

# Patience

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In Luke 21, we find one of the shorter verses in the Bible. Jesus simply says, "In your patience possess you your souls." The context of Jesus' statement is, he's answering his disciples' question back in verse 7. He told them that there would come a time when the temple would be destroyed, and they asked him "Master, but when shall these things be?"

He culminates the discussion of these things in verse 19.

Luke 21:19: "In your patience possess ye your souls."

He gives them some warnings, and he gives them some indication of things that are going to happen – times of great trouble. He tells them in verse 8 to take heed that they be not deceived. He tells them that they'll hear of wars and commotions, but not to be terrified, for these things must first come to pass.

Luke 21:10-19: "Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls."

In this time that's coming - and we can see that we're coming closer and closer to a climax of trouble - Jesus gives us a key here, how to survive the troubles that are coming. This key is patience.

We live in a very fast-paced world. Our expectations for instant gratification have been accelerated. A generation ago, people wrote letters. They would post the letter, put a stamp on it, put it out for the mailman to send, and they would wait for days for the message to be received, and wait weeks sometimes to get an answer in the mail. But now, we send email. We wait minutes or less for the message to be received, and sometimes to get an answer. Or, even faster, we send a text message.

We have such elevated expectations of speed that we actually chafe with impatience if we click on an icon on our computer screen and the program or file takes several seconds to load. We want everything right now.

I think it's the waiting that really kills us. I think about when I worked in an office, before the personal computer was so common. If you wanted to get a file, you had to get up from your desk, go to the file room, and alphabetically find the right drawer, open it up, and go through the files until you found the right one, and find the piece of paper that you were looking for. I don't remember it being really irritating to do this. I think that's because, when I was looking for the file, I was doing something. But when you click on your computer screen for a file, and you're just waiting while the computer retrieves it, you're doing nothing. It's gotten to the point where we have such an expectation of things being immediate in speed that even if it's just a few seconds, it's irritating. We're just waiting, doing nothing.

For example, I hate waiting in traffic. Traffic really, really bothers me. I would rather take a longer route, where traffic is moving and I can drive at speed, even if it's going to take me longer to get there, because I'm doing something, as opposed to just sitting in traffic and waiting.

As I said, I think part of what bothers us so much is the waiting. Our appetite for instant gratification is also fueled by the entertainment industry. The entertainments that we watch have done a lot to influence our sense of immediacy. For example, when you watch a movie, all the problems faced by the characters on the screen are resolved before you leave the theater. Even though we know intellectually that real life is not like that – we know that the issues in our lives are not going to be resolved in ninety minutes – on an emotional level, we're conditioned to expect immediate results. Feel bad? Take a pill and feel better right away. Feel bad emotionally? Look for a quick fix, some kind of an escape. The physical world that we live in offers a handful of common escapes that people use – drugs, alcohol, sex, entertainment. These are escapes that people use as a quick fix when they feel bad emotionally.

I've come to see that one of the biggest problems that we, the human race, are up against is the problem of emotional immaturity. I speak to myself, as well as to those of you that are listening to me. One of the most damaging aspects of emotional immaturity is a lack of patience.

We start our lives as immature, little tiny babies. We have very little patience. Babies are extremely impatient. If you've ever just watched a baby, how they react, you know that a baby gets hungry and will cry. Not all babies are the same, I'm generalizing, but typically babies get hungry and they cry. Some people will claim that the baby cries because that's the only way that a baby has of communicating before they begin to develop language skills. There's no doubt some truth to that. I think it goes beyond that, though. I think babies get scared. I think they panic, sometimes. I've seen babies that will be crying for their mom because they're hungry, and then the mother's hunting around for a bottle for the baby and it takes her a minute, and the baby is becoming ever more distraught. Finally the mother gives the baby the bottle, and the baby begins drinking the milk, but is still distraught. Body still racked with sobs. You can tell that the baby was sort of panicking, "Oh no, I've got no food and I'm hungry, there's no one around and no one's helping me, I'm going to die."

