

## **Fruit of the Spirit: Patience, Kindness, Goodness**

I wonder how many of you have been waiting for a very long time to hear a sermon on patience. If you have, you don't need one, because you are already a living example of what patience means: the ability to take disappointment or bad treatment or things that test our resolve and to remain firm, remain calm, not irritated or upset ... just patient.

In the Greek New Testament patience is based on the word *makrothumia*. The "makro" part means "long" as in "a long time" and "thumia" in New Testament times meant 'anger'. Holding one's anger for a long period of time is long-suffering, enduring, persevering patience.

Of course, patience is a word that also describes God's character. He is described in several Old Testament passages as being "long" or "slow" to become angry. He is also described as demonstrating patience by delaying punishment for sin (Is. 48:9):

*For My own sake, and for the honor of My Name, I will hold back My anger and not wipe you out.*

Another example from Psalm 50 (vv. 20,21):

*You sit around and slander a brother -- your own mother's son  
While you did all this, I remained silent and you thought I didn't care  
But now I will rebuke you, listing all My charges against you*

There are also demonstrations of God's patience, as in His conversation with Abraham about the judgment of Sodom, or with His rebellious prophet Jonah, or with His chosen people, Israel. We find a couple of references that help us understand the purpose of God's patience; that He is not wanting to rush to judgment because His desire is that each person would come to the place of repentance, of changing their minds and allowing God to change their hearts. (Romans 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9) And so He waits.

If patience is part of God's character, we would expect it to be the fruit of the presence of His Spirit within us. And yet our whole culture works against this godly attribute. We are all challenged by this vision of patiently waiting for something to happen, for anything to happen. We don't wait.

The internet's been down for 15 minutes. I can't get my banking done and I have to get to the fast food place by quarter after so I can get to work on time ... barely on time. If I can't get my banking done today ... and I've got a lot on after work ... then I might get charged \$5 in late fees on my payment and ... well, who wants that? Now, here I am in the drive through and there are, like, 5 cars ahead of me and some guy ahead of me is ordering, like, everything on the menu, and now I am going to be late for work and I'll have to make excuses, again, and I'll have to stay a bit later, again, to make up for lost time and I'll be late for my spa time and ... (a little later) I can't believe how my boss came down on me for being just a few minutes late, maybe 10, or so, and he was so uncaring about my day and the hassles I had getting to work in the first place.

Maybe it's time for me to move on, find work somewhere else, somewhere I feel more appreciated and where I'm not getting stressed out. Imagine the nerve to tell me I should expect long lineups at the drive through this time of the morning. Come on -- I was there on time.

Now, you may not relate to that whole scenario at all, and that's a good thing. But just notice with me the kinds of pressures that work against patience ... pressures that are common to many of our lives. There's the pressure of instant access to many services that we count on, such as banking. Why is that a pressure? Because we no longer think about giving time to making a trip to our local bank and lining up for 15 minutes and explaining our need to a teller. Because we expect to be able to do something quickly we don't budget time for it, often don't do it ahead of time and can be squeezed when something goes wrong. That's true, not only for banking, but for lining up in a drive-through for some calories or booking an appointment right after work because we don't want to have a gap there, time that isn't fulfilling some purpose.

A major pressure is simply the pace of life that is typical of our culture today. Everything is moving so quickly that it's actually a challenge for us to slow down, to relax, to unwind. We keep moving out of habit. It's somehow in the blood of my generation and the one after it that if you're not doing something there's something wrong with you. One of the problems with the pace of life is that it can mess with our perspective on life. That \$5 late fee can become a big deal in our minds, even though we'll forget about it as soon as we pay it.

Patience is stretching things out over an extended period of time, not responding quickly or acting impulsively, but being willing to wait. It is LONG suffering, putting up with a person who is slow to do the right thing, slow to reconcile your relationship, slow to move forward with their lives, slow to deal with the issues that hold them back. We can sometimes think that everything is urgent, including our mission to people who don't know Jesus, but, even there, the Holy Spirit tells us to be patient.

