

**THE EVIDENCE OF PATIENCE****GALATIANS 5:22-23; JAMES 5:7-11**

Patience is not a virtue in our culture. An article in Time.com noted that ketchup flows out of a glass bottle at a rate of .028 miles per hour. That's slower than a Galapagos tortoise which zips along at a blazing 0.16 miles per hour, or almost six times faster than ketchup. But impatiently tapping your ketchup bottle soon might be a thing of the past. Dave Smith, a PhD candidate at MIT, and a team of MIT engineers and scientists have offered a possible solution to this ketchup flow problem. After months of research, Smith and his team developed LiquiGlide, which they define as a "kind of structured liquid [that's] rigid like a solid, but lubricated like a liquid." Coating the inside of a bottle with LiquiGlide will cause ketchup and other sauces to slide out faster than a Galapagos tortoise. Dave Smith claims that the sauce industry, which rakes in \$17 billion a year, would love to get their hands on his invention. The Time.com article concluded: "Let's hope some big [ketchup] companies' bite. I'm tired of waiting five minutes for ketchup to land on my cheeseburger."

If you're accused of being a Christian, what evidence will convict you? If you were accused and then arrested for being a Christian, could a court of law find enough evidence to convict you? The evidence that you are truly a child of God is called the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I'd like everyone to find the following passage in your Bible – Galatians 5:22-23 – but I want us to read those two verses in unison today. "But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!" (Gal 5:22-23 NLT)

Today we're considering the fourth fruit of nine that are mentioned there – the evidence of patience. Have you ever noticed that when it comes to patience, we admire that quality in others but rarely demand it of ourselves? Maybe we think patience just comes naturally to some folk – especially those with quiet, laid back, passive personalities. I think we're also a little suspicious of patience. Patience can seem like the opposite of what our culture says we should admire: being aggressive, having a can-do, goal-oriented mindset towards life. And yet throughout the Bible, we find that one sign that God truly lives in a person is the presence of patience. What does patience look like in your life and mine? How does God enable patience to take root, blossom and grow? Why is patience important? Let me suggest two biblical principles about patience.

**IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, PATIENCE LOOKS LIKE PERSEVERANCE.**

Some of us have actually been dumb enough to ask God to help us become more patient! God will actually take that request seriously. God has an interesting response when you invite Him to develop character qualities in your life. Maybe you asked God to make you more loving towards people, so He exposed you to hate, misunderstanding and rejection. You asked God to make you more joyful, so He sent aggravation, irritation and sorrow. You asked God

for peace, and He allowed circumstances that provoked anxiety, fear and worry. If you ever ask God for patience, He will send you difficult situations.

When it comes to difficult situations, patience ends up looking a great deal like perseverance or endurance. Look with me at James 5:7-11, because there we find a most interesting description of patience. Earlier, James explains that God has a purpose in allowing difficult situations. He says, "Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow." (James 1:2-3 NLT) Having perseverance in or endurance through difficult situations in life is one demonstration of patience. By facing those difficulties in God's grace, the Holy Spirit produces patience in you.

I read about a pastor down in Florida who used to have "count-it-all-joy" parties every now and then. When he was facing a difficult situation, he'd call up a few friends and say, "I want you to come over to my house for a party." They'd say, "Oh, is it your birthday?" "No." "What's the occasion, then?" they'd ask. "Well, I'm going through this incredibly difficult crisis right now and I'm having a 'count-it-all-joy' party. We're going to celebrate this difficulty, because I know God is going to create something of special value in my life through it. I don't know what it is yet, but I want you to come and count it all joy with me." Have you ever thrown a "count-it-all-joy" party? I haven't either. It's tough to consider as joy something that hurts a whole lot, but God can use it to develop your faith.

Now, James describes the importance of patience as perseverance to his readers who were facing difficult situations. James compares a follower of Jesus to a farmer. How does a farmer get a crop to grow to the point of getting harvested? He does a lot of waiting patiently. He doesn't control the amount of rain or sunshine. He just plants the seeds and waits... and waits... and waits some more. Why does he wait? Why persevere and endure? Because the farmer knows that the harvest will have great value. Difficult situations create the need for patience. There's some kind of a spiritual harvest God produces in you by allowing those difficult situations in your life. Just like you can't rush a crop to maturity, you can't rush the work that patience does in your life.

