

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
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John Crosby
Fruit of the Spirit: Patience/Self-Control
Galatians 5:22-25

Last night I started the sermon after the offertory, after the music was over, just sitting here for 37 seconds. You have no idea how long 37 seconds can feel until you have silence and people looking at you going, "Is he asleep?" "Is he dead?" "Is he senile?" And the questions went from there, and then standing up after that 37 seconds of very awkward silence saying, "Let's talk about patience." Webster describes patience or forbearing as the state of endurance under difficult circumstances. Persevering in the face of delay or provocation without acting on annoyance or anger in a negative way. Patience is the level of endurance one can take before negativity. Patience also refers to the character trait of being steadfast.

Patience is a lot like tolerance, another misunderstood word. We think that people are patient when they never lose their temper. We think people are tolerant when they can handle anything that anybody believes and it doesn't bother them at all, but that is not what tolerance is. Tolerance is not believing that he is right and she is right and they are right and everybody in their own way is right. That is not what tolerance is. Tolerance is believing that there is a right and a wrong and that people who believe in different things need to be treated with civility and grace and respect. That is tolerance. You are not being tolerant when you agree that every position is okay.

You are not being patient when it doesn't bother you to wait. Patience has the same tension as tolerance. Patience is waiting when we want to be somewhere else. Patience is not what happens when my wife is running late, and I'm watching the last two minutes of the football game. It doesn't bother me at that point. It is an act of God's goodness and grace. That's not patience! Patience comes out in different ways in our lives though, doesn't it?

A supervisor, a manager, and an owner are walking to lunch. They find an antique oil lamp. They rub it, and a genie comes out. The genie says, "I'll give each of you just one wish." The supervisor jumps to the front of the line saying, "Me first. Me first. Me first. I get to go first. I want to go to the Bahamas and be on huge yacht and have lovely girls waving palm branches in my face. I want that right now." And puff! He's gone. He disappears. Seeing that, the supervisor jumps in front of the owner and says, "Okay. Okay. My turn, my turn. I want Hawaii. Yeah, Hawaii, relaxing on the beach with lots of piña coladas and a physical therapist who looks like Antonio Banderas. I want everything to be perfect for me." Puff! He disappears. The genie turns to the owner and says, "Okay, you've been patient where they were impatient. What would you like?" And the owner says, "I want those two back in the office right after lunch."

We marvel sometimes at patience. I see it around me all the time in moms. Moms have patience beyond belief. Or in someone who is taking care of a handicapped person in public and does

not seem embarrassed or agitated but just loves her. This week I saw patience fleshed out in front of me. I did a couple of weddings, the second down at Westminster and at the end of the wedding, the groom was a Catholic, the couple had asked to have Communion as the first act of their new marriage. Because of the number of guests, we had just the family receive Communion. The father of the bride had died, Mike Moore, some of you knew Mike, so Michelle's grandfather, Andre, walked her down the aisle. Andre is in his mid- to late eighties, a classy gentleman. When we talked about Communion, we were going to have the parents and grandparents come up and take Communion. I said, "Andre, please come up," and I met Andre's wife, a lovely woman, but she is deep in dementia. It was just a miracle that she was there at all. He said, "No, no, I'll just leave her there. She'll get upset if she doesn't know what to do."

So Communion time came, and the parents and the grandparents got up, and when Andre got up, his wife immediately got up and started to follow him. The priest put the host in her hand, and she didn't know what to do. Andre just put her fingers around the host, and I raised the host to her mouth. Then he offered his arm like they were courting and walked her back to her seat. Well, the service was terrific. I know this sounds weird, but Michelle looks like a model. She is a beautiful, beautiful young lady, and the groom really is from Argentina and really does look like Antonio Banderas on a good day. I was more than a little jealous. They get done with the service and the family gathers in a room just inside the church while the guests are all waiting on the steps. Pictures are being taken of the bride and groom, and I get a little tug on my robe, and Andre's wife turns to me and says, "That's my guy" and points to Andre. I thought, "That's what it's supposed to be like. To love someone that way, to be patient with them all the time even when their mind is gone.

Patience is more than an intellectual exercise because patience also includes being cut off on the road and pulling out a gun and shooting at the other person. We call it road rage. Patience also includes people being killed, literally being killed, running in and out of stadiums or concerts because they cannot wait their turn. Patience includes seeing parents hitting their children in stores. Patience includes hearing things that couples say to each other. You know that they love each other but that they would say that to their spouse.... That is the opposite of patience, IM-patience.

How many of you feel as we talk about the spiritual fruit that God offers us, like you could use a little bit more of the fruit of patience? Just raise your hand. How many of you are sitting next to someone who could use a little more of the fruit of patience? This is not an intellectual exercise. How many of you can think of the last time that you lost your patience? How many of you have had that time less than 24 hours in the past? I'm standing in the line at Lunds working on this sermon going, "Would she just hurry up!" This is not something that is ancillary to our lives as believers. Patience is at the core of whom we are and what God is doing in us. I've asked seven of my friends to help describe God's view of patience beginning with the Book of Romans.

