

## How Can We Develop True Patience?

### **Waiting Does Not Always Equal Patience**

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We have just come through the time of year when the manifestation of the true nature of people is seen at its worst. Crime soars! Attitudes flair! Impatience flourishes!

I know that you have probably felt this way when you were driving, but I felt as though I were driving with the headlights of the drivers following me on my rear bumper. People were rushing back and forth, to and fro, in a frenzy to celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa. If that was not enough, the New Year's holiday came and people rushed to go to their parties to drink, frolic, and play, and whatever else they do at those worldly parties.

Showing how this society views patience is Bill Meglashen's quip, "Patience is something you admire in the driver behind you, but not in the one ahead." That is true for all of us sometimes.

In 1989, Margaret Thatcher, ex-Prime Minister of England, who was referred to as "The Iron Lady," suffered from this same human view of patience. She said, "I am extraordinarily patient provided I get my own way in the end." Although she was trying to be witty, her comment was revealing with regard to human nature.

I feel confident that it is safe to say that we have just come through a worldly festival season of impatience. The "Impatiencemas" season manifests human nature at its worst. Covetousness, shoplifting, burglary, drunkenness, gluttony, family violence, and even murder all increase in this season. After all, 'tis the season to be jolly—if by "jolly," you mean sinful!

Probably the most ridiculous statement about Christmas is, "We need to put Jesus back into Christmas." How can we put something into Christmas that was never there? The pagan winter solstice celebration had Christ's name syncretized into it; but nothing else in it in any way represents Christ, as you all well know! I am not telling you anything new. That includes His character as well: There is nothing about His character that is seen in that winter solstice celebration.

The season of impatience in no way represents Jesus Christ and His way of life. Jesus was a patient Man, and He is a patient God. Jesus' patience was so extraordinary to the apostle Paul that it is one of the two main things he emphasized in his prayer for the church in Thessalonica.

II Thessalonians 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

Obviously, that is a virtue in which Christ excels. We are to have the same patience under all our sufferings and persecutions as Christ manifested under His. He meekly received the contradiction and persecution of sinners; and "when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten."

Earlier, Paul urged the Thessalonica church to perform their Christian duties including being patient as a required priority for those who love God.

I Thessalonians 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

Maybe God inspired the apostle Paul to put so much emphasis on the essential virtue of patience because it is such an unnatural way for us to think. It is so against human nature—but it is so much a part of the way God is. The demonstration of patience in a frustrating situation is one of the best indications that our character is being developed through the use of the Holy Spirit. It is part of the transformation, the conversion of becoming more like God.

It is not my intention today to get into the details of the Hebrew or Greek words that are commonly translated into our English word *patience* in the Bible. I am approaching the subject from the general principle contained within the word *patience* used throughout the Bible.

This word in English contains elements such as "patience in respect to persons, longsuffering," as well as "endurance," "putting up with things or circumstances," and "perseverance." In a general sense, patience is being slow to anger.

Patience, the apostle Paul wrote, is one of the fruits, or results, of God's Spirit. In your New King James, I think it uses *longsuffering* and in other translations, *patience*. We are using it loosely for patience because longsuffering, in one sense, is a type of patience. If we work with God to develop His own nature in us, we will become more like Him; and that includes patience. It is not enough to just *act* patient; we must actually *be* patient.

Patience is a characteristic of God that many mainstream "Christians" often overlook. Christ's mercy toward Saul, who was later called Paul, displays His unlimited patience and mercy, revealing the love of God for a wicked person. God's patience with His people, ancient Israel, is an outstanding example of this elusive virtue. Though Israel turned to idols and wickedness, God pleaded with them to repent and call on His name. He told Solomon,

II Chronicles 7:14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Only a patient and longsuffering God would be able to offer forgiveness after what they had done. Here we see the general process of our calling and conversion: humility, prayer, seeking (that is, zealously trying to be like God and living His way of life), and repenting of and overcoming sin. All of those elements are seen here in this verse 14 of II Chronicles 7. This involves a change of attitude from the beginning of the process and that continues for eternity. It is not a state that you reach and no longer have to worry about; it is an ongoing process to develop that Godly patience.

