

Truths that are out of fashion Patience

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
New King James Version of the Scriptures is used unless otherwise stated.]*

When I was growing up, my father sometimes used to quote a line from a rhyme to me, 'Patience is a virtue'! I don't suppose I was a very patient child or teenager! To be honest, I wouldn't say that it is my strong point today, either! But patience is something that the Bible mentions quite a lot, so where do we start with this virtue of patience?

A good place, actually the best place, to start is to think about God and how patient He is. When I was preparing and studying for this talk, I listened to some sermons on patience by Alistair Begg on Truth for Life, which were excellent and very helpful. Alistair Begg pointed out that God is patient and that this is how He reveals Himself to be, which I found illuminating. So, let's start there!

In Exodus chapter 32, we read about the episode of the golden calf. God had delivered His people Israel from slavery in Egypt, and He had delivered them from Pharaoh's army by making a way for them to cross the Red Sea. The Israelites had then been in the wilderness as they started their journey to Canaan, the Promised Land. They had come to Mount Sinai where God had revealed Himself to them. Moses had gone up the mountain into the presence of God, where God had revealed many things to him, and given him the ten commandments written on tablets of stone. But while Moses is up in the mountain, we read in Exodus chapter 32 verse 1, New King James version,

"Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.""

And so the people made a golden calf and started to worship it. Moses came down from the mountain and broke the two tablets of stone. God was angry with the people, but Moses interceded for them, and he went again a second time up Mount Sinai, where God had promised to show to Moses His glory. [Let's pick up the story in Exodus chapter 33 verses 18-19:](#)

["And he \[that is, Moses\] said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He \[that is, God\] said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.""](#)

If we now jump to Exodus chapter 34 verses 5-7, we read,

“Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him [that is, Moses] there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.””

This is very illuminating! God describes Himself as long-suffering. This word means patient, or slow to anger. It describes the patience of God as He bears with the sin, lack of faith, and unbelief of His people. And indeed, we could sum up much of the message of the Old Testament as a demonstration of God's patience, His slowness to anger, and His steadfast love towards His people. God truly is a patient God!

If this was so in the Old Testament, it is no less true in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus was supremely patient. He patiently worked as a carpenter until He was about thirty, when His public ministry began. He was patient with His disciples who often appeared not to understand Him or His mission. And He is patient now! In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 3 and verse 5, we read,

“Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.”

Clearly then, patience is a divine attribute. And so, it is no surprise to see it feature as one part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, as we read in Galatians chapter 5 verses 22 – 23:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

Once again, we have this word long-suffering, or patience as the English Standard Version translates it. God, revealed to us in the New Testament as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is patient, whether we see that as an attribute of God generally, or of Christ, or of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, we also learn from the Bible that patience is a feature of love. In the famous chapter about love in the first letter to the Corinthians chapter 13, we read in verses 4 – 7,

“Love suffers long and is kind; **love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**”

The verbs used here, suffers long, bears all things, and endures all things, show us clearly that patience is a key component of true love as the Bible defines it.

So, we've seen that God is patient and that He describes Himself as such, that patience is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and that patience is an integral component of love. But how do we become patient? How do I get it? And why is it a good thing to be? Let's consider these points together.

Naturally speaking, many of us are not patient. I know I am not! The other weekend I was getting frustrated over some train delays. I hate being stuck in a traffic jam. I don't like waiting what seems

to be ages to receive a parcel. If I am tired, I can quickly get impatient if I am having to listen to someone who seems to be taking a long time to get to the point! And I am sure that you will have your own experiences, and your own pet peeves that you find difficult to deal with.

But God is not like that towards me! Quite the opposite, in fact. How often He has patiently reminded me of things that He has previously told me quite often, but that I have been slow to put into practice. How steadfast and consistent He is towards me, even when I can be so up and down, one day trusting and the next day grumbling and complaining. So how do I get to be more like Him?

On the one hand, this is something that God works in us. Like we considered earlier, patience is part of the fruit of the Spirit, and so patience is something that God develops in us by His Spirit, as we spend time in His presence, and learn about Him from His word. It is not something that we can manufacture out of our own resources.

