

James 5.7-11

Patient Endurance, Steadfast Hopefulness Sermon #7 in a Series on Biblical Change and the Fruit of the Spirit

Preached by Pastor Glenn Durham at Dominion Covenant Church, Omaha, Nebraska, on August 14, 2005.

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Main Idea: The Holy Spirit allows Christians to trust the Father's good end regardless of current trials.

Scripture Introduction

Galatians 5.22-23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” In God’s perfect timing, we have arrived at the fourth character trait of those in whom the Spirit of God is working: “patience” or (in the older translation) “longsuffering.”

Someone observed that “The greatest thing about having patience is that it annoys the person who is annoying you.” I’m guessing that may not be the best reason for pursuing patience. Instead, we know that this is a good and gracious gift which the Father increases in us as we walk in the Spirit.

So that we might be known for our patient endurance and steadfast hopefulness, let’s study **James 5.7-11**. Follow along, please, as I read our text, and then I will pray for us.

Introduction

“Patience is something we admire in the driver behind us, but not in the one ahead.” There is something about patience which leads us to demand more of it from others than we are willing to give ourselves. Additionally, we live in an “instant everything” culture. The result is that patience is not highly desired by most people.

But it seems the kingdom of God does not advance apart from patient endurance. I have been thinking on this for many months, since I listened to Pastor Kayser’s sermon on, “let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

I confess to you, my tendency has been to give up—too often and too easily. But *note well*, the reaping promised is “in due season.” We do not reap in the same season in which we plant! We sow in the spring; and harvest in the fall. Patient endurance and steadfast hopefulness are necessary because God has so ordered the universe. We may find fault, but ultimately we will fail unless we bring our thinking in line with his reality.

Thank you, Richard, for your prayer on Monday: “Lord, we are good at beginning prayer but not necessarily at persevering prayer.” You are so right, brother! Jesus taught us to pray and not lose heart. We lose heart, partially, because we do not know the patient endurance which the Lord requires of those who would harvest in his kingdom.

One day a friend saw New England Pastor, Phillip Brooks, pacing like a caged lion. “What’s the trouble, Mr. Brooks?” he asked. “The trouble is that I’m in a hurry, but God isn’t!” Have you not felt the same?

But the near universal testimony of those who have attempted great things for God is that patience will be learned. William Carey labored 7 years before the first Hindu was brought to Christ in Burma. Adoniram Judson toiled 7 years before his preaching was rewarded. In western

Africa, it was 14 years before one convert was received into the Christian church. In New Zealand, it took 9 years; and in Tahiti, 16 years passed before the first harvest of souls began.

John Bunyan was a faithful preacher of the Gospel. Many devout and sincere Christians joined their prayers to his pleading with the Father for release from prison. Yet the door remained locked for 12 years. We might ask, “Why God? All he wanted was to impact peoples’ lives with the Good News of Jesus.” But by patient endurance and steadfast hopefulness, Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim’s Progress* from prison, a book which has taught millions the Good News.

So how do we grow more patient? As we have done each week, we begin by embracing...

1. We Must Embrace the Biblical Definition of Patience

In the King James of Galatians 5, it is translated, “longsuffering”; the exact same Greek word is used four times in James 5 and is translated, “patience.” In both texts, it is μακροθυμία [*macrothumia*], made from two words, *macro* which means, “long” and *thumos* which is wrath or anger. The idea is not really one who suffers a long time, but one who is “long to anger,” who does not have a short fuse. It came to mean patience because the person who has μακροθυμία endures suffering without being short-tempered. In other words, a person walking in the Spirit takes a lot of grief without grumbling against either God or other people!

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says, about μακροθυμία: “Patience is often hard to gain and to maintain; but, in Romans 15.5, God is called ‘the God of patience’ as being able to grant that grace to those who look to Him and depend on Him for it. It is in reliance on God and acceptance of His will, with trust in His goodness, wisdom and faithfulness, that we are enabled to endure and to hope steadfastly.”

Here is the definition I would propose. Let me give it to you and then we will see if it does not come directly from James 5. *Patience is joyful endurance in the midst of difficulty or suffering, while living to please God, because of faith in God’s final judgment.*

First, notice that a patient person is...

1.1. Joyful (James 5.9)

Is not the opposite of grumbling, joy? So when God prohibits grumbling, I see Him as requiring joy. But if that is not clear enough, turn back a page to James 1. **James 1.2-3:** “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” Other versions translate “patience” as “steadfastness” (ESV) or “perseverance” (NIV). Whichever you prefer, the point is clear: we are to be joyful in trials as God produces in us patient endurance and steadfast hopefulness.

