

Sometimes You Just Have to Wait

Aim: To show that we need to grow in patience.

Reading: **James 5:7-11** “..Therefore, be patient, brethren.....”

Introduction:

Most of us have times when we don't have a lot of patience. We want things to happen “now”. Media advertising pushes the line; “*Why wait, you can have it today.....no repayments until 2099....*”.

And our impatience is not just with “things”, or “events” (such as holidays). There are also times when we have little patience with other people. It may be that we want them to do something for us, but they take longer than we would like because of their inexperience. Or maybe they didn't do it as well as we would like. We can also be impatient with people who don't understand what it is that we are saying to them.

We can also show a lack of patience when we are facing trials and tribulations. We want the problems to go away, but they don't – they just seem to hang around. As a result, we get discouraged and down-cast, and we wonder whether it really is worth trying to live a faithful life for the Lord.

Today, I want us to look briefly at what the Bible has to say about our need to learn to grow in patience.

1) Some things just can't be rushed

a) Physical and spiritual growth

Our bodies took time to grow. When we were born, we most likely weighed around 3 or 4 kilos (7lbs). Our body was probably about 30 – 40 centimetres (12 - 15 inches) in length. We didn't get to our current weight and height over night – it took several years to happen.

When we were kids, we couldn't wait to be a teenager or young adult. But we couldn't speed things up – we had to wait.

It is the same thing with spiritual growth. Spiritual growth and maturity doesn't happen instantly - it takes time (**Romans 12:2**; **2 Peter 1:5-7**). While a newly baptised Christian is made clean and whole (**Romans 6:3-4**; **Colossians 1:21-22**), it takes time to mature in Christ (**Hebrews 5:12a**), it takes time to overcome some of the temptations we struggle with (**James 4:7b**); it takes time for us to understand some of the deeper things in scripture (**2 Peter 3:18a**).

b) Cures for diseases

When we get sick, we don't get better the moment we take the medication. The healing process takes time as it fights off the germs, the bacteria, *etc.* Some illnesses and injuries can heal quickly (*e.g.* a headache, a small cut to your finger), but there are other injuries and diseases that can take weeks, months, even years to fully recover from. Mostly, these things can't be speeded up. For instance, doubling the medication doesn't mean halving the recovery time – sometimes it can make things even worse.

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As (literally) painful as it can be at times, we just have to wait and let nature and medication take its course.

c) Time

I mentioned before that sometimes we get impatient waiting for certain events to arrive, for example, waiting for the day when we can start our holidays. Watching the calendar, even ticking off the dates, won't make the day come any quicker. Pacing back and forth, muttering "*hurry up*" to ourselves won't make any difference. Time will still pass, one second at a time, 60 seconds every minute, 60 minutes every hour.

d) Laws of nature

We are bound by the laws of nature – “time” being one of them. When the farmer plants the crop, he/she has to wait for the seeds to germinate, and then for the crop to grow to maturity (**James 5:7**). The crops don't instantly appear when you plant the seed. Walking out to the paddock every day won't make the crops grow any quicker.

Point: Waiting is a reality that we can't avoid. Some things can't be rushed – they need their own time to happen. And there is nothing that we can do about it – it's a part of everyday life.

2) We need to learn to wait patiently

a) Waiting patiently

The previous section showed that nature itself demonstrates the need for waiting at times. But not only do we need to wait, we need to wait patiently. Some people can wait for something, but not be waiting patiently. They can be agitated, restless, anxious, frustrated, even angry.

Patience is defined as the quality of “*suffering without complaint; endurance, perseverance; forbearance*”¹. Patience involves waiting - it understands that time is required, and humbly accepts that fact.

When you see terms like “*suffering without complaint*”, it implies that patience won't always be easy – suffering is seldom easy. This is why it can be so hard for us to be patient. But this is where “*endurance*” and “*perseverance*” play a part. Endurance and perseverance mean to “*hang in there, keep going, even though it is tough*”.

b) New Testament passages relating to the need to wait patiently

In the New Testament, there are several scriptures talking about the need for patiently enduring. A lot of the time, patience was required due to trials and hardship (**James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6**). Christians in the first century faced a lot of opposition. In fact, the scriptures tell us that...”...*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution...*” (**2 Timothy 3:12**).

¹ Attitudes 1 by Virgil Leach, page 15, “Patience”.

