

## 9 Flavors, 1 Fruit - Patience

Patience is a virtue we love...in other people, but it's not something we want to have to demonstrate in our own lives. Colossians 3:12 says, *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."* This sounds very similar to Galatians 5:22-23 which says, *"the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance (or patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."* We come to the fourth attribute of the fruit of the Spirit— patience.

I asked myself, thinking of what Paul wrote to the Colossians, "What does it mean to clothe myself in patience?" To clothe yourself in something is to put it on. It goes on the outside. It's what others see. To clothe myself in patience means that is what I display toward others, even if it isn't what I feel on the inside. Not that we fake it. We genuinely want to love others. But we need put it on, so to speak, even when our feeling aren't quite there yet.

Sometimes you dress how you feel, and other times you dress how you want to feel. You with me? There are days when you don't feel very good, and you're just going to lie on the couch and binge Netflix and so you put on sweats and a ratty old tee shirt, right? But other times you want to look the part, and so you dress for part—a first date, a job interview, a big presentation.

Garrett, I have to imagine the first time you put on that uniform was a pretty powerful experience. It brought something out of you. It made you feel something inside. It gave you an ideal you wanted to live up to.

When we clothe ourselves in patience, we not only display patience toward others, but it brings something out of us as well. It inspires us to become more than we already are. We become more like Jesus. This is why the Spirit is producing in us love, joy, peace, patience, and all of these qualities.

There was a time when nothing was more comfortable that pair of 501 Levis, a cotton tee shirt, and a pair of white leather New Balance. But my choice in clothing has changed over the years.

In recent years, I've become a fan of technical fabrics. These are modern, advanced materials that combine natural fibers like cotton or wool with high-tech manufactured materials designed to perform very specific roles in your clothing. I have pants that stretch and flex in all the right places so that I'm comfortable no matter what position I'm in. You add the right threads and you get fabric that is light and airy but also protects you from the sun. Swap out only 5% of the threads for something else and you get a very soft weave that wicks moisture away from your skin.

When we clothe ourselves in these Spirit like qualities, it's like the different threads of a technical fabric. Each fiber fills a different role in our character. When we clothe ourselves in just a little patience, it allows us to be more flexible. We can stretch with the demands placed

on us. We can give a little more to the abrasive personalities around us, without breaking. Greater flexibility with more durability. That's what patience does for us.

### **Suffering mistreatment**

The Bible describes patience in multiple ways. The first thing patience enables us to do is suffer mistreatment. The old King James translation used a word here in Galatians 5:22 that we don't use anymore, but it beautifully describes this kind of patience – long-suffering- the ability to suffer a long time.

It isn't just that we are able to endure mistreatment, but that we bear up under it without growing resentful or bitter. This habit can serve you well in all sorts of occasions from enduring an almost innocent practical joke in good humor to the way we respond to malicious wrongs. When you're the victim of office politics or organizational power plays, the follower of Jesus must be long- suffering. The believing husband or wife who is mistreated by an unbelieving spouse needs this kind of patience.

The apostle Paul stressed the need for long-suffering in our lives. It's this long-suffering kind of patience that Paul has in mind in Colossians 3, when he tells us to clothe ourselves in patience. How do we develop this habit of long-suffering? First, we must trust in the justice of God. When you're treated unjustly, your instinctive response is to say, "This isn't fair. This isn't right." And yet we're not always in a position to demand fairness, and even when we are, we often cause more damage than we fix, and we destroy our out attitude in the process.

But this all changes when we know that God is a good God and God of justice. We know He will set all things right ultimately. Isaiah 30:18 says, *"For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him."* Be patient; God will make it right. A huge part of patience is the ability to wait on God to make things right in the way that He knows is best.

The apostle Peter holds up Jesus as our supreme example of this in the way he responded to those who mistreated him, *"When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."*

But we aren't just trusting in the justice of God, we are also trusting in the faithfulness of God. This is more than God saying "I'll deal with it later, but you'll have to put up with it for now." We have a deeply held conviction that even right now God is working his plan beneath the surface. Regardless of what others intend, we know that God, in His power and wisdom can bring something good out of it.

The greatest example of this in Scripture is Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers. Years later, God brings Joseph to a position of power in Egypt where he saves his brothers and furthers God's plan. In Genesis 50:20, Joseph declares, *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people[a] should be kept alive, as they*

*are today.”*

When we fail to be patient in the face of mistreatment from others, we don't allow the goodness of God to do its thing. We may achieve our limited notion of justice rather than allow goodness to have the last word.

### **Slow to Anger**

Another level of patience is being slow to anger. Being patient means having a long fuse. It burns a really long time before you go boom. This is an attribute of God Himself. God describes himself in Exodus 34:6-7 as *“slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”*

This is why James tells us in James 1:19-20, *“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”* Paul says that love is not *“easily angered”*.