In 1853 a denominational mission society discussed closing a station in Ongole, India because, after 15 years of mission work from that station, only 10 people had come to faith in Christ. Was the mission society being responsible if they continued to pour precious resources into a place that had yielded such meager results? They made the decision to continue the work and thirty years later the church had grown to 15,000 members.

In Burma, the missionary pioneer Adoniram Judson once wrote home, "Beg the churches to have patience. If a ship were here to carry me to any part of the world, I would not leave my field. Tell the brethren success is as certain as the promise of a faithful God can make it." He lived and preached the gospel in that land for 7 years before one person came to Jesus.

Patience is perspective. If we only see the short term, if we only see the right now and

maybe tomorrow, we can hardly wait patiently for anything. But if we look into the distant future, to the future that God sees, we can be sure that our perspective on current stresses will be changed - we will become more LONG-suffering. This is a fruit of the Spirit that is growing in us, this ability to look beyond the temporary, the urgent challenges of today and the next day, and to reassure ourselves, "In the light of eternity, this is really not such a big deal." Out of that perspective, we grow in this gift of something we call patience.

The next fruit of the Spirit that Paul adds to his list is "kindness". Just a word of caution as we work our way through this list. There is a risk that we will read words like "kindness" and "goodness" and "gentleness" as meaning pretty much the same thing, and that the catch word for most of the fruit of the Spirit is "niceness". If a person is patient and kind and gentle, he or she is a nice person, right?

But the words that are used here are actually much stronger than 'nice'. For starters, the word for "kindness" is the Greek form of the Hebrew word *chesed* which includes the idea of compassion and faithfulness. It is sometimes translated as "lovingkindness" in the Old Testament, usually of God's faithful, enduring love for His people. In the New Testament, as well, kindness is seen as an attribute of God and as including the ideas of generosity and graciousness.

Kindness is expected of followers of Jesus, especially in relation to the poor and the weak, those who are in need of compassion. The individual who demonstrates kindness is, obviously, much more than a nice person who doesn't cause any trouble. This is a person who acts in caring and compassionate ways towards others, a person who demonstrates love.

In Paul's letter to Titus he writes (3:4-7) of the kindness of our Lord Jesus:

*But then God our Savior showed us His kindness and love. He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of His mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did. He declared us not guilty because of His great kindness. And now we know that we will inherit eternal life.*

The word 'kindness' appears twice in those four verses and expresses the way God has dealt with us - saving us by His mercy, washing away our sins, giving us new life by the Holy Spirit, declaring us not guilty and promising us eternal life. None of those things were deserved -- and Paul makes that clear as well -- but are gifts to us because of God's kindness.

If you pay someone \$200 to fix up your lawn after another heavy winter of moss-growing and the person does the work you've paid them to do, neither of you looks on the other as having done anything particularly kind. If you could only pay for half the job and the person did the whole yard anyway, that would be kindness. And you would be doing a kindness if you paid them double what they were asking. But when you give and receive what you deserve, kindness isn't the best term to describe the

transaction. It's when you give or get what is undeserved that kindness comes into play. That's why the word is used so often to describe what God has done for us, what He did for Israel in the books of the Old Testament and what is expected of believers, of people who follow Jesus, in the books of the New Testament. A couple of examples and then I'll offer a couple of illustrations.

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Eph. 4:32)*

Maybe people deserve or at least provoke anger and harsh words, but we are to respond with what they don't deserve; with kindness, forgiveness, tenderness.

*Since God chose you to be the holy people whom He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. (Col. 3:12,13)*

Again, just as we are called to love because God first loved us, so we are called to express kindness and forgiveness, because God initiated those ways of dealing when He made a way for us to have relationship with Him.

He makes the first move and then asks us to imitate that move -- and we'll see more of that in the coming weeks.

Lord Palmerston was Prime Minister in England during Queen Victoria's reign. He was once crossing Westminster Bridge when a little girl ahead of him dropped a jug of milk. The jug broke into fragments and she dissolved into tears. Palmerston managed to calm her sobs by telling her that, if she came to the same spot on the next day he would give her enough money to pay for both the milk and the jug. The next morning, in the middle of a cabinet meeting, he remembered his promise, quickly left the bewildered cabinet ministers, dashed across the bridge, pressed a half a crown into the waiting child's hand and hurried back. Kindness. An unnecessary promise from a generous and compassionate heart.