However, that does not mean that we have no part to play. In James's letter in the New Testament, chapter 1 verses 2-8, we have the following practical but rather challenging words:

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Clearly then, God uses difficulties, or trials as James puts it, to develop and work patience in us. Ordinarily speaking, I don't particularly want trials. I don't specially want to have to wait for a delay, or deal with someone who greatly tests my patience, and so on. I am sure you could come up with your own examples. But James says the opposite! "Count it all joy", he writes, "when you fall into various trials." Why?! Because, "the testing of your faith produces patience." As we enter circumstances that test our patience, James encourages us to act in faith. We should believe that God is using these trials for our good, and that He will indeed develop patience in us, as part of the fruit of the Spirit, if we trust in Him and accept it from Him. We might have preferred to skip the training, but God knows what He is doing, and, if we take it from Him, patience will "have its perfect work", as James says. So in my case, perhaps the first thing I should do next time I am in a situation that is provoking my impatience, and I can feel the frustration and the irritation rising up in me, is that I should turn to God, asking Him in faith to strengthen me in the situation, to trust Him that He knows what He is doing, and to develop patience in me. For as James goes on to write,

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting ..."

God has promised to give ... but He wants us to have faith in Him.

So, God can and does use trials and difficulties to develop patience in us. Why does He want to do that? Well, we've already seen that patience is an attribute of God. It is part of His character. God wants to transform us to become like the Lord Jesus, as we read in second Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18, and so patience is one of those transformed characteristics that God desires to see.

As you look back at your own life, think about someone who had a really positive impact on you. Who was that person who really helped you along, and who encouraged you to develop in a good way? I think I would likely be right if I said that that person was probably very patient. Because a patient person puts us first. They have time for us, and they want what is best for us, and they are prepared to wait until that happens. They are in it for the long haul, and they are not easily put off or discouraged. It's not hard to see why someone like that would be such a helpful and positive influence.

I was never particularly good at sport! I expect my school PE teachers needed quite a lot of patience with me! It was not a subject I enjoyed. But I remember one summer term, we were doing athletics on the school field. One of the things we had a go at was pole vaulting. Of course, I was hopeless and couldn't do it at all! But on one occasion, as I ran up with the pole, the PE teacher grabbed the pole and manoeuvred it so that it sent me over the bar and down onto the crash mat the other side. I remember the feeling of exhilaration of the process. Sadly, I never managed that sport, but I still remember that moment of kindness from the PE teacher. He could have washed his hands of me and shouted at me for not trying, but on the contrary, he was patient and helped me show how much fun a sporting activity could be if I was to put in the effort. A seemingly small moment of patience that has remained with me all these years.

What about you? Can you remember individuals who were patient with you? What was it about their patience that impressed you? What example did they leave for you to follow?

If we think about it, just about anything of value in life takes patience. There are very few people who can immediately and instantly become an expert at something. Most, if not all of the time, it takes a lot of practice and patience. Children need to learn to walk, to talk, to feed themselves. It takes patience, particularly on the side of the parents! As they get older, children take time to learn to ride a bicycle, and later to drive a car. These things usually do not just come automatically. We have to put in the effort to learn a new language, a new skill, to navigate a new relationship such as becoming a husband or wife, or new parent. We are thankful to people who are patient with us and give us space to grow and to develop, and so we should extend that same patience to others in return.

Another area in which Christians need to exercise patience is with themselves. We can be impatient to grow as Christians, to succeed, to achieve. But the Christian pathway is not presented to us in the Bible as an instant affair. It is true that when we are converted and we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, that we are there and then saved, forgiven, made fit for heaven and given a new life. But that new life now needs to develop, and that takes patience. And so, the Bible often uses metaphors that suggest growth over time. For example, let's consider the first Psalm, which I will read out:

"Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.
The ungodly are not so,
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,

Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Although the word patience does not occur in this psalm, the idea of it certainly does! Who would not like to be like the psalm describes, someone who whatever he does, it prospers; someone who is always fruitful at the right time? But that takes patience! First of all, the godly person of Psalm 1 has made a choice – he is spending time getting to know the Lord through His word.

“His delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.”

This is going to take time and patience.

According to an internet search, it would take an average person around seventy-four hours to read the whole Bible in one sitting. But I doubt that if one did just that, one would have instantly attained a thorough understanding of the word of God and how to apply it to daily life. I wouldn't particularly recommend it. On the contrary, reading portions steadily, often, and regularly, meditating on them and finding out what they mean, will be the secret to being fruitful.

