

## “Fruit of the Spirit” series- STUDY 5

### PATIENCE

Patience is acquired through hard work and prayer  
Some just have a head start.

He wanders home, schools finished for the day  
Counting the cracks, the game he does play,  
On the pavement he walks, progress is slow  
At home what awaits him he does not know

The love of God has found him joy in his heart  
Family and friends despise him, it's torn them apart  
Mocked and ridiculed his daily routine  
Patiently he waits to be pure and clean.

Home late again, the door creaks give her away  
All attempts to talk, her anger keeps her at bay,  
Frustration sets in, parents lay awake  
Their minds start to wonder, to spin, a lot is at stake  
They pray, O Lord, please teach us today  
Your patience to trust you'll have your way.

From the beginning of time God did show  
The rules to live in order to grow.  
Over and over we fail Him again  
The patience of God looks beyond all pain  
With patience from God, love is the key  
To care and to reach and calmly let be  
Things that annoy or when persecution fails to cease  
Quietly persevering, God's love is our release  
Imagine patience as a well –“How deep is your control”  
Each time we are tested water is drawn from the hole  
Until eventually it all goes dry  
We snap or withdraw, getting angry or cry  
Jesus the everlasting well, in Him we have new life  
Patiently waiting for our Jesus to return  
How deep is your well, draw from God when in strife.

**Introduction.** If there is one thing in Sydney that tests the patience of everyone it is our traffic. How do you cope when you are stuck yet again, getting nowhere fast? My rule of thumb when visiting is to estimate how long it should take and then double it. When we first came to Sydney I was told that Ryde was 20 minutes from the city or 45 depending on the time of day. Reminds me of the story of a man's car that stalled in heavy traffic just as the light turned green. All his efforts to start the engine failed and a chorus of honking and yelling behind him only made things worse. He finally got out of his car and walked back to the first driver and said, "I'm sorry but I can't seem to get my car started. If you'll go up there and give it a try, I'll stay here and blow your horn for you." Wouldn't it be good if the roads were just for us? Wouldn't it be good if there were no other people to annoy us, or bother us, or frustrate us...? But life cannot be lived in isolation. There are always people or situation or events that need to be handled, even if it's just the stuff in our own homes.

**"Slow to anger."**The most common reaction to unpleasant people or difficult situations is anger. Which is interesting because the Greek word "*makrothumia*" which we translate here in the list of the fruit of the Spirit as "*patience*" literally means "*slow anger*" (makro means long). In other words, half the Greek word for "*patience*" is "*anger*" and the other half is "*long*" or "*slow*".

<b>Patience</b>
=
<i>makrothumia</i>
=
<b><u>slow anger</u></b>
OHP

So patience is handling anger slowly. Now if we know our Old Testament we recognise here a characteristic of God (which you will remember is what the fruit of the Spirit is- God's characteristics). Remember how God described Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6 "*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*" Being patient is not just about promoting a feel-good, let's-all-try-to-get-along moralism. When Paul writes in Ephesians 4:2 "*Be completely humble and gentle, be patient bearing with one another in love*" (cf also Colossians 3:12), he means act this way because that is what God wants. He gives His Spirit so that we produce the fruit of patience. And we do that not only to get along together, but (again) to reveal something of God, what His character is like, how he is dealing with the world right now. The world continues to exist because God, by his very nature is a patient God. Think about this: it doesn't take much to realise that there is an awful lot wrong in the world. In fact if you are really honest there is plenty in your life, and mine, that is wrong, sinful, rebellious. Right? Why doesn't God grab us by the scruff of the neck and deal with us, fully, finally? Because he is patient. In Romans 9:22 we read, "*What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath- prepared for destruction.*" Hear what Paul is saying: God is incredibly patient with those who are destined to come under his just punishment. For the time being he puts up with those who reject him and rebel against everything God says in his Word. God is frightfully angry with what the human race is doing to his creation. That anger is not a sudden and silly outburst of frustration, like when we often get angry. He is completely right and just because of the wrong done to all he loves. But God is slow in his anger. He is patient. But in time his anger will be expressed.

