

Fight the Good Fight: Impatience

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We live in a notoriously impatient culture and advances in technology do nothing to help this situation. We get a glimpse of just how impatient we tend to be from the results of a survey conducted by the American banking company Fifth Third Bank. In their survey they discovered the following statistics;

- more than half of Americans admit to honking after the light turns green;
- a majority will wait 10 seconds or less before passing a slow walker on the sidewalk
- 72 percent of Gen Y'ers admit to pushing an already lit elevator button
- 96 percent of Americans will knowingly consume extremely hot food or drink that burns their mouth; 63 percent do so frequently
- More than half hang up the phone after being on hold one minute or less
- 71 percent frequently exceed the speed limit to get to their destination faster
- Americans will binge-watch an average of seven TV episodes in a single sitting
- Nearly a third of respondents ages 18-24 wait less than one second before bypassing a slow walker
- Gen Y'ers check their phones an average of eight times when waiting to hear back from someone they've dated
- When waiting for a table at a restaurant, nearly a quarter of respondents ages 18-24 wait less than one minute before approaching the host again after the wait period has passed

None of us are immune to impatience, human nature is such that we want what we want, how we want, when we want. Of all the things we struggle with impatience is one of, if not the most dangerous. Not only is it its own struggle but it can pour fuel on the fires of our other struggles. It is hard to focus on our fight against the likes of despondency, anxiety, shame, and bitterness when we are struggling with the very patience those battles require.

As we've seen, the two reasons we struggle with any spiritual battle are lack of knowledge and unbelief. We have been developing a threefold strategy in response consisting of knowing God's word, believing God's word, and preaching God's word to ourselves. Today we will apply this strategy to fighting the good fight of faith against impatience.

We should begin by reminding ourselves of what we as Christians are called to (1 Tim. 6:12) and why it is that we will ultimately succeed (Phil. 2:13): "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called ... for God is the working one in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure". With that in mind, today we will look at how to fight the good fight of faith against impatience.

Isaiah 30:15-26 shows us the danger that impatience poses for God's people. God had promised his people deliverance;

^{NAS} **Isaiah 30:15** For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you shall be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength." ...

But God's people thought they had a better plan;

^{NAS} **Isaiah 30:15** ... But you were not willing,¹⁶ And you said, "No, for we will flee on horses," ...

Their impatience ended up creating an even bigger problem;

^{NAS} **Isaiah 30:16** ... Therefore you shall flee! "And we will ride on swift *horses*," Therefore those who pursue you shall be swift.¹⁷ One thousand *shall flee* at the threat of one *man*, You shall flee at the threat of five; Until you are left as a flag on a mountain top, And as a signal on a hill.

How often do we let our impatience get the better of us and so we rush ahead foolishly, ignoring the fact that delays or roadblocks can often be hidden blessings from God? That flat tire we discovered in the driveway this morning, setting our travel plans back by half an hour, may have delayed us just enough to cause us to avoid a fatal accident on the road. We can get so focused on our plans and our will that we can fall into the trap of thinking every delay or roadblock is some scheme of the enemy when in reality they often are God's providential deliverance from dangers we did not know even existed.

Through their impatience God's people had created a bigger problem for themselves, nevertheless God will deliver those who patiently exercise faith in him;

^{NAS} **Isaiah 30:18** Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long for Him.¹⁹ O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.

Notice verse 18, God will execute his plan of salvation for his people but now it will be delayed until they cease to trust in their own schemes and instead place their faith in him and his deliverance. Due to their impatience, God is exercising tough love and teaching them a lesson of patience. Given the consequences of their present impatience God shows his love and long-term care for his people by helping them to learn patience. Adversity is in their best interest.

