. They didn't hang on to the end. Well, that's not the idea of perseverance at all. It isn't at all. You know, you have to have God reveal this to you: when we trust Christ, He saves us, He's got us in his hand, and He's not going to let go. In other words, the real reality of the believer's perseverance is that God has us.

Now, we can illustrate that very simply. When our life ceases to live, and it becomes lifeless, whatever we do with the body after it ceases to live, it can no longer move. And the whole thing of going to heaven is a work of God. That's something that he does. We can't do it. We don't even know the direction of heaven. We don't know where it's at. We don't know how far away it is. You see, when we die, we're absent from the body. That body is no longer alive, but we're present with the Lord.<sup>2</sup> You see, God does it. He's got us. Even when we can do nothing, we have eternal life because we trust in Christ. We go to be with the Lord, and there we are up in heaven with the Lord.

I was just listening to a sermon that a pastor preached back in the 1980s. He talked about our destiny. There are two options: You're either in the body as a Christian, or you're with the Lord. It's God who brings us there.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 5:6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. <sup>7</sup> For we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Patience. Why do we need it? I listened to Charles Swindoll on Job, and he talked about his observance of pain. You see, pain breaks down the human Spirit, breaks down the human soul. People, when they are in pain, they often do not have any patience when they're in pain. We see it all the time in hospitals. A person is not themselves. They're so absorbed with the pain that they can't deal with anything else, and it wears them down. Now, some people who have resisted the Lord all their lives because there's so much pain turn to the Lord and trust the Lord.

Sometimes, God has a purpose for pain. Now, we know pain helps us understand that we have a problem.<sup>3</sup> We have a problem in our body, and pain often is the one thing that tells us there's something wrong. If we listen to that pain, and we listen to it early enough, whatever the problem is, we have a better chance of surviving it. So, pain tells us when our bones are broken, or when our organs have a problem, or somewhere in the body, you know, that we can't see something that happened.

I knew immediately something was wrong when my polyp burst open, and in my colon, I had tremendous pain. It was immediate. It was different, and I couldn't avoid it. It was so painful. So, I went to the hospital, and they were able to clean me out. They were able to take out the damaged intestine and reconnect it to the small intestines, and they were able to give me drugs to help fight the infection. And, you know, I was healing within a matter of days. In a matter of about seven weeks, I was back to going to work. But, if I hadn't done that, the doctor informed me that I would probably have about two weeks to live, and it would be a very painful death. So, going in and fixing the problem was very possible, and here I am, many years later, still alive. So, sometimes, pain shows us a benefit, but other times, it breaks it down.

### **Lessons from the Book of Job**

Now, we, listening to pain and people involved in pain, have a choice. We can choose to listen and be patient and help relieve the suffering, or at least try to just sit there and encourage people as they go through it. Or, we can choose to be like Job's counselors, and we can shame them, blame them, and criticize them, all of which doesn't do any good to the people who are suffering.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Henry Brant working with people who had leprosy observed that pain help us understand that there is a problem. Without pain we would probably not know something is wrong. But I am also glad that we have treatments to help pain. Once we know we have a problem. I am glad there are treatments that help us cope with the pain. Phillip Yancey books [The Gift of Pain](#) and [Where is God When it Hurts](#) explores the problem of [Pain](#)

You know, Job's counselors originally had a good purpose in mind, and I often wondered, in looking at that, why do you think they change? They went from a good purpose to a very bad purpose. How did that happen? Well, let's take a look at the scripture,

Job, chapter 2:11 "Now when Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, each one came from his own place—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. For they had made an appointment together to come and mourn with him, and to comfort him."

You see, they had originally a very good purpose, you know. They were going to come along and comfort this fella, and they were going to mourn with him, okay? So, they went to him, in verse 12,

"And when they raised their eyes from afar, and did not recognize him, they lifted their voices and wept; and each one tore his robe and sprinkled dust on his head toward heaven."

Here's a very good verse that gives us a possibility of where things went wrong. Look at verse 13: "So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great."

Now, for seven days and seven nights, they sat down there. Not one of them raised a finger to help Job find someplace to sleep where he could start recovering. Not one raised a finger to help clean his wounds. Not one made any effort to try to use whatever medicines they had at the time to help him, or, you know, the whole idea of Job getting sleep and a place to rest and some new clothes, etc., that would have been really nice. But they didn't do any of that. They just sat there with him for seven days. Now, I think that seven days of silence is where they developed their attack on Job because when they begin to counsel Job, they are entirely different from verse 11, where they came to mourn and comfort him. They take on a completely different attitude.