World continues to exist only  
because God is patient

We reach  
the promised land / glory  
only because God is patient  
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God is not only patient in how he deals with the unbelieving world that will face destruction. His patience is even more clearly seen in how he deals with his own people. Take Nehemiah 9:16,17 where we read about how God was patient with Israel when they were in the desert after having been delivered from Egypt- *“But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them.”* God put up with their complaining and whinging and brought them to the promised land. That’s patience for you. It’s also the reason why you, trusting in Christ, will reach the new earth. It’s not because you so faithfully hang on. Despite our daily failures God sees us forgiven in Christ and is patient, very patient.

**What does it mean to be patient?** Let’s explore a little further what it means to be patient. Does it mean we turn a blind eye to wrong, or we tolerate all sorts of failure or nonsense, or that we suppress everything, while seething inside? Let’s explore it by looking at God being patient. Does it mean God ignores sin until we push him too far and then he blows his top, like we often do in our parenting? Well, get it clear, God being “*slow to anger*” does not mean he overlooks sin. We read in Nahum 1:3 *“The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.”* Now at first it may seem that these statements contradict each other. *“Slow to anger... not leave the guilty unpunished.”* Well we have to understand why God is patient. In 1 Timothy 1:15,16 Paul writes *“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners- of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who believe on him and receive eternal life.”*

There you see the point of patience- it runs hand in hand with grace. Paul was a terrible bloke, who hounded down, persecuted and killed believers, who resisted Christ with all he had. But Christ’s patience brought him round and saved him. Paul says if he did that for me, the worst of sinners, imagine then what he will do for you. In 2 Peter 3:15 we read: *“Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation”*. Earlier in that chapter Peter had taken up the point of scoffers who stir the Christians. You can imagine them saying, *“If Jesus is raised from the dead and promised to return where is he then?”*. We now 2000 years later can feel the taunt in the scoffing. Jesus being resurrected and coming to judge the world can seem like a joke. But Peter reminds us *“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire...”* Judgement for sin will come, suddenly, swiftly and completely. God’s anger for sin will be justly expressed. But God is patient, so there’s time for witnessing and repentance and faith. Our Lord’s *“patience means salvation.”*

*“the Lord’s **patience** means salvation”*

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That is the attitude we should take in being patient. There are times we get frustrated and angry because of our own hang-ups and issues. We need to deal with those. Other times we get angry with others rightly. They have indeed wronged us. There are times when the kids do wrong and we should be angry. We don’t turn a blind eye to failure or injustice etc. But we get angry slowly. We deal with the wrong, the failure, the injustice, in such a way that we move the other person forward in their growth and learning and maturity. *“Patience means salvation”*. A temper flair up and a swift back hander to our big mouthing 16year old may be what we feel like doing. But slow anger says spend time with our teenager, talk about what their struggles are and what yours are, and help them see why he/she big mouths and how it doesn’t help.

**Cultivating patience.** Now, how, in practical terms, can we cultivate patience in our lives? Well Ecclesiastes 7:8,9 gives us a few clues: *“The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.”*

1. Remember the goal

2. Put aside pride

3. Slow to get stirred

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There is a lot of wisdom here. First consider *“The end of the matter is better than the beginning.”* This refers to achieving the goal. If you want to develop patience keep your eyes on the goal. Think about what God has in store for us. What is the goal of our relationship with Jesus? Is not God doing things in our lives so that we reach perfection and life with Jesus on the new earth? Isn’t God’s goal to do good for us? Isn’t that why he is patient in the first place? So if things get really tough in life, maybe illness strikes us, or there is death in the family, we lose heavily in our work or investments, we can get angry with God. But we should be slow in our anger, we can be patient, because we know that *“God works all things for good for those who love him”*. Keeping our eye on the goal also helps in our relations with each other. If the goal of our relationships in the church is to help each other mature in our love for God and become like Jesus, then we will be slow in our anger when we feel wrongly done. Flying off the handle will not achieve the other’s growth. You might feel better for a short moment having blown your stack. But it won’t achieve the goal. It is very easy to focus on the things that bother us in life. It is hard to focus on our reason for existence and the end (of the matter) God has in store for us. It’s not easy to keep God and his glory at the forefront of our thinking, as the goal for everything we do. But the more we do that, the more patient we become.

