

“Being Attractive Without Having to Look Good - Patience”

God’s Extreme Makeover - Part 4

James 1:2-12

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We’ve been looking at Galatians 5 over the past three weeks. *“When the Holy Spirit controls our lives He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.”* This is the Extreme Makeover that God wants to do in our life. When my daughter was in junior high and we were discussing the way she believed that she had to dress, I said, “Your clothes don’t define who you are.” And she responded, “Yes they do.” And that is the way most of the world thinks. Appearance is the only thing that matters. God doesn’t think that way. When Samuel was sent to find a king to replace Saul, the Lord said to him, *ADo not consider his appearance ... The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*” (1 Samuel 16:7) It is the desire of God to change us from the inside out, so that when He looks at our heart, a reflection of the love and grace of God will be seen.

Last week we talked about one of the fruits of the Spirit that most of us need, peace. This week and next we will look at patience. Because we are not a very patient people. That’s a big reason why we are in the financial mess we are right now. We couldn’t wait for things that we wanted and so we just expanded our credit beyond the amount we could pay. We did that personally and collectively. And Congress, regardless of the party in leadership, has not only encouraged that lifestyle, they’ve led the way. Their spending is still out of control. There’s not a whole lot of patience in the land. We know that. And sometimes we even pray, *ALord, give me patience and give it to me now.*” We need patience in our world, and in our life. But what is patience?

Patience is easy to define. It’s the opposite of impatience. Actually patience and impatience are different sides of the same coin. They are our response to the events that happen or don’t happen in the world around us. When we hit that bump in the road, when things don’t go the way we want, we either react with patience or impatience. And we all have our favorite way to express our impatience. Some yell and scream. That includes blowing your horn because the horn is simply the way our car screams. Or they make all sorts of derogatory comments and snide little remarks, looking at their watch and scowling. Some get physical and punch, slap, or shake something, anything. Some pump up their blood pressure so the veins in the neck pop out, scaring small dogs and children. Others get moody and pout, refusing to communicate until they get what they want. Some judge and blame others, making huge assumptions about the facts. And some just isolate themselves completely. And sometimes we use any and all combinations to display our impatience.

We all have our favorite ways to express our impatience, but what are the situations that trigger our impatience? Traffic. Kids. Waiting in lines. Being late. Parents. Teenagers. Procrastination. Waiting for your wife whose been shopping for what must now be 8, 10, 12 hours. Not that I know anything about that. Or long sermons. I don’t know anything about that either. We all have our personal impatience triggers, but there are some general triggers as well, like ...

1. Relationships

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Nothing tests our patience more than those who are closest to us; those that we love the most. Have you ever lost your patience while getting ready for church? I see it from time to time. People sitting there all angry and upset. Not listening to the sermon. No singing. Ready to punch any usher that comes by. And they’re coming to church. Something happened, probably in the home, that got them off schedule. A kid was running late. Someone didn’t brush their teeth. There was a wardrobe malfunction. If it weren’t for people, life would be fun. But relationships trigger our impatience and frustration.

2. Life circumstances

Maybe it’s battling an illness that isn’t going away, and you’re impatient, waiting to get this whole thing behind you. Or you’re frustrated and impatient because you’re single at an age where you think you ought to be married. Or you’re in a financial hole that just seems to be getting deeper and deeper, running on a treadmill and unable to get off. It is when we cry, “When is this going to end?” Life circumstances will trigger our impatience.

3. Stupidity

Now to be fair, we all spend some time in this category because stupidity is no respecter of age, race, gender, wealth, or anything else. We all do stupid things but when WE do it, it is forgivable. . When others do it, they are just rude, mean, and ignorant. The person in the 15 items or less line with about 25 things, and we get irritated and impatient. You spend 20 minutes walking around the convenience store until you decide what you want. Take it to the counter and the clerk says, “Is there anything else?” “Yeah, I want everything in the store except this. Ring it up. And here’s your sign.” These are the situations that make us ask, “Lord, how long must I suffer these fools?” And a careful reading of the gospels will tell us that Jesus in his dealing with His disciples even experienced this trigger.

Now one thing that all these triggers have in common is that they are beyond our control. They come unannounced, unwanted, and unprepared for. They’re roadblocks that keep us from getting at something we need or desire. And it drives us nuts. And then we look around and see the person over there that seems to be living with patience and peace. There’s a calmness, a depth, an acceptance. They have roadblocks, too, but they have figured out some way to maneuver around the roadblocks without hurting other people or crashing themselves. The person with patience is very attractive, and that’s what we want, an internal beauty. And God has a Biblical picture of the patience that He wants to show us.

The PICTURE

In the Bible, the word “patience” is not found in the Old Testament, which is a little strange because we speak about the patience of Job. But the word isn’t there. In the New Testament, two different words are used for patience. One is *makrothumeo*, which means self-restraint that doesn’t retaliate, or having a long fuse. The other word is *hupomone*, which means, hang in there. These words are kind of synonymous, have a long fuse and hang in there.

