

## FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (PATIENCE)

### INTRODUCTION

We all know people who are easily irritated, people who lose patience quickly and blow up in anger. In our fast paced society, waiting for someone or an appointment can be frustrating. We live in a society that promotes instant gratification where impatience, intolerance, oversensitivity and impulsive anger are so prevalent. Clearly we need the antidote for these traits, which is God's Spirit!

It's interesting to note that when Paul talks about what life is like **outside of Christ**, he describes it as "an angry life" (Col 3:7-8), lots of short tempers and lots of anger. Why does God put such a high priority on patience? Patience sets a godly example for others. In this age of stress and instant expectations, our patience with others is something that sets us apart from the world.

Developing patience to produce a fruitful living by staying connected to God, the Vine. Developing patience requires some effort on our part and some cooperation with what God is trying to do. A man can be patient if he understands what is going on in a given situation. Ignorance breeds impatience.

### SHARING

The Greek word for patience is **makrothumia**, which is a combination of two words. **Makro means "long"** and **thumia means "temper"** - *Long-tempered*. Patience has to do with having a fairly long fuse, being able to absorb life's annoyances without exploding in anger.

The dictionary defines patience as long-suffering, resignation, and forbearance. These words have the feeling of enduring hardship, annoyance, or inconvenience without complaint. So patience is the willingness to tolerate delay with calmness and self-control. Longsuffering is virtually the opposite of anger, especially of "outbursts of wrath" (2 Corinthians 12:20).

The impatient man has some reason to be upset. He sees injustice or harm being inflicted or things are not going according to his plan; he becomes angry and takes matters into his own hands. He is short-tempered and quick to anger. When a traffic light turns green, some drivers will impatiently honk their horns if the car ahead doesn't start moving within *two seconds!* No longsuffering there! Even worse is the epidemic of road rage with cursing and actual violence.

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, *slow to anger* and great in mercy" (Psalm 145:8). That's the way He expects us to be! Consider carefully these words about being "**long-tempered**": "He who is *slow to wrath* has great understanding, but he who is *impulsive* exalts folly" (Proverbs 14:29). "The discretion of a man makes him *slow to anger*, and his glory is to *overlook a transgression*" (Proverbs 19:11).

Truly the first step of longsuffering is to exercise restraint. We must *think* first! *What does God want me to say or do?* If your feelings are hurt and you feel the need to immediately say something, speak softly and don't say anything to hurt back. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Your goal is to *act lovingly* rather than *reacting hatefully*.

### **How do you feel? The Fruit to Be Detected & Cultivated**

A huge part of maturing, is learning to acknowledge and experience our emotions without being controlled by them. We may not be able to control what we feel, but we definitely can control what we do with those emotions – how they affect our thoughts and behavior.

It is important to realize that a healthy emotional life doesn't mean you stuff how you feel and hide your emotions. No, we are created as emotional beings. We just have to express our emotions without being controlled by them. Don't let the course of your life be dictated by your emotions. Feel what you feel, but then do what God wants you to do. Some Christians believe they should never get angry. Jesus experienced the full range of human emotions than any of us feel, yet He never sinned. Jesus got angry, Jesus cried. Clearly he experienced all emotions we do, but he didn't allow them to control his thoughts, behavior or interaction with others. He's our best example of how to feel all the rises up inside us and still yield to what God would have us do.

Often we face situations in life that test the limits of our patience. Exercising patience when you don't feel like it or you don't have any other options is hard work. I am sure each one of us has experienced such frustrations in our lives and very likely will continue to experience them in the future. The challenge is to exercise this patience in life's most difficult situations. Patience is an attribute associated with God. The Bible is full of references talking about God's patience. In Exodus 34:6, we read about a "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

None of us has ever come close to exhibiting patience like God. The Bible reveals God's patience as a quality of His character that deters Him for long periods from retaliating against those who sin against Him. Patience is a major characteristic of our God for He is slow to anger and abundant in grace (Psa 103:8). God's patience delays His wrath, allowing time for good to occur. Clearly, God's patience is exercised so He can work on the situation and produce repentance.

Having patience has its advantages. Can you think of a time where a lack of patience led to an argument or misunderstanding? Lack of patience can be disastrous. Recall Abraham's situation when both he and Sarah were getting advanced in years and failed to wait on God's promise for son. Naturally as human, we will tend to take things into our own hands instead of waiting on God. And often the results are disastrous. The patience is worth the wait. This Fruit of the Spirit helps you discover the benefits of waiting.

*Waiting* is a test of our patience and an opportunity to *build* patience. And the Bible has much to say about our need to wait on God. We want God to solve all our problems *right now*, but God knows the best timing. Every farmer knows that under ordinary conditions the time for harvest cannot be hastened.

There is a story of a little boy who found a chrysalis on a branch. He thought it was moving, and then he saw that a butterfly was struggling to breakthrough. He felt sorry for the butterfly, so he took out his pocketknife to help the butterfly avoid the struggle. He cut open the chrysalis, pulled out the butterfly and held it in his hand, expecting it to fly away. But it didn't move, within minutes the butterfly was dead. When the challenge to emerge from the chrysalis was removed, the butterfly's opportunity to strengthen its wing was denied. With only weak, wet wings, the butterfly was unable to survive. It needed to struggle in order to soar. God allows trials in our lives because it is needed in order to strengthen our wings so we can soar to our full potential. He wants us to endure with patience and we do that by trusting Him. The key is to know your role to be the branch and connect to the vine (John 15:1-5). Branches by themselves cannot produce fruit.

### **DISCUSSION**

1. How have the impatience and anger affected your other relationships?
2. What is the greatest challenge to practice patience in your lives?
3. Do you see any examples of patience in others that we should emulate?

### **CONCLUSION**

We're all works in progress. We fail and make mistakes. Our problem is not that we don't love God enough. It's that we don't understand how much He loves us. If you could grasp just a little bit of how much God loves you, you'd surrender all areas of your life to Him. With His love as your foundation, you can discover a new power in the way you relate to others with *patience*.