

The Fruit of the Spirit is Patience
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(Wait 90 seconds before going to pulpit – allow people to fidget)

Today we are talking about mastering the art of patience.

HMMMMMM

Did you get a little jittery waiting for me to get up here?

There was actually a pause in the service where nothing seemed to be happening...did you notice that?

A moment of un-programmed space

And you made it through...

Was it difficult? Did you think that I had fallen asleep? Gone home?

Maybe that the rapture had come and of course...I was taken and you were...well...

That pause...that waiting...that lull in the business as usual

The lack of immediate results...

YIKES!

How scary can you get?

People talk a lot about our fast paced culture.

How folks nowadays don't like to wait.

Click, Send, Comment, Deliver, Text, Get Directions, Post, - all that only takes 5 minutes...where before it would take days...

Patience? Who needs it anymore?

We've got

Same day delivery, fast tracks, express lanes, in and out burger, and why write a cursive F when you can tap a key and make it happen! We even have a door close button on the elevators.

Ponder this with me...Why do we have a door close button?

The elevator door will eventually shut by itself – did you know that? If you are a Type A person, you would not know that because you will always will push the door close button to hurry things up a bit....

The irony is that all these time saving devices, rather than increasing our ability to calm down and have more time to enjoy life... seem to only make us more frantic as we just keep going faster and faster.

It is hard to understand patience – courageous endurance with expectation – when patience isn't really a necessary part of our culture anymore.

We don't do delayed gratification well....everything is at our fingertips...and we expect God to respond at the click of the pad or the touch of the screen as if God was a kind of cosmic I-phone....

Now, the meaning of **patience** in scripture is not sitting there drumming our fingers on God's counter, wishing God would snap to it.
Nor is Biblical patience a kind of glazed over apathy

Biblical patience = courageous endurance in expectation of God's action....

This courageous endurance with expectation of God's action is vividly illustrated in Habakkuk 3:17-19 which I think we should all commit to memory...it is a great passage for practicing patience...and here it is....Let's read it together....

(SCREENS)

"Though the fig tree does not blossom; and there be no fruit on the vine; the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no grain; though the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stall...." Habakkuk 3:17-19

Now this is a pretty dismal picture that the writer is painting here...Every staple of life that the ancient person relied on is now gone....

Fruit and fields

And flocks

And herds and oil (also used for medicinal purposes)

GONE

There is nothing left...the writer of this passage is essentially destitute

And the psalmist says...when nothing is blooming, or growing or flourishing....verse 18 says...

"Yet," ...

that little word YET...is a huge, hopeful, bold, confident word of faith...YET... given all that lack, ..."**I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation...God the Lord is my strength."**

Do you see the courageous endurance here and the joyful expectation?

God is the God of salvation...he will come through for me...

God is my strength...not the herds, not the flocks, not the olives, not the grain

It's when there is nothing left...no crutches, no distractions, and no finite securities

That we can really find out just how faithful God is for us right now...

Let me tell you...

As people who know and love Jesus...

You never want to waste those times in your life when the fig tree does not blossom

You never want to waste those times in your life when there seems to be no fruit on the vine

You never want to waste those times when you are have a wilderness experience

Its in those times that God says, "Have patience. Wait. Breathe. Trust."

You see, you want to use every hardship in your life as an *opportunity* – yes an opportunity - to build your faith, and strengthen your dependency on God

Every time the situation looks desperate...it's a new chance to trust with courageous expectation – Lets say this again..Biblical patience is..

Courageous endurance in expectation of God's action....

Sometimes we can live in suspended animation...in anxiety...drumming our fingers on the counter in our minds if you will, for different reasons....

None of us is sure what the future holds...but certain circumstances can and do make us more anxious...

If you've been laid off and you're not sure what's next
When that new job is going to open up...what that's going to be like...How are the pieces are all going to fall in place...

Some of you are sick, and your future health recovery is uncertain...and you're discouraged...and you are waiting for the next doctor's visit, the next medication, the next test...

Some of you are trying to just get through school, or certain job requirements in order to achieve the actual level of training that you want to be at....and you can't wait until it's over and you can really do what you want to do....but it's a drain and a pain...and you are exhausted

Others of you are living on a fixed income, and you're not sure how you are going to make ends meet...from month to month

And we want to pray
Do something God! Snap to it...come on
Let's find a solution to all this...and let's find it quickly

HOWEVER..... given who I am – a true coffee lover this quote was very key to my understanding of life...and patience

We are too often double espresso followers of a decaf Sovereign.

When I used to pray for something twice in a row, and nothing seemed to be happening, I used to never trust...I would always panic.

And I was like a child in the backseat of a car

"Hey, are we there yet? (3X)

This teeny little window view in the back seat has really lost its charm!"

