

HOW TO DEVELOP PATIENCE

A family was out vacationing at the lake one summer. Dad had been puttering out by the boat house. His 3 year old, little Billy, thought that would be a good time to check out the shiny aluminum fishing boat tied up at the end of the dock. So he went to the dock and put one foot on the boat, and one foot on the dock. He lost his balance and fell into the water, which was about 5 or 6 ft deep. Hearing the splash the dad came running from the boat house, jumped into the water, swam down, but was unable to see anything in the murky water so he came up for air. Sick with panic, he went right back down and began to feel everywhere around the bottom. He couldn't feel anything. Finally, on his way up, he felt little Billy's arms locked in a death grip on one of the posts of the dock, about 4 ft under water. Prying the boy's fingers loose, they burst up together thru the surface to fill their lungs with life giving air. Finally when the adrenaline had stopped surging, and nerves had calmed down a little bit, the Father asked his son, "What on earth were you doing down there hanging onto the post so far under the water? And little Billy's answer was a classic, laced with the wisdom only a toddler could give. He said, "I was just waiting for you dad. Just waiting for you."

Today we are concluding our series in the book of James. I want to speak today about patience.

James 5:7-12 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. 8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! 10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. 12 Above all, my brothers, do not swear -- not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

As a culture today, we hate to wait. We are the Now Generation. It seems like we spend a lot of time just waiting around. Some of you wait in traffic on your way to work. You wait in line at the grocery store. Next week you are going to have to wait after the service if you want to get some food. When you go to a restaurant, you have to wait.

There are actually five different waits when you go to a restaurant. You wait to get a seat, then you wait to get the menu, then you wait to order, then you wait to get the food back, then you wait for the bill. And they have the audacity to call that guy the other person the waiter! 3 things about patience;

1. When to be Patient

James gives 3 example here of times when patience is essential;

a. When Situations are Uncontrollable

I hope that you have figured out by now that a lot of life is beyond your control. James uses a farmer as an example of when circumstances are uncontrollable.

James 5:7b ... See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

Part of the job description of being a farmer is you do a lot of waiting. Farming requires a lot of faith. There are so many factors that the farmer has no control over -- weather, rain, heat and the economy. If you don't have a lot of faith don't be a farmer, because it takes patience. You deal with a lot of uncontrollable factors. The same is true in life.

Have you noticed that even when we realize a situation is beyond our control, we still try to control it? How do we do that? By worrying. We think that worry will control a situation. To worry about something you CAN change is dumb, to worry about something you CAN'T change is useless. Either way you shouldn't worry. We need to have patience in uncontrollable circumstances.

b. When People are Unchangeable

Next, James talks about when people won't change. He gives an example of the prophets.

James 5:10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

What was the role of prophets? To help people change. They sought to bring people back to God so that their behavior would be transformed. Have you noticed that people resist change? Maybe you have heard the expression that the only person who likes change is a baby in wet diaper. For most people, when you make any little tiny suggestion, they resist you!

Do you have anybody in your life right now who refuses to change? Do you know how difficult it is to live with that kind of person? We need patience with people. They may never change. What are you going to do about it? James says to have patience.

The word "patience" in the Greek is the word MACROTHUMOS -- MACRO meaning LONG and THUMOS (from which we get the word thermometer) meaning HEAT. It literally means "it takes a long time for you to get hot". That means you have a long fuse. You don't blow up easily. If you're going to be a success with people, you have to learn patience. If you're going to be successful parents, you have to have a long fuse. You don't get overheated. E.g. video of dog with kitten.

James says you need to be patient when circumstances are uncontrollable and when people are unchangeable and won't cooperate with us.

c. When Problems are Unexplainable

James 5:11b ...You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about.

Job had everything going for him. Then everything fell apart. He went bankrupt, his children were murdered, he got an incurable, deadly disease that was very painful. You think you've got problems and have had a rough day! He lost his family, his friends, his finances. He was suffering in every kind of way. One day his wife comes to him and says, "Curse God and die!" Now that's a support system! God allowed the devil to take away everything in his life except a nagging wife.

The worst part of Job's suffering was that he had absolutely no idea why it was happening. For 37 chapters in the book of Job, God doesn't even talk to him and tell him why it's happening. There was no apparent reason for his misfortune. Of all people, Job had the privilege to say, "Why me?"

Life is not fair! That is true. God never said it would be fair. A lot of things in life just don't make sense. Maybe we'll never understand on this side of heaven. Job didn't understand. In all of those unexplained problems, Job maintained his faith. Sometimes we just can't figure out our problems.

Max Lucado in his book, *Gentle Thunder* wrote; Once there was a man who dared God to speak. Burn the bush like you did for Moses, God. And I will follow. Collapse the walls like you did for Joshua, God. And I will fight. Still the waves like you did on Galilee, God. And I will listen. And so the man sat by a bush, near a wall, close to the sea and waited for God to speak. And God heard the man, so God answered. He sent fire, not for a bush, but for a church. He brought down a wall, not of brick, but of sin. He stilled the storm, not of the sea, but of a soul. And God waited for man to respond. And he waited. . .And he waited. . .And waited. But because the man was looking at bushes, not hearts; bricks and not lives, seas and not souls, he decided that God had done nothing. Finally he looked to God and asked, 'Have you lost your power?' And God looked at him and said, 'Have you lost your hearing?'

When circumstances are uncontrollable, when people are unchangeable, and when problems are unexplainable you really need patience. Why?

2. Why be Patient

James 5:7 Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming... 8 ...because the Lord's coming is near. 9 ...the Judge is standing at the door!

Three times in this passage, James says, "The Lord's coming is near, Jesus is coming back." That is the ultimate proof that God is in control. Nothing can stop it. God is in control of history – history is really "his story". He's got it all planned out, everything is on schedule, nothing is late, it's all moving toward an end. God is in control. God has a purpose for your life that is greater than any problem you're facing right now.

Though a situation may be out of my control, no circumstance is out of God's control. Although I can't control everything that happens in my life, God can so I ought to trust Him. Because God is in control and everything is working out, be patient.

Job persevered. God's timing is perfect, He is never early and never late. What you call a delay right now is not God's delay, you can never thwart His purpose. What is God's purpose?

James 5:11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered.

God wants to bless us, but sometimes the pathway to blessing must come through pain. We see this was the case in Job. His pain produced something beautiful in his life;

Job 42:5 My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

The second half of Job's life was more blessed than the first half. God doubled everything he had. It pays to be patient. There are all kinds of rewards. Your character grows, you get along with people better, you're more happy, you reach your goals. There are lots of benefits of being patient. God rewards it.

But not just on this side of eternity, but on the other side you're going to be rewarded. When people put you down, when they criticize you, be patient, because there's going to be a reward in heaven.

Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It is our natural tendency -- one of the strongest desires in life -- that when you're hurt, you want to get even. You want to retaliate, get revenge, take matters into your own hands. When you get criticized, you want to criticize back. If you get insulted, you want to insult back. Revenge, retaliation are the natural thing -- but that's the opposite of patience. James says that the next time someone criticizes you, before you strike back, think about this, is it worth giving up the reward I'm going to have in heaven? What really is your momentary frustration in light of eternity?

You need to be patient because God is in control and He's going to reward patience.

Story of Phillip Brooks, a famous pastor of the last century. One day he was in his office, pacing the floor, frustrated. Somebody walked in and saw him and asked, "What's the matter, pastor?" He said, "I'm in a hurry and God isn't!"

God says, "Be patient because I'm working things out." While I am waiting, God is working. You need to remember that! Your hands may be tied and the situation may be uncontrollable but it is not uncontrollable in God's viewpoint.

In advance, thank God because He's working things out. He gives the illustration of the farmer. When the farmer plants the seed, he's waiting for that seed. While he's waiting, God is working behind the scenes to cause that plant to sprout. He's creating the conditions so at the right time, in the right way there will be a harvest. The farmer waits, God works.

In every circumstance in your life, God is working. Be patient. I don't know what kind of problem you have this week, but regardless of the problem you're going through (financial, relational, health) God is working in that problem. Be patient and trust Him.

3. How to be Patient

James says consider these three illustrations: look at them and realize what they did and do what they did while you're waiting on God.

a. Wait Expectantly

I must expect a harvest. I must believe that it is inevitable, that I've done the right thing. What does a farmer do while he's waiting on God? Just sit and watch reruns on television all day? While he's waiting on the harvest, the farmer is preparing for the answer. He's getting ready. Waiting is a time for preparation which shows your expectation. We demonstrate our expectation by our preparation. We get ready for the answer in advance.

Psalms 130:5-6 I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. 6 My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

What are you waiting for from God? Maybe to heal a long-term illness, or to transform your marriage, or to reverse your financial problems or for God to reach your teenagers for Christ? Do you really expect Him to do that?

