

BE PATIENT

By Rev. Will Nelken

Don't you appreciate people who are patient?

For instance, when you're trying to explain a problem or a frustration...? Or, when you're trying to turn into a lane of traffic, or trying to cross a busy intersection? When you're in a new city, trying to find a specific address...? Or, when you're searching for just the right pair of shoes...?

And are you as patient with others as you wish others were with you?

I'm in a season of life, where God is developing my patience. (*Patience is always needed, and frequently tested, but God doesn't work on every weakness in our lives at once. There are seasons of focus.*)

How do I know I'm in such a season? Because when I'm driving to work (a 12-minute trip, if traffic is clear and the lights are green) I encounter multiple red lights, almost doubling my time on the road. Sometimes recently, I think I hit every red light!

And then, when I'm moving along at a good pace, a driver will turn into the traffic lane, traveling at well *under* the speed limit, with no way around them. Just as they finally turn off, a big, slow truck pulls into their space, and I'm delayed again!

Outside of driving incidents, there are any number of unexpected needs that may arise, just when I thought I was in control of my schedule at last. You get the picture. What used to make me groan with frustration, I'm beginning to see as a spiritual discipline to embrace. I really believe God is in charge. Here's what His Word says:

Proverbs 16:32 **Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city.**

We have grown up as rationalists; we expect (if not demand) explanations (reasons) for everything that happens to us. "Why?" is our primary question in life.

But God introduces *MYSTERY* into our lives (that just means explanations that are beyond our pay grade; there are some things we are incapable of understanding yet, as history has frequently shown us in the fields of science and technology, where things we take for granted today were nearly unimaginable just a few decades ago.)

Isaiah 55:8 “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. ⁹For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

The “mystery” that God presents, says to us, “When if it is unfamiliar to you, there may be a higher way of looking at this circumstance, a higher perspective, another perception.”

A Fruit of the Spirit

Galatians 5:22 *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control.*

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, which means it is produced by Him as He acts within our lives. I can't generate it on my own, and neither can you.

2 Thessalonians 3:5 *May the Lord lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.*

Godly love and patient endurance come *from Christ*. They go hand-in-hand, and they have no other source.

1 Corinthians 13:4 *(Godly) love is patient and kind.*

The only sort of patience I can muster on my own is the sort that grumbles (it is *not* kind). So, the real deal, godly patience, is love in action. It is a subtle expression of God's love, like all the other elements in Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 13.

God's love for you is often expressed in His patience with you—especially, His patience with your sins.

Romans 2:4 *Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?*

Patience is that particular expression of godly love that is designed to open your eyes to God's kindness, and to inspire your repentance and your realignment with God's plan.

As a fruit of the Spirit, patience is something that only God can develop in our lives.

What tools does He use? Sad to say, frustration and delays. We're not so good with those. And instead of practicing patience when we encounter frustrations or delays, we practice distraction or sublimation. We busy ourselves with nearly incessant games, email, texts, music, or videos.

The Value of Patience

What value does patience add to our lives? Above all else, patience makes us *present* with our environment. Patience is undistracted. It is attentive and aware. Present with difficulties. Present with pains. Present with circumstances. Present with people, whether they are friendly or challenging (and they are always imperfect).

2 Timothy 2:24 *A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.*

Ephesians 4:2 *Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love.* ³ *Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.*

Hebrews 10:36 *Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.*

We all hope to receive everything that God has promised, but it does not fall on us like ripe fruit from a tree. It requires *patient endurance*.

Answers to prayer are not guaranteed within minutes, or days, or even years. Pull a chain, ring a bell—that is *not* how prayer works.

The Book of Revelation describes “bowls” in Heaven that contain the “prayers of the saints.” Prayer is like filling a great bowl, one cupful at a time. When at last the bowl is full, it is poured out (the answer comes). (In the meantime, just keep praying, until it is filled.)

Through the practice of patient presence we gain trust in God and peace in our hearts.

What's more, patience is a spiritual building block that leads to godliness and godly love (*agape*).

2 Peter 1:5 In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises. Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence, and moral excellence with knowledge,⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with patient endurance, and patient endurance with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for everyone.

We are all “under construction,” works in progress. And we have God’s promise, that He “*who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns*” (Philippians 1:6).

So, let this be our motto, “Please be patient; God is not finished with me yet.” And let that also be our practice with others, for God is at work, even when He can’t be seen or felt.