As adults, we watch how a baby reacts, and in a way it's cute, since babies are cute. But when you think about it, we react oftentimes the same way. We're like a little baby that's panicking because he's hungry and there's no bottle right there. We sometimes react the same way to circumstances in our lives. We become very impatient. We panic, sometimes, because we don't see an immediate fix. We're like that little baby. You're thinking, if that baby had just a little more maturity and awareness, he would know that his mother is right there and she's going to take care of him. We need to have more awareness of the fact that our Heavenly Father is there, and he knows everything that's going on in our lives, and he's going to take care of us.

We all grow into physical maturity, or chronological maturity. That's inevitable. But how many of us really develop and mature emotionally? Specifically in the area of patience. How many of us really develop patience as part of emotional maturity?

Even though sometimes we know something on an intellectual level, we can at the same time show by our thoughts and actions that we believe something entirely different on an emotional level. We know intellectually that our problems are not going to be resolved in the time it takes to watch a movie or TV show. Nevertheless, we are, by our environment and the world that we live in, emotionally programmed to look for and expect the quick fix. We get discouraged, or even depressed sometimes, when faced with a long-term trial or a deeply engrained character flaw.

Depression is something that some people are more susceptible to than others. I think depression is simply chronic discouragement. We all get discouraged sometimes. That discouragement oftentimes comes from impatience. Our adversary knows that we're vulnerable in this area. He's able to attack us through our emotions. I believe that Satan is able, through his spirit, to influence and speak directly to our emotions. There are times when I wake up and I just feel negative. I think this has happened to all of us, at one time or another. I believe that Satan broadcasts negativity through his spirit. He would like to discourage us. He would like for us to grow impatient with the life that God is leading us through.

One of the biggest ways that Satan does affect our emotions, I think, is in our inability to wait patiently. It's our lack of patience that causes many of our problems – in our relationship with God and our relationships with one another. We've all heard the old adage that "patience is a virtue", but there seems to be very little of it in the world in which we live. Our world does not condition us to wait for much of anything.

How do we get patience? How do we become more emotionally mature, more patient people? Well, there is no quick fix to becoming patient. I can't give you three points to being patient, how to have us all turn into patient people overnight. What I can do is to raise our awareness of how things work, so that we see things a little differently. That can actually make a big difference right away. It won't completely transform us overnight. The bottom line is that ultimately, it takes patience to develop patience.

I hope that I'm able to raise our awareness of the reality of how things work, and in so doing increase our level of patience simply by opening our eyes a little bit to seeing reality and how that reality relates to being patient. I'm going to do this in three areas of life.

First I want to talk about the need for us to be patient with God. Then I'm going to talk about the need for us to be patient with ourselves. Finally, we'll talk about being patient with others.

I think that when the subject of patience comes up, typically we think primarily of the need to be patient with people and things around us. Which, no doubt, we need. But I think that patience actually begins with our relationship with God, so that's where I want to start.

As I said before, the world we live in doesn't condition us to wait for much of anything. Yesterday I was out doing some shopping, and we were at Home Depot. I saw that they had a really high-tech looking washer-dryer set that they had on sale out front, and the advertisement said that the washing machine would save twenty minutes. We have become so obsessed with time-saving devices, and we are so impatient that we can't even wait for our clothes to be clean, we've got to get them clean faster.

The world we live in does not condition us to wait. But waiting is an integral part of the way of life to which God has called us. In so many places in scripture we are admonished to wait upon God. I'm going to encourage you to look up the word "wait" in scripture and see all the places.

Psalm 37:7, 34: "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. ...Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it."

Psalm 27:14: "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."

Isaiah 40:31: "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

The word "wait" is a pretty interesting word. Waiting can either be inactive, or it can be active. Dictionary.com's first definition for the word wait is: "to remain inactive or in a state of repose, as until something expected happens". But God doesn't want us to be in an inactive state or in a state of repose. God wants a different kind of waiting from us.

The second definition of "wait" implies a more active type of waiting. The second definition is "to be available or in readiness". When you think about the example of the ten virgins, they were all waiting. It says that they all slumbered and slept. Then the cry went out at midnight, and they woke up. They'd all been waiting, but only five of them were in a state of readiness.

The time that is spoken of in Matthew 24, I believe, is imminent, and so I think it becomes more and more important for us to familiarize ourselves with it.

