

Patience - A Divine Quality
Galatians 5:22-23
Pastor Draeger - June 29, 2008 10AM

You're laughing...what's the deal? You're waiting patiently for me to get started. Don't you hate it when you have to wait? You wait and think, wasn't he prepared? What's he taking so long for? Does that cross your mind?

This morning at the earlier service one of the children still had not put her dollar into the Rwanda Well. She was going to do that at the end, and it was at the bottom of her bag. How many of you women have had that experience - whatever you're looking for is at the bottom of the bag? And she was in there, and she pulled out a piece of paper, and this is like a three year old, I mean she was really tiny - maybe even two. She was in there trying to find the dollar at the bottom; it took the longest time. It was just a perfect, scripted moment even though I hadn't scripted it, it was absolutely precious. I'm sure there were people waiting for me to go and help her -- to rescue her so it wouldn't take so long, so that we wouldn't waste time, because time is so precious. It was wonderful!

How many of you have had the experience of going to the doctor's office and waiting? How many of you wait patiently? I have a physician that is notoriously late, and finally she's figured out that she needs to tell me if you want to come at 5 o'clock, make the appointment for 3; serious, this is no joke. And even the first appointment in the day, come late for that because she will be late. Frankly, that bothered me for a very long time because it didn't feel respectful of my time.

How many of you consider yourself, in terms of the 'Fruit of the Spirit,' the fruit being love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithful, self-control. Of those nine are there any that are particularly difficult for you? How many vote for patience? How many think self-control is hard? So probably of the nine, those two are most likely the ones that we have the most difficulty with. And just when I think I'm getting a little bit of a grip on patience, something happens. Twice this week it happened - I was trying to squeeze in a little project at home, one of the towel bars had pulled off the wall and left a great big marble sized hole where the bolt had been. So I went out and got a molly bolt, and I was trying to get that little puppy to do what it's suppose to do in that hole. But unfortunately the little nut on the end slipped off, and I've got an appointment in 40 minutes. I was trying to squeeze this in, make good use of time. And it's one of those Murphy's Law things: something that normally takes 20 seconds takes 3 hours. So I got in there and was working on this thing, wiggling the bolt through and fortunately the good news is, that little wing nut got stuck in the insulation so it didn't fall down into the wall. So I had to be careful and line that bolt up and the time kept going, and going, and going; and it was getting right up to when I was suppose to be at the office for this appointment, and I didn't want to be late. Lo and behold, it finally snuck in there and I was able to leave the project and call the office and say I'm going to be just a couple of minutes late, let my client

know, and it worked out fine. But I got irritated, I was not a happy camper, my patience was tested in those 40 minutes - big time.

Yesterday I was at Costco, and I have recently made the statement that one of the things I'm getting better at is in lines -- you should never make a statement like that. Don't ever brag about your progress because you're going to get tempted right away, you're going to be tested immediately. So here I am at Costco yesterday, and once again I was trying to squeeze a little household thing in between things. I had enough time to get it done, I finished and I checked out; found a short line at Costco and I was cruising saying man this is working. But everybody else found a short line at the same time and were checking out and they had all day to walk. They had their carts full and they were walking two abreast behind their carts, so there was no space for me to pass them; because I drive shopping carts the way I drive my car. I'm always looking for the number 1 lane so I can be going the fastest. I couldn't get past these people, and I had to talk to myself, and all of a sudden it occurred to me I'm preaching on patience. If you want the whole sermon here's the deal, take a deep breath and focus on God. A deep breath is filling out your abdomen and letting it out slowly; slowly in and slowly out, and then focus on God. I think that's what it means when He says "be still and know that I'm God." It's focus on God.

So I'm thinking about this idea of patience as I'm walking in this line, and trying to get out but not making a whole lot of progress; and it really did help me to take a deep breath and focus on God and say it'll happen, it'll be fine. And I just want to encourage you today that when you get impatient, maybe the bottom line is simply take a deep breath, focus on God. Now I can't have a sermon that lasts for only three minutes or something like that, so let's tease this out a little bit further. And I want you to be patient with me, you've got the bottom line now let's be patient and get to the whole thing, OK? Are you up for this?

As we think about patience, I was reminded this Wednesday for example, of a goofy thing. One of the guys was talking about this, has this ever happened to you, where you've been standing at a bus stop and the bus is not coming, not coming? So you decide well I can walk down to the next bus stop and then when you get there it's the same bus! But you feel like you've done something because you've walked from this bus stop to the next one. Have you improved anything? No, if you had waited it would have been the same bus here as the one over here. But you think you've made some progress because you've done something. Who's at the center of that? Me. And I'd like to suggest that the center of most of our impatience is that same word, me. Because things aren't going the way I want them to go, I expect them to go because I have said so. In other words that I make myself the center. Do you understand why it's good to then take a deep breath and focus on God? Because that way we're not focusing on *me*. That's our problem, when we get impatient, oftentimes it's too much about *me*. I want to be in control and I am not; I am not. We get impatient with others because we can't control them. When you get impatient with the kids or

grandkids, it's because you can't control them. When you get impatient with your spouse, it's because you can't control him or her. They're not doing what you want. Has that ever happened? Don't raise your hand.