Now why would God want us to have a long fuse? So people don’t get hurt. Ecclesiastes 7 *Patience is better than pride. Don’t be quick tempered for anger is the friend of fools.*” So we understand why

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we would want to have a long fuse. The idea of hanging in there has to do with endurance and perseverance, because we have to last through the tough times. James 5:8 *“You too must be patient and take courage for the coming of the Lord is near.”* Hang in there. Don’t give up. God is working behind the scenes. Hang in there, persevere, endure, it’s going to be worth it. We’ve got to learn to wait on what God is doing. That is God’s picture of patience. Have a long fuse, and hang in there.

OK, that makes sense, but why is patience a fruit of the Spirit anyway? Why does God want me to have patience in my heart? Because patience reflects love. 1 Corinthians 13: *ALove is patient.*” And in Ephesians 4:2 we read, *“Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.”* Love and patience are connected. And yet, we are often most impatient with those we love the most. God wants to change that.

Patience also leads to spiritual growth. James 1: *“For when your faith is tested your endurance [or patience] has a chance to grow. So let it grow for when your endurance is fully developed you’ll be strong in character and ready for anything.”* Spiritual growth needs to be a priority for all of us. For the Christian faith is not a stagnant declaration. It is a continual walk with God, always moving to where we can be a better reflection of the love and grace of our Lord. Just as we walked away from God, step by step, so must we come back step by step. And it is only fair, for the Lord Jesus made the journey to come to us, to die for us. Now it is our responsibility to move toward the Lord that we might live in Him, and Him in us. And in that journey we seek to have the fruit of the Spirit grow in us. And when we grow anything, it is not an instant process. It takes time and it takes patience. Patience leads to spiritual growth.

And patience is rewarded. How? Well, if we are more patient, people will like us better. That’s a reward. We’ll have better relationships and more peace in our life. And it is easier to respect patient people. In essence, we will be more attractive, and that’s just on earth. Patience is also going to be rewarded in heaven. James 1:12 *AGod blesses the people who patiently endure testing.*” Patience is rewarded on earth and in heaven.

Patience is very attractive in an individual, and it is a very desirable attribute. So why are we as impatient as we are? Because there are problems. And I want to talk about a couple of them.

The PROBLEM

1. Overload.

There’s a country song that proclaims *AGod is great, beer is good, and people are crazy.*” Now I don’t believe all of that, but I know that God is great, and I am sure that people are crazy. That’s us. We regularly try to cram too much stuff into too little time. And our schedules, our calendars, our lifestyles are overloaded. There’s no breathing room, and no margin for error. We have overloaded our lives. And then we are always running late. So we are tense and on edge, making it easier to lose our temper. Or we cause others to lose theirs. How many of you know someone who has to be told that the event is 45 minutes earlier than it actually is so you can get them there on time? An overloaded schedule is an enemy of patience. Have you ever had a cup filled right to the tippy top, so full that the least false

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move will cause it to spill? That’s what we do with our schedules. And the least little thing pushes us over the edge. When we live life with no margin, any little mismanagement will trigger impatience.

2. Expectations.

When life is filled with expectations, there will be times when those expectations will not be met. There will be disappointments and our patience will be challenged. And that’s not just unrealistic expectations, but just plain, ordinary, everyday expectations. Especially when we attach those expectations to another person because no one is perfect. People will let us down at times, and at times we will let others down. Often we don’t even know that we let someone down, but we have, because they had expectations of us. And we let ourselves down. We can excuse ourselves, but we become impatient with others because they don’t live up to our expectations.

We have expectations on ourselves and others. And often we put expectations on God. Over time I’ve met all sorts of people who felt as though God had let you down because their expectations were not met, even though God never promised to meet all our desires and expectations. Some walk away from their church, away from their faith, away from their God because they laid their desired expectations on God, and God didn’t meet them. That can lead to an agnostic lifestyle where one lives as though God doesn’t exist because in their mind God let them down. When we lose our patience with God, patience with others decreases as well. Expectation is one nasty enemy of patience.

3. Pride

Pride is the over inflated view of oneself and it impacts patience by devaluing others. For when pride is triggered, egos get puffed up. But when pride is challenged, impatience suddenly appears. We think, "I’m better than that. I deserve better than that. Don’t they know who I am? How dare they?" When I was a new teller in banking a member of the Board of Directors came to my window to cash a check. I asked for ID and he blew up. "Do you know who I am?" Obviously not because I asked for ID. Later in the day when I asked the president of the bank for ID, he laughed and said "Of course."

What was the difference in the two? Pride. And behind the pride is a major case of self-centeredness. In turn, self-centeredness blinds us from the truth. It blinds us from the real issues. Self-centeredness always points to somebody else "It’s his fault. It can’t be mine." Pride is very ugly. That’s one of the reasons the Bible says that God hates pride. And conversely, in the movie "Devil’s Advocate", Al Pacino, playing the part of Lucifer, declares, "Vanity (that is pride) [is] definitely my favorite sin." Pride. God hates it. Satan loves it. And pride will make us react in ways that are closer to the bottom than the top, for it devalues others and our impatience with those around us is prominently on display. And it’s not very pretty.

Humanity can act in pretty ugly ways. Just a quick look at news from any time or place will testify to that. But God wants to implement a beautification process within us. There is a plan to make that happen which we will look at next week. This week take a good look at the things that trigger your impatience. And then pray, "Lord Jesus, who patiently suffered all that we threw at you, forgive us our impatience, and help us live in the patience and peace that comes when Your Spirit rests within us. Amen." And in your life, may it be so.