

## Patience

Have you ever been in London during rush hour?

Have you seen people's frustration at the tube ticket gates? Even if they lose just 5 seconds of their day because the person in front gets something wrong!

Have you ever sat in front of the computer waiting for it to do what you told it 2 mins ago?

Does it make you want to scream? To shake it – as if that helps!

Perhaps it's at the traffic lights, the light goes green and the person in front still hasn't pulled away! Ughhhh!

Or when you're going on a long journey with the kids... You hear that voice in the back saying... "are we there yet"

Yeah – children really have a problem with patience don't they!

Good thing we're grown up now!

I prayed at the start of this week – "Lord teach me patience"

And I tell you what, that's a risky thing to pray.

I've had my mother in law with me all week!

We lost our cat for a whole day, there were tears, we had her picture on lost pet websites, half of my football team helping or offered to help to try and find her.

And she came back after dark, just after we'd given up looking!

I know it's not just me... is it?

And those examples, the tube, the computer, the car: they're a little bit fun aren't they.

And if it's not road rage, or smashing the laptop across the room, they're not hugely *serious* examples.

But our lack of patience very often *is* of real importance.

Patience is sometimes harder with those you are closest to!

With my Dad, I get frustrated and short with him *much faster* than other people – especially if it's about using the computer. It's almost like I'm **starting** the conversation annoyed.

And with my wife!

Sam and I were moving a sofa, one of us lifting from each end.

It was late and we were tired... Of course we weren't lifting and moving at the same time in the same way, we got frustrated with each other.

It's much easier to know what **you're** thinking than someone else! And we forget that, and become impatient.

Do you find that, impatience can affect our most important relationships?

It's also there in the big things of life.

Like the teenager who wants a relationship and starts going out with someone totally unsuitable. (And actually that's not just an issue for teenagers)

Christians willing to compromise and date someone who doesn't share their Christian faith.

There are those who are trying but failing to have kids.

Those who have health problems where nothing seems to progress, and it drags on and on. I was talking to someone whose husband has dementia – and sometimes it's not him, but the really loud lady in the nursing home who always bothers her.

Not to mention the tests to your patience that parenting must bring, I've not faced it myself, but even when I'm out and about, I've seen people losing it with their kids.

All of us, at times, will have our patience **tested** – and that's quite a good word, because when our patience is tested, we are tested...

And we can fail that test by getting angry, but also by responding with emotional manipulation, by throwing in the towel too quickly. There are *lots of ways* to respond wrongly to tests of patience.

So I hope that you'll join me in praying "lord teach me patience". Will you?

In this talk I'm going to say what patience is, how we grow in it, and then try to expand quite a bit on what the bible means by patience.

So, what is patience, here's a definition I looked up:

"Patience is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, problems or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious."

And I think most people think of that as a good thing – Patience is a virtue!

To make it Christian patience, I want to add a reason:

**Christian** "Patience is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, problems or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious" **because we trust God, and because we see people more as God sees them.**

I want us to see that Christian patience is hugely linked to our faith. It is grounded in our trust in God.

I read some really funny suggestions from the world to help with patience.

From the instant suggestions: "stop and count to 10" and "breathe slowly"

To more long-term patience-training tactics:

Take 100 coins, scatter them and then pick them up *slowly*, and put them in neat stacks.

Or take a book with about 150 pages, and turn each page, slowly, making a small pencil mark on the corner of every on.

Even, count slowly out loud for 10 mins. That's 600 seconds!

Now I find some of those things funny, and it's an interesting idea to do exercises to train yourself to be patient - like a mental gym workout.

At the men's breakfast yesterday someone (whose job it is to help people to change) was telling me that it's no good just thinking something, you need to *do* something different.

But I think why I find those things funny, and I'm sure they help, is that *on their own* they just don't go deep enough.

A Christian should have a patient **heart**, and God the Holy Spirit wants to work in our hearts to change us so that we have a more patient heart!

The way we grow in patience, like all Christian growth, isn't just with commands "do this, do that, don't do the other".

All through the New Testament, we are taught to admit our failings, confess them to God, and find forgiveness because of Jesus.

Then 100% certain of that forgiveness and our acceptance from God, which has already happened, then(!) after that, we seek to live how God wants, we ask him for his help and we try to please him in every way. (which may involve training)

That same method of *how* we change, is there in Colossians 3:

v1 “Since, then, **you have been** raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

[see how deep the change is- heart and mind]

For you died, and **your life is now hidden** with Christ in God. When Christ... appears, then **you also will appear** with him in glory.” [it’s certain!]