James says the Old Testament prophets were great examples of perseverance. These were men who loved God, spoke His word courageously and ended up getting persecuted bitterly by the very people to whom God sent them. As a rule, they had tough lives. Intellectually, you know that just because you've decided to follow Jesus that you aren't going to escape all of life's difficult situations; nevertheless, you still struggle with the illusion that you should somehow. Those prophets remind you that even the most obedient, dedicated Jesus followers often face the most difficult of life situations. But they persevered; they endured; they hung in there; they remained faithful; they did what they were called to do.

As a pastor, I've seen many people begin to follow Jesus. They're enthusiastic. Committed. Turn out for everything. They want to serve Jesus in every ministry the church offers. Then something happens. More often than not, a difficult situation hits them broadside. That's when some of those who begin just stop. Sadly, far fewer people continue to walk with the Lord than those who began. The old saying is very true: "It's not how you start the Christian life that matters; it's how you finish." Lots of folk start; far fewer ever finish. Patience isn't sitting around being lazy and doing nothing. It's not giving up and waiting for Jesus to come back – apparently something some of James' readers were doing. Sometimes patience is simply not giving up and throwing in the towel in your journey with God even when you're miserably discouraged by it all.

Are you just supposed to lie down and take it when difficult situations come into your life? No. James asks: Remember Job? He lost all of his kids in a freak accident, all of his immense wealth and then his health, too. But Job was no silent sufferer. He cried out to God in his misery. He wrestled with why God allowed all this misfortune to come his way. He told his pious friends to go jump in the lake. But never, never, never did Job forsake God. He persevered. He endured. He held on to God even when his wife told him to just curse God and die. Is patience this kind of quiet, serene, unruffled, unfazed attitude all the time in every difficult situation? I don't think so. Go ahead – cry out to God. Question Him. Wrestle with Him. Tell Him how much it hurts. Just don't let go of Him. Don't give up your faith. Don't walk away from Him. Don't leave God's family. Hang in there. Persevere. Endure. I read somewhere that patience is the ability "to stay put and stand fast when you'd like to run away." Why not just run away? Because, like the farmer, you believe that somehow God is doing a great work in you that will produce a great spiritual harvest. That harvest may be next year, 20 years from now or when you get to Heaven, but there will be a harvest.

In June of 1955, Winston Churchill, very old and physically infirm, was asked to give a commencement address at a British university. He had to be helped to the podium. He just stood there at the podium for the longest time with his head down. It was starting to feel a bit awkward, when he finally raised his head and said – in that voice that years before had called Britain back from destruction during World War 2 – "Never give up. Never give up. Never give up." With that, Churchill turned and went back to his seat. I'm told there was a moment of total silence and then the whole audience rose to applaud him. He was a man who practiced what he preached. He was a man who had known many severe setbacks political and otherwise and yet somehow he had a sense that there was still something left after the worst. Perseverance isn't just for world leaders. The Bible says to you and me: "So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up." (Gal. 6:9 NLT) Never give up. Never give up. Never give up.

The choice in life isn't whether to have difficult situations or not. I've felt like 4 year old Katie at times. She'd been strapped in her car seat for 17 hours as her

family traveled to the beach for a vacation. When the car finally took the exit off the interstate for the motel, she asked, “Can I please be excused?” Haven’t you felt like that? You find yourself right in the midst of a difficult situation or you see one on the horizon heading for you. Aren’t you tempted to ask, “Lord, can I please be excused?” They come whether you want them or not. They happen whether you love Jesus or not. They arrive on your doorstep if you’re obedient and faithful to Jesus or if you could care less about Jesus. Having difficult situations is not the choice. The choice, instead, is whether you will allow God to use the shovel of hardship, the hoe of difficulty and the pickax of trouble to break up the hard soil of your life so that God can grow some patience in that place. Will you persevere and hang on long enough for God to do what He wants to do in you or will you say, “Who needs you, God? I’m through with following you, Jesus.” Will you give up and give in to bitterness, resentment and fatigue or will you persevere and endure through God’s grace? In difficult situations, patience is perseverance. Here’s another biblical principle when it comes to patience.