God waited patiently! He sent His prophets for generations before exiling Israel and Judah to foreign lands. Nehemiah acknowledged this while praying to God:

Nehemiah 9:30 Yet for many years You had patience with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

What is patience? Dictionaries tell us that patience is "the capacity, habit, or fact of bearing pains or trials calmly, or without complaint." That gives us a general idea of the word *patience* at which we are looking this afternoon. Keep in mind that such is the secular version or definition of patience. Two things are involved in this definition: one is being in an unpleasant but common situation; and two, being calm about it. Biblically, *patience* usually indicates a calm, abiding endurance, sometimes associated with wisdom or humility.

Proverbs 19:11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.

We have to be patient when things are going well, as well as in times of trial; but our patience seems to be tried more when we are under duress, trial, or persecution. Jesus warned His disciples that they would be persecuted, and He told them how they should handle it:

Luke 21:19 By your patience possess your souls. (NKJV)

Luke 21:19 By your endurance you will gain your lives. (ESV)

Patience has an element of endurance in it; in fact, it has a great element of optimistic endurance within it. The meaning here is that, by our patient endurance in faithfulness to God, we will acquire eternal life. This is not to say we earn it but that we must be developing this quality in order to be considered for eternal life. Obviously, we have our part to play in the gift that God is going to be giving us.

The apostle James wrote something similar about profiting from trials:

James 1:2-4 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.

We see there that patience is a very, very important virtue for a Christian to develop. James is not referring merely to the ability to bear things but to the ability to turn trials, suffering, and frustrations to positive growth opportunities and chances to be a true witness for the glory of God. The context here refers to the way in which we handle tests of character. He refers to the process of testing. If we handle these tests righteously, it will produce unwavering faithfulness.

God wants patient and faithful people in His Kingdom.

The word *patience* here in the Greek means "optimistic or hopeful endurance, patient continuance or waiting." William Barclay defines it this way: "the quality which makes a man able, not simply to suffer things, but to vanquish them." There are elements of optimism, determination, endurance, and patience in his statement.

Jacob is an example of someone who endured adverse conditions without complaining. He was a man who had great patience. His patience required that he serve fourteen years for his marriage to Rachel. Afterwards, he continued to serve Laban another six years to earn flocks for himself. During this time he endured fatiguing heat and painful cold. He suffered from lack of sleep. His wages were changed ten times, and he had to tolerate loss from his own flocks to pay for stolen animals. Yet, through all of this, his lack of complaining is extraordinary. He was a man of great patient endurance.

There is little or nothing we can do about some trials and persecutions. We just have to persevere through them and remain under them until the trials are over, learning and changing what we can along the way as best we can. We should endure them optimistically and continue with patience.

Optimism is easier to endure than bitterness or self-pity. The pessimist is going to struggle much more through a trial than the optimist. We all, as God's people, having faith in God and having Him care for us, should be optimistic people. Optimistic people are more cheerful than pessimists; that is just a fact of life.

We have a Christian duty to do something about our problems. For example, if we are unemployed, we should find another source of income. Since we may not find it immediately, we should patiently continue looking. We must have the endurance and perseverance that it takes. Patience does not mean that we should sit around waiting when we should be working. It has been said that looking for a job is the hardest work there is. For those of you that have been out of work and who have had to look for a job, you know that is a true statement.

At some time in our lives, most of us have reached the point when our problems seem overwhelming and too much for us to deal with. Nevertheless, through our advocate Jesus Christ, we can ask God the Father for His help and He will give it to us. God knows the true urgency of a situation or condition, and in His infinite wisdom He knows when and how to intervene. If the problem is not as urgent as we believe, God may make us wait; but at least we know, by His seeming non-intervention, that the problem is not quite as urgent as we thought. If we are looking at it optimistically, positively, and faithfully, the lack of God's intervention on our behalf, at least in our view, may very well—and probably does—indicate that the time just is not right.

