

## Patience: Our Relationship to Time Romans 5:1-8

And the fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self Control. As we noted in the first sermon of the series, Love is like a diamond. Each of the other words in the list describes part of its radiance, a facet of the diamond. Today's radiance is that of patience. This has been a more difficult dimension of love to talk about partly because I have a problem with time and timing - and when we talk about patience, we in reality are talking about our relationship to time. I think I am not the only one to struggle with time. We often live like we are on Jeopardy with the clock ticking away until time is up - living breathless lives racing to beat the clock!! We talk about running out of time, the time being short, the time has passed, I don't have the time, time is filling up, time is up. We ask, what time is it? Are we there yet? How long will it take? When can we go? We keep calendars, schedules, agendas sometimes on paper, sometimes on our phones and computers, but always in our minds.

My personal relationship with time has meant making plans, needing to know the schedule, the when, as well as the the where and the who and the how. I can feel panicked when I am running out of time for a task, yet can also procrastinate making the panic worse. Why all the focus on time? For me it is all about staying in control. I told you in an earlier sermon that I do have control issues, as they say in therapy! Having a schedule, keeping to a plan, means I have some control over the events of my life. I can drive others crazy with my need to control the time. And sometimes I can't and neither can you - time has its own power and it will roll on with or without our permission. Here is the truth about patience, having patience means that you have surrendered, at least in the moment, to God's timing, God's rule, not your own. A friend long ago gave me this wisp of wisdom about time - God is seldom early but never late! To believe that and live into it is the pathway to deepening faith and trust in creator, sustainer, maintainer, time-keeper God. So before we actually tackle the topic of patience, let's look to God and time.

Paul says in Romans 5 which we read earlier, "when the time was right, God sent His Son." God waited through a lot of messy history, already knowing how He would bring shalom to His beautiful earth and His beloved people who inhabited it. He had patience. He waited for the rescue that would make Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egypt just a prototype for the real thing to come. And after years more of waiting, then came Jesus. We remember that Jesus waited 30 years until His time had come. Jesus was always waiting until the time was right, "My time has not yet come" he would say. And He knew when the right time was because he was in constant communion with His Father. And even though the Gospel of Mark races through Jesus' life, we see Jesus unhurried, able to meet each interruption with grace because His life was directed by God and God's timing. Jesus waited.

Patience pops up regularly in the Old Testament as well as the New. So many of the main characters are placed in God's waiting room: Abram and Sarai, Jacob, Joseph, Hannah, Israel in a 40 year walk through the desert. And then we read of David and his patience. David's patience stretched for years. David was anointed by Samuel when he was about 15 years old. David was declared by God to be the king after King Saul had failed miserably to follow God and lead the people well. David waited another 15 years to assume the role of king and stepped into his calling at age 30. That is a long wait, taking much patience in dealing with crazy King Saul and spending a great deal of that time running for his life with Saul in hot pursuit. He didn't do all things well during that 15 years but he was patient. He declared to his men who twice wanted him to kill King Saul that he would not take for himself what God had not yet given to him. Patience!! He tells one of his mighty men not to harm

King Saul, even though Saul was asleep just feet away from them. “Don’t destroy him. Who can lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed and be guiltless? The Lord himself will either strike him, either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord’s anointed.” Patience! David would not take by force what rightly belonged to him. He was willing to be patient and wait on God’s timing. Wouldn’t our world today be more at peace, less at war, if our leaders would not dare to take by force that which didn’t belong to them and were content to let God determine the outcome of disagreements and negotiations? Sadly it takes two to tango and rarely are two leaders apt to be that patient when power and control are at stake.

Waiting seems to be the training ground for patience. God seems to use waiting time to form the “waitees” into vessels He can use. “Wait on the Lord” is a common refrain in the Old Testament, often from the pen of David in the Psalms. David spent the first 30 years of life tending sheep, hiding in caves, resisting the advice and urge to take what he had been promised before God actually gave it to him. Then there is Moses needed 40 years in the desert, also with sheep, to become the humble man that God could use in freeing His people from the slavery of Egypt. And by the way, Moses was in that waiting room because he had been impatient as a young man, trying in his own strength and wisdom to free his people from the slavery of Egypt.

Once about 20 years ago maybe - I’ve lost track of time - I was anxious about all I had to do in my role as Pastor to Women at Cedar Mill. It was increasingly difficult to manage my time as so much was demanded. I felt the prompting to look up some scriptures to help me relax into God’s perspective on time and timing. I typed them out and put them on the front flap of my Bible where they remain today for easy access in times of stress. Here they are -

Eccles. 3:1 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven”  
Eccles. 3:11 “He has made everything beautiful in its time.”