### **WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE, PATIENCE LOOKS LIKE FORGIVENESS.**

God has a purpose when He allows difficult situations into your life. He’s also got a purpose when He allows you to rub shoulders with difficult people. Apparently, it’s one way He can work into your character another important demonstration of patience: the ability to tolerate, to be generous, to put up with and to forgive graciously even those who drive you right up the wall and around the bend.

Patience – when it comes to people – is the ability to handle anger slowly. The Greek word for patience is *macrothumia* and it’s derived from two words. *Macro* means “long” or “slow.” *Thumos* means “heat, energy, anger.” So *macrothumia* or patience literally means the ability to get angry slowly or to take a long time to get angry. Now we all get angry – that’s a given. We just differ in how we express anger. When it comes to anger, people have been described as either skunks or turtles. Turtles get angry but they suppress and internalize their feelings. Plenty of resentment and strong feelings can be there just beneath the surface, but turtles find it hard to express anger, so they bear it in grim, pinch-lipped silence. Skunks, on the other hand, express their anger to whomever and whenever and however they want! Everybody gets sprayed. You never have to ask these folk how they feel. Expression is their forte. They feel so much better have they’ve sprayed out their angry feelings to everyone while the rest of us are left bleeding emotionally and pulling out the pieces of verbal shrapnel they’ve left behind.

Now God gets angry, but He gets angry very slowly. The Bible says, “The LORD is slow to anger and filled with unfailing love, forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion....” (Num 14:18 NLT) God doesn’t say don’t ever get angry. Instead, get angry slowly. How do you do that? Well, first of all, take your angry feelings to the Lord and submit them to Him in prayer. The Bible way is not suppression (the turtle way) or expression (the skunk way), but confession. Take the time to understand why you’re angry. If it becomes necessary, then, take the proper

steps to talk with the person with whom you're angry. And then be thoughtful as to the timing and tone of what you say. For example, I might make you angry someday. I hope not, but it's possible. Please don't come at me when we're about to start a worship service just because that's a convenient time for you. Not good for me! Likewise, be thoughtful about your tone. If someone comes at me, "Rick, you did this and you did that", I'm likely to be as defensive as the next guy. Instead, if you say, "Rick, when you did this, it made me feel this way" I'll likely react a whole lot better. The Bible doesn't say don't ever get angry. Instead, learn how to get angry slowly and how to express your anger positively.

God provides several venues where you can learn patience. Marriage is one venue. Men and women are just different and those differences provide fertile ground for learning patience. Husbands and wives rarely communicate well automatically. They have to learn how to be sensitive, how to respect one another, how to love and be loved. That demands patience. And even with the most compatible couple, there's going to be some failures and so forgiveness will need to be both offered and received. I'm reminded of the husband who asked his wife, "Why do you keep talking about all of my past mistakes? I thought you had forgiven and forgotten." His wife said, "Well, I have forgiven and forgotten. But I want to make sure you don't forget that I've forgiven and forgotten!" Real forgiveness has to be offered and received. That's patience.

Parent and kid relationships is another venue for learning patience as it relates to forgiveness. Mom and Dad, there are those days when you think God let you have kids for the sole purpose of teaching you patience! There's a humorous take on the Genesis story from a parent/kid perspective that goes something like this. God created Adam and Eve and the first thing he said was, "Don't." "Don't what?" Adam replied. "Don't eat the forbidden fruit." God said. "Forbidden fruit? We have forbidden fruit. Hey, Eve, we have forbidden fruit!" "No way!" "Yes, way!" "Do NOT eat the fruit!" said God. "Why?" "Because I am your Father and I said so!" God replied (wondering just then why He hadn't stopped creation after making the elephants). A few minutes later, God saw His children having an apple break and was He ticked! "Didn't I tell you not to eat the fruit?" God asked. "Uh huh," Adam replied. "Then why did you?" God asked. "I don't know," said Eve. "She started it!" Adam said. "Did not!" "Did too!" "DID NOT!" Having had it with the two of them, God's punishment was that Adam and Eve should have children of their own.

