

Meditation – the fruit of the Spirit - Patience

Intro

The summer I was 21, I was working at a camp for children & adults with disabilities in south-central Saskatchewan. Our first job was to help clean the place before the campers arrived. It was hard work. One hot day I was crossing the campus, lugging a mattress on my back that had to be moved to another cabin – had to stop to rest now & then. That summer I was trying to memorize the New Testament book of Romans, and I was already in chapter 5. I remember lugging that mattress, going over the verses, thinking,

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...

we glory in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces patience;

And patience, character; and character, hope:

And I wondered, ‘how could I glory in suffering, how does suffering produce patience, how do you get patience from suffering?’ - as I was struggling to carry the mattress to the next convenient resting spot – struggled to walk just a few steps further, wondering how many more trips like this I would have to make – and I realized that by hanging in there with my heavy awkward load, by taking rests instead of giving up & quitting & asking the big guys to do the job – that I was learning perseverance, learning to be patient, learning to get through.

(Rom. 5) we glory in our suffering, because we know that suffering produces patience;

And patience, character; and character, hope:

Ok, I thought – I get it, how suffering could produce patience, and how patience produces character – a good, useful character trait – but how does character produce ‘hope’? And so on went my musings ...

I jumped at the chance to speak about ‘Patience’ during this summer series, because I am currently in the middle of a big struggle for patience. But I’m not just going to focus on the rehab experience! I’m going to talk about:

Being patient with yourself

Patience within relationships

Patience in our spiritual journey

The roots of the word for ‘patience’ are a good place to start. [Show word card - ὑπομονή hupomoné]

The Greek word used in the New Testament is hupomoné. It is built from ‘Hupo’ – from the root ‘hypo’ – and ‘ménō’. ‘Hypo’ means ‘under’ – as in hypodermic needle (injection under the skin). ‘Ménō’ means ‘to remain, to endure’, to hang in there. So the definition is ‘a remaining behind, a patient enduring’.

The English word ‘patience’ comes from Latin ‘patientia’ – "the quality of suffering or enduring, submission," but also "indulgence, leniency; humility; submissiveness; submission to lust;" literally the "quality of suffering." And Old French ‘pacience’ - "sufferance, permission" (12c.). Thus many synonyms emerge - "bearing, supporting; suffering, enduring, permitting; tolerant," but also "firm, unyielding, hard," - "the quality of being willing to bear adversities, calm endurance of misfortune, used of persons as well as of navigable rivers. Patience is a quiet or calmness in waiting for something

to happen" [late 14c]. Or "constancy in labor or exertion". It can also mean 'experience' – what you get from living life, or from going through a time of suffering or endurance.

As to the difference between 'patience' and 'longsuffering' – 'longsuffering' focuses on the '**long**' part of the experience ...

Being patient with yourself

When we face an illness or an injury or a disability – as we rub our noses in the fact of our aging bodies/joints/vision/memory – as we struggle with habits or personality traits which seem to drag us down – we are often impatient with ourselves. I had to laugh at this definition from Ambrose Bierce, 'patience is a minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue [Devil's Dictionary, 1911]. Sometimes our injuries or accidents are actually caused by impatience, by hurrying, by not paying attention to our limits. As in my fall on stairs 6 months ago, resulting in a knee injury.

Many of us have learned patience through fitness or sports – or through learning a new language – or a new skill – or through gardening. My brother-in-law says that to be a good motor mechanic, you mainly need a lot of patience. A friend who was working on the 10 year plan for her Ph.D. said that for graduate studies you need 'sitz-fleish', that is, the ability to sit in a chair for long periods.

There is a clear goal in mind, and we work towards it. It seems to take **for-ev-er...** We do see progress, sometimes friends notice our progress more than we do. This kind of patience is active, pro-active, determined, tolerant of slow progress, aware of milestones. For me, this involves doing physio exercises several times a day, trying to go into & beyond the pain, thinking of pain as 'stiffness' which begs me to do the exercises. And also, keeping my eyes on the goal of those long-distance bike rides, of skiing Mt. Royal again, of walking up & down stairs with alternate steps!!

When we are facing things like aging or chronic illness or unproductive or harmful habits in ourselves, being patient can have a different quality. My 97 yo friend Elisabeth says frequently – 'patience is a virtue'. This is usually in reference to her limited mobility & independence – compared to her previous life of working into her 90ies as a travel agent, living on her own, travelling the world.

Being patient without giving in to despair, tests our creativity to the MAX. Perhaps it involves more of 'living in the moment', mindfulness, being tuned into the small gifts in our lives. Last Saturday Elisabeth fell & fractured her arm just below the shoulder. In ER, she almost brought me to tears. She said, 'I'm thankful I still have my head.' A habit of gratitude, of noticing the small gifts, of cultivating thankfulness – right in the middle of the mess. There is that wonderful little book 'One thousand gifts' by Ann Voskamp; gratitude, as a non-pharmaceutical approach to depression. A tool for learning patience.

Patience in Relationships

The song I played for offertory is an old love song – À la claire fontaine. The refrain says:

'Il y a longtemps que je t'aime,
Jamais je ne t'oubierai'

('I have loved you for a long time, I will never forget you.')

Yes this song refers to lost love. But I borrow it today to refer to the love & patience needed for those long-term friendships and relationships between family members, partners, parents & children, sisters & brothers

I Cor 13 says 'Love is patient, love is kind.' - being patient with our family members is love-in-action.

