

“Empowered – Waiting with Patience”

June 13, 2-21

Summer series – Fruit of the Spirit

Here’s the problem. I start reading this list of the fruit that the Holy Spirit cultivates in us, and I’m good. Love...Joy...Peace...those seem right and good. Love that’s at the root of everything – God’s agape love shown most powerfully in Jesus. Joy that is grace recognized and grace received. Peace – the peace of God – that promise that I can rest in God’s care. And then I get to patience...

Patience. Even saying the word, we already hear the challenge. It’s too hard and practical and timely, and every time I read through the fruit of the Spirit, it’s always a challenge. I sometimes picture myself as Veruca Salt in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* – the girl who wants everything NOW!

Between waiting in lines, annoyance with trying to reach the right person on the phone or being on hold, irritation driving on the road, or just things not working out how we want or as quickly as we want, patience is a premium. And in Western culture, especially, having to wait or be patient for anything challenges our desire for instant gratification – getting what we want when we want it, how we want it, exactly as we want it.

Did I mention patience is hard? And if patience is a fruit of the Spirit, then that means it can be cultivated in us as we keep in step with the Spirit. It’s not enough to say, “I’m not patient,” and move on. We don’t get to make that excuse. It’s not something we can give up on and ignore. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit that God nurtures in us.

Patience in Scripture isn’t new; it doesn’t start in Galatians 5. Go all the way back to Abraham, Joseph, and our ancestors in faith who were called to be patient and wait on God’s timing. The Israelites were in exile for 70 years and called to remain faithful to God. God’s Word through Jeremiah the prophet was to be patient even as they were called to keep on living while they waited for a return to more normal times. How have we been challenged in recent months in out-of-the-ordinary times, especially with so much that seems out of our control? Patience is a premium, and it’s hard – always practical and always timely.

Early Christians lived in chaotic times, with many voices trying to persuade them in different directions and lots of dissension and uncertainty. We hear it in these New Testament letters - the letters that Peter, Paul, James, and others wrote to communities of faith that were sometimes in conflict.

And we hear the call to patience over and over again. There’s a reminder that God’s timing isn’t our timing. God is patient with us, so we should be patient with each

other as a reflection of our faith. Unity in Christ requires patience with each other. And there's a need for patience in suffering, and this is perhaps the most difficult word to hear. When we're suffering, patience can be an incredible struggle, especially when we don't feel God's presence. God is there, but we don't always feel God's presence.

Even as we hear these letters read and hear that call to patience, it's important to note that those who wrote them believed that Jesus was coming again – and soon – like any day. Jesus' return was imminent, so patience was required. It still is, though our perspective on Jesus' return isn't so immediate. Even so, patience is a virtue – a nice thing, but it's more than that. It's something God cultivates in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. And if we look at this list of the fruit, we realize that the Spirit's main agenda is transformation – changing us from the inside out. When the Spirit is in control, it produces fruit. Jesus even says that you'll know his followers by their fruit.

SHOW SLIDE: Greek word for PATIENCE – **μακροθυμία**

The word in Greek – *makrothumia* - literally means “long-tempered” or “slow to anger.” You may have heard patience also described as forbearance. Patience isn't just about waiting or being patient. Patience is a reflection of God's patience with us – “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” We hear that refrain about God over and over again.

Patience is a call to show patience with others just as God shows patience with us. I'll confess that it's the most difficult part of this list because if I'm honest, I want God to treat me with patience, but I don't always consider treating others with patience.

But there's something more to patience, too – not seeking revenge or evening the score even when we could. This flies in the face of how we want to react – the immediate pushback. Rev. Stephen Tillett shared a powerful phrase about patience. He called it “holding your heat” and practicing self-restraint before we say or do something in anger.

Dr. Amit Sood, a researcher at the Mayo Clinic, explained in an interview, “Impatience is not simply the opposite of patience. Rather, the absence of patience brings anxiety, illness, injury, loneliness... An episode of explosive anger, stress or impatience can increase your risk of [illness by as much as eightfold] for the next few hours.”

As one commentator says, patience is what we need most when we feel like showing it the least. And another put it this way: “Patience trusts the Spirit to guide the process rather than anxiously manipulating it to serve one's own ends.” God wouldn't call us to patience if there wasn't the possibility of being patient. That might sound strange, but the fact that patience is mentioned throughout Scripture – both as a part of God's nature and a quality that Christ followers are called to display tells me that God

works in us to nurture patience.

And I want to be clear on a couple of nuances. First, on a very practical note, patience (or sometimes called “long-suffering”) doesn’t mean that we are to endure abuse ourselves or allow others to experience harm. Patience may require setting clear boundaries.

Second, patience doesn’t mean that we sit around and passively wait for something to change; patience requires us to stay connected to the Holy Spirit, which means that the Spirit is working to transform us. Patience is not something we just “have.” We sometimes stew with impatience, forgetting that God is long-tempered. These letters to early Christians make it clear that God’s desire is for people to come to relationship with God. These writers wanted everyone to know that a relationship with God is possible – for everyone.

God isn’t indifferent or uncaring, but God is fully invested and waiting for people to repent and come to faith. God cares about what’s happening in our lives, in our communities, and in our world. God desires transformation for all of it.

We only need to think about someone who is patient with us (a parent, family member, friends, teacher, or someone else) to know how vital it is that we let God nurture greater patience in us – not only for others, but also for our witness to who God is – slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

May God help us be more patient and nurture patience in us – so that we reflect God’s patience with us and for the world. Thanks be to God. AMEN.