Jesus told us to pray with persistence, as we see in the Parable of the Persistent Widow found in Luke 18: 1-8, but this does not mean we are to pray with impatience. I think that quite often when we are well into a trial, and we are praying, that we have a certain impatience about our asking God to intervene. With patient persistence, we show that we still want God's solution to the problem and are calmly assured that God knows what is best for us and when and how to intervene.

I Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

If God does not solve the problem right away, He will at least help us have the patience and optimism we need to cope with it. Patience is one of the virtues Peter tells us to add to the other virtues that should be evident in our lives as the elect of God. It is so important that it helps keep us from falling away from the faith.

II Peter 1:5-10 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

People with true patience bear trials calmly. God wants us to stand like a rock in the face of adversity. Patient people are not hasty or impetuous but act with wisdom and discretion. The Bible gives many examples of patience, but God's Word also records the failures of some others to exercise this godly trait. King Saul comes to mind, as do the Israelites in general.

At some time in our lives, most of us have reached the point where our problems are overwhelming and we do have to develop that patience. There are certain fallacies in the human reasoning of impatient people that are well worth noticing. According to Drs. James and Constance Messina of [Coping.org](http://Coping.org), these are some of the common excuses of impatient people. What I am going to do at the end of each of these statements is give my initial reaction to it. You can give your initial reaction since there are other common human traits that you will see, but these are what I saw.

- I should be able to do this faster and better than I am. [I saw self-exaltation with unreasonable expectation]
- He should understand me the first time so I do not have to repeat myself. [I see a self-willed trait in that]
- I have so much to accomplish I will never be able to do it all. [There is an element of pessimism in that]
- There is no way that I can ever be helped to change.

- I am an impossible case. [Faithlessness stands out]
- There is a right way and a wrong way to do things. Why is it that everyone I come in contact with chooses the wrong way? [Self-righteousness]
  - Why can she not change quicker than what she is? [Again, self-righteousness]
  - Everyone should be as excited about the desire to grow and change as I am. [Self-righteousness again]
  - I want this done yesterday. [Self-centeredness, selfishness]
  - It makes no difference how far along I am if I have not accomplished my target goals. [Self-delusion, maybe]
  - I cannot stand such things as diets, counseling, physical therapy, allergy desensitization, and orthodontics; they all take too long before results are visible. [ I see self-denial with shortsightedness in that one]
  - I could never accomplish my goal of growth and change, so there is no use in even getting started. [Self-will with an excuse]

When we think of patience, we usually think of putting up with situations and other people. However, we also need patience with ourselves. If we are not patient with ourselves, we will cause ourselves a great amount of anxiety, maybe to the point of losing sleep and hurting our health. That is an area that I have to work on; I know that. This sermon really hit me between the eyes. When I say, "We," here, the "we" is mostly at this end.

Some people get frustrated when they cannot accomplish something the first time they try. Some are frustrated when they do not grow spiritually as fast as they would like. We have all heard each other say that. There is nothing wrong with acknowledging that or seeing that but we cannot dwell on it. We do not have to lose our enthusiasm and drive for personal improvement or spiritual growth. God is the One doing the work as Paul tells us.

Philippians 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

As we learn to cooperate with Him, He will complete His work in us.

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Those are emphatic statements. There is no doubt; there is no room for faithlessness in those

statements. Our patience with ourselves should be based in the fact that He is and will be satisfied with His initially finished product. This work is done through the Holy Spirit, but we have to be willing to access this spiritual power as we submit to His shaping and molding of our character in preparation for His Kingdom.

Patience is often linked with hope. If there is no hope that our situation will change, then there is no incentive to endure suffering and no power for patience. Hope empowers patience.

The Bible speaks of two kinds of hope when it comes to patience:

- The hope of fulfillment—that is, the expectation that God will come through on His promises.
- The hope of rescue—that is, the expectation that God will rescue us from our sufferings, that there will be a Day of Judgment when evil is punished and justice is done.

