

*“Not Too Much to Bear”*  
*Part 5 – PATIENCE*  
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In light of the ever-increasing hostility we see in our country towards others (especially among those who differ in political views), and in partnership and unity with our children’s ministry focus for Vacation Bible School this year which is entitled Fruitful Farms, teaching and displaying for our children the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5, we are walking through Galatians 5:22-23 on Sunday mornings. Let’s read it together, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”*

We have already heard sermons about love, joy, and peace. One of the resources I am using for the series, *“The Fruit of the Spirit, Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be”* by Trask & Goodall makes this claim, *“If we have love, joy, and peace in our lives, patience will be present also. The fruit all develop from one another, and all begin with love.”*

If we have love, joy, and peace in our lives, patience will be present also. Let me rephrase and expand a bit: If we have God’s love, God’s joy, and God’s peace in our lives, God’s patience will be present also. We have to be careful to remember that these nine descriptions of the one fruit that comes from the one Holy Spirit of God is not something of our own making or will-power. The key in displaying the character of Christ through the full-ripening of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, lies not in our abilities to perform in a certain way, it lies in our willingness to submit to the Spirit’s work within us. Remember: When we have put our faith in Jesus Christ, when we have said ‘yes!’ to Him, our eternal address changes: We are now IN Christ as Christ as now IN us! Do you remember the sponge in the water illustration? The water is Christ, we are the sponge. When we put our faith in Him, we are now In Him and He is now in us! That means, the ingredients needed for God-level, supernatural love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are all there within you. You didn’t get a bad batch. (This past week I bought a watermelon and when I cut into it, it was horrible! All mealy! I got a bad watermelon.). If you are in Christ and Christ is in you, you didn’t get a bad batch of fruit! Nope! We have everything we need to keep maturing as disciples as we allow the fruit to fully ripen in our lives to re-present Christ to a very troubled world around us.

Today I propose that biblical patience is about two things – the first of which being ... waiting - and therein lies a lot of the problem with displaying it. We aren’t very good waiters, and it’s going to be even more challenging for the next generations who are becoming even more used to instant everything. But let’s face it, even my generation isn’t very good at waiting. But here’s the key in the context of what God is teaching us: Patience is about eliminating hurry and waiting for God’s permission, God’s prompting, and God’s truth to instruct us before acting or speaking. So, patience is about waiting, but it is a very intentional waiting and a very prayerful waiting and a very obedient waiting.

Christopher J. H. Wright describes patience as fruit of the Spirit in this way in his book *“Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit, Growing in Christlikeness”* (p. 69):

- The ability to endure for a long time whatever opposition and suffering may come our way, and to show perseverance without wanting retaliation or revenge.
- The ability to put up with the weaknesses and foibles of others (including other believers), and to show forbearance toward them, without getting quickly irritated or angry enough to want to fight back.

I'd like to change his word 'ability' to 'discipline.' Because I believe this will never become completely natural for us. Our sin nature is just too strong. I believe displaying patience as a fruit of the Spirit is about discipline. It's about obedience. It's about breathing and praying before you spit out those words that your sin nature wants you to say, and you wait before speaking for one reason and one reason only: Because your primary goal in life is to become more like Jesus in your words and your actions. If that truly is my primary goal – my PRIMARY goal – then I'm going to wait with eagerness to see how the Spirit leads me in the moment to bring abundant life into the moment!

In Micah we read about God's patience with us in 7:18-19, *"Who is a God like you who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."*

Think with me for a moment about God's patience with humanity – over all these centuries, throughout the generations. Over and over and over and over throughout the Scriptures we read God's instructions and God's warnings to a disobedient people, and they would reply, *'Everything the Lord says to do, we will do it,'* and then they didn't do it. They did exactly the opposite, over and over and over and over again. How patient must God be?

Now think with me about God's patience with you (and me). How many times have we known what to do and didn't do it? How many times did we know that the words coming out of our mouths were not approved by the Spirit, and we said them anyway in a harsh, degrading, sarcastic or destructive manner? How many times have we known what not to do, the Spirit was clearly speaking, and we just ignored His voice? John wrote in his gospel, *"My sheep know my voice and they follow me."* How many times have we heard His voice and did not follow? How patient must God be?

Biblical patience is about waiting, but it is also about bearing. It is about carrying. Let's remember what Jesus carried for us (Isaiah 53). *"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all ...For he bore [or carried] the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."* Patience is about bearing. It is about carrying. So, when the apostle Paul tells us that the Spirit of God will produce the fruit of patience in our lives, he is reminding us of all that God carries for us, how Jesus took upon his own shoulders the sin of the world, including your sin and mine. That's the true cost of God's patience – the suffering death of his Son – to pay the penalty for our perpetual rebellion against the One who loves us the most. So, in light of that thought, listen now to these Scriptures:

- 1 Peter 2:20-24, *"But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."*
- Colossians 3:12-13: *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

Wait! What? She's going to bring forgiveness  
into this now *in addition to* patience?  
This sermon is really trying my patience! ☺

The word 'patience' in some Bible translations is long-suffering, or forbearance. That's not a word we use often – forbearance. It means we make the effort to 'bear with' other people, even for a very long time for something that happened a long time ago, even when the pain is still deep and real. It means we forgive. Patience, forbearance, forgiveness – hit the bullseye in the goal of displaying the character of Christ to the world.