“Put to death therefore...” a big list of bad stuff.

And v12

“as God’s **chosen people, holy and dearly loved**, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and **patience**. **Bear with each other** and [see how this is rooted in our faith:...] **forgive one another** if any of you has a grievance against someone. **Forgive as the Lord forgave you**. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity”

This is how we change as Christians- we see our lack of patience, confess it to God, *know* we are completely and totally forgiven and accepted, and then with his help to seek a deep change.

So what does the bible mean by patience? At least 4 things – and following some really helpful material from [this book \[Jerry Bridges the fruitful life\]](#), I’m going to explain 4 big things. In each case I’m going to give a biblical example, to help to explain.

So firstly, **longsuffering, as a victim**.

The example of this is Joseph, the Joseph in the Old Testament with the multi-coloured coat. Outrageously he was beaten up and sold into slavery by *his own* brothers. He was taken away from his family, sold to Egypt as a slave. He was unfairly put in prison, unfairly forgotten there for years. All the while, over the course of many years, entrusted himself to God, suffering patiently.

Here we are focussing on showing patience when provoked, unjustly, and in a situation where you are weak and powerless.

Justice is the key issue here, because this kind of patience **suffers injustice**.

Imagine the Christian who is provoked by colleagues at work. Perhaps practical jokes played on them, or they repeatedly suffer because of office politics, or get caught in organisational power plays.

This patience is seen when you are the powerless and weak party, when you are provoked. And longsuffering is the kind of patience which enables you to suffer under this mistreatment without growing bitter or resentful.

Longsuffering is not weakness, as if it's an attitude where we are ok with being abused – No, it's strength, strength to stand up to a situation which is unjust. Strength to keep going, as you entrust yourself to God.

This patience in many ways might look like *resilience*.

Joseph is our example. He was weak, but he entrusted himself to God, in the face of unjust treatment by other people.

Are you patient like this? Or do you find yourself clamouring for justice? Complaining, writing letters, fighting your case, shouting loudly and so on.

Perhaps you just write those letters in your head, and inside your fight your case and get bitter?

Friends, there will never be complete justice in this life, when we suffer we need to remember God's justice and his faithfulness, we need a longsuffering and resilient patience. Peter tells us "those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their **faithful** Creator and continue to do good."

Our trust in God can help us to be patient when provoked.

That's the first kind of patience.

The second is also **longsuffering**, but this time when we are the ones **in a position power**.

The example this time is Jesus facing opposition!

As Jesus taught, the Pharisees accused him of doing the miracles he did through evil power. His mother Mary and his brothers, demanded that he stop his teaching and come home to get some food.

At his arrest, Jesus could have called upon legions of angels to deal with this ridiculous arrest squad, not to mention his trial.

Jesus was in a position of power, he could have struck out, responded to his tests of patience by swift retaliation or punishing in some way, but he didn't.

This kind of patience, longsuffering when we have some power, follows the way of God, who is slow to anger.

Parents need this when their patience is constantly tested by their child over and over again. Perhaps you need this patience at work, or amongst your friends you have power socially, so that you can retaliate to put someone down.

It would even include physical power, men particularly, where you are provoked and you could instantly respond physically.

This kind of longsuffering shows itself under provocation by restraint and control.

It doesn't rule out honest conversation, of course you question your child about whether they are doing their best.

But we don't discipline our kids in anger. We are patient, we don't show an eagerness or a delight in punishing the person who angers us, whoever they are.

Only recently someone said to me that it was only by God's mercy changing them, that they don't still have fits of anger and rage.

I want to say a **special word** to you if you are very bad at losing your temper, if you often hit out in anger, physically or verbally.

“You need to control anger and not let it control you”

This could be you, or it could be someone close to you.

Here are some shocking statistics: 1 in 4 women in England and Wales experiences domestic violence, and women who come to speak to the police, are assaulted 35 times *on average* before they come forward.

If this is you, you need help, come and speak to me, it’s not a problem about which you will be rejected, but it **is** important to get help.

Jesus teaches that

“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his *heart*, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his *heart*. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of”

It comes from the heart: growing in patience will inevitably mean *much more* than simply trying to control your behaviour, and there is help available.

If that’s *not* you, remember we can respond *powerfully* and *impatiently* in non-physical ways too: like the silent treatment or other emotional manipulation

We all have room to grow in our patience, to be longsuffering when we have power.