The apostle Paul, in the service of God's Work, underwent hardships that we today can hardly imagine. Yet he endured patiently, and exhorted others to do the same.

Romans 5:3-5 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

We tend to grow impatient and lose hope quickly when God's promises and His rescue seem slow in coming, but it is important to understand God's sense of time. We want problems to be sorted out quickly—today, tomorrow, or next week, at the latest. Next year seems so long or too far off. However, God's plans operate not just over days or weeks, but over years, centuries, and even millennia.

Psalms 37:7-9 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret—it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

On the Feast of Trumpets, a few years ago, I gave a sermon having to do with waiting patiently for God. I would like to just touch on that aspect for a few minutes here. Although we may be waiting, are we waiting patiently? If, in my mind, I am still in a hurry, I am not waiting patiently! I cannot expect to be blessed for patience for just waiting?and waiting?and waiting. Eventually, as human nature dictates, the waiting?and waiting?and waiting turns into impatience.

The servants of God throughout history have manifested this trait of godly patience. Abraham patiently waited a quarter of a century for the son God promised him from his wife Sarah.

Abraham's patience is one of the many reasons God considered Abraham His friend.

Hebrews 6:13-15 For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Remember Job. God allowed Satan to utterly destroy everything Job had and then to wrack his body with severe pain. Yet Job set a tremendous example of perseverance and steadfastness, which James later made a special point of referring to in James 5:11.

King David, unlike Saul who preceded him, had great patience, which was linked with an unshakable faith in God. David's psalms are filled with expressions of this attitude of patience:

Psalm 25:5, 21 Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You.

Psalm 27:14 Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!

Psalm 40:1 I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry.

Psalm 62:1 Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation.

Psalm 130:5 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope.

If we do wait for God, living righteous lives, practicing godly patience and enduring to the end of this age—or to the ends of our physical lives—an incredible future awaits us. Waiting patiently does not mean we cannot long for eternal life. Longing does not mean that we are being impatient, but it should mean that we have the right goal and that we are eager to reach it. Once we have experienced the first installment of the power of the Holy Spirit, of the glory that will come, we long with all our hearts for the full benefits of God's Kingdom.

Romans 8:19-23 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

We see there the right way to long and the right way to endure and persevere with patience. Even God's creation sets an example of patience for us as it awaits the fulfillment of His plan of reproducing Himself through us! Although we are adopted when we are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, the full blessings of our adoption are not realized until our change to an incorruptible state happens.

God still acts on behalf of those who wait on Him and trust in Him.

Isaiah 64:4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, Who acts for the one who waits for Him.

He is a God of righteousness, who cares about the obedience and attitude of His people. Sometimes God's own people are noticeably impatient with the One who shows great longsuffering toward them. The ancient Israelites' lack of godly patience caused them no end of troubles. They saw God's direct intervention for help in miracle after miracle on their behalf, yet they became impatient and rebelled over and over again rather than trust God for food, water, and protection. When they traveled in the wilderness after their deliverance by God's hand from Egypt, grumbling and impatience marked their character. As we read in Numbers 21, the people became impatient on the way and spoke against God and Moses.

Numbers 21:4-5 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread."

We see here the opposite attitude of patience. Rather than thanking God for the food that they had, their freedom, and His visible presence with them in the wilderness, they grumbled because they were taking a long route. God was not performing what they thought He should do as fast as they thought He should do it. After all, were they not waiting?and waiting?and waiting?for Him to deliver to them the Promised Land. Here impatience is shown for what it is: a selfish, whining demand. The self is placed above God's purposes and demands that its desires be met immediately rather than according to God's perfect plan. However, notice why ancient Israel's example is recorded for us:

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

So the holy Scriptures have a great deal to offer, such as patience and comfort. By studying the

examples in God's Word and using His Spirit, we can avoid the mistakes recorded there that the ancient Israelites made.

