The Virtues Of Patience, Endurance, And Longsuffering

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I think we all have heard this statement: Patience is a virtue. You probably also have heard the term "patience is golden." Have you ever lost your patience with somebody? Have you ever let your impatience get the better of you? Or your temper get the better of you, while you are trying to wait for somebody or dealing with a spouse, dealing with a child, coworker, or friend.

The question I have for you today: Do you recognize when your patience is being tested? And do you recognize that it is part of our Christian life that we will be tested? Our patience will be tested. And when you are tested, how do you respond? Do you respond with patience, enduring, and longsuffering, or do you just react?

Considering the subject, the first verse that came to my mind was I Corinthians 13:4, which says,

> **I Corinthians 13:4** Love suffers long and is kind.

Patience, longsuffering, and kindness characterizes God's character, and it should also characterize us. And I was remembering an example of this from a few years ago, where one of my inspectors was out working one afternoon completing insurance inspections, and she had a very meaningful encounter with an elderly woman.

She was there at the house to complete a standard insurance inspection, and again, the lady of the house was very elderly, and she asked the basic questions that we do, and she completed the inspection. But then somehow they started a conversation after the inspection had been done, and she said it is something that she will never forget, and I am going to tell you the story.

As they were talking, she said that the woman told her that her husband had just recently passed away, and she said that she could hear the loneliness in her voice.

And toward the end of the conversation, the elderly lady said, "I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon. Would you be willing, or would it be possible for you to take me to that appointment?" Without giving it much thought, the inspector said, "Yes, I will." And when they arrived at the doctor's office, she told her, "I'll just wait in the car for you here." And she did. She waited right there until she was done, and you know how long doctor's appointments can be. She did not remember how long she had sat there.

When the lady returned to the car, she asked, "Well, there is a McDonald's nearby. Can I take you out to lunch?" She gave it some thought, and she was thinking, "You know, I could be out working. Should I be wasting all this time?" But without thinking about it, she said, "Yes, I will." So as they sat at the McDonald's, she said something began to change in her. The longer she spent with her, the less the work seemed important. It did not matter as much. Even the money that she would have been making did not matter as much.

What mattered, what hurt to her, was that little bit of time that she spent with this lady that was lonely, and she did not want her to be alone. Now, maybe she did need someone to take her to the doctor, and maybe she did need someone to have a meal with. Or maybe after losing her husband, she simply needed someone to sit across from, to talk to, and someone to listen to her, and for someone just to show her a little bit of kindness. She said that she realized sometime during this that giving of herself was something that was much more valuable, and to have an opportunity like this to serve the needs of another person, another human being. She said, "That day I felt maybe I was helping this elderly lady, but looking back, I realized maybe she was helping me even more."

You know, I know for a fact that most inspectors, at least in my business, would not even have given this woman a second thought. They would only think about the money they are making that they might lose and the time that

it would take to spend time with this elderly woman. I have considered this thought myself. But you know something? Great moments often catch us unaware, beautifully wrapped in what others may consider unimportant or insignificant. Oftentimes, because of our self-centeredness, we miss out on wonderful moments in our lives by failing to show kindness, patience, and love to others, no matter who they are. And I know I have been guilty of this.

In fact, we live in a society where impatience, intolerance, oversensitivity, and the impulse of anger are prevalent. And we know that this world is driven by Satan, and it is amazing how even we can be wrapped up in this attitude, in this mindset. We are not immune to it ourselves, mainly because we are not wired that way. Too many of us think that being patient with someone is a trial in itself. But there will always be someone or something in this world that will try our patience. It can be a stranger, but most often it is people that we know, that we are around all the time, that we are close to—especially friends, family, even church members, and in our marriages. These are the people that we are around the most. And I have to say, when we look at long-lasting marriages, usually there is one mate out of the two that is very patient. And I have that in Jackie.

There are many times our patience will be tested, and often the example that everyone likes to use is the example of driving in traffic. And I read a quote about it which I really liked: Patience is something you admire in the driver behind you, but not so much in the driver ahead of you. I think this is a very accurate assessment of the subject.

But in our Christian walk, in our relationship with God, patience is a key component.