I don't think we've learned anything new from this passage concerning patience, so if we already know this then why do we continue to struggle with impatience? The answer for us is the same as it was for Isaiah's audience, unbelief. We struggle with impatience because of unbelief in the wisdom of God's timing. We too often seem to think our timetable is better than God's and we get impatient when our timing is not satisfied. This is unbelief in the wisdom of God's timing. We struggle with impatience because of unbelief in the goodness of God's guidance. We don't like the direction God takes us at times, questioning our circumstances and the events of our life, certain there is better out there. This is unbelief in the goodness of God's guidance. We struggle with impatience because of unbelief in God's sovereignty. It is one thing to say we believe God is sovereign but like the Israelites in Isaiah 30 our actions often tell a different story, one that says we do not really believe God is in control. This is unbelief in God's sovereignty.

The way to fight back against impatience is to fight back against this unbelief through focusing on the purpose of patience. Impatience demands gratification now, but patience is the pathway to the true gratification of eternal blessings. James 5:7-11 helps us understand the purpose of patience.

First James calls us to patience;

^{NAS} **James 5:7** Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

James appeals to the prophets as examples of godly patience;

^{NAS} **James 5:10** As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Being a prophet was not an easy calling;

^{ESV} **2 Chronicles 36:16** But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

^{NIV} **Acts 7:52** Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. ...

In the face of endless persecution the prophets remained patient and faithful and yet we get upset and impatient when the burger we ordered arrives with the wrong condiments. Our trials are not for nothing however, through trying our patience God is preparing us for greater blessings;

^{NAS} **James 5:11** Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful.

Consider the life of Joseph which was a roller coaster of massive ups and downs. His life took an unexpected turn for the worse when he was sold into slavery but then it took a big upturn when as a result he ended up in charge of Potiphar's house. The good times didn't last for long though, he soon found himself wrongly accused and sitting in jail. I wouldn't imagine an ancient Egyptian jail was anything like a country club, and their prison system was not under human rights checks and balances like ours, so Joseph was probably now under all-time low circumstances in his life. Things again picked up for him though when he was given considerable responsibility within the jail and things looked up even more when the cupbearer was released. The cupbearer however forgot Joseph and he languished in jail longer than he should have. In the end, the cupbearer remember Joseph which ultimately resulted in Joseph being second in command over all of the kingdom of Egypt.

Through it all Joseph seemingly never lost patience. There are Christians who blame every bit of adversity on the enemy and with that mindset, had they been Joseph, they would have viewed every negative episode as the enemy trying to steal their blessings and rob them of the good God wants for them. Fortunately for Joseph he had a clearer understanding of the sovereignty, goodness, and wisdom of God. Notice Joseph's assessment of the reason for his sufferings when he addressed his brothers late in life;

^{NAS} **Genesis 50:20** "And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

We do have spiritual enemies, and we are in a spiritual battle, but God is in control and he even uses his enemies to accomplish his purposes. The sentiments expressed by Joseph in Genesis 50:20 are not isolated but rather are reflected throughout the entirety of scripture;

^{NAS} **Zechariah 13:9** "And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

^{NAS} **Hebrews 5:8** Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.

^{ESV} **Psalms 119:71** It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.

^{NAS} **Romans 8:28** And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

It is vital that we know and believe that adversity is not a roadblock to blessings but rather that the testing of our patience *is* the pathway to blessings;

^{NIV} **James 1:12** Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

^{ESV} **Revelation 2:10** Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

^{NIV} **Revelation 3:21** To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

^{NIV} **1 Peter 1:7** These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

^{NIV} **Hebrews 6:15** And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

To conclude, impatience can only lead to greater frustration and suffering but patience will lead us to God's richest blessings;

^{NAS} **Isaiah 30:18** Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who wait for Him.

^{ESV} **Lamentations 3:25** The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. ²⁶
It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

^{NAS} **Jeremiah 17:7** "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD.

^{NAS} **Isaiah 40:31** Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.

^{NAS} **Isaiah 25:9** And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation."

Armed with this knowledge, when our circumstances are not to our liking and impatience starts to set in we should remind ourselves of the wisdom of God's timing, of the goodness of God's guidance, and of the complete sovereignty of God.

^{NAS} **Isaiah 30:15** For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you shall be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength." ...