The prophet Samuel had arranged to meet King Saul at Gilgal and offer sacrifices there before a battle with the Philistines. When the time came and went and Samuel did not appear, Saul began to worry. His patience wore thin and turned into impatience. Saul and the people with him grew more and more impatient and fearful, until Saul decided to offer the sacrifices himself, in direct defiance of God's command. Immediately after Saul's sin, Samuel appeared. Samuel condemned the king's act, and informed Saul that God had rejected him from being king of Israel (I Samuel 13: 7-14). Too bad Saul had not waited a little longer. Maybe he could have made the right decision, or at least received good advice from Samuel!

A Chinese proverb says, "One moment of patience may ward off great disaster. One moment of impatience may ruin a whole life." That Chinese proverb fits perfectly with what Saul did. Saul's one moment of impatience certainly ruined his life. He had other problems, but impatience was certainly a major one. Of course, he was faithless and so on.

Jesus Christ told a parable about a servant who owed a great debt to a certain king (Matthew 18: 23-25). When the servant begged for mercy, the king, in an act of patience and kindness, released the servant from the debt. However, this same servant then went out and cast into prison a man who owed him far less than he had owed the king. What was the punishment for his greed and lack of patience?

Matthew 18: 32-34 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

This servant was impatient. He could not wait to get that money from those who owed him.

Take a look at negative consequences of impatience. Here is what Coping.org lists as some negative consequences of impatience in our lives:

- We run the risk of always being dissatisfied, upset, and angry with ourselves for our slow pace of growth and change.
- We easily lose our control and fire off outbursts of anger, temper, and blame on those who are slow to change and grow.
- We become a member of the "throw away" generation, discarding relationships, people, jobs, school, and church whenever things are not working out as quickly as we want them to.
- We waste energy worrying about how slow things are changing instead of directing the energy toward the changes we desire.
- We withdraw prematurely from a helping situation because we are not seeing an immediate pay off for our efforts.

- We turn off the others in our life who want to support us but whom we offend by accusing them (especially when change is slow) of not helping us enough.
- We sacrifice friendships and relationships prematurely because the other person is not changing as quickly or as thoroughly as we desire.
- We ignore all of the positive gains we and others have made on the road to recovery and growth, only concentrating on what has not yet been accomplished.
- We become pessimistic about life, seeing only the "half-empty cup" rather than the "half-filled cup."
- We will be in such a hurry that we neglect to count our blessings and see how far we have come.
- We burn ourselves out in the pursuit of vain goals.
- We lose the ability to reward or reinforce any level of success or attainment, discouraging ourselves and others in the pursuit of recovery and growth.
- We lose the ability to take a large goal and break it down into manageable increments.
- We become overwhelmed by the large tasks ahead of us and lose the hope and motivation to keep on trying.

There is a sermonette or even a sermon in every one of those statements.

What, then, can we do to develop true patience? Let us look at five ways to help us develop the right kind of patience.

1. We have to stay focused on the ultimate goal!

We all have to deal with trials and problems. When we are trying to reason with unconverted spouses or striving to please unfair bosses or struggling to make financial ends meet, it is sometimes hard to keep our minds on our ultimate destiny—birth into God's Family and co-rulership with Jesus Christ of the universe.

That, though, is exactly what we have to do—keep our minds on that great, ultimate goal. James wrote that we should focus on and conduct our lives in expectation of Christ's Second Coming and the Kingdom of God.

Here is the apostle James' advice about being patient and persevering:

James 5: 7-8 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.

Just as a farmer cannot cause rain or give growth, we cannot develop patience by simply "willing it so." Nevertheless, we can develop habits that allow God to grow His patience in us. I should not say, "Allow God" because He can do whatever He wants with us; and if we are not working with Him, He can do what is necessary to bring us down so that He can work with us. What I mean by "allow" is that sometimes we put up walls that God decides He is just going to break down another way. It is much easier for us to work with God by overcoming our problems.

The most important thing on God's mind right now is the perfecting of the saints, the restoration of His government to this earth, and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom throughout the universe.

