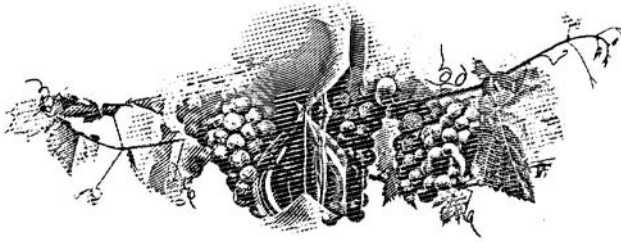


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Patience



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 6:3; Exod. 34:6; Mark 4:26–29; Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:1, 2; James 1:2–4.*

Memory Text: “For you have need of endurance [patience], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (*Hebrews 10:36, NKJV*).

In the Greek, two words express the meaning of “patience,” another fruit of the Spirit. The first is *hupomone*, translated “endurance, steadfastness, and fortitude” in circumstances that cannot be changed. The second word, *makrothumia*, means “great” or “long tempered.” It is the opposite of short-tempered, impatient, and easily frustrated. In general, it means to stick with things and not to be derailed by adversity. The word is usually applied to having patience with people.

A patient person is mild, gentle, and constant in all circumstances. The real test of patience is not in the waiting but in how one behaves while waiting. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (*James 1:4, NKJV*).

Reaching this point in one's life takes practice, takes God's grace, and takes a willingness to put aside self and to surrender to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The good news is that if we learn patience, we are in a position to receive many other blessings from God, as well.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 30.*

Patience Is an Attribute of God *(Exod. 34:6)*

“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth’ ” *(Exod. 34:6, NKJV)*.

One of the many Bible stories illustrating the patience of God was His dealing with Nineveh. The prophet Jonah recognized God’s patience: “ ‘Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm’ ” *(John 4:2, NKJV)*.

Note some of the other qualities that patience is combined with in Exodus 34:6. God’s grace, mercy, lovingkindness, goodness, and truth protect and sustain even the most hardened sinners in order to give them the maximum time and advantage to turn their lives around. If God struck out at people as quickly as humans frequently do, we’d all be dead.

Why is God patient with sinners? *(See 2 Pet. 3:8, 9.)* **How** have you seen the reality of this truth manifested toward yourself or toward others?

If someone were to ask you how you picture God in your mind, how would you describe Him? This is revealing, because how a Christian thinks of God has a lot to do with his worldview and how we treat others. If we see God as angry and quick to punish, how would we likely treat others in the church and in our homes?

How can we learn to do what the Lord calls us to do in Romans 15:5?

Patience Required *(Eph. 4:1, 2)*

Read Ephesians 4:1, 2. Look at the elements Paul presents for those who are to “walk worthy” of the Lord. Among them is patience. How is patience linked with the other attributes presented? That is, how do they feed into each other?

The church is made up of a mixture of people from various backgrounds and cultures. It also includes people who are on different rungs of the maturity ladder. Patience is necessary to be able to get along where there are so many differences. It is a temptation for those who are mature to be impatient toward those less so. In spite of the fact that it took years for them to arrive at their present level of knowledge, often the mature are unwilling to give the immature the same amount of time and study to reach their level of knowledge and understanding.

What is Paul’s counsel on how we are to deal with those who may be weak in faith? Rom. 14:1, 15:1.

Patience in the church is one thing. But what about patience at home? What are some of the things that make us impatient with other members of our family? How long should we pray for family members who are out of the faith? Have you ever known anyone who had to pray for a loved one for many years before the person gave his or her heart to the Lord? What are practical ways in which we can learn to cultivate patience with family members? Why is death to self so important here too?

Also, if we can be patient at home, with those who are always “in our face,” then we likely will be patient with others, as well.

Think about how patient the Lord has been with you. How does keeping that reality constantly before you help you learn to show patience with others? If the Lord treated you as you treated others, what do you think would be your fate?

Patience in the Gospel *(2 Tim. 4:2)*

Preaching and teaching the gospel is one of the most difficult areas in which to exercise patience. Most of us are too impatient with people who don't know the truth or who don't seem to care about it. But in a world full of false doctrine and prejudice against truth, we must be longsuffering as we seek to lead people to Christ. It is too easy to shake our head and say, "Why don't they understand? The truth is so plain."

The truth always is plain to the person who is not looking at it through glasses tinted by false doctrine, tradition, family, and so forth. We must be patient as we seek to open minds and untie the tentacles of prejudice and false teaching that bind them to error and tradition.

Read Mark 4:26–29. **What are some practical lessons from this parable about patience in the area of soul winning?**

We are prone to think that when someone studies a particular Bible doctrine and doesn't accept it immediately, it must mean the person has rejected the truth. That, however, is not necessarily the case. The fact is that conversion can be a long, complicated process that could take years in some instances. Though many of us might be eager to see the immediate fruit of our labors, it doesn't always happen that way. What's important is that, in our zeal, we don't become a hindrance to someone; that is, we must not push so hard that the person gets turned off. Most important, we never must condemn or judge someone who doesn't make a commitment to the truths that we love and care so deeply about at the precise time that we think the person should. Your labors, your work for the person, could very well be an important step in a process that might not bear fruit for years. You just don't know. The crucial thing is not to ruin it all by being condemnatory or judgmental.

What crucial point found in 1 Samuel 16:7 should we always keep in mind in this context (and in all contexts, really)?

Patience Has Its Limits (*Gen. 6:3*)

No greater demonstration of patience can be found than that shown by God toward humans. But we must understand that even God's longsuffering has a limit.