> **Psalm 37:7-9** (ESV) Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for [H]im; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

So patience, endurance, and longsuffering, these are three key components of our spiritual life and building trust and a close relationship with our God. Developing patience and longsuffering can be a very profound challenge, since human nature looks only for self-preservation and comfort. We do live

in a culture that wants instant gratification, and I believe this is a mindset that breeds self-centeredness.

Now, self-centeredness and patience are psychological opposites because they fundamentally contradict each other in practice. Self-centeredness focuses entirely on me. It operates in the belief that your time, your needs, and your schedule are more important than anything else in the room. Whereas patience focuses on the situation, the other. It requires you to look beyond yourself and accept that the world does not revolve around you and your timeline.

As we know, patience and longsuffering are among the fruits of God's Holy Spirit, and I do not know about you, but I think maybe they are the two that we most struggle with sometimes. You know, you have all heard the prayer, "Lord, give me patience, and give it to me now!" Well, that is not what God really wants to see in us. God does not work that way, and anything worthwhile usually does not come quickly. Patience is something that we do not develop in a day. It is actually a lifetime struggle. And again, I do believe that patience, endurance, and longsuffering may be the most difficult aspects of our human nature to overcome.

Please turn to James chapter 1. Another very familiar scripture on this subject.

> **James 1:2** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, . . .

Another word here that could be used for trouble is temptations, trouble. The Message Bible reads it this way: "Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides." That is just the opposite of how we normally feel. It is a punishment; we feel like we are being done wrong, and it is very hard to look at a trial in a positive way. And there in verse 2, it says the word "when." And when indicates that there is going to be a long road before you, and there will be suffering, there will be trials, and it will not be easy. In other words, be ready to suffer long.

> **James 1:3** . . . knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

> **James 1:12** Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

You know, just as a fine work of art can only be made a perfect vessel through shaping and molding by a master craftsman, we are lucky and pleased and blessed to have a master craftsman as our Father and Savior. And thankfully so, because that is to know that He is willing to work with you and to mold you in His Spirit, and that you are something special to Him. So when trials come, when the temptations come—that is why it says rejoice—because knowing that it is God that is working with you, and He loves you.

At the beginning, I said patience is called a virtue. What is a virtue, and why is it important? The word virtue is synonymous with having a noble character. It simply means the quality or practice of moral excellence, as one of the central tenets of becoming like God. Let us go to Galatians chapter 5, verses 22 and 23. These are the fruits of the Spirit, and each of these are, by the way, virtues of God.

> **Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

You see, Paul is showing us that to live a life as God lives, we must be characterized by His own traits, and they can all be summed up in one word, and that is love, because God is love.

Then in Colossians chapter 3 and verse 12, it says,

> **Colossians 3:12** Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; . . .

Here, longsuffering is *Strong's* #3115, and I am not going to try to pronounce it, so I am going to spell it for you: *makrothumia*. And what that word means is longsuffering, patience, endurance, forbearance, and perseverance. And so patience and longsuffering are a part of God's Holy Spirit, and they are essential in building and enjoying a wholesome life, and very important in the building of healthy relationships.

Then in verse 13:

> **Colossians 3:13** . . . bearing one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

Bearing with one another and forgiving one another, that is patience, and that is longsuffering in action. That is what the Holy Spirit is for. That is what the fruits are for, is to be put into action. And this gives us the opportunity to rely solely on God when we are dealing with others.

So these three words, longsuffering, patience, and endurance, their definitions are very, very close, almost overlapping, but they are vital to each other. The difference between these three words is very subtle, and maybe not obvious at first glance, but they are different, and they are vital when comprehending the faith that God expects from us. Understanding these words and applying them helps us to comprehend faith as God sees faith, and it is faithful.

Now, patience means staying calm when dealing with delays, waiting, or annoying situations; accepting it peacefully. Patience is the power and a tool within ourselves that allows us to know that in this present age there will be discomfort, but eventually there will be an end to that.

The word longsuffering is made up of two Greek words meaning long and temper, literally long-tempered. To be longsuffering, then, is to have self-resilience when you are stirred to anger. So longsuffering is an extension of patience, characterized by enduring when suffering long-term difficulties, hardships, mistreatment, pain, or some relenting struggle, and handling it without complaints. It involves a deeper emotional reliance. It often pertains to enduring the faults or shortcomings of others, patiently forbearing others over extended time, and it deals with illnesses and sicknesses as well.