Secondly Ecclesiastes 7 says: *“patience is better than pride.”* Put aside your pride and you will go along way to becoming patient. Think about it. How much doesn’t pride generate impatience? Isn’t it pride that says; *“What right have you to do that to me?”* *“What right have you got to speak to me that way?”*? We become very shorted tempered, very impatient when some one has injured our reputation or us physically. We don’t take it too well when some one admonishes us. We think we know better than others, so we become impatient when they don’t see things the way we do. We

become impatient when things don't go our way. But would we be as impatient if we put aside pride and really thought of others before ourselves. It's no wonder Paul in Ephesians 4 puts humility and patience together in the one "*Be completely humble and gentle, be patient bearing with one other in love.*"

The passage in Ecclesiastes also tells us "*do not be quickly provoked in spirit for anger resides in the lap of fools.*" That again brings us back to the general definition of patience –slow to anger. Don't react quickly. Take a deep breath and consider what you are doing, because if you just respond in anger you may do enormous damage (eg road rage, psychological damage to your child, broken relations in the family or church, loss of your job etc). That's why it says: "*anger resides in the lap of fools.*" One moment of uncontrolled rage can ruin things, many things for a long time. Listen to some of these proverbs: (Greek proverb) "One minute of patience, ten years of peace." (Dutch proverb) "A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains." (Chinese proverb) "One moment of patience may prevent disaster; one moment of impatience may ruin a life." (St Augustine) "Patience is the companion of wisdom."

*Greek*

*One minute of patience, ten years of peace*

*Dutch*

**A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains**

*Chinese*

*One moment of patience may prevent disaster  
One moment of impatience may ruin a life*

*Augustine*

***Patience is the companion of wisdom.***

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Patience does not mean we ignore sin, any more than it means God ignores sin. Being patient with your children does not mean you let them get away with all sorts of things. You must discipline them. Why? Because you have lost your cool? No, because you love them and want them to grow in the ways of God. You patiently correct and teach. Patience does not mean we do not admonish one another in the church. Lots of churches no longer have a form of discipline. That has nothing to do with patience. It is actually a lack of care. We should love enough to correct each other, doing so with humility and patience.

**The greatest incentive.** The greatest incentive for patience I find in one of Jesus' parables. It seems Peter was having trouble with somebody and trying hard to handle it properly. You know his impulsive character. It seems his patience was running thin. He asked Jesus how many times to forgive. He suggested seven times and thought that rather generous. But Jesus told him seventy times seven was more like it. He then told the story of a man who ran up an enormous debt with his employer. When it became obvious he could not pay he asked his master for "patience-makrothumia". He knew the boss was perfectly right in being angry. The servant asked for "slow anger". The master went way beyond that request and forgave him everything. An enormous debt

(millions) simply forgiven. With great relief the servant went off and bumped into a colleague who owed him a couple of bucks (ratio 1:600,000). When the second guy asked for some makrothumia to give him time to pay, the one forgiven grabbed him by the throat and demanded payment. When the master heard it he was furious and dealt with the first guy. Jesus point is very, very clear. If God has forgiven us so much through the death and resurrection of Jesus, if God is so very slow to anger, so very patient with what we dish out to him every day again, can't we be patient with those who offend us? As Paul puts it in Colossians 3:12-13 "*Cloth yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive what ever grievances you may have against each other. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*"

## **DISCUSSION.**

**Preparation.** Read the sermon notes.

**Readings.** Exodus 34:1-7; Ecclesiastes 7:1-9; 2 Peter 3:3-10; Galatians 5:22

**Questions.**

1. What are some of the things that frustrate and annoy you? What has you "flying off the handle"?
2. What is the literal meaning of the Greek word for "patience"? Describe how this is a characteristic of God. Is it a characteristic we reveal in our lives, and thus reveal God? How do we benefit from God's patience?
3. Demonstrate from the bible that the "*Lord's patience means salvation*" (2 peter 3:15). What are the implications of this? Describe how the "patience means salvation" theme should be a guide for how we relate with one another.
4. Use Ecclesiastes 7:8,9 to describe how we cab cultivate patience in our lives. How does "keeping our eyes on the goal" help us be patient with what God is doing in our lives and in our relating with others? What is the connection between patience and pride? How often is it a problem for you? What are some of the possible effects of reacting too quickly? How might you slow down your anger and gain time to give a considered responses?
5. What do the following proverbs mean? Which speaks the most to you? Why?

*One minute of patience, ten years of peace*

*A handful of patience is worth more than a bushel of brains*

*One moment of patience may prevent disaster*

*One moment of impatience may ruin a life*

*Patience is the companion of wisdom.*

6. What is the greatest incentive for us to be patient with each other?