

The fruit of the Spirit, part 4: Patience

The key to healthy friendships, businesses,
and marriages

Message for Sunday, February 7, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:26,
Exodus 34:6

Children's Message: Galatians 6:9

I was running late this morning so I skipped breakfast. Thank goodness I've got one of those "instant breakfast" things. It's hard to believe: I can eat a full breakfast in fifteen seconds, the time that it takes to drink this milkshake (*chug it down*).

What other kinds of "instant" can you think of? (instant replay for sports; instant hot chocolate; instant coffee, and many more.)

What's next? Instant church, where we can be in and out of here in two minutes? How about instant friends?—You don't have to spend time getting to know someone; that takes way too long. You just click on "Like" and — presto! — you're friends.

There are still some things that take time, though. We need to be patient and wait for them. This apple didn't grow overnight. The tree was planted years ago. Last spring, when the apple tree was in blossom, bees came along and pollinated the flowers. Then came the summer, and finally, months later, this apple was ready to pick. And all that time, the farmer was busy keeping down the weeds, fighting bugs, fertilizing, and pruning all the trees. That takes patience.

The Bible passage we read also talks about patience, although it doesn't use that word. Here's what it says:

Galatians 6:9, Good News Bible:

So let us not become tired of doing good; for if we do not give up, the time will come when we will reap the harvest.

Message "Fruit of the Spirit, Part 4: Patience"

Here is the passage we're looking at in this message series:

Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

1) Patience: the path to peace (the antidote to anger??)

Here's something interesting: in the original Greek language in that passage from Galatians, the word for patience is *macrothumos*. It's a combination of two words: *macro* meaning "long or slow," and *thumos* meaning "temper or anger or heat or suffering." So patience means slow to get angry; when you get frustrated because things aren't going well, you don't boil over; you control your temper. It can also mean "longsuffering," which is how the King James Bible translates it. That means bearing with troubles, but without becoming angry or bitter; instead one remains patient.

You see, we can't talk about patience without also talking about anger. Some Bible passages pair the two together:

Proverbs 14:29, New Century Version:

Patient people have great understanding, but people with quick tempers show their foolishness.

Proverbs 15:18, New International Version:

A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Some people have the idea that it's wrong to be angry, that it's a sin. Not quite.

Ephesians 4:26, New Revised Standard Version:

Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

There is a proper time and place for anger, such as when you encounter injustice and evil. The sin is when you don't control your anger. "Don't let the sun go down on your anger." Well, you can't control the sun, so that must mean, "Control your anger."

Anger is an emotion, just like happiness and sadness. You don't have much control over how you feel; but you do control what you do with those feelings.

It is possible to control your anger. I can prove it to you. When police investigate a family dispute where a man has assaulted his wife or girlfriend and started smashing things around the house, there is a very obvious pattern: the only things that get broken are the things that were valuable to the woman. None of his toys are touched.

Here's another example: you're yelling at your kids and stomping around the house like a mad rhinoceros. The phone rings. You pick it up and in a calm, sweet voice say, "Hello." You can turn your control off and on just like a light switch.

Anyone who says they can't control their anger, that they've just got a temper that gets the better of them — it's a pack of lies. If you use that excuse, I'm sorry to offend you, but it's the truth: that's a total lie. It's about time you faced the truth, and dealt with your problem.

What I want to do here is to show you how to overcome that problem. I want to show you how you can have patience instead of anger.

2) Techniques for controlling anger

Lots of places can teach "Anger management." Here are a few of the tips you'd learn in such a course.

- Learn what triggers your anger. You probably can't get rid of those people or those situations, so learn how to respond differently the next time the trigger happens.
- Cool off: breathe deeply, count to 10, go for a brisk walk. All these are ways of controlling your response to anger.
- Change your thinking: instead of "*Everything* is ruined, I'll *never* be able to fix it, you *always* mess things up," — none of which are true, by the way; they're all exaggerations — think to yourself, "It could have been worse, and blowing a fuse right now isn't going to help."
- Express your anger: tell the other person how you feel, but without swearing, exaggerating or insulting. Just simply say, "I feel really angry about what you did." If you keep it bottled up inside, it'll either (a) explode and make a huge mess, or (b) eat away at your inside. Some doctors think that most depressions are caused by years of anger that was never let out.

If you need serious help on dealing with your anger, I can suggest the names of several local Christian counsellors who can work with you on this.

3) Patience is God-like

Those techniques are very helpful. But most psychologists don't come from a Christian background, and they miss the most important step of all: letting God help.

Patience is part of God's character. When Moses went up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments, God met him there.