And the word endurance means having the strength to keep going through long-term pain, discomforts, and adversities. Endurance is the ability to withstand. It is the staying power while waiting for a remedy. Endurance involves holding up under heavy loads without giving up or surrendering to the circumstances. Just surviving sometimes is the best we are going to do in this life.

I was not sure if I should talk about myself because I can get emotional, as you know. But I have dealt with epilepsy since I was 19, and there have been difficult times. Now, there are times that it has gone very easy for me, and I do not ever notice it, but I am aware of it every day in one aspect or another. And I do what it takes to keep it under control. And I think of Paul, because I have had hands laid upon me in my life for healing, and it is still here, it is still there. And so I think of Paul when he talked about the constant thorn in his side.

And I know that there are so many, and after the announcement today my issues do not compare with the life struggles that so many of you are going through. But know that it has a purpose. God knows the purpose. We may not know the purpose in the moment, but God does. One thing I do know: the trials humble us, and when we humble ourselves, we are able to see a little clearer how small we are and how great God is.

Part of being a Christian is the ability to accept the unfortunate circumstances gracefully, while having faith that they will ultimately find a solution in God. Remember the song by the Rolling Stones? They sang, "You can't always get what you want, but you just might find you get what you need." You know, God simply does not give us what we want. He is not

in the business of spoiling us, you might say. He is in the business of shaping us. And His approach with us is to give us what we need rather than what we want.

We must always remember that God cares about your eternal destiny, your eternal life, more than your current situation or comfort. Is it possible that being uncomfortable now is for the greater good, for later? The answer is yes. We have to endure today for what He is molding us into for our future. It is difficult to go through trials, but please know there is a reason for it. There is a purpose for it.

Please turn to Romans 5. These are some of the most encouraging verses on this subject, I believe. The heading in my Bible in this chapter says Faith Triumphs in Trouble.

> **Romans 5:1-5** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into His grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The thought that we should glory or rejoice in sufferings goes totally against human nature, totally against it. But it does not go against God's. It truly takes a godly perspective and godly faith and trust, and remember that God is working things through you, and that He is working for your best and for your good. Trials will change the course of our lives. Trials strengthen our weaknesses. Trials also open up doors, leading us closer to a relationship with God, to God's perfect will in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

> **Colossians 1:10-11** That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.

And yes, it does say suffering with joy. It takes you back to James 1:2, where it says, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." God wants us to trust Him, and to know that His promise is that He promises to strengthen us by His glorious power. And so patience, endurance, and longsuffering are gifts of God.

And as I earlier said, patience is a virtue. Virtues are not virtues until they are tested. We do not have patience until we are tested and are able to endure and suffer long. Faith is a virtue. Our faith is not faith until it is tested, and it is the very testing of our faith that purifies. Our faith is created slowly by our patience and our ability to endure everything that this world throws at us. And brethren, we will fail, we will make mistakes one after another, we will fall short, and we will sin against God. But thankfully, we have a God who is a God of patience and longsuffering, and that is His Spirit in action.

> **Romans 15:4** For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Here, Paul speaks of patience and comfort coming from the Scriptures. As I was thinking about this, I remember there are so many things that we can learn from the stories throughout the Scriptures to give us strength that we might endure.

Think about Joseph. Joseph was sold into slavery and imprisoned, but Joseph maintained patience and integrity, ultimately rising into power in Egypt and reconciling with his brothers. You can read that in Genesis 37. How about Hannah? Hannah suffered for years being barren, and was mocked for being barren, but she remained faithful in her prayers, eventually being blessed with a son named Samuel. That is in I Samuel 1.

You can read about David. There are so many scriptures about David, and they record his trials. We see his failures, one right after another. We see him overcome, then we see him fail again, and we see him overcome, and we see him fail. But he never gave up. Not until, and I think it is safe to say, especially since it is so recorded, that we are seeing that it took David a lifetime to overcome, but he did. It is because of God that gives us patience.

Throughout the Gospels, we saw how Peter struggled, and we see how Christ was patient with him, and we must have the same determination not to give up after our failures, like David and Peter. We must beg God for forgiveness and for His patience with us, to help us keep pushing forward. And thankfully, patience is a major characteristic of our God, and each of us should be greatly grateful for that.