Do you remember what God did when Israel grumbled and complained? We are reminded of it in **1Corinthians 10.10:** “Do not complain as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.” Why is a grumbling, complaining spirit such a serious problem?

The answer is really simple: a grumbling spirit comes from a heart of unbelief. Patience is the outworking of faith in the God of the Bible.

I love gardening. Next spring we hope to plant many wonderful vegetables. Suppose we purchase seeds and I plant them but what sprouts is not tomatoes but crabgrass. Will you not say, “Your seeds were defective; there were tares among the seeds.” In the same way, if joy does not sprout from our hearts during the spring of trials, then our seeds are not the pure ones of the Holy Spirit. Joy is the fruit of the seeds of faith; grumbling is the fruit of unbelief. Patient is joyful; second, it is joyful...

1.2. Endurance In Difficulty or Suffering (James 5.8a-b,10-11a)

James 5.8a-b,10,11: “You also be patient. Establish your hearts....¹⁰ My brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure....”

Notice how God connects enduring difficulty with patience. Please understand that the Christian life is not a 100-yard dash, but a 26-mile marathon.

Of course, we have all asked, “Why must I suffer? Why cannot life be easier?” Although God does not reveal specific answers for your particular situation, He does tell us much in the Bible.

Sometimes we suffer because of sin (either our own or another’s). Or it may be to strengthen our faith; or to equip us to comfort others; or to learn perseverance; or so that we ourselves and others also will know if we are “fair weather friends” of God. All of these are Biblical “answers.”

The key, however, is *not* to explain “Why?” to our satisfaction; it is to trust God when the answers are not clear. Know this: a true Christian has a supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit to keep her composure even in the midst of difficulty, including difficulties faced...

1.3. While Living to Please God (James 5.10-11)

Can we be honest? Do not many seek godliness as an escape from difficulty? And are they not disappointed when, though they have “done what is right,” they still suffer?

Lest we suppose religion to be a way out, God reminds us that *the great people of faith are not those whose godliness allows them to escape suffering, but whose godliness sustains their joy and endurance in suffering!* Take as an example the prophet and Job and notice, please, three encouragements to our hearts from meditation on their endurance.

First, our hearts are established and strengthened from knowing that our case is normal! Even great men of God suffer. Do not allow your trials to lead you to doubt God’s sovereignty and goodness. Nothing special is happening to us; trouble is normal!

Second, our hearts are established and strengthened from knowing that our case is not shameful! We easily fear that our troubles are signs of God’s disfavor or our failure. Such is not true. The prophets (and Christ himself) suffered while living to please God!

Third, our hearts are established and strengthened from knowing that their example is for our imitation! “When God makes us like them in sufferings, we should be like them in patience” (Manton, *James*, in loc.).

But how do we do so? The key is to change our thinking. Impatience flourishes in a heart which refuses to see the future. Thus, the final part of our definition: Patience is joyful endurance in the midst of difficulty or suffering, while living to please God...

1.4. Because of Faith in God’s Final Judgment (James 5.7-11)

Have you considered the long range planning and commitment of the farmer? He invests life savings in seed, fuel, equipment and land. Then he labors long and hard to plant, till and weed. Then he...waits. There is nothing else to do.

God would have us wait patiently for His working or His judging of our case. Most of my impatience comes from my being in a hurry when God is not.

So when your son leaves the door open for the 30th time this week and you feel frustration, anger and resentment welling up inside, how do you respond? (Simply, “Be patient, O my soul!” is insufficient and sub-Biblical.) You remember the compassion and mercy of God, and you give the same. Not always without punishment or penalty, but by faith that God has

orchestrated this failure as an opportunity to disciple your children. So you teach without blowing up: “Son, I love you. And because I love you, I must remind you of the \$1.00 penalty which you must pay when you leave the door open. I do this so that you learn to take responsibility for your actions. God gives me this privilege because he also loves you, and wants you to be disciplined in thinking and self-control. Please shut the door you left open; please bring me the \$1.00 fine; and let me pray for you so that God would make this a tool in your life for maturity and preparation to be a disciplined husband and father.”

What about when the turkey in the car in front cuts you off and curses you for being there, and you feel anger and vindictiveness welling up inside of you? Remember the Judge who is standing at the door, and pray this: “Holy God, what that driver did is ungodly and dangerous. I feel attacked unfairly. But I trust you to bring better justice than I possibly could. Bring him to justice in your way, in a way that brings glory to you and conversion to him. And thank you for being my shield and defender, protecting me from a wreck, guarding my heart and providing perfect justice. Amen.”

Patience is joyful endurance in the midst of difficulty or suffering, while living to please God, because of faith in God’s final judgment.