And the parent, with the GPS on, seeing the whole map...on the screen in front of them smiles, and says

“Not there quite yet,” – and knows the entire journey from a completely different vantage point.

The adult in the car knows the journey in terms of miles, and sees the end from the beginning.

The adult knows the joy in store for the child once they get to the great place where they are going.

The reason they are on the journey is because the adult wants the child to fully enjoy the destination, and the journey is the means to that end.

The child knows the trip only from the backseat, from the teeny window view, and the car seat straps digging into his chest.

The child sees only fields and farms and is tired of these.

Two minutes later the little tyke asks again, “Are we there yet?”

I get impatient with God...just like that little kid
I've been known to panic

BUT know this....God's voice is NEVER frantic...God does not panic
When you hear desperate thoughts you can know it is NOT God speaking to you....in no uncertain terms

The reason we panic is because we don't have the whole map.

And if we did we wouldn't know how to use it.

It would be incomprehensible to any of us, just like a GPS would be to a small child.

It would be ludicrous for the parent to answer the child's **are we there yet?** with, “Well here's the GPS. You figure it out.”

We can't see the end from beginning. God does.

In fact that's God's name...God is called the Alpha and Omega...the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet...the beginning and the end.

When you not only hold both the beginning and the end, but you **ARE** the beginning and the end, you are NEVER in a hurry as if time were scarce.....

When you created time, you don't rush around as if you don't have enough of it.
You get the whole picture.

We are the ones who want a quick answer
And God says...Slow down... I am creating a masterpiece there is no hurrying a brilliant artist.

As Leonardo da Vinci told people who became impatient with his work on the Sistine chapel ceiling... *it is when I pause and wait, that I then make the most telling marks with my brush.*”

(on screens)

What we patiently wait for, is not more important than what happens to us while we are waiting...

Learning to wait can be a process of spiritual formation that allows us over time to become the people God wants us to be.

Each time we learn to wait, and each time we learn that our waiting is always met with God's faithfulness... patience comes a little bit easier the next time. And we are formed

Are we there yet? asked the Hebrews wandering in the desert.

"Not yet," said the Almighty. "Before I make you a mighty nation, Let me send you manna, and quail, let me lead you with a pillar of fire at night, and a cloud by day so that you can learn to love me, and depend on me." *And scripture says God led them by a roundabout way.* And the Hebrews learned patience.

Are we there yet? asked Joseph sitting for years in prison, betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery.

"Not yet," said the Almighty. "Before I make you second in command to Pharaoh, there's a little more dreaming I want you to do and a little less boasting. And Joseph learned patience.

Are we there yet? cried Job in agony sitting in ashes, with boils covering his body.

"Almost," declares God. "I am going to restore your fortunes four times over and let you see my face, but just hang on because I knew suffering wasn't going to make you curse me...just keep on a little longer and prove me true. And Job learned patience.

Are we there yet? cries St. Paul, turned from murderer of Christians to Christian himself as he is being beaten with rods, shipwrecked, hungry and hunted by those who opposed Christianity.

"Not yet," declares the face Christ before him. "You must make witness to Caesar. You must suffer some more for my sake but let me strengthen you with my Holy Spirit." And Paul learned patience.

God was creating a masterpiece in each one of these situations, and God is creating a masterpiece in you.

There is a story of a man who found out that a penny was the same as a million dollars to God, and a minute the same as a thousand years. And the man says to God...will you give me one of those pennies. And God says "Sure. No problem. Just wait a minute".

Sometimes we impatiently push the elevator door close button on God. And declare, "God you're just not listening. You've given up on me. When in essence, the opposite is true.

God is so invested in you, God can't give up.

God's got the whole map

And we've got a little teeny tiny window view

Hang on, just a little longer, he's telling some of you today. I am creating a masterpiece in you...

Trust me...I will come through for you....We're almost there... **Patience!**

(Screens)

Paul said, “**For in hope, we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.**”

Whatever you are waiting for today - wait with patience as you recommit yourself to the God who holds the end from the beginning – who is deeply invested in you and utterly faithful.

Let's say it together one more time... **Biblical patience = courageous endurance in expectation of God's action....**

This kind of patience says...I know there's a better thing coming
Than what I can see around me right now

I might not have the whole map in front of me
But I trust the driver....that the destination is going to be awesome.

(transition to table)

Jesus was our prime example of patience. Jesus patiently endured the cross (in Bible)

It says in the scriptures that he could have called 10,000 angels and they would have rescued him...

His deliverance was only a prayer away

YET

He chose to stay hanging there for us...it was an act of courageous endurance in expectation of God's action...

What was God's action? Restoring you and me into relationship with him through Jesus' blood – by his stripes we are healed. As we take the bread and the cup this morning may we do so gratefully and be mindful of Jesus' courageous patience that made this possible. You can thank him for it now as we pray together...