My sister heard about today's meditation and said 'For me, I think the art of patience lies somewhere between sitting still (waiting, watching, reflecting) and moving (staying engaged with the problem, seeking solutions, trying things).' This applies to our family relationships. But also with our school mates, work colleagues, and in the community.

I checked with James about telling the next story about patience & impatience. There is a couple who didn't agree about whether to do a modest renovation in their home. The woman arranged for the reno to be done while the family was away on holiday. And when it was discovered on the return home, there was disharmony in the couple relationship! At that same time we ourselves were stalled in a home repair project & I decided to be patient & go with James' sense of timing for the repairs. And there was disharmony in the couple relationship!! There is not a simple formula for patience in relationships...

Sometimes people – especially women – have been encouraged to be patient in their marriage relationships, long past the time when it was safe to do so. When do we sit still & wait? What action points can we take towards health & open communication, even in the midst of frustrating situations?

Patience in spiritual journey

Although 'patience' is one of the fruits of the Spirit, patience is not only found in Christians! But how can our patience be infused with spiritual quality? How can faith in God affect the experience of patience? How does patience play out in our relationship with God, in our spiritual journey?

A sense of trust in God's presence. The Bible speaks about God as all-knowing, all-seeing. An awareness of this can be comforting in a time of suffering or distress. In Gen. ch. 9, Sarah's slave Hagar finds herself in a desolate desperate situation, is met by God, and then says 'you are El Roi – the God who sees me.' Perhaps the most simple prayer we can pray is 'Oh God, you know. You know what I'm going through.' The God who notices, who is paying attention.

Isaiah 40

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel,
"My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"?
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.

A sense that God is patient with me. Had another flashback to a poster from the 1970ies. 'Please be patient – God isn't finished with me yet!' My Mom had this in her bedroom. The picture on the poster was an angry 6 yo boy with dirt on his face.

There is much progress in society that is measured in terms of efficiency, of a faster production process, of increased automation of work, of très-grande-vitesse trains, of airplane travel. And yet there are trees growing, and balcony gardening, and people taking walks with their children, and many learning to make bread. Not everything is better when it is fast-tracked.

Eugene Peterson wrote about the Psalms of Ascent (Ps. 120-134) in his book 'A long obedience in the same direction: discipleship in an instant society' (1980). These are the songs that Israelites sang as they walked on their way to worship in Jerusalem. It's a fascinating & still relevant study, but the title says so much – a long obedience in the same direction. God patiently directing me – and me patient in my long walk.

The link between patience & hope.

Hope generates patience – and patience keeps us walking in the path towards that which we hope for.

We have Jesus' incredible example – he says at age 12 'I must be about my Father's business'. But when most young men were establishing families and their vocations, Jesus was working in Joseph's carpentry shop, and did not begin his ministry until age 33, 18 years later. "He waited for God to reveal the next step (Williams, p. 140).

The apostle Paul, in writing to the young church in Thessalonica which was facing persecution, commends them for their 'patience of hope' (I Thess. 1:3) – their 'patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ'. Hoping for the end of persecution, hoping to see God at work in their city, hoping – as many did in the early church – for Christ's return to take them to heaven.

Hope & patience & time & God's timing – these factor into decision-making and discernment, on a personal level, as a church community, as a society. We yearn for wisdom when faced with the bigger questions in life, we want to make the right decision – or at least the best decision possible – certainly as a church we want to be in step with God's work in our world.

Questions around what job to take, what to study – relationship questions. But also the big stuff – climate change action - the Truth & Reconciliation process that Canada is in with First Nations. Yes patience is needed, timing is an issue, but action is needed.

Monty Williams (2009, p.140) says

"There are many ways to wait. We can 'kill' time with distractions; we can freeze time in boredom; we can suffer time in anxiety as we search for meaning, purpose, fulfillment. [Or] we can slowly learning that **the patience of God is time**, and so become attentive to time... to what is daily given. We learn to cherish each moment without grasping it. In this we learn ... [to do] what we can to the best of our nature and trusting that what we do reveals our acceptance of the constant mercy of God.

"Through this learning, we become instruments of God, attuned to God's will... We learn to be flexible and open so that we can delight in what is joyful, mourn with what is sorrowful, revere what is holy, shun what is destructive.

"We can learn to live fully in the world without becoming trapped by the world and its values & judgements."

Amen.

Benediction – The Serenity Prayer (Reinhold Niebuhr)
God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.

References:

Ambrose Bierce, Devil's Dictionary, 1911.

Be Still, God will fight your battles. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kewjLH1rGqo>

- James Abbington, from album: "46 More Hidden Treasures from the African American Heritage "

Eugene Peterson, A long obedience in the same direction: discipleship in an instant society, 1980.

<https://biblehub.com/greek/5281.htm>

<https://www.etymonline.com/word/patience>

Monty Williams, The gift of spiritual intimacy: Following the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius (2009).

They that wait upon the Lord. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIVY48x0syQ>

- sung by TheNCrew

The Fruit of the Spirit. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-hrxEjWxkE>

Reinhold Niebuhr, The Serenity Prayer.

The Tree Song, by Ken Medema. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-iY9h3ciABY>

- Sung by the youth choir, RSCM Summer School, Brisba