The last verse is from David who waited so long to take his job as King says in  
Ps. 31:15 “But I trust in you, Lord. I say, You are my God. My times are in your hands.”

These verses have been tremendously helpful in reshaping my relationship with time - at least in my head. But as Shelley, our speaker and worship leader last week said, “I need to ask myself not just if it is true, but am I living it.” And there lies the work of the Holy Spirit who kneads into my life the fruit of patience.

We certainly don’t like to wait, do we? But waiting is a significant discipline in developing patience. Waiting increases faith and trust. In waiting, you learn the peace of knowing that God truly does have it all in His hands; you experience a bit of shalom; and you have an opportunity to gain a new perspective.- you practice seeing life through heaven’s eyes. The patience that is developed by the Holy Spirit in our lives as we stay connected, abiding in Jesus the vine, builds perseverance, steadfastness, and biblical hope.

In the New Testament two words translated patience are makrothumia = long + tempered - (This is contrary to the short fuse that so many have.) And hupomene = abiding + under, specifically abiding under suffering.

Makrothumia is the Greek word used in John 15 and is most often used by the New Testament writers. It has to do with the ability to endure difficult people without giving in to anger or giving up hope. It is directed mostly to our relationships with people. It is what you need when raising children

or training puppies, relating with employees or employers, flaky neighbors, noisy neighbors, messy neighbors, nosy neighbors, almost all teenagers and forgetful old folks of whom I am one.

The other NT word for patience, *hupomene* - to abide + under, speaks mostly of situations that are extremely difficult, various forms of suffering, wrongs and evils that we meet with, and to bear with patience those injustices which we cannot remedy and provocations we cannot remove. Having done what we can do, we then choose to abide, to bear up under suffering, to bear up courageously, without whining or giving up, which is to be patient. When I think of *hupomene*, I think of Jesus enduring all that he did. Jesus showed us how to be patient with imperfect people, messy people, people bent on hurting him. He knew when the time was right. That was Jesus as he patiently remained under the opposition, persecution, prosecution and finally his undeserved and barbaric death knowing that God had a plan and a time for it to be realized.

So how do we cooperate with the Holy Spirit as She works patience into our lives? First I think we have to accept and appreciate that it is often through difficult people, difficult circumstances, suffering and pain that we learn patience. The apostle Paul says, to “rejoice in our sufferings because they produce perseverance/*hupomene*” and James also writes that we should not only accept but also “consider it pure joy when trials come.” Once again linking suffering to the development of perseverance/*hupomene*. Once again our friend King David tells us how this seemingly impossible frame of mind about trials and suffering, can be transformed from irritation, discouragement, giving up or giving in, to joy. “I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘you are my God.’ My times are in your hands.” Patience becomes a whole lot more do-able when our perspective shifts to this confidence in the God who holds our times in His hands, who is never late but seldom early.

The scripture this morning in Romans 5 tells us to look at suffering as a doorway to patience and eventually to hope. “We rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance/*hupomene*; perseverance, character (the character of Jesus); and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” The work of the Holy Spirit is linked to the development of the fruit that brings rich harvest.

One practice we might adopt this summer, just to try it out, is to add to our morning call - Good morning Holy Spirit, part of David’s prayer. “Good morning, Holy Spirit! “I trust in You, Lord. My times today are in your hands.” What a great reminder each morning that the work of patience is an inside job that the Holy Spirit wants to work into our lives and to do so, He changes our relationship with time through the development of patience which leads to our character being transformed and which leads to hope.

Another practice would be to choose waiting as a discipline that makes space in life for the Spirit to increase our patience: Choose the longest line for gas or groceries, choose to refrain from questions or advice when listening to another person, choose to let someone cut in front of you in line or on the road and pray for them with grace.

Not all ills are to be patiently endured. There are times when patiently waiting is not wisdom, but neglect or disobedience. Of course, but the tenor of our lives ought to be a growing willingness and character that embraces the humility and grace of a patient child of God trusting in Him, His timing, His directions, His purposes. Patience is a way of living out our value of grace, hope and love. We don’t like it, but our sufferings bring rich fruit into our lives and one of its fruits is patience. And Hope is a resulting outcome of patience.

I love Psalm 131 - especially in The Message

“God, I’m not trying to rule the roost, I don’t want to be king of the mountain. I haven’t meddled where I have no business or fantasized grandiose plans. I’ve kept my feet on the ground. I’ve cultivated a quiet heart. Like a baby content in its mother’s arms, my soul is a baby content. Wait Israel (insert your name)for God. Wait with Hope. Hope now, hope always!” Amen