Matthew 24:42: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Watching is a type of waiting, but it's an active waiting. You're looking for something.

Matthew 24:42-44: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

In one sense, waiting is inevitable. We're told to wait upon the Lord, but in one sense you can't do anything but wait. It's really a matter of what type of waiting you're going to do. We all have to wait. Time marches on, regardless of whether we want it to or not. We're all waiting for something. We're waiting for tomorrow, we're waiting to grow old and someday die, we're waiting for Christ to return. The passage of time is inevitable. The question is, will we wait inactively? Being spiritually asleep, like the goodman of the house who was asleep? He was waiting, but he was waiting in a state of slumber and inactivity, and his house was broken into. Will we wait inactively, being spiritually asleep while we pursue the dreams that the world around us manufactures for us, the stuff that won't last? The stuff that has no lasting value? Or will we wait in an active sense, actively pursuing the kingdom of God and his righteousness?

The word "wait" has another interesting meaning. We use the word "wait" to describe a type of service. When you go to a restaurant, you have a waiter or a waitress. A waiter is one who waits. They wait upon you. They're there to serve you. I believe that when we read in the scriptures that we are to wait upon the Lord, it has a dual meaning. I believe that it not only means to be watching, waiting for the return of Christ in an active manner. I think it also means, to be serving God in whatever ways that we find that we're able to do.

John, who the scriptures say was the disciple that Jesus loved, really emphasized the concept of love when he wrote letters to the church. One of the overriding principles that we learn from the epistles of John is that we show our love to God by showing love to the people around us. Our neighbors, our family, our friends, the world at large. Paul said, in one of his epistles, that we are to do good unto all men as we have opportunity, but first of all unto the household of faith.

This concept of waiting, I believe, involves service. Serving God, and the way we serve God primarily is by helping people. We show love toward God by loving people. We serve God by serving the people around us, in whatever ways that we're able to. Of course, we're limited. We don't want to necessarily get caught up in the Protestant concept of service, in thinking that we're going to be able to save the world now. That's not the way God's plan works.

We do have opportunities to serve people, frequently. We need to take advantage of those opportunities, whether that's donating some of our time, our resources, or our money to help people, near or far.

My family used to go to the Feast of Tabernacles in Tuscon. One of the places that we really liked was a restaurant called The Tack Room. The Tack Room was rated a four-star restaurant. It was a true four-star experience. I have never in my life been in a restaurant that had the type of service from the wait staff that we got at The Tack Room. The waiters would stand up against the wall – there would be two or three of them stationed around the room. They would just watch. They were very much attuned to everything that was going on in the room there. They would be there with whatever you needed almost before you even knew you needed it. If you were running low on anything, they would just be right there with it. It was the most remarkable service that I've ever seen. I think that's the true meaning of "waiting table". They were really watching and alert. They were waiting, but they were doing it in a very active manner.

This is what God wants from us.

Here is the reality that I want to raise our awareness of. This is the crux of what I want to say to you today. Even though we live in a world that is all about time-saving, where someone's going to buy a new washer and dryer because they're going to save twenty minutes in cleaning their clothes... even though we live in a world that conditions us to not want to wait for anything, and to be emotionally immature, impatient people, the fact of the matter is that the plan of God requires time to come to fruition.

The sooner we come to grips with and embrace the reality that the passage of time is necessary to what God is doing, the sooner we will be on the road to becoming patient people. There is nothing in life of any value that happens quickly. Everything that is of value – true value – takes time to achieve. It has been said that if you want to become an expert at something, you must spend ten thousand hours, on average, working at it. What God is doing with us is of so much greater importance and value than becoming an expert in some physical field, some material pursuit. It's going to take thousands upon thousands of hours.

The passage of time is something that God has built into this physical world, because physical matter changes, and can change. We, being physical beings, can change and be transformed from one thing into another. We can be converted from one thing into another, but it takes time. We have to understand that the passage of time is necessary. Once you embrace that, I think that just the realization goes a long way toward developing patience.