2. We Must Deny Ourselves the Opposite of Patience: Self-centeredness

Obviously, impatience is the opposite of patience, but that does not really help, does it? Think back to the example of the poor driver. What is my heart doing when I react in impatience? Is it not saying, “I know better than God how to get even! I know what this driver deserves! I ought to be treated better! I have a right to be angry!” With each thought “I” is the center of desire.

But notice something amazing in James 5.7-11. Who is mentioned in every verse? God!

In order to produce patience my thoughts must be turned from myself to my Savior! My flesh wants me to think *only* of self; the Spirit wants me to *think first* of God. So the Spirit teaches patience by convincing us to ask: what is *God* doing *in my suffering*? We deny ourselves the opposite of patience by refusing to give in to the sinful thought of self at the center of our circumstances. At the same time...

3. We Must Be Cautious of the Counterfeit of Patience: Fatigue or Laziness or Fear

William Wilberforce was converted in 1785. Almost immediately he saw the sin in the slave trade. So he began using every means at his disposal to fight against what clearly displeased to God. He never argued for patience in ending the slave trade—it was too great an evil; but he patiently enduring every setback. It was not until the Abolition Act received the Royal Assent on March 25, 1807 that the trade became illegal in British ships. Twenty-two years he had remained steadfast in hopefulness. But even then slavery was still practiced, it was just outlawed on British ships. So he continued to work, to preach and to fight the good fight of faith. It was not until July 26, 1833, when Parliament agreed to pay farmers for their loss of slave labor, that the practice was effectively ended. “Thank God,” said Wilberforce, “that I have lived to witness a day in which England is willing to give twenty millions sterling for the Abolition of Slavery.” Three days later he died. Patient endurance.

Contrast him with some of the pastors in the south during the same years. Some Presbyterian preachers, though admitting the practice a clear violation of the law of God, insisted on “patience” in the dismantling of slavery. Why? Because they feared losing their pulpits and they feared the fight which must come. Wilberforce never suggested patience with a sinful

practice; but he patiently endured. Others call for patience at every turn, because they will not suffering with the prophets. One is patience; the other a cheap counterfeit. Which will we choose when enduring suffering is necessary to the work of God?

4. We Must Actively Cultivate True Patience

What shall we do when we find ourselves with grumbling, murmuring, complaining, impatient hearts? The solution begins with thinking differently.

We are impatient because we know the results we want, we know the way to get them, and we know the timing we should have; but God frustrates our desires. In our way of thinking, God hinders what should and could be done; God stands in the way of our joy and progress.

We must believe something different about God. Believe that God is for you; believe that God loves you more than you love yourself; believe that God has given you this very circumstance for your joy and your blessing. Believe that God is doing something great in this process, in this pain, in this period of your life. Believe that patience is both good for your soul and a blessing to be sought after.

Did not Jesus do just that? He patiently endured the cross *for us*, that He might produce the fruit of patience *in us*.

Hebrews 12.1d-3: “Let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him *endured* the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who *endured* from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”

5. Conclusion

He pastored in the Church of England for 54 years beginning in 1782 when the bishop appointed him to a church against the will of the people. They opposed him, not because he was a bad preacher, but because he was an evangelical—he believed the Bible and called for conversion and holiness and world missions. For 12 years the people refused to let him give the afternoon Sunday sermon. During that time they also boycotted the Sunday morning service, locking their pews so that no one could sit in them. For 12 years (600 weeks) he preached Sunday mornings to those who stood in the aisles! How did he survive?

“In this state of things I saw no remedy but faith and patience [note the link of faith and patience!]. The passage of Scripture which subdued and controlled my mind was this, ‘The servant of the Lord must not strive.’ It was painful indeed to see the church, with the exception of the aisles, almost forsaken; but I thought that if God would only give a double blessing to the congregation that did attend, there would on the whole be as much good done as if the congregation were doubled and the blessing limited to only half the amount. This comforted me many, many times, when without such a reflection, I should have sunk under my burden.”

Rather than growing impatient with God and grumbling against people, Charles Simeon saw God’s hand in his suffering. He believed differently about God than his flesh would have liked, and so he served with joyful endurance.

Years later, as Simeon lay dying, the illness was dragging on. Might we not have been impatient for God’s healing or death? Instead, he said this: “Infinite wisdom has arranged the whole with infinite love; and infinite power enables me to rest upon that love. I am in a dear Father’s hands—all is secure. When I look to Him, I see nothing but faithfulness and immutability and truth; and I have the sweetest peace. I cannot have more peace.”

Simeon could die with patient endurance and steadfast hopefulness because he had trained himself for 54 years to go to Scripture and to take hold of the infinite wisdom and love and power of God and use them to conquer the unbelief of impatience. By the testing of his faith he knew the Lord to be compassionate and merciful. Will we?