Let me summarize that attitude with Bildad. in chapter 25. It's a short chapter with six verses. I want to get to the gist of what he said to Job. In his analysis, this is the diagnosis that he gave Job all right. Here is his viewpoint of what Job was. Go down to verse 6.

"How much less man, who is a maggot, And a son of man, who is a worm?"

What is his analysis of Job? He's a worm. He's a maggot. Now, if you're in Job's situation, where you lost your whole family, you lost your health, you lost everything that you owned, and there you are in a depressed state, in a diseased state. He was very sick, and this guy calls you a maggot. A guy calls you a worm. That's what he thinks of you. That's not how to help somebody who's suffering. We help people suffering by coming alongside them and listening to them, but we're also involved, like the great physician, the good Samaritan, who tried to help the fellow on the road and treat him as best he could. He took him to an inn where the guy could get some sleep. At the inn, the guy would get regular meals, and his body would begin to heal. And if he had to stay longer than needed, he would come back and settle the bill to cover the expenses. So, this guy now had an opportunity to recover.<sup>4</sup>

Well, that's what they should have done with Job, but that's not what they did. Their diagnosis is that he's a maggot and a worm. So that won't do. That won't do.

Now, I want to close this message with the idea that we wish to have the patience to work in us so that we take a long view as we minister to other people. We are trying to minister to people who may be different than ourselves. They are different, actually. Everybody's an individual. We're trying to minister to people who may take a long time to put things into practice. We're ministering to people with a long-term view of their growth. Now, I think to become a mature Christian, if you're not a mature Christian, to become a mature Christian, it starts with the decision to, as Paul says in Romans, "I beseech you by the mercy of God that you present your body, okay, a living sacrifice,"<sup>5</sup> that you learn the idea that I'm going to live for Christ. I'm going to live for God. I will choose my purpose in life to walk in the Spirit and depend on the Lord to work through me as I obey and walk with Him. Work through me as I exhibit his fruit, and I bear much fruit. That's the idea that Jesus gave towards maturity. It falls on good ground and produces much fruit.<sup>6</sup> The fruit provides evidence of God working, and that person begins, a mature Christian, to take care of the needs of others and use whatever talents and abilities that they have to help other people. That's the idea of maturity.

How long does it take? Well, it starts with the decision, and then it starts with the practice, the walk; as Paul says in Ephesians, walk in the Lord.<sup>7</sup> So, as

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:25-37

<sup>5</sup> Romans 12:1, 2

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 13:8, 23

<sup>7</sup> Eph. 4:1, 17

we do that, that maturity will probably develop, and we're going to grow because we're going to get into God's Word. We're going to read it. We're going to learn about it. It might take a few years, but we can do whatever God wants in our ministry. So, you know, any person who decides to walk with God within three years can actually be a very mature person in the Lord. Maturity is not perfection, nor is it that we know everything. No, just the opposite. We continue to learn and focus on the goal of knowing Christ and walking with Him. We are not only looking for our needs but also for the needs of others.<sup>8</sup>

Now, look at that. I'm talking about time. You know, God is patient. God is patient and working with us as we learn to do this. You know, it's not overnight. It's not today and then tomorrow, you know, bingo, look at me, I'm different. No, it's a process that God works, but it's a doable thing we can see over a couple of years. That's what I'm suggesting. But our individual timelines are precisely that: individual. So, we are patient with people as they're growing in Christ.

So, I hope that we learn to wait on the Lord to take the long view of things and think about endurance, that we run the race, you know, for endurance, and that we help people over time. We're patient, and we're trusting the Lord. We're waiting on the Lord, and it's not just an immediate, you know, yeah, I prayed, and this happened. Sometimes, I pray, and then the Lord works it out over time, and we look back, oh yeah, God did help me, you know. So, I hope this helps you.

Lord, thank you for your Word. Thank you for your patience with us. You're patient, Lord. Help us to be patient like you were patient and help us to apply that in our life, to take the long view, knowing that we might lose a battle, but we're gonna win the war. Help us, Lord, to walk with you, our children, our grandchildren, and our other body members in Christ. Help us take the long view about how God is working and then also help us understand that we need to choose to walk with the Lord and we need to live, for me to live as Christ, we need to make that decision and then allow you to work in our life. And over time, you know, we too can be used by you to help others. So, could you help us with these truths? In Jesus' name, Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Food for thought - consider Phil. 2:1-4; 3:12-15