

“When You Just Can’t Grin and Bear It”

James 5:7-20

Series: Faith That Works Week 7. Praying Patiently

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A lot of us will be traveling during the upcoming Thanksgiving week. All those miles in the car take me back to the days when my two children sat in the backseat. They assumed their assigned battle stations. Despite the separation between them, they began to fuss with each other. The progression was precisely predictable. It starts with laughter and fun. They are having a good time. This turns to touching and tickling. Next comes the poking, prodding and pushing. And finally the screaming and shouting. The shouting is my part. I lose my patience. “Will you kids knock it off? Stay away from each other!” Peace prevails...for about two miles and then the process starts all over again with laughter and giggling. This predictable pattern worked on me like Pavlov’s dog. The minute the kids started having fun I yelled, “Stop it!” Now those little rascals are both married and have kids in car seats. And I’ve heard them shout, “Stop having fun!” That goes to show if you are patient, you’ll get your revenge.

We all lose our patience. The Associated Press surveyed over a 1000 adults about impatience. They found:

- While waiting in line at an office or store, it takes an average of 17 minutes for most people to lose their patience.
- Women lost their patience after waiting in line for about 18 minutes.
- For men, it was an average of 15 minutes.
- On the phone, it takes about 9 minutes for most people to lose their patience.
- People with lower income and less education are more patient than those with a college education and a high income.¹

The increasing speed of the internet is actually training us to be less patient. An article in the Boston Globe states:

Retailers are jumping into same-day delivery services. Smartphone apps eliminate the wait for a cab, a date, or a table at a restaurant. But experts caution that instant gratification comes at a price: It's making us less patient. One researcher examined the viewing habits of 6.7 million internet users. How long were subjects willing to be patient? Two seconds. After that they started abandoning the site. After five seconds, the abandonment rate is 25 percent. When you get to 10 seconds, half are gone." The results offer a glimpse into the future. As Internet speeds increase, people will be even less willing to wait. The researcher, who spent years developing the study, worries someday people will be too impatient to conduct studies on patience.²

¹ Trevor Thompson, "Impatience Poll Glimpse," www.hosted.ap.org (5-28-06).

² Christopher Muther, "Instant gratification is making us perpetually impatient," *The Boston Globe* (2-2-13)

We can all use patience especially in those moments when you feel trapped.

From the outside this 18-month-old Platinum-edition Sequoia SUV looks perfect. Yet when the owner from Waterton Park south of Calgary, Canada opens the door he discovers his Toyota is totaled. Somehow, a grizzly bear was able to open the door. Once inside, he must have pulled the door shut and trapped himself.

Now try to picture the scene. Frustrated beyond belief, frantic to escape, the bear begins clawing his way to freedom by ripping off all the door panels. As he tears through the wiring alarm bells sound, voices cry and sparks fly. He shreds the head-liner, headrests, leather seats, and dash board. The steering column is twisted sideways. At some point, two of the six airbags explode and pummel the bear. He fights back by puncturing the other four airbags. Then, just before he breaks through the rear window and escapes he leaves his calling card. The insurance company stopped counting the cost of the repairs when they rose above the \$70,000 cost of the car.

Do you ever feel trapped? How do you find patience when you can't grin and bear it? Maybe someone else set the trap. Maybe, like the bear, you locked yourself in. Either way, you lose all your patience. You are seized with the sudden urge to claw your way to freedom. Patience is one of those things I'm afraid to ask God to give me. If I pray, "Please God, make me more patient," He may send me annoying people to teach me how to be patient. There are four ways to test your patience. Which bother you the most?

- A. Interruptions – things or people getting in the way of your plan for the day.
- B. Inconveniences – break downs or disruptions which detour your schedule.
- C. Irritations – annoying habits of others that get on your nerves.
- D. Inactivity – waiting and waiting and waiting for something to happen.

We all want patience and we want it NOW! But that's not the way patience works. It takes time to develop this fruit of the Spirit. The original meaning of the word "patience" is "to endure suffering." Why do we suffer and feel pain? Two reasons: Events don't follow our plans or our timetable. Maybe you're waiting to get pregnant, to find a job, to find someone to love, to get the test results back, to hear what the judge has to say, to finish school, to heal a relationship, to discover your purpose in life. Maybe you're tired of this physical pain or illness, of arguing with your parents, your spouse, your children, of being lonely. How do you grow the fruit of patience? It begins with a God engineered attitude adjustment.

