

Patient Endurance

'To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; a time to hug and a time to refrain; a time to search and a time to give up; a time to receive and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to discard; a time to rend and a time to sew; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace' (Ecclesiastes 3:1 to 8).

There are fifteen opposites here. Apart from war and killing which are of course, always wrong, none of these opposites are always right and most of them are not always wrong, but most are correct at the right time. In our age of wanting everything to be instant, many people have difficulty waiting for the right time for what they want. One essential requirement for being sure the timing is right, is patience or being willing to wait until God clears the way. We need to cultivate sensitivity to God's timing because there is a time for everything on the earth. Impatience leads to irritability which leads to anger, hastiness and fretting. Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). There are many verses in the Bible that tell us to wait. 'Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Fret not yourself ... Cease from anger and forsake wrath; fret not yourself for it leads only to evil doing ... but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land' (Psalm 37:7 to 9). 'To be overhasty is to sin' (Proverbs 19:2). 'Everyone who is impatient and hasty comes to poverty' (Proverbs 21:5). 'From ancient times, no one has heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who works and is active on behalf of him who waits for You' (Isaiah 64:4). The Bible is full of promises for those who have patience, so if we want to succeed in our Christian walk, we have to cultivate patience just like people of the Bible had to.

One area of our lives where we need to exercise patience is waiting for the Lord to give us the 'green light' to proceed in ministry. We may be fully aware God has a particular ministry for us that will produce spiritual children and we sometimes get so excited about it we feel like we can't wait; but we must. Moses was called to deliver the children of Israel but acted too soon and killed the Egyptian, then had to run for his life. He served his father-in-law Jethro for forty contented years (Exodus 2:21) before the Lord finally called Moses back to his original ministry (Exodus 3:1 to 4:20). We can liken waiting for the Lord, to a conductor of an orchestra. If a musician within the orchestra plays the right note at the wrong time, the whole musical piece sounds wrong, but if the musician keeps his eye on the conductor, then the notes will be played just at the correct time. We need to keep our eyes on our Conductor and wait for His signal for the correct time. We need to see ourselves as musicians in God's holy orchestra, waiting for the instruction to play our part. It takes patience to wait on God for direction, especially when our calling will lead us to something as important as a soul-saving mission. God does not waste time during the periods of waiting, but He uses that time to help us grow and develop enough so we can perform our task properly, and so our ministry will not wither and die. An expectant mother has to wait for her unborn baby to develop and grow until it is able to sustain life, so too we need to develop until we have matured in the Lord sufficiently, so that the demands put on us during the time of our ministry do not cause us to wither and die spiritually, or burn out. We need to be able to sustain our lives, both spiritually and in the natural while we are serving God. Just as a baby born prematurely has difficulties surviving, so too does a premature ministry struggle to survive and may die. But just as a mother knows she is about to produce a child and knows it is in the child's best interests to wait, so too, we need yield to God's timing and His sovereignty, and wait patiently to produce our spiritual children. Jesus had the most wonderful ministry on earth that has produced an incredible amount of fruit, but even Jesus had to wait for the Father's timing. 'Truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing of Himself but only what He sees the Father doing, for whatever things the Father does, so the Son does likewise ... I can do nothing on My own. As I hear so I judge and My judgement is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of My Father Who sent Me' (John 5:19 & 30). That is the pattern all people in ministry must follow. Jesus inferred He never pre-empts the Father and we must be

the same. Impatience is not seeking the will of the Father, but fulfilling our own will to 'get moving'. If we preempt the Father's timing, even when we know the ministry is His will, it could lead to disaster.