Romans 2:4,

⁴ ...Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and **patience**, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Isaiah 7:13,

¹³ Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the **patience** of men? Will you also try the patience of my God?”

So God models patience. It’s in the character of God to be patient, not to sit there twiddling His thumbs, waiting for the movie to be over but to wait patiently. God’s timing is not the same as our timing. A thousand years are a night quickly gone for the Lord, but God waits. Not passively but leading us toward a peculiar destination, leading us toward repentance, toward joy, toward wisdom, toward growth. With patience God leads us toward the destination, but you and I, we’re like the slowest kids in class. We need more time. We’re like special needs people who just keep going the wrong way. We are like the kid in the back seat saying, “Are we there yet?” to the person in the front with the map and you can still see your house in the rear-view mirror. We need that practically applied.

Proverbs 19:11,

¹¹ A person’s wisdom yields **patience**; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.

Proverbs 25:15,

¹⁵ Through **patience** a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.

Ecclesiastes 7:8,

⁸ The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and **patience** is better than pride.

I love that. Patience is better than pride. Maybe you will identify with this? A man’s car stalls in heavy traffic just as the light is turning green. All of his frantic efforts to get the car started seem to make things worse. It doesn’t work at all, and the chorus of honking horns behind him just seems to make things worse. Finally he gets out of the car and walks back to the first driver behind him and says, “Look, I’m really sorry. I can’t seem to get my car started. If you’ll go up there and give it a try, I’ll stay here and honk your horn for you.”

Patience is better than pride. The early church learned that. The early church learned patience not because things were good but because things were bad. It was persecuted fiercely by the Roman Empire. It had no power. The Empire had all the power and killed Christians mercilessly, but the Christians did not break. They developed a faith so patient that it outlasted the Roman Empire. We hear it described in Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians.

2nd Corinthians 6:6,

⁶ [as servants of God we show] purity, understanding, **patience** and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love....

Colossians 1:11,

¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and **patience**....

Colossians 3:12,

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and **patience**.

Wherever I am given the chance to pick the Scriptures for a marriage, that is the one I pick, Colossians 3. I love 1st Corinthians 13:4, "Love is patient, love is kind...." but everybody knows that one, right? Colossians says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people...." You are God's chosen people. He has chosen you. He has sought you. He has brought you in. You are dearly beloved, and He wants to give you the clothing of people who belong to the King, which includes patience. The passage in 1st Corinthians where Paul describes loves starts, "Love is patient...." That is the foundation of love from God, patience. Joyce Meyer says this,

"Patience is a fruit of the spirit that grows only under trial. It is useless to pray for patience. Well, actually I encourage you to pray for patience, but I'll tell you what you'll get TRIALS!"

Trials are how patience grows. She says,

"Patience is not the ability to wait but the ability to keep a good attitude while waiting."

Keeping a good attitude when you don't want to wait. That is Biblical patience. Okay, I'm convinced. I want it. How do I get it? How do I get it right now? I'm not very patient. We have said all through this series that one of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit is that it is a gift from God. It is not something you conjure up by trying harder, reading more, concentrating harder in your head. It is a gift from God. The illustration that Dan used this morning with the kids is perfect. We at most plant the seeds. "God, help me." We water the ground by reading God's Word, spending time with other people, serving. We pull out the weeds. We realize when something has gone wrong, but God is the one who grows us, who sows patience.

Let me just offer you a couple of things that you might do to cultivate the fruit of patience. The first one will sound churchy, but I can't help it. I believe that to be patient you need to pray for patience in specific situations *before*. Pray specifically *before* the situations arise. The clearest case of patience being fruit is that it is something that is rarely achieved in the moment. I don't all of a sudden in the moment get patience, but it is a need that I have recognized I have in this setting. I prepare for it a little by thinking of how it might go, and I pray that God might be there. "Please, God, show up" otherwise I'm going to kill her. For me, patience is just doing a little better than I would have done by myself.

One of the clues for me that I need to pray before I lose my patience is that there are often warning signs. Do you get those warning signs? Do you physically start to become impatient? Do you twitch? Do you pat? Do you tap your feet? Do you sigh? Those are physical signs the battle may be getting away from you. In my family we have a person who loses patience by sulking. We have another person who loses her patience by blowing up. Different triggers. How about you? Are you among those who when patience is being frayed, you don't blow up or sulk, you become the self-righteous martyr who is always waiting? Or do you notice that patience is getting away from you because your tongue which can say nice things on occasion all of sudden is saying, "Oh, no, no, no...." Oh, that felt good; do it again. "No!" Or for some of you, not having

prayed, not having thought about when you lose your patience, it is not that last little cup the poor, hapless husband left in the wrong place. It is the 14 things that he forgot to do before that, and so we've lost our patience. The first thing we need to do is pray that God will show us those settings where we are vulnerable and where we need to specifically pray beforehand for the fruit of patience.