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Consider the treatment Paul received from the Jews when he was spreading the gospel. At one point, he was stoned, then dragged out of the city and left for dead (**Acts 14:19**). The Thessalonians also faced persecutions, but they patiently endured it, becoming an example to others (**2 Thessalonians 1:4**).

Trials and tribulations are often unavoidable. But God wants us to learn to endure these things patiently. In **Romans 12:12** we read, "...*(be) patient in tribulation....*". He wants us to "*hang in there, and not give up*" (**2 Timothy 2:3**).

c) Consequences of not waiting patiently

Being impatient, *i.e.* not waiting patiently, can cause other problems. Consider the case of Abraham and Sarah, and God's promise that they will have a son.

- Abraham was 75 years old at the time he was told that he would have descendants (**Genesis 12:1-4**).
- Sarah was 10 years younger than Abraham (**Genesis 17:17**), and hadn't been able to have children in the past (**Genesis 11:30**).

Time passed, but still no child arrived. Finally, about 10 years later (**Genesis 16:3, 16**), Sarah took matters into her own hand. She arranged to have Abraham father a child by her hand maiden, Hagar (**Genesis 16:1-4a**). But what were the consequences of this action? Joy? No. When you continue reading the chapter, we see that Sarah's attempt to speed things up a bit caused various problems to arise;

- Hagar despised Sarah – verse **4b** (presumably because she could do what her mistress couldn't, *i.e.* have babies.)
- This led to Sarah being upset – verse **5**
- Abraham gets the blame – verse **5**
- Sarah then treats Hagar harshly – verse **6b**
- Hagar runs away due to the harsh treatment – verse **6b**

Overall, a very unpleasant situation existed.

Note: It was another 14 years before Isaac was actually born (**Genesis 16:16; 21:5**). God will do His Will in His time, not ours.

Point: The inability to wait patiently can lead to anger and frustration. Anger and frustration can then lead to us doing things that we may later regret.

James 1:20 "*...for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..*" There is plenty of evidence in the world of problems arising because people are not patient – "road rage", for one.

3) How can we wait patiently ?

a) In prayer

We are not left alone in this world. The Hebrew writer states, "*...For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" "*" (**Hebrews 13:5b**). We can draw on God's help through the avenue of prayer.

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- **Philippians 4:6** “*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer...let your requests be made known to God*”
- **Romans 12:12** “*...patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer..*”

In **James 1:5** we are told that, “*...if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God...*”. I would dare to suggest that if we lack patience, then we can ask for His help in this area also.

When Jesus was about to face the greatest tribulations of His physical life while here on earth, The arrest, the trials, the scourging, and finally, the crucifixion would all take time – probably about a total of around 20 hours. Jesus was going to have to patiently endure these things in order to fulfil the Will of God. And so He prayed to the Father (**Luke 22:39-44**).

When we pray to God, we need to remember that He may choose not take the tribulations away, or choose not to take it away as quickly as we would like, so we need to ask for His help to endure the trials patiently.

b) In thanksgiving

Quite often, we only see “*the glass as half-empty*”, instead of being “*half-full*”. If our only focus in life is on the trials we face, then we will not see the blessings that we already have or which come our way.

In **Colossians 1:11-12** we read; “*...strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father...*”

On more than one occasion, the Bible links tribulations and trials with joy, for example, **1 Thessalonians 1:6**; **James 1:2**; **1 Peter 4:12-13**. Why is that ? - particularly when we usually consider trials as being something undesirable.

Well, one answer is in **James 1:3** “*...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience..*” Paul says a similar thing in **Romans 5:3-4**, “*...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope..*”

Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22** “*longsuffering*”) It is one of the fruits in which we are to grow (**2 Peter 1:6** “*perseverance*”). We will never learn patience if we are never placed into a situation where patience is required.

Another answer is found in **1 Peter 4:12-13**. When we suffer for the cause of Christ, we are sharing in His sufferings. We have a fellowship with Him in the sense that, just as He suffered for doing right, so do we. He endured because of the glory set before Him (**Hebrews 12:2**). So too, our suffering is not in vain – if it was, then we would be “*men most pitied*” (**1 Corinthians 15:19**). From **1 Peter 4:13**, we too can expect a reward (see also **2 Timothy 4:8**; **Revelation 2:10b**)

c) Taking comfort from the scriptures

While we are not living under the Old Testament law, there are lessons that we can learn from a study of that part of scripture. In **Romans 15:4** we read; “*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that through the patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*” By

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looking at some examples in the Old Testament, we can see that some things didn't happen instantly. God has His own timetable, and His people had to learn to wait at times. We have the benefit of hindsight to see that God truly was in control of things, even if events didn't happen as quickly as people would have liked.