Another area where we need to be patient is when we are waiting for God to fulfil promises. God promised Abraham a descendency as numerous as the stars, but he had to wait many years for his promised son, and during the time of waiting he became impatient and produced Ishmael. That was truly a disaster. If we are ever inclined to take the initiative, we only need to look to the story of Ishmael to see how it could end. We need to wait for the Lord's time no matter what the situation or the circumstances. Abraham's situation seemed hopeless, but God gave Abraham his promised son at the right time. Abraham's problems did not come through failing to obey God, but by trying to hurry things along (Genesis 15:2 to 21:8). Abraham knew it was God's will for him to have a child, but his and Sarah's impatience led to Abraham fulfilling his own will and Sarah's will before the Father's timing. We need more than faith to receive God's promises; we need patience (Hebrews 6:11 & 12). Impatience leads us to make hasty decisions and we pay the price.

If we have been wronged, we need to wait for the Lord to avenge us, for vengeance belongs to God. 'Beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave the way open for God's wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord' (Romans 12:19). Patience was once called long-suffering; it leaves room for God to act. David exercised an enormous amount of patience with Saul who was trying to kill him. 'I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry' (Psalm 40:1). Patience is an irreplaceable aspect of Christian character that we need to cultivate; it is powerful. 'May you be strengthened with all power according to the might of His glory, for every kind of endurance and patience (tolerance, persistence, perseverance, forbearance, long-suffering), with joy' (Colossians 1:11). Notice in this verse, patience is an expression of God's power. It is not a mark of weakness but of strength. 'The man who has no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down' (Proverbs 25:28). That is a 'picture' of a man who loses control of his temper which as we know, can sometimes lead to violence. That is not strength, that is weakness. It is a man strong in character who rules his own spirit. Patience will stop us from being provoked into rash behaviour when we are confronted or challenged by the wicked, thoughtless people in this world. We have to learn to let things go and do nothing about them. Vengeance belongs to the Lord and He will repay the wicked in His time. 'The man who rules his own spirit and is slow to anger is better than the mighty who takes a city' (Proverbs 16:32).

Waiting for healing can seem endless. The ultimate healing we read about in the Bible seemed completely hopeless. 'When Jesus heard Lazarus was sick, He stayed two more days where He was'. Four days later, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1 to 45). If Jesus hadn't been listening to the Father He would have healed Lazarus instead of raising him from the dead. The raising of Lazarus from death brought many to salvation because they believed on Jesus. Mary and Martha gently rebuked Jesus for not coming sooner, but their faith made them realise that even then, God would do what Jesus asked, and the same happens today. Sometimes Christians criticise others because they misunderstand their patience in a given situation, but there is Someone Who always understands our patience, and that is God Himself.

When we are waiting for a loved one to turn to God, sometimes people misinterpret God's patience as indifference to sin, but that is wrong. The patience of God should lead the unsaved to repentance. Some think because they have not come under the judgement of God, they believe they have got away with it. 'The Lord is not slow about what He promises according to some people's perception of slowness, but He is extraordinarily patient toward you, not desiring that any should perish but that all should turn to repentance ... Consider that the patience of our Lord is our salvation' (2 Peter 3:9 & 15). God is patiently waiting for people the world over to come to repentance. 'Do you despise His kindness and patience? Do you not know that the patience of God leads to repentance?' (Romans 2:4). God's patience is revealed when He does not intervene hastily in any given situation, unless there is no time to wait. For example, God could wait for a person to come to Him all their lives if necessary, then on their deathbed He urgently sends someone to lead that person to Jesus at the last moment. We recently led a very elderly woman to Jesus just three hours before she died. The Lord waited

patiently for many years for her to repent, and when her time had run out, He urgently brought her to salvation. That is the purpose of God's patience. God passes over sin because He chooses to show mercy and exercise patience. But once His patience has run out, we need to look out! Patience is a characteristic of God and also of Jesus. 'For this reason Jesus shows His patience for an example to those who will believe on Him for eternal life' (1 Timothy 1:16). 'A servant of the Lord must not be quarrelsome but instead be gentle and patient toward all people, and correct others with gentleness in the hope that they will come to repentance and come to know the Truth (2 Timothy 2:24 & 25).