The third type of patience is **Bearing With**, here the focus is on peoples weakness and failings.

Our example is Jesus again, focussing on Jesus with his disciples.

The disciples really were slow learners! He must have been tested! He was with them for 3 years, teaching, healing and so on. They saw him feed 5000 people, walk on water, not just healing people but even raise people from the dead.

But they were so slow to understand, so ‘thick’ in some ways.

He was so patient, he didn’t blame them or hit out at their shortcomings, but gently taught them – he *bore with* them.

This is the kind of patience which we need to have with **ourselves** as well as others (yes we need to be patient with ourselves!!) as we bear with our own weaknesses.

I bet the disciples did the same testing things over and over and over again, the same test coming back again and again!

As Jesus bears with them we see a kindness which is full of mercy. This kind of patience involves being very forgiving, like our verse in Colossians said:

“Bear with each other and forgive one another... Forgive as the Lord forgave you”

Often people won’t do things on purpose:

Small things like making annoying chewing noises when they eat; Big things like loving someone with dementia. But they’re not done on purpose. We need to bear with them.

And the key, to bear with someone, is to be forgiving as the lord forgave you, think about how difficult you were, and yet the lord’s great love meant he forgave you.

So you love, forgive and bear with others too!

But do you know what, I've been trying really hard with this, and it's hard!  
It's not easy in the heat of the moment, to say to yourself – "love them more, love them more"

What I've found is exactly what I said before, that *after my* moment of impatience I will confess my sin to God:

I'll talk to him about how I know I'm a sinner and he has forgiven me, though I must try his patience a lot.

I ask him to give me a greater love and a more forgiving spirit with the kind of patience which will bear with this other person.

Then I apologise to the person, and say I shouldn't have said what I did or responded how I did.

That's the third type of patience, "bearing with".

The final type of patience is waiting.

And the focus here is waiting on God.

Our example is Abraham.

The very first thing we see Abraham do in the bible is to obey God and set out on a journey, and he doesn't know at the start where he's going! He looks to God and *waits* for that.

Abraham is the great father of the faith, he's held up for his **faith** in God, but I want to draw particular attention to his waiting.

He really did have to wait a lot, for many many years, more than 25, for God to do what he promised. God promised him many descendants, but he and his wife were getting really old! Did Abraham get impatient, yes, and he made mistakes because of it, but he kept waiting on God. When he took his eyes off the ball, God brought him back again to waiting on him. Abraham had to learn the lesson that his own ways didn't work.

When people are facing health problems, and they drag on, or look like there is no way forward at all – the real question of patience in suffering isn't just with the doctor, or with yourself, but with God. What is he doing, why is he allowing this?

And very often, we don't have an answer.

I heard a story once of an open-sea swimmer who was swimming the channel, all 21 miles of it! She'd trained hard and was ready for the task. About half way across the channel, the current was hard, a sea fog descended – visibility got low. She struggled on and on, but not seeing where she was going, she became more and more discouraged. Eventually, not seeing through the fog she gave up. She signalled to the boat and climbed in to warm up and recover. As they got to shore, they realised that they were only a few hundred meters away. She was gutted, and said of course: although she was exhausted, if she'd have known how close she was, she'd easily have had enough energy to finish the swim.

And our patience with God can be like that can't it, it would be so *easy* if we knew the end was just around the corner.

The cross-channel swimmer is used as a motivational story to get people to keep going. The problem is, what do you do if you *don't* know where the end is? Or where God is even taking you?

And that's where it comes down to faith. Remember I said Christian patience is bound up with faith.

Do you trust that he's taking you somewhere good? He is good, he is love, he does love you.

And here's the patience part, are you willing to get there in his timing?

Or do you take matters into your own hands because he's too slow, or you don't like his way.

Do you subconsciously cut a deal and go his way for a time, as long as he delivers after a month, or a year or whatever?

Real waiting on God trusts him for the destination and the timing.

With all his failings, Abraham is our example of waiting on God.

God's will for you is that you grow in patience, firstly to be longsuffering, when you're in the position of more weakness like Joseph, or of power like Jesus with those who opposed him.

That you bear with others' failings, like Jesus with his disciples, and that you wait patiently on God and his timing, like Abraham.

Let's pray and ask God to help us.

Father we say simply, sorry – we are impatient and it comes from our hearts. Forgive us because of your son Jesus Christ, and help us and change our hearts, that we would love others and trust you, so that we would be patient people, for your glory, Amen.