

Adventuring with God

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June 2009

How Patient Are You?

As products of our “me” generation, most of us are used to instant gratification. So we have trouble with the idea of persevering when things become difficult or when we have to wait a long time to reach our goal. We want things *now*. We want things to go easy. We don’t want any hassles, any detours, or any closed doors. Even when we pray, we want immediate answers. If we don’t see results right away, we tend to get either discouraged or angry. We wonder why we should be expected to “seek and knock” when a simple “ask” should be sufficient. How impatient we are.

When I was a young wife and mother I prided myself on being very patient. I would wait for hours at a doctor’s appointment with one of our kids and never feel any sense of anxiety. At the time, I saw myself as being in perpetual “flex” mode—I could and would cheerfully work around my husband’s schedule, my kids’ school schedule and after school activities, and any other community or church responsibilities that might come up.

Then the big change took place. I began to juggle many of the same responsibilities around another dynamic that was both fixed and demanding in its time restraints: a career outside the home. As I sat at slow traffic lights and stood in annoying grocery store lines that never seemed to move (at least the ones I picked didn’t), I began to realize how most of the people in our fast-paced society live day to day. And I realized that I wasn’t any more patient than anyone else!

With so many tasks to get through in a short period of time, every moment suddenly counted. Every delay was seen as a hindrance to the goal I was intent upon fulfilling. Efficiency became the new motivation, and anything that interfered with that was run over,

ignored, or grouched about. I didn’t really like the new role I had adopted, but I found myself adjusting to it with a growing sense of anxiety and impatience.

But this kind of lifestyle is not inevitable, and it certainly is not praiseworthy from God’s perspective. When we look at how Jesus lived, we see a stunning contrast to our impatience. The Lord Jesus had tremendous responsibilities and tasks to accomplish in a very short period of time, but He never seemed to get in a hurry. He cultivated the time required to hear from His Father and never rushed ahead to take on life’s challenges in His own skill and human wisdom. When opposition came (and it seemed to show up nearly every day in His case) we never see Him throwing up His hands and saying “This is too hard! Let them all die in their sins ... why should I care if they don’t want to know God?”

He patiently endured the taunts, the misunderstandings, and the interruptions to His ordained walk of obedience, believing that His Father was greater than all of them. He trusted that in the end all would be accomplished if He continued to move forward. That’s the kind of attitude He wants us to have as we serve Him too. *“The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop”* (Luke 8:15).

When pressured or opposed, our tendency is to give in to the anxiety and frustration that bubbles up deep inside us. When we do, we display the fruits of the sinful nature rather than the fruits of the Holy Spirit. But we do have a choice. We can choose to resist the easy way and respond as Jesus did, trusting in the resources of God rather than our own.

I find it interesting that the apostle Peter wrote so much on the subject of patient endurance in the face of difficulty. Perhaps this is because he had seen firsthand what the passion of human impatience can lead to. Because of his impetuous nature, he often reacted to events before thinking through how he could best glorify God in that situation. He was the one in the Garden who rashly drew his sword in an attempt to prevent Jesus' arrest and ended up cutting a man's ear off.

By contrast, in His three years of public ministry Jesus regularly withdrew from the busyness of life to seek God's wisdom and draw strength from heavenly resources. I'm sure His tranquility even as He faced the horror of the cross imprinted Peter deeply and gave him courage for the task when it came time for him to give leadership to the early church. "**Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation**" he writes in 2 Peter 3:15. Jesus' willingness to patiently endure whatever came and still fulfill God's purpose through Him provided for us the gift of salvation.

Now, Peter points out, it's our turn. As His disciples, we're called to patiently serve Him in good times and bad, in easy circumstances and in difficult ones. "**Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, *standing firm in the faith. ... And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast***" (1 Peter 5:8-10).

Being patient in all circumstances is possible only as we put our confidence and trust in God. We must believe He will make a way and give His children the strength to "**commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good**" (1 Peter 4:19). When we finally develop this wonderful quality of patience, we'll be able to persevere in setbacks, discouragements, and hardships of all kinds. We won't give up when things look impossible, or throw our hands up in disgust when things don't work out the way we think they should.

I love to read the tenth chapter of Hebrews when I'm facing difficult or frustrating circumstances. It reminds

me of the great resources I have in Christ and encourages me to believe that if I will persevere and not give up, my faith will be rewarded. "**Since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith ... Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to *persevere* (be patient) so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised**" (vv. 21–23, 35–36).

What are you facing today that is testing your ability to endure patiently? What disappointment have you faced or roadblock have you encountered that whispers to you that it's time to throw in the towel—God maybe can't be trusted to come through in that area after all? Or are you just "weary in well doing," tired of seeing too little fruit in your life for all the effort you're putting out?

Whatever place you find yourself today, don't give in to Satan's lies. God's resources are plentiful and abundant. He will supply what you need in His perfect timing. Jesus' response to Peter when he sought to save Jesus from arrest in the Garden was to ask, "**Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?**" (Matthew 26:53). It wasn't that Jesus didn't have resources available to Him; He just understood that deliverance was not the immediate plan for Him. Deliverance would come once the purposes of the cross were fulfilled.

This is the kind of patient endurance we need to cultivate to become mature, rock-solid disciples who cannot be shaken by anything the world may throw at us. Then we can live our lives in unhurried confidence and, like Jesus, be the source of great blessing to others. If you're like me, you have some distance to go in the area of patience, but don't get impatient with yourself! Choose to live in obedience to Him no matter what setbacks or delays may come and trust that God will work everything out for your good and for His glory. One day, like Peter, you will look back with embarrassment at your former way of life and rejoice in all the trials that helped to cultivate in you the vital quality of patience.

I Will Follow You

Some may join me, some forsake me, but whatever it may take me,
If my friends should stay behind, there's nothing gonna change my mind.
I will follow You ... nothing's gonna hold me down.
I will follow You and never turn around.

Take me where the rivers flow, baptize me before I go.
Lay down my pride, take up my cross, all the rest I count but lost.
I will follow You anywhere you want me to,
I will follow You everywhere You go.

When the powers of darkness fall, follow by the Spirit's call.
I will not give up this race till I see your holy face.
I will follow You ... nothing's gonna hold me down.
I will follow You and never turn around. (Higher Praise, 2001)