A friend of mine told me something really interesting the other day. I told him that I was going to use it in my message. I hope he doesn't mind. He was talking about an app that he has that shows him the best route to take from work to home. This app is remarkable. What it does is, based on current traffic patterns, it analyzes the different ways that he could take to get home, and it tells him the best one to take. Here's the really remarkable part: it tells him when he's going to get home. It says "you will arrive home at such-and-such a time". He said that it's uncanny, how accurate it is – that he arrives home, almost every time, exactly when the app says he's going to get home. He said that since he's started using this app, he's able to relax a lot more when he drives, because when he runs into traffic he's not fretting about the fact that he's losing time. He knows ahead of time when he's scheduled to get home, and he knows that the traffic patterns have already been taken into account. So he's able to be more patient with the driving experience.

The point I'm trying to make is that if we know ahead of time that what we're doing is a long journey, and that it's going to take time, we can be a little more patient. We need to understand that what this life is all about, the reason why we're drawing breath, is going to take time. We're not going to get there in the next five minutes - it's a long journey. God has already looked down the road, he knows the traffic patterns, he knows which obstacles and traffic jams we need to go through in order to learn the lessons that we need to learn. Maybe if we understand that and get our minds around that, we could relax a little bit more, be a little more patient and understand that this is the nature of the beast, and not fight it so much.

One of the ways in which we have to be patient with God is, we have to let him do things his way and in his time. There are times that you will see something that you know is wrong, or you're at least convinced that it's wrong, and feel that you need to take action to correct it. Sometimes you should, and sometimes you shouldn't.

When Saul saw that Samuel delayed his coming, and he wasn't there to make the sacrifices, Saul took it upon himself to perform the sacrifices. God was very displeased with Saul for that. Saul should have waited. He should have waited for God to work this out his way.

When Uzza saw that the Ark was about to topple off of the cart, or at least he was afraid that it was going to, he put his hand up to steady it. He shouldn't have done that. Now, if you were to ask me why Uzza shouldn't have done that, I don't know. I don't always know, in every situation, when it's time for me to act and when it's time for me to wait for God to intervene. I can't even answer if you were to give me a specific situation. What I can tell you is that we need wisdom. Fortunately, we're told in scripture that "if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally". We can have wisdom. We have to ask for it. We definitely need the wisdom to know.

David and his men were fleeing from Saul and were hungry. They went to the priest, and the priest gave them the old showbread. That was fine. He didn't just sit around and wait for God to miraculously feed them – he took action. Why was that okay and some other things weren't okay? I don't always know. But I know that God promises to give us wisdom to know, and so we can have the wisdom to know in our own particular circumstances and our lives, when there are times that we should step in and take action, and when it's time to just wait for God to correct a problem.

David said "A good understanding have all they who keep the commandments". This is one of the reasons why it's so important for us to strive to be commandment-keepers. Not because we think that we can make ourselves righteous – God is the only one that can make us righteous, through the operation of his spirit changing our hearts and writing his law in our heart. We have to cooperate in that process, and when we keep the commandments, our understanding is enlightened. I think it's in the Proverbs that it talks about how the law is a lamp – it's a light. It shows the way.

We can have the wisdom and the understanding to know how to act in our lives, but that has to come from God. We have to be aware that there are times when we just need to wait for God to intervene and correct the problem, and that there are times when there's something that we should do.

We attended for a short time with a congregation that was sort of an offshoot of the Worldwide Church of God, in that a lot of the people that ran it and attended it used to be in Worldwide. They had kind of wandered far afield in some areas. One of those areas was that they, for a time anyway, were going out and knocking on doors to try to preach to people about Jesus. This is one of those areas where I think that wisdom says that this is not what God has called us to do. We can't go out and save the world. Only God can save the world, and he's going to do it on his timetable.

The second thing I said I was going to talk about was being patient with ourselves. I don't mean this in some sort of New-Age, touchy-feely sort of way. I also don't mean it in a sense of excusing ourselves. There's a lot of overlap between this point and the first point of being patient with God. Being patient with ourselves really ties in to being patient with God, because of what God is doing with us. To state it really bluntly, God is reproducing in us his perfect character through this process that takes time. That's what I mean when I say that we need to be patient with ourselves. Again, the reality is that this is a process that takes time. You will not, in a week or a month or even a year, overcome a habit that has been ingrained in you for years and years, from before you started down this path. It will take a long time.