So, something happened 20 years ago, or 10 years ago, or maybe something happened in your family before you were even born, and your parents are still mad about it, so you're mad about it too, and you don't even know exactly why anyone is mad. Brothers don't talk to brothers, sisters don't talk to sisters, good-willed people still bring up 'that time' with 'that person' who said this to them, or shouted curse words in their direction, or didn't say 'thank you' when you worked hard to help them. Patience, forbearance is choosing to overlook something that was hurtful or unkind rather than fighting back with harsh words or making sure you get even with the one who did you wrong. Forbearance is choosing patience, meaning choosing forgiveness. It is a choice, not a feeling. Forgiveness is a choice to be obedient even though you don't feel like forgiving. Let's remind ourselves again: Patience is about eliminating hurry and waiting for God's permission, God's prompting, and God's truth to instruct us before acting or speaking. Why would we choose to be patient, why would we choose to forbear and forgive in any and all interactions with people? Because within we have the voice of the Spirit reminding us how patient God is with us, how God through Jesus Christ has forgiven us completely of our sins even though we are constantly 'trying His patience.'

In this world in which so much is instant, posting and commenting on social media, and then commenting on people's comments, patience is desperately needed. We text someone and if they don't respond immediately, we are annoyed. We email someone and if they don't reply within our time frame we text them to see if they received our email. Geesh, people. We're a mess, aren't we? Breathe. Pray. Wait. Forgive. All are qualities of our Savior, in whom we live and who lives in us.

On Thursday nights before the Sundays I am preaching, before I go to bed, I do several things because first thing Friday morning is when the sermon is written. Here's what I do: I put the first draft of the PowerPoint file together to begin to get my head into the flow of the service, I re-read the Biblical text for the sermon, and I review the other resources I've read throughout the week. I do this before I go to sleep because I firmly believe the Scripture in Psalm 16:7 that says, *"I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me."* On Friday morning I woke up well aware of the dream I had just had which we all know doesn't happen all that often. In my dream I had been asked to lead a camp for troubled teens. There already was a team of ministry workers at the camp, but I had been brought in to be their leader. In my dream, I was in a room going through a stack of Bibles. Some were newer some were older. Some were paperback some were leather-bound. I had already met many of the teens at the camp so I knew a few of their names. As I was going through this stack of Bibles, one of the leather bound ones, an older one, had imprinted in it the name of one of the troubled teens who I had been told was not a believer in Christ. I was very excited about finding this Bible with this girl's name on it, seeing it as a sign of what God was going to do in her life at the camp, so I called the ministry team together to tell them about it to encourage them and pray with them for this girl. They came in the room (all women), and as I started to speak, another woman started talking loudly over me. I stopped talking and she stopped talking. So, I tried again. As soon as I started talking she started talking and the other women in the room were listening to her and not to me. I then interrupted her and asked her to stop talking because I had something very special I wanted to share, and as I started talking, she did it again. In my dream, I dismissed the women, never getting a chance to tell the story of the Bible. Then a few minutes later I went down the hall to where my room was, and all the women were in one room talking and laughing. When I went to the doorway, all talking and laughing stopped and they all just stared at me. I had this dream on the night I went to sleep thinking and praying about patience! Wow! Wouldn't we want to give them a piece of our mind, or tell them who's in charge here, or, or, or .... (Thankfully I woke up before I did any of those things.)

We all have different personalities and preferences, different likes and dislikes, different visions and ambitions. Even right here within the family of God. Some people are easily upset, quickly defensive, or regularly offending. Some people can't wait to get a word in, get their point across, speak their mind – even when they preface it by saying, "I probably shouldn't say this,

but..." Oh, how patient God is with us, and yet how impatient we are with Him when he doesn't answer our prayers quickly enough or the way we wanted him to answer, or how impatient we are with the people around us.

Biblical patience is about waiting & biblical patience is about bearing. It is about eliminating hurry and waiting for God's permission, God's prompting, and God's truth to instruct us before acting or speaking. Patience is about waiting, but it is a very intentional waiting and a very prayerful waiting and a very obedient waiting. It is God's work in and through us. On our own, we cannot and we will not display God's patience in this volatile world. We just won't. We just can't. We need the Holy Spirit of the Living God to fill us, move us, help us, correct us, stop us, start us, and keep reminding us of the forgiving patience of God and the suffering of Christ for us. We desperately need the Holy Spirit on full throttle within, don't we?

Forgive me if I have been impatient with you in any way. I have work to do as do we all. Former senate chaplain Lloyd Ogilvie wrote this: *"Perhaps our problem with impatience is that we misunderstand patience. It is not acquiescence, or perpetual placidity, or feckless lack of fiber. Patience must be rooted in an overarching confidence that there is someone in control of the universe, or world, and our life. We need to know that God does work things together for good for those who love Him. A patient person knows the shortness of time and the length of eternity. Patience is really faith in action. No wonder it is called an aspect of the fruit of the Spirit. It is one of the matchless characteristics of Christ himself. If we would learn patience, He alone can teach us. There are many facsimiles of virtue, but authentic patience comes as a result of our deep personal relationship with Christ."*

Heavenly Father, I pray that this day I may live in Your presence and please you more and more. Lord, Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow You. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with Yourself and cause Your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Amen.