Being quick tempered will always make you the opposite of godly. When you fly off the handle you always go in the opposite direction Jesus wants you to go. We discipline our children out of anger, while God disciplines out of love. We are eager to punish those who mistreats us, while God is eager to forgive. We desire to express our authority, while God desires to show His love.

Being slow to anger doesn't mean ignoring the provocations of others; it simply responds in a godly fashion. Patience enables us to control our tempers to seek deal with the person rather than the provocation. This allows us to heal relationships rather than aggravate problems. It seeks the ultimate good of the other person, rather than the immediate satisfaction of our own anger.

Let me talk to the quick tempered among us. No, you don't have to raise your hand, and I'm guessing that's most of us, at least in certain situations. You may be cool as a cucumber most of the time, but you get in traffic on 44, then suddenly you're a cauldron of anger ready to boil over, or maybe its when you get to work and you discover you have to spend the day working with THEM, or its when your neighbor goes off on one of their stupid tangents, or that one relative comes for a visit. You know which one I'm talking about, and that's when your fuse goes from 50 feet long to about 5 millimeters real quick.

Being slow to anger means we have to quit offering excuses for losing our temper. *“That's just the way I am. I can't help it.”* And we have our reasons, *“I'm redhead. I have an Irish temper. I'm too old to change now.”* We do some victim blaming, *“You shouldn't have provoked me. You should have known that would set me off.”*

The excuses have to stop. A short temper is not a character trait. It's a character flaw, and it can change. The forgiveness of Jesus on the cross through the power of the Holy Spirit in your life can produce within you the fruit of patience.

Acknowledge your quick temper as a sinful habit before God, and before your family, your friends, you coworkers, whoever gets caught in the blast radius of your temper. This is what the Bible calls confession. We must confess our sin to God and to those we sin against. Quit acting like you can't help it, and accept personal responsibility in how you choose to respond.

Another thing you need to do is apologize whenever you do lose your temper. Don't call it something else. Don't downplay it. Own it. Apologize and ask for forgiveness. You aren't going to change it, if you don't identify it and call it out. So apologize to the person you just verbally assaulted. This builds humility and an awareness of your own sinfulness before God.

Habitual sinful patterns are not easily broken, and that's what character flaws are. They are habitual, sinful patterns, and you're going to mess up. That's okay, but you have to get started on this journey. You can change, and God's Spirit will change you, but if you never start down that path, you'll never make the journey. In the words of Proverbs 24:16, *"though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again."*

### **Tolerating shortcomings**

Another level of patience is tolerating the shortcomings of others. It is likely that we have far more opportunity to show patience when dealing with minor flaws or those glitches of personality that sometimes annoy us, than we do the purposeful mistreatment or provocation. People are people and that means that they sometimes do things that irritate us. There's nothing intentional or malicious in this, it's just that other people aren't us.

It may be that driver in front of us that's driving way too slow, or that person behind wants to drive way too fast. It's that girl at the next table who's talking on her phone way too loud, or that neighbor that fires up their weedeater way too early, or that person at church that tells stories way too long, or that preacher who tells jokes that are so unfunny.

This is especially true with those close to us, because we have ample opportunity to see all their annoying traits. Our husbands and wives, our kids and parents, have little maddening habits that get under our skin, except you honey. You're perfect. Living in any marriage, any family, any church requires the patience to tolerate such shortcomings.

Jerry Bridges points out that such annoyance at the shortcomings of others has its roots in pride. Our impatience stems from the belief that we are smarter or better than that other person at whom we are internally rolling our eyes. Even if we are, Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 4:7 that whatever abilities we possess have been given to us by God, so we have no reason to ACT like we are any better than anyone else.

This tolerant patience is what Paul had in mind when he writes in Ephesians 4:2, *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."* This is literally the idea of "putting up with" someone. This is a gracious tolerance of each other's imperfections.

Let me tell you something about the shortcomings of others. You're human too. We all have annoying habits. We all say stupid things. We are all capable of driving perfectly reasonable, sane people absolutely nuts. I accepted long ago that I would never want to meet myself, because I know I would drive me nuts, and I don't want to face that awful truth about me.

Apply this to a church setting. You could define a church, at least on a certain level, as a group of people who've mutually agreed to tolerate each other's annoyances. If you can't do that, you can't make it in a church. Right after Paul calls us to be patient bearing with one another in love, he says, "*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*" So, one of the keys to unity is our ability to be patient with each other's shortcomings.

Right after Paul tells us to clothe ourselves in patience in Colossians 3, he goes on to say in verse 13, "*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.*" Grievances in this verse carries the idea not of major offense, but of those petty slights and irritations that can wear on a relationship like a pebble in a shoe.

Such tolerant patience doesn't mean we can't ever address a major wrong or irritating habit in someone else's life. But it does mean we should only do so with the right attitude and right approach. The recipe for the right attitude is all the essential ingredients of godly patience—humility, kindness, gentleness, and compassion. We never seek to belittle, but only build up.