So when we find ourselves struggling, down in the trenches doing battle, we have to recognize that this war is going to last a long time. God will give us the victory, but it will not necessarily be immediate.

When the Israelites battled the Amalekites, the battle raged on and on and on, and Moses' arms grew weary. We can't grow weary and get discouraged. We have to recognize that this is a long process, and it's going to take patience.

Hebrews 12:1: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

The race that we're in is not a sprint. It's a marathon.

I used to think that a marathon was the longest race that there is, but I found out that there are crazy people that engage in something called long-distance running. They'll have races that are 150 miles, maybe more. There's a race that I read about where you run for days. I have no idea how people are able to do this. The race that we are engaged in is a very long-distance race. But remember what we read in Isaiah. Those that wait upon the Lord will run and not be weary.

Another aspect of being patient with ourselves, which ties in with being patient with others, is that we realize that we are no different than the people around us, except for the fact that, for whatever reason, God has chosen us. God in his grace has chosen us to be a part of his family now. He has chosen us to take part in the first resurrection. He has chosen us to run this race now. He has imparted to us the gift of his Holy Spirit, and he is slowly, over time, little by little changing us. When we realize the amount of time it takes, and we're patient with ourselves, it makes it so much easier to be patient with others.

I have a picture sitting here in my living room, which I have not yet taken the time to put up on the wall, since I'm not sure where I want to put it exactly. It's a picture of a river flowing over a bunch of rocks. The caption at the bottom, in big letters, is "Life". One of the reasons I bought that picture and had it framed, and one of the reasons I like it besides the fact that it's just a beautiful picture, is that it reminds me of what life is like. The life that God has called us to is a life that involves change. And just like that water running over those rocks will, over time, smooth those rocks out, to the point that they become polished, the Holy Spirit flowing through us, over time, will remove the rough edges. It will polish us. It will purify us. But it takes a long time. That water running on that riverbed didn't make those rocks smooth very quickly. It took a long time. It takes a lot of patience.

When it comes to being patient with the people around us, that's really the point I wanted to make. We recognize the time that it takes in us to change. We would so dearly love to change the people around us sometimes. We get irritated with them, and we wish that they would do things differently. A lot of being patient with the people and circumstances around us – which, as I said in the beginning, is where we usually start off thinking about when we think about needing patience – so much of it has to do with understanding what God is doing. We have to understand that God does things in his own time. That there's times when we just need to wait, and let God take care of it when it's time.

It's also recognizing that God is changing us, and that we can't change the people around us. We can only change ourselves, and we really can't even do that without God in our lives.

This is a critical passage of scripture, and I think it outlines one of what I consider to be the litmus tests of conversion. If you want to know to what degree you have been changed from what you used to be into what God wants you to be, look at this scripture and then think about how you react to things in your life.

1 Peter 2:20: "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."

It's so difficult to do, but as we allow God to change us, and as we patiently wait, as Job said, "for my change to come", I think we will find it much easier to be patient in the circumstances that we find ourselves in and the people that we're surrounded with.

I want to read a passage of scripture in conclusion. It's a beautiful scripture, and one we're familiar with, but I don't know if you've read it with this focus in mind before. This is talking about a time in the future. This is the reality for which we are waiting and looking for. What we should be actively waiting for.

Isaiah 25:6-7: "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations."

Again, we can't save the world now. There's a veil. There's coming a time when God's going to remove that.

Isaiah 25:8: "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it."

This is a little bit of an aside, but the phrase "For the Lord hath spoken it" is, to me, one of the most beautiful passages. God expects us to be people of our word. If we say we're going to do something, we should do it. Let your yea be yea and your no be no. But here's the difference between us and God. We can have the best intentions. We can try to do something, and try to be people of our word, but there are many circumstances that are beyond our control. There are some times when our best just isn't enough. We don't get it done. But the beautiful thing about God is that God isn't limited like we are. When God says he's going to do something, he's going to do it. "The Lord hath spoken it."

Isaiah 25:9: "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

We have been called upon to wait. So let us wait, in an active manner.

Luke 12:35-36: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately."