

Monday

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

2 Timothy 4:2

Paul exhorted the preacher Timothy to be prepared to preach the Word of God at any time. Whether or not we are a pastor, we should always be equipped and prepared to share the Word of God with others. Paul also told Timothy to reprove and rebuke. Those are both words that speak of confronting error and pointing out what is wrong. Yet Timothy was supposed to do this with complete patience and teaching. As we saw on Sunday, patience means that we have the proper response when someone else sins against us. We don't respond in anger and retaliation, but we respond in patience. But patience is not indifference. Indifference would ignore sin or pretend that a particular sin is not really wrong. Biblical patience does not respond in anger, but it *does* still reprove and rebuke. It does still point out what is wrong, and it seeks to teach what is right. But it reproves and rebukes in a very particular way, including teaching and demonstrating patience.

As believers, we can sometimes struggle with demonstrating Biblical patience. We can be quick to recognize sin, and we can be ready to reprove and rebuke sin. But if we only rebuke without patiently teaching what is right and how a person can repent, then we've missed the point. No, we should not be indifferent to sin, and we should Biblically confront sin. But as we Biblically confront sin, we must do so with patience. The person that we confront may not immediately repent and seek to turn from sin; very often they will not. If they do repent and seek forgiveness, they may quickly fall back into the same sin. But when they fail, we must remember the patience that God has shown to us. Often we do not repent of our own sin immediately, and even when we do repent of a particular sin, we can still struggle and fall into that same sin again. Yet God is still patient with us. Let us show that same patience to others, even when they struggle and fail.

1. In stressful times or in times of change, it can be easy for us to react quickly in anger, especially when someone else irritates us. This can be especially true when we are spending a lot of time around the same people, and they repeatedly struggle with the same things. If I consider the people that I spent a lot of time with over this last week, how patient was I with them? Did I show patience often, or did I have the tendency to lose my temper and react in anger?

2. In what ways do those around me irritate me? Over what kinds of things do I lose my patience? Pray that God would help you to react with patience when these things happen.

3. Often we can lose our patience when someone repeatedly struggles with the same issue that we have already tried to help them with. Instead of losing my patience, how can I lovingly teach them to do what's right? Even if I find myself repeating the same things over and over again, will I continue to help them faithfully?

Tuesday

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

James 1:19-20

God is often described as “slow to anger” (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8). Proverbs 18:29 says, “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.” God is often patient and slow to anger with us, even when we sin. In being conformed to the image of Christ and representing God’s character to others, we also should be slow to anger. James exhorted his readers to be quick to listen, but slow to speak and get angry.

Often we have the tendency to hear part of the story and jump to conclusions without knowing all of the facts. We see a headline in the news or we hear a little bit of what someone said or did, and we fill in the details in our minds and conclude that we know what happened. Once we think we know what happened, we can react in anger, thinking that someone else did wrong. We can also be quick to speak our minds about what should happen or how a problem should be fixed. Yet there is great wisdom in being quick to hear and being patient enough to listen to the whole story. Sometimes when we hear the whole story, we might find that we were correct, and someone did genuinely do wrong the way we thought. If that is the case, then we should react Biblically and try to help them. But sometimes we will find that we were mistaken in our conclusions, and someone did not do wrong the way that we thought. Let us follow the wisdom of James and be quick to hear, but slow to speak and slow to anger.

1. Do I tend to hear part of a story and jump to conclusions, or am I patient enough to hear the whole story? How can I develop the habit of listening well without jumping to conclusions?

2. Many of us are spending more time at home right now, which means we have more time to spend with our families. An important part of building relationships is listening to one another. How can I use this time at home to listen to those in my family? How can I strengthen my relationships with my family by being quick to listen to them and by learning to listen well?

3. As I spend time listening to my family, what did I learn about them? What are some things I learned about my spouse, my children, my parents, or my siblings? How can I use this knowledge to strengthen our relationship with each other?

Wednesday

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.

You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

James 5:7-8

James exhorted his readers to be patient until the coming of the Lord. His readers of the first century faced various trials, persecution, and uncertainty. But they could set their hope on the promise of Christ's return. Difficult people may come into our lives, circumstances may change, and certain periods of life are more difficult than others. At times things may look hard, and we struggle to see how God's plan will be completed. But Christ's promise of His coming is certain. No one and nothing in the all of the universe can interfere with that promise. So just as a farmer waits patiently for his harvest, we must wait patiently for Christ's coming. We do not know exactly when it will take place, but we have a steadfast and sure hope which can establish us and guide us as we live our lives today.

We face uncertain times, and we don't know exactly what the outcome will be over the coming weeks and months. But in the big picture, God has already told us what happens. Christ will return and be victorious, and we can rest in the hope of His promise. Life goes up and down. Sometimes life is easy and simple and enjoyable, and we find our security and hope in the good things of life. But circumstances change and grow more difficult, and we can lose our sense of security and become discouraged. But our minds should be set on heavenly things, and our ultimate hope should rest in the coming of Christ. When our hearts are established in Christ and we look forward to His coming, we can find our hope and security in Him, not in the good things of life. On the other hand, when our hearts are established in Christ, the difficult times of life should not discourage us, because we know that they are temporary. Knowing the promise of Christ's coming victory, let us set our hope on Him and remain faithful to Him.