The ultimate goal we are waiting for is the return of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus. All of God's people are a waiting people. We are waiting for the coming of Jesus, His Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10). We are called to serve God while we wait for His Son. That is where perseverance and patience take their place. We serve with perseverance while we patiently wait for Jesus. Jesus Himself is waiting to return to earth (Hebrews 10:12 & 13). Right now in heaven, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, waiting – and He has been waiting for 2,000 years. Heaven must retain Jesus until God's purposes on earth have been fulfilled (Acts 3:21). Jesus will never go ahead of the Father's timing and we too must observe God's timing. There are many elements that go together to make up a strong Christian character. If any one of these elements are missing, then the character is weakened. Patience, endurance or perseverance are elements every Christian should have. If we carefully study the warnings in the Bible regarding the end times (Matthew chapters 24 & 25; Mark chapter 13), we will notice those chapters do not give us a very happy picture of what the world will be like immediately prior to the return of Jesus, and many Christians are so terrified of that scenario, they have come up with the rapture theology to talk themselves into believing they will avoid it. There are many frightening things mentioned in those verses, but the main requirement is for Christians to patiently endure it, and the only way to be saved is to endure it. There are a few verses we must lay hold of if we are going to get through. 'See, I (Jesus) have warned you beforehand ... He who endures to the end shall be saved ... only he who patiently endures to the end shall be saved ... you must be ready ... watch therefore, for you do not know when the Son of Man will come'. There is no escaping it. The key to survival and success is patient endurance. Some people will not realise they are at the end until the end comes. 'If anyone is able to hear, let him listen; ... herein is the call for the patience and faith of God's people' (Revelation 13:9 & 10). 'Here comes a call for the patience of God's people; those who keep the commandments of God and faith in the Lord Jesus' (Revelation 14:12). Jesus knows if we have been patiently enduring (Revelation 2:19).

Some of the things we do in life are not sin but they can still hinder our spiritual development. There are many different kinds of testings that we must endure. Sometimes life seems too hard, other times things are too easy. If we look at the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3 to 23; Luke 8:5 to 15), we see that there were four groups of people. The first group of people were not able to accept the Truth. The second group could not endure persecution. The third group had things too easy; their wealth made them indifferent to their need for salvation. Only the fourth group endured and were saved. Jesus did not say 'if' problems arise, He said when. The trouble with $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people in the parable, they had no depth of character or commitment. That parable infers only one person in four actually comes to repentance and keeps their salvation. Far too often in the church, we see how people's lives are wonderfully transformed, but when strife comes they sadly fall away, losing the joy of salvation. Life is too tough for these people. With the third group of people, their lives with all its pleasures were too easy. We are all going to have to face severe difficulties at some time in our lives; every person on earth, Christians and non-Christians alike will all suffer trials of one kind or another during the course of our lives. Not one person can escape that. The illogical and silly thing is, as non-believers often turn to God as a result of facing trials, when believers face exactly the same kind of trials, some turn away from God like the second group in the parable. As some people would say, "Go figure that one out!"

Whatever we are waiting for, we need to wait patiently; for a child, a job, a house, marriage, a healing, for a loved one to be saved, to be avenged or for Jesus' return. Patience seems to be inactive but it is not; it is waiting on God and keeping busy while we wait and we should be growing in God as He prepares us for the

answer to prayer. Patience is a form of self-discipline and restraint. In our modern culture, self-discipline or self-control are considered 'old fashioned' but we need to understand, God disciplines and trains His people (Hebrews 12:1 to 12). As we in these verses, we need to accept God's discipline with patience, not despising it nor being discouraged. We need to cultivate patience without being lazy in our service to the Lord and we need to recognise patience is essential. 'We know that all things work together for the good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose' (Romans 8:28). All of us need to meet the conditions before we can apply that verse to our lives. God doesn't say all things work together for everybody – only for those who love God and are called for His purpose. For that verse to apply to our lives, we have to meet three conditions laid out by the Lord; we have to love God; we have to be walking in our calling, and we must be fulfilling His purposes for our lives. If we have been called but are not fulfilling His purposes, He will treat us in such a way He will force us into His service to fulfil His purpose and His will, just like He did with Jonah (see the Book of Jonah). So all things only work together for good for those who meet His conditions.