You get frustrated with people in the office because you can't control them. You get frustrated at the doctor's office because you can't control the physician, you just get impatient. You get impatient with illnesses, your own especially because you can't control it. You can't control the pain, you can't control the discomfort, you can't control circumstances; so you get impatient. You lose a job, you can't control the circumstances and you get impatient.

Sometimes it's about control, sometimes it's about fatigue. Have you noticed that you become more impatient when you're more tired? When you're physically and emotionally fatigued you get more impatient. And for some of you maybe you're living with a lot of constant pain, and it wears you out and you become less patient. For others you deal with emotional pain, there's a lot of stress in your life and it just wears you down, and your level of patience goes down with it. You're worn out, your coping skills weaken, you get impatient. And then it probably goes from impatience to irritable, and from irritable to frustrated, and from frustrated to angry; and you become explosive. Then people have to say to you, "Chill out." Now so far it sounds pretty psychological in terms of what we're doing here; the psycho-social aspects of impatience.

I'd like to suggest to you the Bible has a way of addressing this for us that is significant and very, very helpful. Because so far when we've talked about the psycho-social dimensions of it, it has to do with *me* at the center. Now if you've looked at the divine qualities here of Galatians 5, we've said the 'Fruit of the Spirit' is - so that's singular so it's not like these are different fruits. Sort of like the bulletin folder describes it, right? But frankly these are the same thing, and every one of the 'Fruit of the Spirit' you find to be a divine quality; it's a quality of God Himself, including this one of patience.

In 1st Peter we read that God was patient in the days of Noah during the building of the ark for the salvation of people. What that says is God is patient, and His patience had to do with salvation. There was a forty year period that Noah was building this ark, and during that period God was patient. And for some of you who grew up with the King James Version the word for patient was oftentimes long-suffering. Remember that one? And it's long-suffering that He would be patient, that He would wait a long time. When you think about the forty years of building the ark, that was no big deal. But then when you think about the fall into sin, and the promise there that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent; there was a long time between that promise and the fulfillment. In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law; and of course He was talking about Jesus and His death and resurrection. And then since the time of Jesus, His ascension, the Lord has promised to return and He has not returned yet, and that's been just short of two thousand years.

So with God time is seemingly irrelevant, and yet it says He is patient. And why is He patient? He is patient with purpose; His purpose is the redemption of mankind. He is waiting for Jesus to return the last day to all the people that are going to be saved are saved. His passion is to reach lost people, and so He's patient until lost people come to know Him. And one of the things we know, our pastoral intern, Eric is going to need is a lot of patience in the work that he does here to help us reaching the lost people on the peninsula, because we know people are not just beating down church doors to come and know Jesus. They are doing lots of other things that are very good things, and they're very far from God and they don't know it. And because their life is qualitatively not too bad, giving Jesus a chance really isn't on the radar screen. So it's going to take a lot of time for him to connect and develop relationships so that he is able to bring the message of Jesus, and help us bring the message of Jesus to the 96% of the population in San Mateo County who apparently are far from God; according to the research. And God is patient, and Pastor Eric is going to need to be patient, and we're going to need to be patient with Pastor Eric and support him in that process - because God is patient for the salvation of folk. And then He's patient with the saved that they might grow toward maturity in Christ. God is patient, God waits, and He waits for His people. In 2nd Peter 3:9 it says, "God is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but to come to repentance."

God is patient and Jesus described that so poignantly in a story about a guy who had two kids and the one kid said give me the inheritance. We call that one the story of the prodigal son, but what was dad doing? Waiting. And so some of us as you know, I call that the parable of the waiting father because that's really what it's about. That He is waiting for those who are far from Him to return home to Him.

I'd like to also suggest that in light of God's waiting, it's about His grace and about His forgiveness. I'd like to look at Colossians chapter 3 with you. Kind of a cool passage, it says, "Therefore as God's chosen people," isn't that nice the way He thinks about you, you are his chosen. You're not an accident; you are a chosen, purposeful people. And then he has these really nice words, He says, "Holy and dearly loved." Doesn't that feel good? That's a nice, nice expression isn't it? Let's see what He says now, "On the basis of the fact you are chosen and dearly loved," he says, "clothe yourself," get dressed this way, here's how you are to live. It sounds a lot like Galatians actually. "Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." There's that word, isn't that interesting? Forty-three times patient, patiently, or patience shows up in the scriptures.

