



## Patience

*The fourth in a series of nine leadership devotionals based on the fruit of the Spirit*

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### Scripture Passages

*“Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.” (Ecclesiastes 7:8)*

*“But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.” (Luke 8:15)*

**Theme: No time to wait: The disappointing effects of impatience.**

We live in a world that seems to run on one speed, fast-forward. Everyday leaders and followers feel the effects of having too much to do and not enough time in which to do it. At work, in our communities, and in our families we are pressed from every side to accomplish, acquire, and provide more and more as time races by. Stretched beyond ourselves in every imaginable dimension of human existence, we race against our own internal clocks, trading our circadian rhythms for power breakfasts, working lunches, and “express” 30-minute, full-body workouts. There is no time to waste so we keep pushing ourselves toward the next achievement, the next conquest, the next important “thing,” expecting—no demanding-- results now. Eventually, we may become aware, however vaguely, of changes in our personalities including impatience with ourselves and others but, lacking a quick explanation for the changes, dismiss those insights by saying something like, “I’m just not myself lately” or “If only I had a little more time...” Impatience makes us do strange things like slip into the express check-out lane with more than 10 items in our shopping cart or drive along like we don’t realize our lane will end when we drive that route everyday then merge in at the last minute, cutting someone off who had been in line.

At work, impatience causes us to make snap judgments about people, to make unreasonable demands of them, to speak disrespectfully, to push our agendas regardless of the impact on others, to be angry, sarcastic, and even mean. We don't intend to behave this way because, after all, we're good people, right? No, we're not! We are selfish, sinful people, remember? In our human condition, we more closely resemble impatient ruffians in David's psalm (see Psalm 86:14-15) than the merciful, gracious, and patient God we serve, although we would never admit it. The false self will have its needs satisfied according to its self-styled timeline. And the fast pace of our lives provides the perfect camouflage for the false self's impatient, unbridled pursuits. Even our desires for holiness and patience are pursued in the fast lane: "Lord give me patience but I want it right *now*!"

It's a bit ironic, therefore, that against this backdrop of hyperactivity, *patience* emerges on Kriger and Seng's list of most desired spiritual values at work. Apparently, we know patience's value, either intuitively or explicitly, and want *others* to demonstrate it at work, but patience takes time and everyone is in such a hurry that it is not commonly observed. We cannot be patient in a hurry, for patience is, by its nature, an attitude that requires endurance over time, whether a few minutes or years. Patience is not hasty or impetuous. In Greek, patience, or endurance, (*hupomone*) means "to remain under, i.e. to persevere, endure, sustain...bear up under...as a load of miseries, adversities, persecutions or provocations *with faith* (emphasis added)."<sup>1</sup> That adversity might be a career-altering event such as loss of job or health or a financial loss brought about by a weak economy. It could be any situation or condition that aggravates our emotional programs for happiness over which we have no control. Regardless of the situation, *hupomone* patience requires a conscious effort to constrain our first impulse to complain or strike back in order to consider the broader, even eternal implications of our actions, and endure to the end of the challenge *with faith*. It is not a passive apathy toward the situation, but "represents a peculiar form of acting"<sup>2</sup> *because of* (not *in spite of*) the situation. In essence, patience is the active choice made in favor of allowing God's compassion to be revealed through us. McNeill, Morrison and Nouwen write, "This becomes obvious when we realize that the word *compassion* could be read as *com-patience*...The compassionate life could be described as a life lived patiently with others"<sup>3</sup> and that is the whole of what Jesus did throughout His ministry on earth and still does today as He lives with and in and through each of us. And, as Jesus endured with faith in His Father (see John 5:19, 11:41-41, 12:27-28), we must also be patient in suffering—with faith in Him (see Luke 21:12-16).

Compassion, *hupomone*, is also the word Jesus used when He explained the parable of the sower and the seed to his disciples. He taught that the Word of God, when planted and held in "the good and honest heart...renewed and sanctified by God"<sup>4</sup> would bear fruit "with patient endurance" (Luke 8:15). Notice that He didn't say that the Word would produce fruit instantly, rather, He taught that its effects would be borne

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<sup>1</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary New Testament*. (Chattanooga: AMG 1993) 1424.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Gray, "On Patience: Human and Divine," *Cross Currents* 4 (1975): 411 30 Dec. 2006 First Search, ATLA Religion.

<sup>3</sup> Donald McNeill, Douglas Morrison and Henri Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*. (New York: Doubleday 1982) 92.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible Volume III: Matthew-Revelation*. (Peabody: Hendrickson 1985) 63.

through a lifetime of hardships patiently endured. Unfortunately, we most commonly read this passage and focus on the type of “soil” required for producing fruit (roadside, rocky, thorny or “good”) and overlook or minimize patience as a crucial component of the good soil. If we read this text carefully, we can readily see how patience is the element, “...by which God’s life-giving presence becomes manifest. Patience is the quality of those who are the rich soil in which the seed can produce ‘its crop a hundredfold.’”<sup>5</sup> And because bearing fruit is Jesus’ stated goal for His disciples (see Matthew 3:8-10, 7:16 and John 15:16), He wants patience to be central in our lives. How? McNeill et al. paint a marvelous illustration:

Patience means to enter actively into the thick of life and to fully bear the suffering in and around us... Patience requires us to go beyond the choice between fleeing or fighting... Patience involves staying with it, living through it, listening carefully to what presents itself to us here and now. Patience means stopping on the road when someone in pain needs immediate attention. Patience means overcoming fear of a controversial subject. It means paying attention to shameful memories and searching for forgiveness without having to forget. It means welcoming sincere criticism and evaluating changing conditions. In short, patience is a willingness to be influenced even when this requires giving up control and entering into unknown territory.”<sup>6</sup>

If God’s *agape* love, *simhah* joy, and *shalom* peace are allowed to thrive within us, the ability to act thusly, to endure situations and people calmly and without complaint but also with compassion and understanding, becomes an outward expression of His character abiding in us as we abide in Him. No longer captive to the false self, we are free to slow down, to look for God in every situation, to suffer with Him in injustice, to abide so closely in Him that we are aware of His guidance and counsel before acting or speaking, free to yield our ideas and need for recognition and praise to God’s timing remembering that He works all things out so, through it all, we may be transformed more and more into Jesus’ image (Romans 8:28). We become wonderfully free to see trials and hardships as a means to God’s *eternal* end rather than as ends unto themselves. When we shift our perspective to the broader, longer view, we align our way of thinking to God’s and actually “...participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world.”<sup>7</sup> Failure to do so will only result in boredom, frustration, revulsion, and impatience with God, self, and others.

In the Old Testament, Solomon realized this great truth after years of impatiently racing to find the meaning of life. You will recall that Solomon, although he possessed unimaginable earthly wealth and wisdom, fell victim to his own short-term, humanistic understanding of life and work. In Ecclesiastes, he reveals that he has seen all the world has to offer and has done it all (Solomon has “been there, done that, got the tee-shirt”) “only to discover that “meaning” eludes” it all.<sup>8</sup> His fundamental problem, and ours as it turns out, “is the inversion of

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<sup>5</sup> McNeill et al. 94.

<sup>6</sup> McNeill et al. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Gray 421

<sup>8</sup> Susan Andrews, “Ecclesiastes 7:1-19.” *Interpretation* 55:3 (July 2001): 299 11 Jan. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

society (3:16)”<sup>9</sup> and his advice throughout the book is therefore focused on how to survive “with dignity in a dehumanizing and annihilating reality.”<sup>10</sup> This, he teaches, is possible only when we “receive life as a gift from God and take advantage of the gratifying moments that humanize even when they seem insignificant”<sup>11</sup> because everything in life *does* have its own rhythm and season that cannot and will not be rushed or abbreviated. It is this philosophy that causes Solomon to proclaim that “Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit” (Ecclesiastes 7:8) for Solomon learned that nothing is gained by impatience. In fact, impatience robs us of the opportunity to find God “in the details of the daily grind of living...the glory of the ordinary”<sup>12</sup> because we are so consumed with *ourselves*. We lose sight of the end result God might be trying to affect and try to force a premature outcome in order to relieve suffering, dissatisfaction, and pain.