The real problem with impatience, is it takes the initiative away from God, Who is working all over the world to fulfil His purposes and plans. It is always a question of His timing. We can do the right thing at the wrong time and ruin a carefully set up plan God has, so to walk in His timing is so important. We need to learn to wait upon the Lord. Getting frustrated will not impress God nor will He hurry things along. He will do things in His time now matter how we react. In fact how we react could determine how long we wait. Frustration and impatience can cause us to become discouraged, and we must consciously avoid allowing frustration to discourage us, because that will keep us from hearing and receiving the scriptural references on patience and taking them to heart. The churches of old, those active in the New Testament, were told these things several times. If we are impatient and frustrated, we cannot hide it from God and it will hold us back in the Lord. Perseverance is active; we run with patient endurance/perseverance (Hebrew 12:1), but patience is inactive or passive – it is doing nothing except waiting.

How do we cultivate patient endurance/perseverance? There is a specific process in which the element of endurance can develop. 'Let us rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering (pressure, affliction, hardship) brings patient endurance. Endurance develops a mature character. Character produces the hope of salvation' (Romans 5:3 & 4). 'Consider it joyful when you encounter various trials. Understand that the trial of your faith brings patient endurance. Allow patience and endurance do a perfect work in your hearts so that you may fully develop, be complete, lacking in nothing' (James 1:2 to 4). We see here, God uses patience to help us develop and grow spiritually. When we are tried by fire and endurance has done its full work, we become mature and complete not lacking anything in Christian character. It is the Lord's plan for us to endure anything that comes our way in life, in an attitude of hope. If we shrink back, God will not be pleased with us (Hebrews 12:12). Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2) and that is an ordeal we will never have to go through, but we need to follow His example and patiently endure whatever our 'cross' is. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).

There is no way we can produce spiritual fruit without enduring. How do we achieve endurance? By making a firm commitment to the Lord. We need to see that we have no alternative. Turning away from God is not an option – not if we want to spend eternity with Him. God's way is the only way to go to heaven. To escape eternal death we have no choice but to submit to God no matter what life brings. Even fully committed Christians must endure hardships but we know if we are committed to God, then He will sustain us. We need to value our salvation then the commitment will come easily, even though our lives may not be easy. 'I press on towards the goal to win the heavenly prize to which God in Jesus is calling us; so let us who are spiritually mature have this conviction ... and let us hold true to what we already have attained and walk our lives by that' (Philippians 3:14 to 16). The apostles did not give the new converts an easy message; 'It is only through many tribulations (trials, testings, pressure, hardships, afflictions, suffering), can we enter the Kingdom of God' (Acts 14:22). We need to remain wholly focussed on the Lord and on heaven. When we get to heaven, all our pain and troubles will be at an end, and so we need to keep our spiritual eyes on the unseen realm of eternity. If we

take our eyes off eternity with the Lord, we will falter. We need to make a firm decision to endure patiently no matter what comes our way, because our suffering is temporal (2 Corinthians 4:17 & 18). Jesus spoke several times about the eternal rewards for faithfully serving God with patient endurance in the face of trials. Jesus said, "Hold fast to what you have until I come" (Revelation 2:25).

Christianity is a long marathon race and only those who endure to the end will be saved. Those who give up will be lost. Paul knew he had an unseen prize waiting for him. He knew he would one day stand before the Divine and just Judge and he knew he would receive the reward that was due to him. For everyone who meets God's conditions there is a crown of righteousness, and His conditions are for us to patiently endure, persevere and persist right to the end. We know Paul endured great suffering and persecution. What he is saying in the following verses, is all those who have endured to the end will be saved, plus they will receive eternal rewards. 'I have fought the good fight; I have run the race; I have kept the faith. What is laid up for me is the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day (Judgement Day) and not to me only but all those who have yearned for His (second) appearing' (2 Timothy 4:7 & 8).

Amen and God bless you.

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