The Fruit of the Spirit: "Patience"

Galatians 5:22-23

We’ve come to the fruit of “patience” in our series on “The Fruit of the Spirit.” I tried to get a guest preacher because patience is not one of my virtues…but I couldn’t wait for anybody to call me back, so I’ll just do it myself!

Paul wrote these words to the early Christians in the region of Galatia;

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

What Paul is defining is the very nature and character of God. “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Is that really our image of God? Do we see God as joyful, kind, gentle or patient? Is God really like that? You ever thought of God as having patience; with you, with me, with us, with the world? God apparently knows how to wait. If you were God, why would you have to wait? It’s a very loving thing to be able to be patient with someone.

We’re all waiting for something this morning. Somebody is waiting for test results, or surgery. Others wait for a child to be born. Someone is waiting for a job offer. Parents are waiting for school to start! (Seriously!) A couple waits for their marriage to heal. We wait for a son or daughter to come to their senses. Somebody is waiting for forgiveness, healing, or reconciliation.

We wait for our nation to heal and to unify; to be “…one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” (Pledge of Allegiance). Not two nations, but one. Not above God, but under God. “Indivisible,” which means “unable to be divided or separated.” With liberty, (not oppression), and justice, (not injustice), for all, (not just for some). We wait for that. We hope for that. We pray for that.
The person sitting next to you, in front of you, or behind you is likely waiting for something today. And what are you waiting for in your life right now? We all have to wait.

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We use to be better at it.

Ice cream was hand-churned with packed ice and rock salt. We had to wait for it. (And it was definitely worth it!)

*The Wizard of Oz* only came on television one Sunday night a year! That’s it! We had to wait for it.

There were no microwaves or fast food restaurants. We waited.

We used to have to wait for film to be developed from our cameras. Imagine that! (And we had cameras!)

We had to wait for a letter to come in the mail!

We had to wait to get to a phone. Now I’m waiting for the day when I don’t have a phone tied to my hip 24 hours a day, 7 days a week!

Technology has sped up our lives so we don’t have to wait as much.

*Speed dials, emails, cell phones, GPS, the internet, digital photos and videos, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and texting have diminished our need to wait.* We record TV shows and skip the commercials! No waiting! You can even start your car before you get in it! Your hot water can be instantaneous.

(It’s funny, but if my parents were alive today, they wouldn’t even understand what I just said! “What’s GPS?”)

We have an aversion to waiting. It’s a bad thing. “I had to wait in the doctor’s office. *It was a long wait in the DMV!*” (Ok, I’ll give you that one!) “I had to wait in traffic, wait on the phone, wait in the drive-thru.” We hate waiting!

We live in a culture that conditions us not to wait, and yet we all have to wait. We need patience.

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If there are only nine fruit of the Spirit, nine characteristics of God’s personality, how significant is it that one of those fruit is *patience*? God gives us *patience* as a characteristic of God’s Spirit that dwells in us. You really need *patience* to live in this world. Sometimes *patience* is the door to wisdom. It can be the gate to making the right decision. *Patience* gives time for something new to happen.

I’ve told married couples who are going through a hard time, “Hang on as long as you possibly can, and then hang on 5 more minutes. In those 5 minutes, a breakthrough may happen.” *Patience* waits for God to be involved in our lives.

The Bible knows about waiting.

*Wait* for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; *wait* for the Lord! (Psalm 27:14)

*But it is for you, O Lord, that I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.* (Psalm 38:15)

*I wait* for the Lord, *my soul waits*, and in his Word
I hope; *my soul waits* for the Lord. (Psalm 130:5-6a)

...*but those who wait* for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)

Waiting is not a mistake, it is a way of life. Sometimes there is wisdom in waiting.

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Years ago, I learned something about *patience* that I have never forgotten. I was a young pastor in my first church. I must have been 25 or 26 years old. *(It should be against the law for a 25-year-old to be a pastor!)* Maybe it was the stress of all of it, but one Sunday afternoon I had severe abdominal pain. I was rolling from one side of the bed to the other. There was no relief.

Catherine called Dr. Romm. He made house calls! Remember those? He came in with his little black bag, asked me a few questions, poked and prodded and then said, “*I'm not going to do anything right now.*”

I sat straight up in the bed, my head turned 360 degrees and I said with a demonic voice, “*You're gonna do what?!!*” He wanted to wait. I wanted to say something that you shouldn’t say!
But Dr. Romm taught me something that day. There is a time to act, and there is a time for patience. Wisdom is knowing the difference. He didn’t want to mask the symptoms. So, he had coffee with Catherine while I was dying! Eventually, (what felt like 12 years), he gave me a shot and I lived! *Patience* can allow time for things that need happen.

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But waiting does not mean being helpless, powerless, or weak. A farmer waits for his crop to yield a harvest, but the farmer does not simply stare at a barren field. The ground is tilled, the weeds removed, the rows are formed and the seeds are planted. Fertilizer is purchased and applied. Irrigation may be needed. Prayers are offered. We labor as we wait.

Having *patience* does not necessarily mean doing nothing. Sometimes waiting is the action plan. *Patience* is the strategy. *Patience* can mean doing everything we possibly can, and then waiting upon the Lord to do what we cannot do. God gives us the gift of *patience* as we wait.

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Oren Arnold penned the prayer,

**Dear God,**

*I pray for patience.*

*And I want it RIGHT NOW!*

*(M. J. Ryan, *The Power of Patience*, p. 2)*

There are many things on our hearts this morning for which we are waiting. We wait for God to answer our prayers. We wait for God’s will to be done, here on earth, as it is in heaven. We wait, and we wait, and then we wait some more. But in our waiting, we have hope. “*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope.*” *(Psalm 130:5)*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Congregation: **Amen**