The longsuffering of God lasted for 120 years in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared (*1 Pet. 3:20*). But the time came when the stubbornness of the people exhausted the longsuffering of God, and He destroyed the earth with a flood.

Read Genesis 6:3. What important principle is seen there?

In the cases of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel in the wilderness, and the Babylonian captivity, what attitude on the part of the people prompted the consequences that the people suffered? *Deut. 31:27, Ps. 95:8, Jer. 17:23.*

It might be argued that, inasmuch as God ran out of patience, this gives us permission to do the same. But when we study the history of God's longsuffering, it becomes evident that His patience was not for a day, a week, or even a year. Often generations would pass before His longsuffering would be exhausted, which, of course, is not an option open to us.

Is there a point where our patience legitimately can run out when dealing with folk in a difficult situation? It depends on what that means. We might decide that we've had enough of a certain situation and conclude that it has to end. But that's not the same thing as being judgmental, unloving, or cruel in the process. It might be time to take action, but that action never must be out of harmony with the principles of kindness, love, and caring.

Dwell on situations in which your patience ran out legitimately and illegitimately. What was the difference between the two? What have you learned from these experiences? If you had to do them over again, what would you do differently?

How to Develop Patience *(James 1:2-4)*

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” *(James 1:2-4, NKJV)*. What has been your own experience with the reality of these verses? What have you learned from the various trials you have faced that, in the end, have made you a better person, one who better reflects the character of Jesus?

The Greek word for “trials,” sometimes translated “temptations,” is the word *peirazo*, which has the broader significance of “proving” or “testing.” The devil tries us or tempts us to do evil. The tests and trials that God allows to come into our lives are for the purpose of developing our characters.

“The trials of life are God’s workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace.”
—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 10.

This doesn’t mean, however, that every trial is in God’s providence. Often we bring suffering upon ourselves through disobedience; often, too, trials and suffering are just the results of what it means to live in a fallen, sinful world where we have an enemy who hates us (*1 Pet. 5:8*). What this does mean, however, is that through a complete surrender of ourselves to the Lord, to grasping hold of Him in faith and obedience, no matter what we go through, we can come out better or more refined if we allow God to work in us. No one said it will be fun. Life here often isn’t fun, but we are given this wonderful promise: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (*Phil. 1:6*).

Further Study: “In His dealings with the human race, God bears long with the impenitent. He uses His appointed agencies to call men to allegiance, and offers them His full pardon if they will repent. But because God is long-suffering, men presume on His mercy. ‘Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.’ The patience and long-suffering of God, which should soften and subdue the soul, has an altogether different influence upon the careless and sinful. It leads them to cast off restraint, and strengthens them in resistance. They think that the God who has borne so much from them will not heed their perversity. If we lived in a dispensation of immediate retribution, offenses against God would not occur so often. But though delayed, the punishment is none the less certain. There are limits even to the forbearance of God. The boundary of His long-suffering may be reached, and then He will surely punish. And when He does take up the case of the presumptuous sinner, He will not cease till He has made a full end.”
—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, p. 1166.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** To say that God is patient is not the same as to say that He is tolerant. What is the difference between patience and tolerance, and why is it easy to confuse the two?
- 2** As we look at the life of Christ, how does He reveal what patience means? What are some powerful examples that He gives of patience? What examples does He give, if any, of situations in which patience was no longer appropriate?
- 3** Dwell more on the question of trials and character. Sure, trials can make our character better in many cases. At the same time, what happens when trials embitter people, turn them away from God, and make them cynical and doubtful? Have you ever seen that happen to someone? If so, what can you learn from that experience?
- 4** Besides trials, what are other ways the Lord can teach us patience? How have you learned (or are still learning) the lesson of patience?
- 5** Is there someone you need to apologize to because of your lack of patience? Why not humble yourself and make the apology and do whatever else it takes to make things right? Isn't that what being a Christian is all about?

Pray for Me

by BENJAMIN SCHOUN

In some places in the world it's illegal and often dangerous to share one's faith with others. Sometimes radio and television signals may be the only means to reach people with the gospel. New believers risk their lives to follow Jesus.

Not long ago Adventist World Radio received the following e-mails from a young man living in one of these difficult areas. We share his messages with you, for through your mission offerings, you help make these broadcasts possible.

"My name is Amin.* I am 19 years old and live in [an unnamed country]. Please help me to learn more about Christianity and Jesus Christ. I'm eager to know. May I have a Bible? Please, pray for me. [He was sent a link to an Internet Bible.]"

Two months later

"I have received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, and my life has changed. Every day I read the Bible on the Internet, and I'm learning more. God's Word makes my heart come alive. It's true what He said, 'I am the light of the world.' 'I'm the way, the truth, and the life' [John 8:12, John 14:6]. I wish I could share the Word of God with someone and pray with them."

Two months later [Amin's family has learned of his new faith.]

"Every day they abuse me. My father tore up my Christian books and said, 'If I see one more book like those in your hands, I will bury you.' I know that Jesus said, 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you.' I pray and read the Bible every day, but I can't receive any letters because my father will read them."

A few days later

"They've taken my computer, and I must go to the cyber café. Yesterday, two policemen came to our house and threatened me, calling me a terrorist for being a follower of Jesus Christ.

"I'm sure I'll be taken to prison soon. I'm not asking for help. No one can help me but the Lord. I don't know what will happen to me. Maybe this e-mail will be the last one. I love Jesus, and am ready to die for Him."

Note: This was the last message received from Amin. Pray for him and for thousands like him who face persecution and death for their faith.

Amin is not his real name. BENJAMIN SCHOUN is president of Adventist World Radio.