Habakkuk 2:3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

If we consider that a thousand years to God is like a mere day, consider the great patience of God! We are to emulate that patience in constantly looking towards His Kingdom.

2. We have to think before speaking or acting!

There is an old saying that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." A person who jumps to conclusions is likely to end up at the bottom of a cliff.

Sir Isaac Newton's (1642-1727) opinion was, "If I have ever made any valuable discoveries, it has been owing more to patient attention than to any other talent." That is so profound. Obviously, he could not have arrived at those discoveries if he had been talking constantly or talking often. That patient attention is meditation—thinking deeply upon things.

This society wears us out mentally and physically. We are a tense and anxious people, and this results in irritability. However, we should not allow ourselves to snap back with something that we will later be sorry we said. When we snap back in irritability, how does that glorify God? We should not allow ourselves to dwell on the irritation, or we will end up saying or doing something that will set a wrong example of God's way of life.

Proverbs 15:1-2 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness.

If we apply patience to the use of our tongue, we will be using quite a bit of wisdom and discretion.

3. We have to look for ways to give of our time and effort to others!

Impatience is many times rooted in selfishness. Paul said, "Be patient toward all men." Our small children who cannot always understand an instruction that we give to them can be a

challenge to our patience to say the very least. By way of an example, our daughter Stacey was acting up when she was only about three years old. I said to her, "Behave!" In a sad, confused voice she replied, "I do not know how to be a have." I thought she was understanding, but obviously she was not. We had to work on that area. It was not her fault, because she did not have the mental capacity to be able to overcome or change what we were telling her.

It is a fact of life that it is much easier to be patient with some people than others. Some very much try our patience. There is the person who cannot get to the point to save his life, droning on and on with the most boring story you ever heard. We can all relate to that in some way. When Paul urged the Thessalonian Christians to "be patient with everyone," he was especially referring to people who have caused offenses; but the principle also includes people who are just plain frustrating.

Colossians 3:12-13 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

That is a pretty direct command to us. It is the inspired word of God. We must overlook the shortcomings of others, especially since we have a few of our own. We have to forget ourselves and be concerned with the welfare of others.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

4. We have to work out conflicts with others.

Even an annoying habit that is about to drive us up the wall can be allowed to become a source of conflict. We cannot overlook it any longer. We have to tell the person about it and gently explain our feelings, but we cannot get petty and picky. Just because it annoys us does not mean it is annoying to anyone else. First, we have to ask ourselves if it is just too trivial on our part. The vast majority of the time, it is our problem in how we view it rather than the annoying person's problem.

The first thing that came to mind when developing this sermon was snoring. I have been accused of that a few times lately. It is a combination of allergies and dry air and so on. Snoring comes to mind as something that can affect a spouse's sleep and health. In this case it may not be that petty.

In almost every case, the other person will not have even realized his habit bothered you and will make an effort to stop, if you approach him with gentleness, tact, meekness, and sincere loving concern. We should pray and ask God to grant us favor in the other person's eyes. We cannot let the impatience and resentment build up inside us until we explode into rage or retaliate in some way; we would not be setting an example of godly self-control or patience if

we acted that way.

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

5. We have to work with God to develop the patience of Christ in us.

Jesus Christ died a hideous death to make possible our reconciliation to God, all the while setting the greatest example of patience.

Hebrews 12:3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

We live in a world where there are more nervous breakdowns than at any other time in history. It is an indication that more and more people have the feeling that they cannot cope with life. Even we in God's church, who have God's comfort and grace, suffer from a similar feeling because society is constantly bombarding us.

Sometimes we feel overwhelmed with a sense of impending doom. Many times we feel burdened down with problems and sins, and we feel our own inadequacies to overcome them. We become frustrated with our seeming lack of progress, even though Paul is confident of and assures us that God "who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Even though we have that scripture, we still have a tendency to get depressed and impatient.

