

Patience Is A Virtue

We've all heard it. "Patience is a virtue." Truer words have never been spoken. A virtue is something that's good, desirable, useful. Patience is certainly that. "The Lord ... is patient" (2 Peter 3:9). "Love is patient" (1 Corinthians 13:4). "The fruit of the Spirit is ... patience" (Galatians 5:22).

What is patience? Patience is the ability to suffer well. Specifically, it means to suffer *calmly* (without blowing up or becoming dismayed – 2 Timothy 2:24-25A; Job 4:5.); *forgivingly* (without staying angry, holding a grudge, or seeking revenge – Psalm 37:7-8; Matthew 18:21-22, 35; 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15); *enduringly* (without giving up on God, other people, or ourselves – Psalm 27:11-14; Acts 26:3; Hebrews 6:11-12.), and *thankfully* (without complaining – James 5:7-11).

Why do we need patience? Two reasons. First, we need patience because we suffer. We don't need patience when everything's fine. No, we need patience "in tribulation" (Romans 12:12). Second, we need patience because we add suffering to suffering when we don't suffer well. I'm sure it was difficult for the Israelites to walk from Egypt to the promised land. However, by choosing to suffer their journey poorly – impatiently, critically – they hurt God, their children, and themselves in ways that made the toils of the road seem as nothing. Numbers 21:4-6.

In our journeys, hitting the brakes because an incompetent driver cuts us off is one thing. Road rage is something else. The former should be nothing more than a temporary interruption of an otherwise pleasant drive. The latter can make the incompetent driver even more obnoxious and ruin the rest of the trip for everyone in our car. The former is the incompetent driver's fault. The latter is the incompetent *sufferer's* fault.

For His sake, other people's sake, and our own sake, God wants us to be competent sufferers, i.e. patient sufferers. In fact, He insists upon it. "As those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on ... patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Colossians 3:12-13).

The wonderful thing about patience is that no matter how much we have, we can always have more; and the more we have, the more we are blessed and a blessing. Leonardo da Vinci put it this way, "Patience serves as a protection against wrongs as clothes do against cold. For if you put on more clothes, as the cold increases it will have no power to hurt you. So in like manner you must grow in patience when you meet with great wrongs, and they will then be powerless to vex your mind."

We need patience in regards to three aspects of suffering. First, the things we suffer. Second, the things that cause us to suffer. Third, the things that can alleviate our suffering. To illustrate, suppose someone rear ends our car and gives us whiplash. We need to patiently suffer the pain of whiplash, the carelessness of the driver, and the delay in the emergency room as we wait to see a doctor.

Try this paradox on for size – we need patience because we suffer; we suffer because we need patience. God allows suffering so we can develop patience. He knows we need irritations to overcome irritability. An oyster gets a grain of sand in its shell. He doesn't like it. It's irritating. But, he can't do anything about it. So instead of staying irritated, he smoothes out the sand's rough edges by making it into a pearl. Think of patience as the beautiful pearl that's born out of the irritations of life.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2-3).