If you do expect God to do it eventually, prove it! How can you prove that you're expecting God to do something? Simple. What are you doing to get ready for it? Are you preparing for the answer? If the answer came today, would you be ready? How can I prepare? The way you get ready for something is by preparing in advance. While you're waiting you're preparing. Preparing demonstrates expectation.

A lot of times when I'm waiting on God, He's really waiting on me. He was ready to give the answer a long time ago but I wasn't ready to receive it. He's saying, "Grow up! Get some spiritual depth in your life. I want to bless your life but you can't handle the blessing I want to pour on you. It's so great and you're such a puny pip-squeak spiritually, you're not ready to handle this blessing. When you've got some spiritual muscle in your life, I'll bless you beyond what you can imagine." Waiting is a time to get ready. Prepare.

After days at sea, the skipper of a fishing boat was bringing his craft back home. As the boat neared the shore, the men gazed eagerly toward the dock, where a group of their loved ones were waiting. The skipper, looking through his glass, identified some of the women, saying, "I see Bill's Mary, and there is Tom's Margaret, and David's Anne." One man was very anxious because his wife was not there. He left the boat with a heavy heart and pressed his steps up the hill, where he saw a light in his cottage. As he opened the door, his wife ran to meet him, saying, "I have been waiting for you." He replied, "Yes, but the other men's wives were watching for them."

Jesus waited thirty years before he began his ministry. Thirty years of preparation and he accomplished more in three years than we would in a lifetime.

b. Wait Quietly

James points out the fact that we have a tendency to run off at the mouth when we're irritated, when we're tense, when we're under pressure, when things aren't going our way and things aren't under our control.

James 5:9 Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged.

Why does he talk about grumbling right in the middle of patience? It's hard to be quiet when you're frustrated. When you're frustrated, you want everybody to know about it. Sometimes we don't mind waiting so long as we can complain about it. Some people seem to spend their whole life complaining about something. If you come home at night dog-tired, it's because you have been growling all day!

I heard about a lady who griped at her husband all the time. Constantly. The guy died and she put on his tombstone, "Rest in Peace". Then they went and read the will. He willed \$5 to his wife and everything else to his secretary. She went back and changed the tombstone to "... till we meet again."

c. Wait Confidently

Job never lost his confidence in all that he did. When the outlook is bad, you look up. You have hope. Hope is Holding On Praying Expectantly -- HOPE.

When you've got a problem that's unexplainable, a person who is unchangeable, a circumstance that is uncontrollable then wait confidently. God is working.

How do you wait confidently? Sit still. Don't get nervous, anxious. You don't take matters into your own hands and work things out.

Where do you need to have patience this morning? Do you have an uncontrollable circumstance in your life right now? Maybe a job situation is beyond your control. Maybe it is an illness. Maybe you have an unchangeable person in your life you is making things difficult. You need patience with unexplainable problems.

What do you do when you have these kinds of things? Remember what God has said in James. God is in control. It may be out of my control, but it's not out of God's control. Nothing is beyond His power and His purpose for my life is greater than the problem I'm experiencing right now. God will reward your patience, if not in this life, He will in eternity. God is working behind the scenes for a purpose.

In September 1999 a Pastor traveled to a remote Province in northern Cambodia. Throughout that isolated area, most villagers were followers of Buddhism or Spiritism. Christianity was virtually unheard of. But much to the pastor's surprise, when he arrived in one small, rural village the people warmly embraced him and his message about Jesus. When he asked the villagers about their openness to the gospel, an old woman came forward, bowed, and took the pastor's hand and said, "We have been waiting for you for more than twenty years." And then she told him this story;

In the 1970s the Khmer Rouge, took over Cambodia, destroying everything in its path. When the soldiers finally descended on this rural, northern village they immediately rounded up the villagers and forced them to start digging their own graves. After the villagers had finished digging, they prepared themselves to die. Some screamed to Buddha, others screamed to other spirits or to their ancestors.

One of the women started to cry for help based on a childhood memory - a story her mother told her about a God who had hung on a cross. The woman prayed to that unknown God on a cross. Surely, if this God had known suffering, he would have compassion on their plight. Suddenly, her solitary cry became one great wail as the entire village started praying to the God who had suffered and hung on a cross. As they continued facing their own graves, the wailing slowly turned to a quiet crying. There was an eerie silence in the muggy jungle air. Slowly, as they dared to turn around and face their captors, they discovered that the soldiers were gone.

As the old woman finished telling this story, she told the pastor that ever since that humid day from more than 20 years ago the villagers had been waiting, waiting for someone to come and share the rest of the story about the God who had hung on a cross.