The Bible has two words for patience. The first attitude adjustment applies to **Patience when you are in Power** and the guidance is **Forgive and Let Go**. This applies to situations where you catch someone doing wrong, they are in your debt, you are about to let them have it, come down on them hard and, instead, you forgive and let them go. The Patriarch Joseph could have punished his brothers for selling him into slavery. Instead he forgives them and saves them from starvation. King Saul persecutes and pursues David from one end of the country to the other. Yet when David has the chance to slay Saul in his sleep, he lets him go. In this type of patience you have someone in your sights. Yet instead of pummeling them, you pardon them.

As we've learned in this series *Faith That Works* James is the younger brother of Jesus. It must have been very tough growing up with Jesus as your older brother. You can never blame anything on Mr. Perfect. Your parents always side with Him. Instead of punching you back He always forgives you. These lessons leave an impression on James which he passes on to the believers.

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! James 5:7-9

James uses two parables here: the farmer and the judge. Farming requires patience and waiting. So much is out of your control. You rely on the rain, seed, soil, and sun. And they make you wait. If anyone thinks patience means sitting back and doing nothing – ask a farmer. They work very hard while waiting for the rain and sun to do their part.

We get impatient when circumstances are beyond our control and the greatest temptation is to start grumbling and complaining. Grumbling is our brilliant idea about what others did wrong and how it should be fixed. Unfortunately no one else appreciates the brilliance of our way. Grumbling divides families, churches, schools, businesses, communities and nations. Instead of grumbling, the Bible says to forgive. James heard Jesus tell a story about a King and Judge who forgives one of his servants a huge debt he can never repay. Yet that servant turns around and throws a friend in jail for a couple of bucks. When the King and Judge hears this, He throws the first servant into jail (Matthew 18:21-35). What's the point? No matter what debt someone owes you, God forgives you far more in Jesus. Does this mean God wants you to cancel every debt? No. But instead of grumbling and punishing others, work patiently with them.

Ask God to help you see the situation the way He sees it. When you do, you discover a new perspective.

1. I am only human. I make mistakes. I'm not God and most things I cannot control.
2. Other people are human and also imperfect. I should not be surprised or upset when people eventually make mistakes and let me down.
3. God is in control and working to use my problem to accomplish His purpose for me.

Paul writes, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

The second word in the Bible applies to the **Patience when you are in Pain** and here the guidance is **Forbear and Hold On**. James continues:

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. James 5:10-11

Perhaps right now you are under the heavy pressure of a burden which is beyond your ability to bear. Your child is heading down the wrong path, your spouse is leaving you, your sibling is deeply troubled, your parent is not getting any better, your body is not working right. Never let anyone tell you that being a Christian means your life will be pain-free and easy. The first Christians faced all the same situations I just described plus they were persecuted for their faith as are many of our brothers and sisters around the world today. What does James say? It will get better? No. He does not give them false hope and neither will I. What he offers is the same promise I give to you: The Lord is with you. He is full of compassion and mercy. He not only knows your pain, He shares your pain and He will help you bear your pain – if you let Him.

Here are some next steps you can take to grow the fruit of patience.

1. I will be patient this week with someone I find frustrating.
2. I will pray and ask God to help me bear a burden.
3. I will accept help from others, especially my brothers & sisters in Christ.

When I think of patience in the face of suffering, I always see the face of Glady. She was a member of my former church. I think I only saw Glady come to church once. But the Senior Pastor, and I brought communion to Glady once a month because she was in a wheelchair and could not leave her home. Glady was afflicted with severe rheumatoid arthritis. Her hands were curled into balls, her limbs and spine were twisted. She could do nothing for herself. Nurses came in daily to care for her needs. I cannot sufficiently describe all she endured. Yet she was perfectly named – for Glady was always glad. Against all odds and every circumstance, Glady smiled every time I visited her. She always wanted to know how the other homebound members were doing and how everyone was at the church.

How did she hold on? Glady would tell you the Lord carried her. The arthritis progressed. It never got better. And one day, Glady's chair was empty. The day we laid her to rest, many of her nurses came to the service because they were so touched by the bright glow of her presence. And as we walked from her grave, all of us agreed that Glady was finally free. She was doing the one thing she always wanted: to dance with Jesus.