But, Mom and Dad, you might need some forgiveness and understanding from your kids, too. Pastor and author, Chuck Swindoll, tells a great story on himself. He had a very irritable morning years ago. Later that same day, while he was enjoying some target shooting with his son, Chuck got a bit convicted by his attitude. So he said, "Son, I was a little impatient this morning." "Uh huh," his son grunted as he squeezed off a round of ammunition. "I realize I was a little hard to be around." "Uh huh," his son responded again. "I want you to know that I feel badly about it. But you know, son, there are times that I'm like that." Chuck's

son paused and said, “Yes, yes, there are, Dad. There are times that you’re like that.” And then he added, “You know, Dad, God uses you to teach all of us patience in our family!” Ouch!

I don’t know why, but church can be a breeding ground for difficult people. Sometimes, I’ve wondered, “Lord, do all the difficult people in the world go to church, or what?” Apparently, it was the same back when the Bible was written because we find verses like these. “Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.... Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.” (Eph 4:2, 32 NLT) Patience, by the way, is a primary qualification for spiritual leadership in any church. The Bible says to leaders, “...Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching.” (2 Tim 4:2 NLT) You have to learn how to be patient with people’s sins, people’s lack of commitment to the Lord, people’s pettiness, people’s selfishness and people’s lovelessness. Church is a great place to learn patience!

Every fruit of the Holy Spirit is found, first and foremost, in God Himself. He is the God of love, the God of joy and the God of peace. The fact is that the only reason you’re here this morning is because God is patient. He has both the patience that perseveres and the patience that forgives. Where would you be today if God had not persevered and forgiven you? Think about how patient God has been with you personally! He chased some of us for a long time before we gave up and gave in admitting that He is God after all. Even after we’ve surrendered to Him, we still find lots of ways to defy Him and disappoint Him. Why does God put up with us? Why does He keep forgiving us? I love it when the Bible says, “The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.” (2 Pt 3:9 NLT) Paul, the great apostle, lived with a constant sense of God’s patience. He writes, “But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.” (1 Tim 1:16 NLT) Where would you be and where would I be without the awesome patience of God?

The first church Steve Mathewson served as pastor was in Helena, Montana. Steve would often spend some of his week studying in the public library at the edge of town. He always saw the same group of four or five scruffy-looking guys wearing dirty coats and long beards. They looked like mountain men—probably because they were. They came down out of the hills to study who knows what. Steve would see these guys with stacks of books, sitting in cubicles. He didn’t think a lot of it at the time, but about four years after Steve left, he found out that one of those guys was Ted Kaczynski—the Unabomber.

If you know anything about Kaczynski's story, you know that he grew up a very gifted young man. He became a math professor, but was soon disillusioned and

moved to the mountains of Montana. He would sometimes come down from the mountains to send mail bombs to people he didn't like. He was finally discovered by police and sent to prison. At this point the story gets even more interesting. A while ago, his mother, Wanda Kaczynski, was interviewed by a reporter with the Chicago Tribune. At the time that the article was written, she had been writing monthly letters to her son in prison.

She shared with the reporter what she had written in her most recent letter. She wrote: "I want you to know, Ted, that when a child is born, the parents give them the gift of unconditional love for a lifetime. This is true of you. No matter what happens, my love for you will be there for a lifetime. Love, Mother." Even after he had refused to look at her when he entered the courtroom during his trial, even after he had given testimony in court that described her as a horrible person, she still loved him enough to write those monthly letters. We look at that as a rather amazing act of human love, but the Bible says God has done something even more incredible than that. While we were still sinners—while we were still in full-out rebellion against Him—He sent His Son to die for us. Where would you be and where would I be without the awesome patience of God?