This is in fact what the Lord Jesus commended Mary of Bethany for doing. In Luke chapter 10, we read about when the Lord Jesus went to Mary, Martha and Lazarus's house, and Martha became frustrated with her sister, Mary, for not helping her. But Mary was listening to the Lord Jesus. It was not every day that one would have the Son of God in the house! And the Lord Jesus said,

“But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (v.42).

Then from Psalm 1 we have the metaphor of the godly person being like a tree. Generally speaking, trees grow fairly slowly. I remember when we bought a pear tree for the garden. It came as a bare rooted stick, and it needed a few years before it reached maturity and started flowering. Some years it gave us a bumper crop, but other years not – one year in particular, it produced hardly any pears, and to add insult to injury, a fox came and ate some of the few ones that did grow! But in Psalm 1, the godly person “brings forth fruit in season”, regularly, year after year. This is as a result of patient growth. A tree does not mature overnight, and to be honest, neither does a Christian!

Well, we've covered quite a bit of ground on this subject of patience. We started off by thinking about how God is patient, and how patience is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit that He produces in believers. One of the ways in which He develops this fruit in us is through trials and difficulties. Patience is an attractive, others-centred virtue that we certainly appreciate when people are patient with us! This encourages us to be patient with others, but we also need to be patient with ourselves and our circumstances. It takes time to develop Christian maturity and fruitfulness, and patient getting to know the Lord through His word and through circumstances will be some of the main ways in which this happens.

Let's consider a couple more aspects of patience as we come to the end of this talk. Firstly, although God has tremendous patience, we should never presume on it. In Peter's second letter, chapter 3 verses 3 – 4, we read that,

“Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.””

So, there will be scoffers, scorning at the idea of Christ's second coming. Peter continues in verses 8-10,

"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."

So, once again, we see that God is patient, and that He waits so that many will be saved and come to repentance. Far from being slack regarding His promise of Christ's return, the Lord is long-suffering and willing to wait. But, there will be a cut-off time. As Peter writes,

"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."

We should never abuse or presume on God's patience. As Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 6 and verse 2,

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Secondly, patience is a very appropriate response that we should have to God's grace. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5 verses 18 – 21 are a great summary and description of God's grace to us:

"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He [that is, God] made Him [that is, Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

This is a tremendous set of verses! They remind us that God has not charged us with our sins. In His sheer grace, Christ took them upon Himself. When the Lord Jesus went to the cross, He took our sins upon Himself, and suffered the judgment that would have been our due. Our sins were not simply brushed under the carpet, so to speak, but they were really and truly judged, except that we did not suffer the judgment for them. Christ did. And so, we really can become the "righteousness of God in Him", because our sins have been righteously dealt with. Obviously, we had no part to play in this tremendous liberation and reconciliation, other than contributing our sins. God did not have to do what He did, but He did so because He is a God of love and of grace. Grace has been poured out on us, and we receive tremendous blessings that we never deserved, and that we could never have obtained by our own efforts. As Paul aptly states in his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 2 verse 8,

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

That being so, we can see why patience is an appropriate response to God's grace – both patience towards other people, and patience with God's plan and how He arranges and orders our circumstances. Having been forgiven so much, and having been given such undeserved

blessings, it must seem dreadfully inappropriate when God sees me being impatient with someone else, or impatient and grumbling about circumstances that He has allowed. Just knowing that it is inappropriate isn't going to give me the strength to be patient all of a sudden – as we considered together earlier, patience is part of the fruit of the Spirit, something that God wants to work and develop in me. But we can cooperate with God, next time we are in a situation that requires our patience, by placing our faith in Him and asking Him to enable us to respond appropriately to the circumstance.

Let's finish by reading some words from James's letter, chapter 5 and verses 7-11, where James develops his teaching on patience further:

“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! 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. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

If ever a man needed patience, it was Job, who suffered the loss of so many things. Yet James reminds us, that the Lord had a good end in view, and that “the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.” This is true, and it will help us a good deal as we seek to become more patient!

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Patience, talk number T1411. I hope it has helped and encouraged you!

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.