Jesus describes the right approach in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7. We should never seek to remove the irritating speck of sawdust in our brother's eye, until we first remove plank from our own eye. That plank may be our own irritating habit, a wrong attitude toward our brother or sister, a judgmental spirit or any apparent hypocrisy in our own life. Only then should we lovingly confront and offer to help the other person.

### **Waiting on God**

There is one final area of patience I want to address, and it may be the most important, because all of the others hinge on our ability to do this. You ever find yourself saying something like this, "What's taking him so long? What is she possibly doing? It's taking her forever!" Do you ever feel that way about God? What's taking him so long? Why doesn't he do something?

But there's a huge difference between waiting on God and waiting on your spouse, your kids, or your friend. God is always on time. God never shows up a minute too early or a second too late. If God tells you, "Five more minutes," it's your watch that's off, not His.

The problem stems from our experience and perception of time being so different from His. The apostle Peter, in his second letter addresses this concern. Some of the Christians he was writing to were beginning to think that God was taking too long. "God made these promises. Why isn't He fulfilling them? What's the hold up?"

*8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand*

*years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

Maybe you're right there with these 1<sup>st</sup> Century believers. For years, you've been praying for the salvation of a loved one. You've been seeking the resolution of a debilitating problem, or you've been desperately hoping for the fulfillment of a long-awaited desire, a good desire.

Like Abraham and Sarah waiting on the birth of Isaac, or King Saul anxiously awaiting the arrival of the prophet Samuel to offer sacrifice before battle, we get impatient with God, we want God to hurry up, and so we take matters into our own hands, and make a mess of it.

We are creatures of time; He is creator of time. That means our perception and experience of time will differ vastly. The problem is that things that we wish would take a thousand years feel like they come at us in a day, and the things we want to happen in a day, seem to take a thousand years.

But our calendars only take into account what we want, but God's calendar takes into account everything. This is where we have to learn to wait on God, to trust in His timing. God promises to reward our trusting patience. David writes in Psalm 40,

*1 I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry.  
2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;  
he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.*

The ability to patiently wait on God's timing is what the Scriptures call perseverance or endurance. There's several reasons God may be making you wait— it's not time yet; God is still putting all the pieces into place. It could be that you're not ready yet, you've still got some growing to do. God may also have a different plan for you, and He's WAITING on YOU to come to that realization. Think about that. Sometimes, when we're waiting on God, the truth is He's waiting on us.

Just because we're waiting on God, doesn't mean God is doing nothing. It just means God is working behind the scenes. He's doing things in people and in places you can't see.

He's also doing things in you. God is changing you while you wait. That's what this fruit of the Spirit is all about, God's Spirit growing and producing these things in us, and that takes time.

Waiting on the Lord may be an uncomfortable process, but it is always a worthwhile process, because it's a growing process. Isaiah 40:31 promises, *"they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint."*

In this time of waiting, we learn to trust in God. We learn that God is still in control, even when we can't see it. In this time of waiting, the more we seek God in prayer, the deeper our prayer

life becomes. We learn to pray for the right things. We learn to listen for the right answers.

And the message of God's word is clear—perseverance will be rewarded. Waiting on the Lord is always a worthwhile process. Hebrews 10:36, *"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."*

James 1:12, *"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."*

Ultimately, all the patience that we have to show, to anyone anywhere, comes down to our ability to wait on God. If God is ultimately the one in control, if God really does have a plan for our lives, that means that any time I'm waiting on somebody or waiting on something, I'm really waiting on God. Does He really got this? Does He really know what He's doing?

He does. He knows what He's doing. He's got this, and He's got you. Instead of just asking you to wait on God, let me ask it this way. Are you willing to wait on an all-powerful God? A God so powerful that he hung all the stars in space, all septillion of them? A God so powerful He can do more than you can ask and imagine? Can you wait on a God like that?

Are you willing to wait on an all knowing God? A God who not only knows everything about you, how many hairs are on your head, what you dreamed about last night, what you had for dinner 11 years ago last Tuesday, and the last time you hummed that song by that band you don't admit to anyone that you like, but He knows you do. He knows everything about every problem you will ever face. He knows more than Google could ever search for you. Are you willing to wait on a God who has that kind of knowledge?

Are you willing to wait on a God who is all present? Everywhere, anywhere, all the time. There are no locked doors that keep him out. There are no passwords secure anything from his presence. There are no secret thoughts beyond his view. He's got people everywhere. He can act anywhere. He has an all access pass to everything. Isn't it worth waiting on a God like that?

Are you willing to wait on a God that loves you beyond measure? More than every valentine ever given? More than every love poem ever written, and every love song ever sung? A God that loves you so much that he gave his only Son that you might believe in him, just so that you can have an everlasting relationship with Him? That's what eternal life is. It's to have a forever relationship with a God that loves you that much. Can't we wait on a God who loves us like that?