- **Genesis 6:5-22** Noah was a righteous man, but lived in evil times (**6:5, 11, 13**). God was going to destroy the world, but He wasn't going to do it instantly. He was going to wait patiently until Noah had built the ark (**1 Peter 3:20** "*longsuffering*"). Noah was 600 years old when the floods actually came (**Genesis 7:6**) – that's a long time to have to live in a world full of evil, a world that obviously didn't respond to what Noah had tried to teach them over the years (**2 Peter 2:5** "*Noah....a preacher of righteousness*"). But in His time, God did what He said He would do - destroy the world, but save Noah (**Genesis 7:10 – 8:19**).
- **Genesis 15:13-16** In the times leading up to Moses, the children of Israel were not instantly delivered from their bondage in Egypt. From verse **16**, we can see that "*the iniquity of the Amorites² is not yet complete*". A part of God's plan for the children of Israel was that in the process of them taking the land of Canaan, they would be punishing the sinful nations that lived there at the time (**Deuteronomy 7:1-5**). The children of Israel would have to endure the suffering until the time was right for punishing the Amorites. We can see that God was true to His word – the children of Israel were released from bondage (**Exodus 12:31-41**), and the peoples of Canaan were destroyed (**Joshua 11:16-23**).

Even in the New Testament, we can see that God does things when He knows that the time is right. **Romans 5:6** says, "*....in due time, Christ died for the ungodly....*". The Jews had waited for centuries for the Messiah (**John 1:41, 45**). But the Messiah didn't come until God was ready for Him to come.

Even God Himself has to endure longsuffering. In **2 Peter 3:9** we read, "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise,....but is longsuffering towards us....that all should come to repentance*". God is patiently waiting for people to repent of their ways and turn to Him. By being *longsuffering*, He doesn't expect us to do something that He isn't prepared to do Himself.

d) In well doing

Rather than sit and become discouraged or angry during times that require patience, we need to be engaged in God's work. We often say to people when they sit around and brood about things, "*Get up and do something useful to take your mind off things*". Usually, when we are busy, we spend less time dwelling on our problems. The time seems to pass quicker.

² The Amorites, as a specific nation, lived on the east side of the lower Jordan/upper Dead Sea area. However, in this context, it refers to the peoples of Palestine in general, e.g. **Joshua 10:5**. Ref. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Volume 1, A-C, "Amorites", pages 142-143, paragraph 5. "Amorites in the OT".

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Idleness provides an opening for the Devil to do his work (**1 Timothy 5:13**).

Idleness leads to decay and destruction (**Ecclesiastes 10:18**).

We need to be engaged in good works (**Ephesians 2:10**).

We let our lights shine when we are doing good works (**Matthew 5:14-16**).

Note: This is not meant to minimise or trivialise any genuine problems or long-suffering that we may be going through. But we should not allow our tribulations, *etc.*, to cause everything to grind to a halt.

Point: Trials are usually not easy – otherwise, we wouldn't see them as a trial. But we are not left alone. We have each other to encourage us (**Hebrews 10:24**). God is still with us, and gives us the privilege of taking our concerns to Him in prayer. We can take comfort from the scriptures in seeing that God is always in control, even if it doesn't look like it from our perspective. Let's be thankful for our blessings, and not grow weary in doing good, for our labours are not in vain (**1 Corinthians 15:58**).

Conclusion:

Sometimes in life, we just have to wait, for either the good things to come, or for the bad things to go away. But God encourages us to look at the examples of those who have gone before (**Hebrews 6:11-12; James 5:10-11**). They patiently endured their trials, and the Lord was compassionate and merciful.

Patience is achievable. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22** “...longsuffering...”) It is something that we can learn and grow in. The Thessalonians were able to do it, and as a result, they were “...counted worthy of the kingdom of God...” (**1 Thessalonians 1:4**).

Let us all try to learn to grow in patience.