Jesus demonstrated the impact of this perspective throughout His ministry and even in His death, His unfaltering obedience to His Father and merciful forgiveness toward man – the products of perfect patience; “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before the shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). Certainly Jesus’ attitude toward suffering was unique; “He encountered suffering and death with his eyes wide open...his whole life a conscious preparation for them. Jesus didn’t commend them as desirable things; but he does speak of them as realities we ought not to repudiate, avoid, or cover up.”<sup>13</sup> And through His example, we learn that when we empty ourselves by giving up our “right” to success, recognition, wealth, health, and even happiness, so that everything we are and hope to be, have and hope to have, is now and forever determined by and found in God, He extends the Divine opportunity for us “to participate in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world.”<sup>14</sup>

In Jesus, we learn that when we finally empty ourselves of ourselves, or *kenosis* in Greek which means the divestiture of “rightful dignity by descending to an inferior condition”<sup>15</sup> (see Philippians 2:6-8), patience will become as natural to us as impatience once was.

But we should not be deceived into thinking that hardships and suffering always come by way of deficiency or strife. Like Solomon “in all his splendor” (see Matthew 6:29), trials may occur in the midst of blessing when we

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<sup>9</sup> Elsa Tamez, “Ecclesiastes: A Reading from the Periphery.” Interpretation 55:3 (July 2001):251 11 Jan. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

<sup>10</sup> Tamez 256

<sup>11</sup> Tamez 258

<sup>12</sup> Greg Parsons, “Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Ecclesiastes, Part 1.” Bibliotheca Sacra 160 (April-June 2003): 169 11 Jan. 2007 First Search, ATLA Religion.

<sup>13</sup> Henri Nouwen, Letters to Marc About Jesus: Living a Spiritual Life in a Material World. (San Francisco: Harper 1988) 29.

<sup>14</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison. (New York: Macmillan 1962) 220.

<sup>15</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed, The Complete WordStudy Dictionary New Testament. (Chattanooga: AMG 1993) 857.

must deny ourselves that which we know is not pleasing to God. Even in abundance, it is easy to become impatient to gain more or to maintain what we currently have. Instead of calmly enjoying God's blessing and provision and patiently waiting for His further direction in our lives, the impatient false self tells us there's still more, something better to be accomplished, conquered, and obtained.

If we understand both adversity and prosperity as means toward a spiritual end, we will find contentment in both (see Philippians 4:11-12), embracing them as implements for God's work in our hearts. As we learn to bear our own burdens patiently, we will become humble, more patient and gracious with our followers as they bear theirs (see Romans 15:1), and even find ourselves coming alongside to shore them up (see Galatians 6:2). We will become more tolerant of circumstances that appear to be beyond our control and more appreciative of our blessings, because we have surrendered ourselves in obedient submission to God who requires that in *all* circumstances we demonstrate His *agape* love to others.

The prominent early Christian apologist Tertullian (ca. 115-230) declares that faith, hope, and agape love (charity) are impossible without patience, making it all the more essential to spiritual health. But if we view difficulty as the end itself, our false self will rail against it, lashing out at those who frustrate our emotional programs for happiness, cheating us out of an opportunity to be transformed. Peter sums it up neatly, "Learn to put aside your own desires so that you will become patient and godly" (2 Peter 1:6).

## **Leadership and Organizational Development Concept**

Leader/follower relationship, Kenotic leadership

## **Wisdom of the Ages**

*"For by whose teachings but those of Patience is Charity—the highest sacrament of the faith, the treasure-house of the Christian name, which the apostle commends with the whole strength of the Holy Spirit—trained? "Charity," he says, "is long suffering;" thus she applies patience: "is beneficent;" Patience does no evil: "is not emulous;" that certainly is a peculiar mark of patience: "savours not of violence:" she has drawn her self-restraint from patience: "is not puffed up; is not violent;" for that pertains not unto patience: "nor does she seek her own" if, she offers her own, provided she may benefit her neighbours: "nor is irritable;" if she were, what would she have left to Impatience? Accordingly he says, "Charity endures all things; tolerates all things;" of course because she is patient. Justly, then, "will she never fail;" for all other things will be cancelled, will have their consummation. "Tongues, sciences, prophecies, become exhausted; faith, hope, charity, are permanent:" Faith, which Christ's patience introduced; hope, which man's patience waits for; charity, which Patience accompanies, with God as Master."*

~Tertullian, "On Patience," Chapter 12, Menzies, ed.