The next sentence says, "Bear with each other, which is going to take patience." Do you see the connection here between patience and the next sentence? This is not accidental; I don't think the Holy Spirit was asleep at the switch when He inspired Paul to write this. But this is purposeful. He says patience and even gentleness and humility and kindness and compassion have to do with bearing

with each other. "And forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another, just as the Lord forgives you." Do you see the connection here between patience and forgiveness? He's tying our patience to the cross and the open tomb. He's tying it to Jesus' sacrifice for us, because God is about waiting for people to come into a relationship with Him, and waiting for those who know Him to grow in that relationship toward maturity in Christ in Ephesians, chapter 4. So if we're going to be patient, I think it has a lot to do with the forgiveness of sin; the forgiveness of sin that God has for us. The forgiveness of sin that we can have toward ourselves for getting irritated at the molly bolt, and for getting a little intense when the people were getting in my way when I couldn't get out of Costco fast enough. Oh by the way, I did make it on time yesterday after Costco without speeding....see God is good.

Breathe in God, breathe in His grace, forgive yourself and forgiven one another. Beam out the unilateral forgiveness of Jesus who said of those who crucified Him, "Father forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." So as we experience that grace within ourselves from God, and express it toward others, it will affect your level of patience. When you can let go of yourself and focus on Him, breathe in His grace and focus your hearts and minds on Him, I can almost guarantee that you're going to be a more patient person; it's hard to be impatient when you're being godly, because patience is a quality and characteristic of the heart and mind of God.

I'd like to also draw your attention to another passage in Isaiah chapter 40 verse 28. "Do you not know, have you not heard the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth? He will not grow tired or weary and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not grow faint. But those who hope in the Lord." Do you hear in there those who wait for the Lord? That expression, wait for the Lord, is a common one in the Old Testament. It shows up I believe it was something like 89 times; that we're waiting on God, and most of the waiting on God. And most of the waiting is about waiting on God or God waiting. And what does it mean to wait on the Lord? I believe it means that we will hope in the Lord. Our hope and our confidence is in Him; in our relationship with Him. That's why I think it's important that when you're getting a little bit tense and impatient, that you take a deep breath and connect with God. That will get you out of you and into Him and Him into you, and it will altar your perspective. It will altar how you see yourself and how you see others, it will altar how you see your circumstances. Indeed what will happen is, He will give strength to the weary and increase the power of the weak. He will renew you, and you will soar on wings like eagles, and you will run and not grow weary, and you will walk and not be faint. I'm thinking of a serious God connection is what we need when we're getting impatient. That we need to reconnect and draw close to our God; get intimate with Him. And as we're

intimate with Him, His patience becomes more our style. It will change us deep within so that we're not so much about me, we're more about me as the redeemed child of a gracious Father, and we can depend on Him.

Now I can't stop circumstances from happening, I can't stop people from getting in your way, I can't stop molly bolts from misbehaving, but what we can do is change what we are in those moments. Kids will annoy you, co-workers will be a pain. Your body will not be what you want it to be, it will ache in spots you don't want it to ache. Stress at work will be stress at work, but there's one thing that you can do; you can wait upon the Lord. You can take a deep breath, slow down, breathe in Jesus and His peace; and see if it doesn't altar your thinking. It's really hard not to relax when you take in a slow, deep breath; physically it just helps. I'd like to suggest that breathing in Jesus spiritually helps even more. Breathing in His grace, His unconditional love, thinking those thoughts and taking a divine perspective on life. You see with God He doesn't keep track of time, He's not wearing a watch but He is keeping track of you and knows where you are and knows what you need and you can depend on Him.

So I just want to encourage you, when you are impatient this week, not if, but when; would you just remind yourself to take a deep breath, breath in the divine patience of God in Jesus, remember that He is the long suffering one. Hope in the Lord and see if your energy isn't renewed, and your mind refreshed, and your perspective on life changed. Does that sound like something you can do this week? Not too terribly complicated? Oh and by the way, we're going to be taking communion this morning, and just in case there was something you did this week where you demonstrated a little impatience, you may want to know that the Lord's forgiveness covers that. And you might just want to receive that forgiveness and that grace because patience and forgiveness are linked together. And if He forgives you, you can forgive you. Maybe if you were impatient with a person you ought to go back and say, you know I was a little testy with you last week, and I just want to apologize for that. I know what I did was not right, would you forgive me? You might want to try that too, that might be just another exercise for you because confession and absolution is a good thing.

May God bless you and me that we might live with a schoosch more patience this week because Jesus is in us, Amen.

May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep and guard our hearts and minds as we live in His long-sufferingness, Amen.