The other thing that I'd say about patience is that it ties into what we talked about last week. How much of my impatience is because of control rather than self-control? Remember I talked to us about the fruit of patience and self-control? I think we lose patience when we want to be in control. Self-control is having enough control of myself to submit to God. That is what self-control is. Me-control is the way I like to run my life. When I run my life, when I am in control, I am impatient with anything that gets in my way. God is in control, not me. God is in control, not them.

Things happen, **but God** has a different idea. Have you heard that before? Things happen, **but God** has a different idea. Moses waits in the wilderness for 40 years, **but God** brings him to the Promised Land. David waits 14 years after the death of crazy King Saul because he doesn't want civil war, **but God** is there. Joseph goes from a dysfunctional family to slavery to jail before Pharaoh raises him up, **but God** has a different timetable. Sarah, Rebekah, and Hannah waited decades for kids. Think they were patient? They waited decades, infertile, while all around them women were popping out children like Pez dispensers, looking at them like there is something wrong with them, **but God**.... There is one Biblical character that we talk about having incredible patience. We say "the patience of Job," but would anybody like to have the life of Job to get the patience of Job? **But God**.... So we pray for patience in advance that God will give us the fruit. We examine our lives and ask, how much of my impatience is because I need to be in control? **But God**....

May I just give you one for the advanced class? For those of you who are, you know, a little further down the road, when you start to get impatient, the spiritual exercise that helps the most is to pray for them. Oh, please, the jerk just cut me off for the third time in the same conversation. Pray for them? Pray for them! That is advanced, spiritual warfare patience. If you really are in the advanced class, then you know that the biggest thing you can do to increase your patience is to ask for forgiveness of the other person. Ask for help not to change them but for God to change you. "God, help me." Now that can easily become manipulative. That is why it is in the advanced section.

Let me just bring this home. I'm going to close with this because Laura did not give me permission to use this illustration. Laura *told* me to use this illustration. I have a very gifted wife. She gets up between 5:00 and 5:30 every morning. She has a checklist. She sings as she checks things off. It makes me sick. She gets more done before noon than I do in an entire week. She is a gifted, strong person, but when you look at the spiritual fruit of patience, one of us in our house may have more of it. It is not Laura.

Laura in a car is a dangerous thing because she has got 14 things to do. I say this because my wife Laura has worked far harder on patience than I ever, ever have. She has prayed about it, confessed it, gone to others to ask for help for it. She is a more patient person than she was when we married. She is a more patient person and worked on it far harder than I have. I wanted to say that because you need to hear that when you look at the fruit of the Spirit, you

cannot judge by what you see. You see somebody in our family whom nothing seems to bother because his wife says he has no pulse and somebody who flies off the handle all the time. The person who is being used by God most in our family is not standing in front of you right now. C. S. Lewis writes this in *Mere Christianity*.

“If you have sound nerves and intelligence and health and popularity and a good upbringing, you are likely to be quite satisfied with your character as it is. “Why drag God into it?” you may ask. A certain level of good conduct comes fairly easily to you. You are not one of those wretched creatures who are always being tripped up by sex,...

or fear of poverty,

“or nervousness, or bad temper. Everyone says you are a nice chap and (between ourselves) you agree with them. You are quite likely to believe that all this niceness is your own doing.... Often people who have all these natural kinds of goodness cannot be brought to recognise their need for Christ.... In other words, it is hard for those who are “rich” in this sense to enter the Kingdom.

It is very different for the nasty people—the little, low, timid, warped, thin-blooded, lonely people, or the passionate, sensual, unbalanced people.”

All of us at some point.

“If they make any attempt at goodness at all, they learn, in double quick time, that they need help. It is Christ or nothing for them. It is taking up the cross and following—or else despair. They are the lost sheep; He came specially to find them. They are (in one very real and terrible sense) the “poor”....”

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor....”

“There is either a warning or an encouragement here for every one of us. If you are a nice person—if virtue”

or a certain spiritual fruit

“comes easily to you—beware! Much is expected from those to whom much is given. If you mistake for your own merits what are really God’s gifts to you through nature, and if you are contented with simply being nice,”

maybe Minnesota Nice,

“you are still a rebel.... The Devil was an archangel once; his natural gifts were as far above yours as yours are above those of a chimpanzee.

But if you are a poor creature—poisoned by a hard upbringing in some house full of vulgar jealousies and senseless quarrels—saddled, by no choice of your own...”

with terrible compulsions or habits—nagged day in and day out by a personality...

“that makes you snap at your best friends—do not despair. He knows all about it. You are one of the poor whom He blessed. He knows what a wretched machine you are trying to drive. Keep on. Do what you can. One day (perhaps in another world, but perhaps far sooner than that) He will fling it on the scrap-heap and give you a new one. And then you may astonish us all—not least yourself: for you have learned your driving in a hard school. (Some of the last will be first and some of the first will be last).”

And all will be loved.

Lord Jesus, thank You very much that this talk about the fruit of the Spirit means that we can change. We can grow, and some of us have seen fruit start to bloom, regardless of the soil. God, Your Spirit is there for us, loving us, giving us courage, showing us an image of our future that we can only dream of. That is the way You already look at us. Let us wait in patience for Your Spirit's work. And all God's children said,

All: Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.