

Reading

James 5:7-11

7 Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. [b] 9 Beloved, [c] do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! 10 As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, [d] take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Introduction

If I was to choose one fruit of the spirit which is most discordant with modern society. It would be patience. We might see the virtue of love, joy and peace. But where would our consumer society be if people didn't want everything quicker, better more efficient and more productive.

We used to talk about patience a lot. Who didn't have a grandparent who would say "All in good time." "A stitch in time saves nine." "Everything comes to those who wait"? But I can't think of the last time I heard someone say that.

Context

Patience does not come naturally. If you want to see a child's eyes glaze over just try telling them to be patient! I think it is one of the hardest and most important things I have learned. Primarily about myself.

The price of impatience is high. Impatience leads to boredom and frustration and disappointment. Impatience damages our relationships, impatience with others - and especially children is hugely damaging. Patience is a crucial part of being a parent. and means we miss out on much of the most important parts of life. The speed of modern life and technology can give us the opportunity to be constantly stimulated. But in doing so we miss the beauty of each day. Sunrise and sunset, the leaves turning, the blossom. Like John Lennon said "Life is what happens when you are making other plans." Impatience means we are in danger of missing out on life.

Patience is the very character of God. He is patient with us like a good father with a child, slow to anger, quick to forgive. Always seeking the good of the other. God is not in a hurry, he always looks at the long game, the big picture. He cares about the fruit of a lifetime, not the work of a day.

He does not force us, or coerce us. He calls and waits for us to respond to him. Patience is about not being in control. God is willing to cede control over us in order to respect our dignity and autonomy, and because the relationship he desires with us is one of love, not control.

And God's character is what shapes ours.

Patience is at the heart of the Story of the Bible

If you think of the Old Testament it is perhaps more about patience than anything else.

Waiting, watching, long-suffering.

The passage uses the example of the prophets v10 As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord

They spoke the words of God, yet few ever God to see the fulfilment of them. Isaiah prophesied about the coming Messiah, but it was 400 years before Jesus came. Patience is where faith and hope come into play. And it may not be the case, but there is a good chance that you and I will not see the fulfilment of our hopes in this life. Just like those prophets.

And there is good reason for God to be patient.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.

The goal is not just that we might be saved, but that the whole of creation is reconciled to God. And God is willing to wait for the best outcome.

Patience is the practice of hope. Romans 8:22-25

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in [a] hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Hope is something you need to hold on to. It will be challenged by circumstances, the darkness of this world will try to overcome it. Choose to hope.

Patience is actively trusting in God. It is not me who is going to fix this, but God. God's purposes are the best thing. Watch and wait for them.

We need to be consciously watching and waiting. The parables are full of stories of people who got so caught up in the affairs of this world that they missed the kingdom of God.

Patience means bearing with discomfort.

God has to hold his desire for justice, his hatred of injustice and wrongdoing in balance with his compassion and mercy.

In the same way we need to bear with discomfort. And we are not good at that. We self-medicate to deal with pain.

Patience is the choice not to act on how you feel right now, but on what is best.

And that will require Endurance

v11 Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

The hardship we go through is an opportunity for us to learn endurance.

So strengthen your heart

The suggestion here is that our hearts are not strong - we are easily swayed, distracted and even despair. We give up on hope and cling to things that will not satisfy.

v8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts

Interesting phrase. What does it look like to train your heart as you would train your body. Practice, challenge yourself, train yourself to trust, be courageous.

Patience needs to be applied to our relationships,

Whether that is our friendships, with others at church, or romantic relationships.

v9 Beloved, do not grumble against one another.

Have you ever been on a long journey with friends where it starts off exciting and joyful, but as the days pass becomes frustrating and you can't wait to get away from them?

Two sides to that - unrealistic expectations, and impatience.

Be realistic that relationships require work, and don't just assume they will be great all the time.

Here is a good piece of advice. In any relationship you will always feel like you are the most patient and long-suffering one. Because you don't see the full picture of what others put up with you.

Does patience mean Apathy or passivity?

Of course there is danger of not responding to wrongs or injustice. But patience doesn't mean not acting, it just means not acting out of frustration, or anger, or impatience. It means prayerfully and thoughtfully considering and waiting for the right moment and acting proportionately and appropriately. And not expecting to get the result you want right away. People are complicated and if God doesn't expect to control us, then we shouldn't think we can control others. Often the best thing is for people to work things out for themselves.

So cultivate patience. In your faith, in your relationships, with yourself. We are playing a long game. Patience is not something you can manufacture - it must be cultivated. It is fruit, and so you can't simply force yourself to be patient.

The best way to patience is being rooted in Christ. As you spend time in God's presence, his character will shape you. His perspective on the big picture, on the what is best will become yours.

Pray Lord's prayer is as a good way to shift from self centred to other centred. *Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done.*

This summer, take some time to slow down. Appreciate the beauty of things.

And as with all these fruit of the spirit they don't just happen. Cultivating patience takes time - no surprise there. You need to wrestle with your frustrations and impatience. Value it, pursue it. Wrestle, trust, be courageous, hold on to hope, strengthen your heart.

Homegroups Questions

What are the ways that impatience robs us of much of what is important?

What are the things that drive you to impatience

Are there ways you can deliberately slow down and practice patience?

What about impatience in terms of life and career. We look at our peers and judge our progress based on them. I should have achieved this by now.

Productivity and self worth. What is it that gives you worth in this society if it isn't your productivity. Your achievements.