Exodus 34:6, New Living Translation:

"I am the Lord, I am the Lord, the merciful and gracious God. I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness."

FedEx, the courier company, has a slogan: "When it Absolutely, Positively Has To Be There Overnight." Do you ever wonder what it was like before the days of internet and fax machines? When the CEO of the Hudson Bay Company in London, England sent a memo by ship and by canoe to his fur traders in Saskatchewan, and it "absolutely, positively has to be there within six months."

When God develops you and me, he's not in the FedEx business. You can't put character in the microwave oven and have it ready in 30 seconds. God is patient with us. (Thank-you, Lord! We'd be in big trouble otherwise!)

Do you remember the story of Moses? How God spoke to him from a burning bush, and appointed him to be the leader of Israel? And for the next 40 years, you know where Moses was? Walking through the desert, leading a pack of complaining and fearful people who kept on wishing they were back in Egypt as slaves. It took 40 years for God to develop Moses to be a great leader, and to develop the people into a nation.

You see, when it comes to building character, God's slogan is something like this: "When it absolutely, positively must be done in 40 years."

So it may be a while before you can be like Grandma Ruby in this story from the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series, told by her daughter-in-law. Ruby is the mother of 6 and grandmother of 13. She is the embodiment of gentleness, patience and love.

One Christmas, all the children and grandchildren were gathered as usual at Ruby's home. Just the

month before, Ruby had bought beautiful new white carpeting after living with the “same old carpet” for over 25 years. She was overjoyed with the new look it gave her home.

Ruby’s son, Arnie, had just distributed his gifts for all the nieces and nephews — prized homemade honey from his beehives. They were excited. But as fate would have it, eight-year-old Sheena spilled her tub of honey on Grandma’s new carpeting and trailed it throughout the entire downstairs of the house.

Crying, Sheena ran into the kitchen and into Grandma Ruby’s arms. “Grandma, I’ve spilled my honey all over your brand new carpet.”

Grandma Ruby knelt down, looked tenderly into Sheena’s tearful eyes and said, “Don’t worry sweetheart, we can get you more honey.” [by Lynn Robertson; from *Chicken Soup for the Woman’s Soul*.]

Wow! I love it! Wouldn’t you love to be more like that? I know I would. I need to be more patient, more willing to just let things be, and be at peace.

4) Patience comes from God

The key to patience is the Holy Spirit. That’s what this message series is all about: the transformation which comes in the life of a person who has asked Jesus Christ into their life as Lord and Saviour.

There are all kinds of techniques you can use to make yourself more patient. But the most important thing of all is to let God work in your life. We’re talking about the patience which comes from God. It’s the “fruit of the Spirit.” It’s the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives; we don’t create it ourselves.

I’m going to lead us in prayer in a moment. In that prayer, you will have the opportunity to ask God to show you where you need patience. At that point, you have a decision to make: will you ask and allow the Holy Spirit to work in your heart and your life to transform you, so that you will have more patience? Or will you go on as usual?

I’ll use myself as an example. I have a habit of always trying to cram as much as possible into the

time that I have, before I have to be somewhere else. (Just ask Jane about my pattern of coming home for supper.) So when I leave, I’m in a rush, and don’t have time to stop and talk. Or if I do stop, the other person can sense that I’m impatient and want to get going. So they’re not likely to tell me what’s really on their mind.

I’m making a commitment to the Lord and to all of you right now: for the next two weeks, whenever I’m going somewhere, I will start on my way 5 minutes early (maybe even 10 minutes!!). That way I won’t be rushed and frantic and impatient. I’m asking you to hold me accountable to this promise: if you see me not doing this, just stop me and tell me. I’ll thank you for helping me to keep my promise to God. [Why only 2 weeks? Because that seems possible, with God’s help. If I promise “my whole life,” I know I’ll fail. At the end of 2 weeks, I can renew that promise, and so on.]

Let’s pray about this. I invite you to join me in this prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ,
I ask you to come in and fill me with your Holy Spirit. Not only right now, but every day, all day. For without you, I do not have the power, the peace and especially the patience that I need.

Why am I sometimes lacking in patience? Is it because I have shut you out of my life? Have I deliberately turned away from you by sinning? Have I been ignoring you and not making time to be with you every day?

Lord Jesus, I’m sorry for the wrong things that I’ve done. Please forgive me, I pray. I *do* love you, and want to follow you and serve you. I ask you to help me to live the way you and I *both* want me to live.

Especially right now, I pray for patience. Show me where and when and with whom I need more patience... Oh Lord, that’s hard! But it would be so wonderful if I could. So please help me, I pray. Amen.