

“THE POWER OF PATIENCE IN SUFFERING.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Text: James 5:7-12

Introduction.

Some of you have seen that YouTube video of children in a room with a plate that has one marshmallow on it. The adult says, “I will leave and come back in fifteen minutes. If you have not eaten the marshmallow I will give you two.” For some of the kids those fifteen minutes were pure torture.

Patience is hard. Lord, give me patience and give it to me right now.
Waiting is hard. I still have issues with long lines and certain drivers.

Christianity is waiting. We have been waiting for 2000 years. A huge part of being a Christian is about patience. It’s part of the fruit or evidence of the Holy Spirit. The Bible recounts some great stories and testimonies of great patience.

Abraham and Sarah waited twenty five years for God to fulfill His promise of son. Joseph languished years in slavery and imprisonment before being elevated to number two over all of Egypt. Simeon and Anna waited all their lives in the temple to see the Messiah.

What is Patience?

What is patience? Patience, simply defined, is the ability to wait; the ability to wait a long time without getting angry or upset; the ability to persevere even in a difficult circumstance.

Why in one situation can we be as calm and cool and patient as Job and in another situation we are anxious or impatient or irritated or exasperated?

Because in the first instance there is nothing bad or wrong or unexpected happening to us. Think about it. Patience is only tested in the presence of sin or disease or evil or trouble or trial. There is no such thing as patience in times of ease or pleasure or comfort or luxury.

Scripture calls us to be patient in tribulation (Romans 12:12) and to patiently endure evil (II Timothy 2:24).

Patience or impatience occurs in the presence of something that must be endured, that calls for an act of submitting ones soul to the hand and will of God. When anger or irritation or frustration or bitterness or sorrow are brought under control and made to submit that’s patience. When the tongue is bridled and made to be silent, when we hold our peace and wait on the Lord, that’s patience.

Why? What is the Goal of Patience? vs. 7.

James says it three times. The goal is to be prepared for and to wait for the coming of the Lord which is at hand. There is a race set before us that will require patience. If we will run with patience there will be a great reward.

Hebrews 12:1-2 let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

The Patience of a Farmer, vs.7-9.

Waiting is hard. We live in the present, the future is hard to wait for. Our expectations want to be satisfied now. James anticipates this difficulty and says consider the farmer.

The farmer has to be patient with the soil, patient with the seed, patient with the seasons, patient with the prices, patient with a myriad of factors and forces outside of his control. That's why we are having that joint prayer service next Sunday evening at Bethel CRC.

Farmers do a lot of waiting and trusting. He doesn't expect immediate results. Farmers don't get anxious by long delays. They wait for the fruit of their labors.

If a farmer can wait patiently for a harvest, can I not also wait for the good of the Lord to come, or better yet, wait for the coming of the Lord Himself? Patience is having a longer view of things, of being able to look past the immediate concern.

Patience takes strength, strength which the Lord provides. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

God's ways can sometimes seem very senseless or wasteful or expensive to us. Why would God want us to have to waste precious resources of time and money on some expensive repair or replacement or treatment? Why does God give things to us only to take them away? Why does He give life only to take it too early or not soon enough?

Impatience is a form of unbelief and of selfishness, of taking too much thought of ourselves and our wants and desires.

Christianity isn't about getting free of suffering, it is about regulating them, learning from them and making best use of them. About waiting on the Lord. Our waiting isn't passive, it's expectant. It's in a manner that says we are submitted to Him and trusting in Him.

Do not grumble against each other, vs. 9.

Have we ever said, "I have no patience for people like that"?

James urges us to be patient with each other. Christians can be very impatient. Do we make allowances for each other? Do we treat each other according to the Golden Rule, do we treat each other the way we would want to be treated? Do we get frustrated with other people's mistakes or that someone doesn't do what we expect them to do? Do we make quick judgments based on partial knowledge?

We get impatient when we don't know what's going on. Patience is much easier when we understand what's going on in a given situation.

When Zach and I were flying home from Minneapolis early last month our flight was delayed about four hours. I immediately started asking what was going on, what was the problem. Mercifully they explained it and explained what they were doing to resolve the issue and why it would take as long as it did. That helped me. But we aren't always privy to the details. And certainly God doesn't tell us all His ways and His dealings with us.

Don't grumble or complain or murmur or bear grudges or harbor animosities or nurture of displeasures over injuries or offenses received. The Judge is standing at the door.

The Patience of the Prophets, 5:10.

James 5:10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

They were God's special servants, specifically called by Him and particularly loved by Him. They had the Word of God in their mouth. They were in the perfect will of God and yet they suffered. Suffering doesn't necessarily mean you are outside of God's will.