In the city of Philadelphia there was a little third-class hotel. Late one night an elderly couple came to this hotel and went directly to the night clerk, pleading for a room, any room, as they were so tired and had been turned away from all of the hotels they would usually have stayed at. "We're dead tired and it's after midnight. Please don't tell us you don't have a place where we can sleep." The clerk looked at them for a long moment and then answered, "Well, I don't have a single room except my own. I work at night and sleep in the daytime. It's not as nice as the other rooms, but it's clean, and I'll be happy for you to be my guests for tonight." The next morning, the couple sent for the night clerk to come join them at breakfast. When he arrived and asked them how they had slept, they thanked him and the husband then astounded him with a proposal:

"You are too fine a hotel man to stay in a hotel like this. How would you like for me to build a big, beautiful, luxurious hotel in New York and make you the general manager?" After the clerk had stammered out, "It sounds wonderful," the guest

introduced himself, "I'm John Jacob Astor." And so the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel was built - 1900 rooms in a 47-story building and the night clerk became one of the best-known hotel men in the world. Kindness doesn't always produce a payback like that, but it does produce an internal reward, the sense of satisfaction, even joy, that comes from following close to the ways of our Master.

There was a man named Stephen Grellet, born in France, the son of an advisor to Louis XVI, whose life was once in danger and who escaped to America. There he became a Christian, an admirer of William Penn and therefore a Quaker. You probably have never heard his name before, but you may very well have heard a few lines attributed to him which date back to the middle of the nineteenth century:

*I shall pass through this world but once. Any good that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now and not defer it. For I shall not pass this way again.*

Finally, then, the fruit of the Spirit is goodness. Again, please don't mistake this for a bland word: "the meeting was good, the food was good, the weather is good, we had a really good time." Here is a definition that will help us:

*Goodness in people is not a mere passive quality, but the deliberate preference of right to wrong, the firm and persistent resistance of all moral evil, and the choosing and following of all moral good.*

Remember what Jesus said when a wealthy young ruler came running up to him with the question, "Good Teacher, what should I do to get eternal life?" He said, "Why do you call Me good? Only God is truly good. As for your question, you know the commandments: 'Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not testify falsely. Do not cheat. Honor your father and mother.'" "Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was a child." Jesus felt genuine love for this man as he looked at him.

The young ruler was a good man, a man who kept God's commandments, who chose to live righteously. His life expressed the goodness that comes from obeying God's laws. While Jesus told him that he lacked one thing, it was only one thing. The other issues in his life had been settled well and in a godly way. That's the fruit of the Spirit that Paul describes as goodness.

When we look at the goodness that God demonstrates, we see the standard ramped up even higher.

*I will tell of Yahweh's unfailing love. I will praise the LORD for all He has done. I will rejoice in His great goodness to Israel, which He has granted according to His mercy and love. (Isaiah 63:7)*

*Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who trust in Him!*  
(Ps. 34:8)

This second passage, Psalm 34, is filled with descriptions of ways in which God is good to us, including v. 15:

*The eyes of the LORD watch over those who do right; His ears are open to their*

*cries for help.*

In these and other passages we see the further sense of goodness, that it actually seeks out what will bring benefit to others. Goodness is proactive, looking for opportunities to bless and build and encourage, to heal and restore.

The fruit of the Spirit is patience, kindness and goodness. In training us in patience, we see the Spirit lengthening our perspective, giving us the LONG view of things, helping us not to be stressed by present circumstances or by those who can't see past their present circumstances. In helping us to grow in kindness and goodness, the Spirit helps us to see others with compassion and with a conviction to act. He produces in us the desire to accomplish good things that benefit others, that encourage others, that build up the church and bless the family of God.

Those things are happening in your lives to the extent that you are willing to be led by the Holy Spirit. If we have the humility to bow our wills to His perfect will, we will grow in the grace of patience, kindness and goodness and we will bless those around us to an ever-increasing degree.