What should be a noticeable quality in us as a Christian is that when others fracture from failure, we stand upright; and when others collapse from calamity, we shoulder our burden and go on. With God's love and Christ's patience in our life, we can face anything. This is why Paul asks for God to direct our hearts in the right direction. Notice the two important characteristics Paul emphasizes:

II Thessalonians 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

We see emphatically where we go for the example of how to be patient.

William Barclay refers to Paul's allusion to these characteristics in verse 5 as what he calls the "inward and the outward characteristics" of a Christian. He said,

The inward characteristic is the awareness of the love of God, the deep awareness that we cannot drift beyond His care, the sense that the everlasting arms are underneath us?The outward characteristic is the endurance [patience] which Christ can give.

In Paul's compliment of them here, he does not imply that they are self-sufficient. He realizes that God's help is indispensable. Therefore, Paul asks God to direct them into a greater appreciation of God's love for them and Christ's patience, and endurance, and perseverance on their behalf. Since complying with God's standard of righteousness is difficult even with the help of the Holy Spirit, the strongest motivation for us is for Paul to help us remember and appreciate God's love and Christ's patient endurance of suffering. When we think we are at the end of our rope—when we think we just cannot grin and bear it any longer—we should ask God for more of His Holy Spirit, His strength, His power.

Isaiah 40:29-31 He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

What an encouraging scripture that is, especially here at the end-time! However, waiting, of and by itself, is not enough. God can give us the patience we need for overcoming society, sin, and Satan. We are to strive for the same patience Christ has and God helps us to do this through His Holy Spirit. Having the mind and power of God makes it possible to have the same patience as Christ, the ultimate example of patient endurance.

Consider the mildly unpleasant or uncomfortable, but common, situation of waiting for service. Most people prefer to pass their time in more interesting and comfortable activities, but most people also realize that waiting is the only way to get the particular service that they want. One of the most trying things in our society today is the "answering machine from hell" that keeps putting you to the next location on it. It really irritates some people; though more irritating, of course, is other people. They fidget and squirm. Others fume inside, harming their own health and peace of mind.

Whether they have something important to do or not, patient people make the best of a less-than-ideal situation. Instead of thinking about the inconveniences that the situation may have given them, patient people find a way to use time profitably. They may think about possible solutions to a problem at work. They may observe the interesting actions of others. They may meditate on laws and principles of human behavior. Patience involves perseverance and waiting, but is known for producing fruit. It will be rewarded.

Stronger faith is one of the long-term rewards of patience. The apostle Paul said that Abraham, during his 25-year wait for a son, "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God." Patience is rewarded more quickly than we realize. True patience produces a reward for which we do not have to wait. Our Father in heaven is the God of patience, and He can help us have a mind like His.

Romans 15:5 Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.

One of the immediate results of patience is a calm, optimistic attitude—that is, peace of mind!

Also, patience often produces physical blessings, especially when we are working with others. In dating, marriage, childrearing, or talking with others, the blessings of patience are magnified. Many of those blessings are immediate.

By optimistically enduring difficult circumstances, we can avoid the penalties associated with impatience: high blood pressure, increased frustrations, and strained relationships. These are all negative affects on our lives. Patience produces fewer hasty words and hurt feelings, fewer jobs of poor quality that must be done again, no irritating outbursts or complaints that make it harder for others to do their work. Impatience leads to stress and mental frustration; it is self-defeating. In developing this sermon, I was just flabbergasted at how much impatience affects our lives in a negative way. It is a horrible trait to have.

Patience will not necessarily make our trials go away more quickly; neither does patience make the line shorter or the trip quicker; but patience always makes the delay more bearable and most of the time makes the job easier.

Patience is much more than the outward action of waiting—it is an inner, mental attitude that helps us to be calm rather than annoyed while we wait.

The blessings of patience are not necessarily outward and physical; they are inner and spiritual. These blessings come instantly, as soon as we are patient in attitude. Impatience, even if it comes with waiting, cannot produce the mental blessing of peace of mind. As long as we are impatient, we do not have peace of mind.

Victor Hugo, author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* wisely advised, "Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones; and when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace, God is awake."