They are an example to us in their hard sufferings and in their great patience.

By their example in suffering we are shown not to flinch under them or falter in our faith in the midst of them. By their example in patience we imitate them by submitting to present trials or inconveniences.

Hebrews 6:12 [be] imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

If God makes us like the prophets in suffering, then let us be like the prophets in patience. If they were patient then how much more should we be?

Is it consolation to us to know God uses misfortune as a means to our spiritual good and sanctification? This is counter intuitive, but true. Pain means gain. What the world calls curse God uses as blessing.

Suffering is not the enemy, sin is. Without suffering there would be no moral development, no character building, no humility, no compassion and especially no spiritual growth.

Suffering draws us nearer to God, builds our trust in God and our dependence on God. This truth is echoed in Scripture again and again.

James 1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Romans 5:3-5 we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

The Patience of Job, vss. 11-12.

James moves from the general to the specific, and picks one stellar example of patience. No one has endured as much loss and grief and suffering and with such a sense of meaninglessness, and yet he remained faithful, steadfast, and longsuffering.

Why have we heard of Job? We would never have heard of him if it wasn't for the great affliction he patiently endured. His suffering made him great and famous. He gained honor from his poverty and affliction.

His afflictions came in waves, one intolerable circumstance after another. Have you lost a job? Job lost his oxen and donkeys, then his sheep and servants, then camels and servants. Have you lost a child? Job lost 10. Have you lost health in some part of your body? Job was covered head to foot in painful sores. Have you lost a friend? He had his turn on him (See Job 1).

Job lost everything except his patience, and even that wavered from time to time.

If we are going to analyze and assess a situation of suffering or distress, we must learn not to look at the beginning or the middle of them, but at the end of them, at the purposes of God in them, of what they lead to. There we will see that the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

The beginning of Job's trial was Satan's doing, but the end was God's doing. Job's patience was rewarded with Satan being shown to be a liar and God restoring to him twice as much as he had before. If we will have Job's patience then we will have Job's reward, from a compassionate and merciful God.

Hebrews 12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Do not swear or make an oath, vs. 12.

James 5:12 doesn't seem to fit context. One possible understanding is that impatience can manifest in oaths, curses, swearing.

Don't take the Lord's name in vain, but also don't take anything He has made in vain. God's glory is over all the earth and over all the heavens. Don't bring God's judgment down on yourself by careless words spoken in fits of impatience or anger or irritation. Bridle your tongue.

Application and conclusion.

James intends for us to learn patience from the example of others. If you surround yourself with patient people you will learn it. Beware of hanging around impatient, complaining people. Impatience breeds impatience.

Our children will learn by our example. If they are acting out impatiently over small things, we would do well to examine our own responses to small annoyances and inconveniences.

We can teach patience by teaching our children to follow through and finish what they start, to not give up too quickly. If they want something, make them earn money or do something else first that teaches patience.

We joke about life is short so eat dessert first, but patience says eat your meal first and then you can have dessert. Learning lessons in delayed gratification are best learned early.

Billions of dollars of credit card debt says we American's haven't learned that lesson well, we are an impatient nation. We want what we want now.

Our last waiting may be the longest and hardest of all, waiting to die. Etta is so ready and she really wants to go home to be with the Lord, but week after week she lays there.

This is God's last test of patience, to teach us and our loved ones the great virtue of patience. We can endure patiently this waiting if we have learned along the way how to wait on the Lord in faith, in trust, in confidence, in hope.

Isaiah 30:18 Blessed are all those who wait for the Lord.

Patience is a spiritual work grounded in what we believe about God. Let me leave you with *five truths* to help you with long lines and traffic and dawdling children and stuck drawers and lawn mowers that won't start and body parts that are failing and life's messes.

First, God is sovereign over everything, every detail of life.

Second, God has purposes for every trial and difficulty, even long lines.

Third, God is merciful, whatever happens, we deserve far worse.

Fourth, God is good and compassionate. Learn to say that outloud.

Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

Psalm 119:75 in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

“God is too just to do us wrong, and too kind and wise to do us harm” (Thomas Manton, p. 419).

Fifth, Christ is coming soon and will rescue and deliver us from every need for patience, and all will be perfect and well. And He will say, “Well done and well suffered my good and faithful and patient servant.”

Christian patience is grounded in our belief in a sovereign and good God who we are confident is at work in all the affairs of man and in men's hearts. Christian patience grows from the belief that God is gracious and will not forget us or forsake us.

Christian patience is strengthened when we have a clear sense of eschatology, of the fast approaching end of time, either for ourselves or for the whole world. Be patient as you rest your hearts in the knowledge that this test we call life is short.

Hebrews 6:12 Be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.