

FRUIT OF THE WEEK: PATIENCE

Ephesians 4:2 *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”*

Patience. A virtue many of us long to have but very few exhibit. If we're being honest, patience isn't the first thing that runs through our minds when we're cut off in the school parking lot, or when our siblings won't get out of our shared bathroom, or (dare I say it?!) when we're listening to our parents discuss the need for us to clean our rooms. In fact, I'm sure we could all make a long list of scenarios that make us lose the little amount of patience we think we have! And truthfully, the reality of possessing such a list should break our hearts.

As we can see from the verse above, Scripture *commands* us to be patient. This is not a recommendation or simply a nice gesture whenever we happen to think about it. As followers of Christ, we're called to be patient regardless of our circumstances. Whether the situation makes it easy or hard - the command remains the same.

Why is that? Why do we have to show patience even when it seems “unfair?” Well, to start, we're reminded in Scripture that when we call on Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we're ushered into a new life in Him. And this new life requires a new way of living. We are to now walk in a manner worthy of the call we have received (Colossians 4:1). We're working to restore the image of God in us that was once tainted. In essence, that is what cultivating the fruit of the spirit is - the restoration of God's image in humanity.

We're commanded to be patient because God is patient. But what exactly does being patient look like? Patience has predominantly two meanings in Scripture:

- 1) Long-suffering = the ability to endure suffering caused by others without feeling the need for retaliation or revenge.
- 2) Forbearance = the ability to accept the weakness of others without getting irritated or angry; being quick to forgive.¹

While there are certainly Christians today who experience long-suffering and persecution, most of us can likely relate to patience as ‘forbearance with others’ in our everyday lives. This type of patience simply means putting up with the things other people do (or don't do - that you wish they did). It means you work to “bear with” other people *even if* they annoy you.

¹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017) 69.

Forbearance is when you choose to forgive people rather than hold a grudge and remain bitter about the situation. Forbearance is when you choose to overlook something that was hurtful or unkind rather than fighting back with anger, trying to “get even” with the one who wronged you.²

So while we think of patience as simply waiting with a good attitude, it involves more than that. Patience is truly the opposite of anger. At the root of patience we see love and forgiveness.

As Paul says in Colossians 3:13, “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive.” Rather than expressing our anger in harsh retaliation, complaints, or gossip - our response to others should be filled with patience, love, and forgiveness.

While this may seem nearly impossible for us to do on our own (which it is!); thankfully, God has sent His Spirit to live and reign inside of us! When we rely on Christ’s strength and abide in Him, patience will come much easier to us. Not only that, but Scripture gives us a perfect example to follow in Christ who expressed loving patience and forgiveness throughout His life, death, and resurrection. And quite frankly, the example He gives us leaves no room for excuses...

Jesus modeled true patience and forgiveness on the cross. As He was actively being persecuted, beaten, mocked, and scorned; Jesus prayed “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34).

If we could pinpoint a circumstance where forgiving others truly was “unfair” and the recipients were vastly undeserving, it would certainly be this one at the cross. If Jesus has the heart to forgive his persecutors, we too should have the heart to forgive others.

I will leave you with this quote from David C. Long: “Understanding the forgiveness freely offered to us serves as a motivation for patience.”³ It is my prayer that you would see and understand the loving patience that was freely poured out for you on the cross. May we continue to shape our hearts after the heart of Christ. May we aim to cultivate a fruitful life that works to restore the image of God in us.

² Christopher J.H. Wright, *Cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit: Growing in Christlikeness*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017) 79.

³ David C. Long, *The Quest for Holiness: From Deadly Sin to Divine Virtue*, (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017) 32.