

We Need Patience Right Now

Message for Sunday, March 29, 2020
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: James 5:7-12

I'm mixing up a mug of instant coffee right now. I'll add some powdered instant milk. Mmm, good! All around us are products and services that are instant:

- instant-on TV
- instant replay in sports
- instant delivery of email and text messages
- instant water out of a tap
- what else can you think of?

Being immersed in a society where we can get things in an instant will produce impatience, when we want something *now*.

Can you imagine a farmer or a gardener wanting instant crops? How ridiculous! After planting the seeds, we have to wait, not days, not weeks, but *months* before harvest is ready. But you don't just plant the seeds, and then relax. While waiting, you keep busy with weeding, watering, weeding, fertilizing, and more weeding. Sometime impatience comes from inactivity.

I grew up in Saskatchewan, so I'm familiar with the seasons of planting and harvest. But when I lived in rural Nova Scotia, I encountered a different type of agriculture. I was with people who made their living by cutting trees on their property for lumber. For every tree they cut, they would plant another five. They did this because not all of the new trees would survive. But those trees they were planting would be harvested by their great-grandchildren 60 to 100 years later! They certainly have learned the habit of being patient.

Patience is a virtue. That's what we're going to look at today as we continue reading in the Bible the letter from James.

James 5:7a, New Living Translation:

Dear brothers and sisters, you must **be patient** as you wait for the Lord's return.

This Scripture passage begins with a command: "Be patient." In fact, the word *patient* or *patience* occurs five times here and in the next few verses. This is important!

1) What does patience look like?

One way of learning about patience is to look at its opposite: *impatience*. What happens when we're impatient? How does that compare with being patient?

- **We're frustrated** because our plans are messed up. I doubt this really happened, but it's a good story. A 747 passenger plane was halfway across the Atlantic Ocean when the captain's voice came over the speakers: "Attention, passengers. We have lost one of our engines, but we can certainly reach London with the three we have left. Unfortunately, we will arrive an hour late as a result." An hour later the captain made another announcement: "Sorry, but we lost another engine. Still, we can safely travel on two. However, I'm afraid we will now arrive two hours late." Shortly thereafter, the passengers heard the captain's voice again: "Guess what, folks. We just lost our third engine, but please be assured we can fly with only one. We will now arrive in London three hours late."

At this point, one impatient passenger became furious. "For Pete's sake!" he shouted. "If we lose another engine, we'll be up here all day!"

When you're rushing to get somewhere and traffic on highway 401 is backed up, or the person in front of you at the grocery store can't get their debit card to work, that causes frustration. Your stress level goes up, and you get anxious.

- **We're worried** when something is happening that we don't understand; maybe something has gone wrong. Example: I'm waiting for Jane to come home so I can use the car, but it's already two hours later than what she had planned, and still no word from her. Maybe I forgot to put gas in the car, and she's stranded in the middle of nowhere; she's not going to be happy when she gets home! Or maybe there was a crash; maybe she's injured.

When we worry, we start to imagine all kinds of horrible possibilities. You don't feel well; in fact you feel awful. You go to the doctor, and you go through a series of tests, but they don't know what the problem is. Knowing what's going on, even if

it's bad news, is always better than not knowing and worrying.

- **We begin to doubt.** Example: I go to someone's house at the time we arranged to meet, but no one is home. They forgot about tonight. Or... Maybe I got it wrong? Maybe we were supposed to meet at *my* place, and they're over there right now, wondering where I am? Maybe it's next week, not tonight?

When we doubt, there is a trust issue. "That person is not reliable." Or maybe I'm the one who is not reliable.

If these things are pictures showing what impatience looks like, then patience will be:

- **Calm** in the place of frustration, when our plans are messed up.
- **Peace** in the place of worry, when we don't know or understand what's happening.
- **Faith** in the place of doubt, when we're confused.

2) Be patient with things you can't control

James 5:7b-8, New Living Translation:

Consider the farmers who eagerly look for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They patiently wait for the precious harvest to ripen. You, too, must be patient. And take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near.

It's impossible to be a farmer and be impatient. Can you imagine a farmer kneeling in the field with his face right down to the ground, yelling at the oat seedlings to get going and grow faster? Yelling doesn't work well with plants, and it *really* doesn't help with people!

When you're faced with a situation over which you have no control, there's no use worrying about it and getting impatient.

Why? Because God is in control. Three times in this passage—in verses 7, 8 and 9—James says that the Lord's coming is near. Jesus is going to return to this world. That's the ultimate proof that God is in control. Nothing can stop this from happening.

God's purpose for your life is greater than any problem you're facing right now. God is in control.

3) Be patient with people

James 5:9, New Living Translation:

Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door!

The more time you spend with people, the more things you're going to find out about them that make you frustrated. But just be aware: this is a two-way street!

So instead of grumbling and complaining about others, James says leave that to God. God, and God alone, is our judge.

When we grumble about people, it's often because we don't know the whole story. That's why we leave judgement to God.

One of the most famous preachers of the 1800's was Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon and his wife raised chickens and sold the eggs. The refused to give away their eggs. Even close relatives were told, "If you want them, you have to pay for them."

Spurgeon was the pastor of a large church and received a large salary. Some people began calling the Spurgeons greedy. They never said a word in their defence. It was only after Mrs. Spurgeon died that the whole story was revealed: all the profits from the sale of eggs went to support two elderly widows.

What if you've been the object of grumbling and complaining? People have said things about you that are not true, or at least wildly exaggerated. Again, be patient. Listen to this wonderful promise from God.

Psalm 37:1-7, New Living Translation:

Don't worry about the wicked.

Don't envy those who do wrong.

For like grass, they soon fade away.

Like springtime flowers, they soon wither.

Trust in the Lord and do good.

Then you will live safely in the land and prosper.

Take delight in the Lord,

and he will give you your heart's desires.

Commit everything you do to the Lord.

Trust him, and he will help you.

He will make your innocence as clear as the dawn,
and the justice of your cause will shine like the
noonday sun.

Be still in the presence of the Lord,
and wait patiently for him to act.

Don't worry about evil people who prosper
or fret about their wicked schemes.

That Psalm really says it all: the key to patience is
to put our trust in God, and in God's timing.

Next Steps:

- Think over the last week. When were you impatient? Especially with this COVID-19 virus turning life upside down, it's easy to be frustrated and impatient. It's ruined your plans!
- Pray: Give all these cares and concerns to God to look after. In their place, ask for calm, peace, and faith.
- God says, "Trust me." You say, "I do, and I will."