> **Romans 15:5** Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Jesus Christ.

None of us have ever come close to exhibiting patience like God. Back in II Peter 3, verse 9 (I am reading a lot of verses, but there are a lot of good verses here):

> **II Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Our God is a God of patience, and His patience with all mankind is beyond understanding, especially when it comes to us. And I am thankful that He is patient with us, and we need to be as patient with others as He is with us.

Please turn to I Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 14:

> **I Thessalonians 5:14** Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

I think this goes back to my opening story that began with the kindhearted inspector. Goodness, kindness, and patience is what the widow desperately needed, just a small act of kindness. Now, we will never know how much that impacted that lady's life at that time. It may have given her hope that there was still some good in the world. And I know the patience of that inspector impacted her greatly, to the point that I know that it is still vivid in her mind, and also in mine.

As children of God, patience and longsuffering must be a part of our daily lives. Patience with everyone is the way that God lives. And by the way, it is not just with the brethren, it is not just with our families, but to those that are unkind to us, folks that we do not know. We need to have this attitude with everyone. Remember, the definition of patience is bearing up with annoyance or any pain without complaint.

As we work through our tests and our trials, I believe it will give you a greater stamina to pray for others, to have more compassion for those that are hurting. Knowing God knows, and that He allows trials, will hopefully help you to learn to take your focus off of your troubles and put them into God's hands, and unload your burdens at His feet. That is what He wants us to do. That is our faith. That is trust.

I Peter chapter 5, verse 10, this is from the RSV:

> **I Peter 5:10** After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will [H] imself restore, establish, and strengthen you.

It is a fascinating story from the Olympics back in 1968, and it took place in Mexico City. There was a marathon runner, and his name was John Stephen Akhwari. He was from Tanzania. I do not know if you know the story. While competing in the marathon, at the 12-mile mark of the race, there was some jockeying about for position between some of the other runners, and one of them hit him, bumped him, and he fell, badly wounding his shoulder and dislocating his knee. His knee was bleeding, and there was someone there to bandage it, but he refused to stop.

Now, considering the severity of his injuries, Akhwari was repeatedly asked to quit the race, but he refused to do so. He continued by walking, limping, and running, even to the point where he was plunged into darkness. He kept running, and I saw a video of this where a single police car drove behind him with its lights on to make sure that no one would hit him. After 3 hours and 25 minutes, he eventually finished among the 57 competitors that competed that day. Oh, by the way, 75 runners started the race, 18 dropped out.

When he entered the stadium, there were only a few thousand people left there that night, and a TV crew was sent out when they heard the word that there was a runner about to finish the race. And as he reached the finish line, there were cheers that came up from that small, little crowd. His bravery in competing the distance injured and alone was immediately noticed by the international media, an example of Olympic spirit. One journalist wrote, "Today we have seen a performance that gives meaning to the word courage." And when he was interviewed, they asked him, "Why do you keep running?" And he said, "Well, my country did not send me 5,000 miles to start a race. They sent me 5,000 miles to finish a race." Although his body was exhausted, his perseverance, his endurance, brought him to the finish line.

You see, patience, longsuffering, and endurance is defined as steadfastness in doing something despite the difficulty or delay in achieving that success. Perseverance can bring the best out of a person. Akhwari's story reminds us that it is not just about how you start a race, but how you finish it.

The apostle Paul echoes this statement in II Timothy chapter 4 and verse 7, where he said,

> **II Timothy 4:7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

You see, Paul understood the true measure of success is not in the beginning of the race, but it is finishing strong. It is about staying the course, and even when the path is rough and the finish line seems distant, keep going.

In Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 and 2, it says,

> **Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He finished the race. He endured. He is our example. And that is a joy that has been set before us. If you and I can just visualize that same hope, we will endure. And remember, in Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 5, which is so important: God will never leave you nor forsake you—never.

So whether you are facing a personal challenge or difficult season in your life, traumatic health issues, keep running, keep pushing, and finish the race with perseverance and grace. It does not matter if you stumble or fall. What matters is that you get back up and you keep going, and you finish strong, because God has given you everything you need to cross that finish line, and He is with you every step of the way.

And finally, Lamentations chapter 3 and verse 24:

> **Lamentations 3:24** "The Lord is my portion," says my soul;
> "therefore I hope in Him!"