## **Example of the Devotional**

Sam was hired by a large satellite television service provider to provide technical support for the customer service call center. Sam was eager to help and apply his considerable skills to the challenges he faced daily on the job. He performed his duties thoroughly, and in the process, identified gaps in the company's processes that had gone undetected. He discussed his findings with his boss, Chris, and suggested several improvement options. With Chris' approval, Sam began working on his own time to develop applications that would address the deficiencies, streamline production, and improve customer satisfaction.

As Sam's developments were successfully implemented, Chris was grateful. He continued to accept the work Sam did on his own time, but when his bosses began noticing and praising him for Sam's work, Chris grew impatient for more innovation. He began calling Sam several times during his shift to inquire about "new developments," denied his requests for vacation, and every Friday afternoon asked what he could expect to see on Monday. Soon, Chris officially expanded Sam's job duties to include the extra work he had been doing on his own, but without a pay increase or promotion.

To Sam's credit, he spoke with Chris about the situation and sought to resolve the injustice, but Chris was adamant that he had the right to expect Sam to engage all of his talents at work, even though he wasn't hired to do all the extra things he had been doing. It was obvious that Chris was not thinking about the long-term benefit of having a creative and self-motivated employee like Sam. Discouraged and frustrated, Sam resigned.

## **Application of the Devotional**

Had Chris been able to shift his focus from his own needs to Sam, he would have seen the incredible talent and potential that stood before him. But, Chris was more concerned with his own image, and as his pride grew, so did his impatience to look even better. He made the disastrous mistake of viewing Sam as the means to an end (his own reputation) instead of seeing him for who he was. Consequently, Sam, Chris, and their organization lost.

Leaders who love their followers will take time to find ways to develop and encourage them, not abuse their talents, and this patience will produce fruitful, mutually beneficial relationships.

## **Practical Exercises**

Reflecting on your relationships with your followers, do you most often demonstrate a patient spirit or a proud spirit? Is there an aspect of your false self that you can identify as a primary catalyst for your impatience?



As with all elements of the Fruit of the Spirit, we can demonstrate God's patience to others if we are willing to concentrate our efforts on that pursuit. One way of approaching a lack of patience is through the mental discipline of "tantum-quantum." First identified by Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits and author of The Spiritual Exercises, a classic work written for the express purpose of enhancing the faith experience, "tantum-quantum" reframes the mind to view every person and circumstance as a means to *the end* (glorifying God), not as the end unto itself. Viewed through this lens, our response to everything and every person that comes into our life will be guided by *the end* rather than the present state (recall Ecclesiastes 7:8). The next time you sense impatience starting to grow, apply the tantum-quantum rule to the person or circumstance frustrating your program for happiness in order to achieve *the end* goal of glorifying God. For ideas on where to start, read the chapter, "A Life of Endurance: The Experience of Suffering" in John Ortberg's book.<sup>16</sup>

Other practices that may help tap into God's patience within us include fasting and guidance. Through the discipline of fasting we "unlearn" the habit of instant gratification, replacing it with a new focus on God, among many other things. Through the discipline of guidance, we yield our very life to the will of God in order to become who He wants us to be, to live that life "fully pleasing to Him."<sup>17</sup>

### Suggested Further Reading

à Kempis, Thomas. The Imitation of Christ. Vintage Spiritual Classics. New York: Random House, 1998.

Menzies, Allan, ed. The Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325: Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001. Available online at <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf03.vi.vii.xii.html>>

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### About the Author

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<sup>16</sup> John Ortberg, The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1997).

<sup>17</sup> Dallas Willard, In Search of Guidance: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God. (Ventura: Regal 1984) 9.

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