1. Do I look forward to the coming of Christ and spending eternity with God? Do I desire for God's plan for history to be completed? Or do I tend to focus on my life now and find my security in the good things of life?

2. Good times of life tend to give us a false sense of security, and we can turn our focus and trust away from God and toward the blessings He has given to us. Difficult times of life can discourage us and lead us to turn from trusting in God. Will I commit my heart to Christ and be willing to follow Him faithfully through the ups and downs of life? How can I be established in God and in His Word so that I am equipped to face the changing circumstances of life?

3. How can I desire and look forward to Christ's coming while I also wait patiently for that coming?

Thursday

In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Job 1:22

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

James 5:11

Although they have some overlap in meaning, generally speaking, the New Testament word for “patience” refers to patience with people, while the word for “endurance” (or “steadfastness”) refers to patience in circumstances. But patience and endurance both mean more than simply waiting until the difficult time is over. Both words refer to the mindset and attitude that we should have when things are difficult. Whether we are dealing with a difficult person or going through a difficult time of life, we shouldn’t grow frustrated or bitter about what is going on. We shouldn’t drift away from God or lose our faith in His character and His promises. Instead, Biblical patience and endurance calls on us to trust God and be faithful to God in any time of life.

Job gives us an excellent example of endurance (the word “steadfastness” in James 5:11 is the word that’s often translated “endurance”). Job faced very hard times in his life as he lost nearly everything that he had. As readers, we are told at the beginning of the story about the conversation in heaven between the Lord and Satan. But as far as we are told, Job never knew of that conversation. So he went through those difficult times without knowing what was going on in the bigger picture. Yet he endured. He did defend his integrity before his friends. But he didn’t grow angry and bitter against God. He didn’t turn from his faith in God. As Job 1:22 tells us, he did not sin in response to his trials, nor did he charge God with doing wrong. As we face difficult times, we must steadfastly endure and trust in God.

1. This is the fourth week since schools and many businesses have been closed, and we have not been able to meet together as a church for the last three Sundays. How am I enduring through this difficult time? Am I simply waiting for it to be done, or am I seeking how I can be faithful to God in this difficult time of life?

2. We don’t like to have our plans disrupted, and many of us are missing out on things that we looked forward to enjoying. Am I growing frustrated or bitter toward God for this difficult time? How can I continue to trust in God and maintain a right attitude even in this ongoing disruption to normal life?

3. Job did not sin in the face of trials. Joseph served God in Egypt. Many of the Old Testament prophets faithfully proclaimed God’s message in the face of rejection. Paul endured much difficulty and persecution in order to continue to spread the Gospel. Instead of simply looking forward to when this time is done, how can I serve God faithfully in this difficult time? What does God want me to do today, and how can I obey Him?

Friday

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3-5

Endurance is one specific result that comes from suffering. Endurance includes the idea of continuing on and not quitting. Even when we face difficult times in life, we must not give up and quit. Instead, we should endure in following God. As we grow in our endurance, our character grows. As our character grows, our hope in God grows. In everyday life, we hope for things that may or may not happen. We can hope that schools and businesses will open again at the end of the month, but that may or may not happen. But the Biblical concept of hope is different. The Biblical concept of hope refers to hoping in a settled truth. The hope of salvation is a sure and settled thing. God promises that all who believe on Christ as Savior will receive salvation and eternal life. That promise is sure and settled. No matter what happens in life, nothing can stop God from completing His plan of salvation. God can use even the trials of our lives to strengthen our faith and hope in Him.

As believers, God uses the trials and sufferings in our lives to build our character. As we learn in the book of Job, not every difficulty or trial we face in life comes as a direct result of a specific sin in our lives. Sometimes a trial *is* the direct result of sin, and at those times, we should be ready to repent of that sin. But sometimes a trial is not the direct result of sin. But even in those times, God can still use the trials that we face to build our character and conform us to the image of Christ, and often trials reveal character flaws or weaknesses. So when we face a trial in life, we should prayerfully examine our lives to see how God can teach us and help us grow through the difficulty.

1. Often difficult times can tempt us to quit and give up. But God calls us to endurance, even in the face of difficulty (2 Thessalonians 1:4; Revelation 13:10). God has shown us mercy, and He has given us the privilege and opportunity to serve Him (2 Corinthians 4:1). So now that a hard time has come, am I tempted to quit and give up? What promises of God can help me endure without quitting?

2. What am I learning about my character through the difficulties I am facing today? What areas of my life does God want to change?

3. Not only should we endure in difficulty, but we should encourage our fellow believers who might be struggling. Who in the church can I contact today and encourage? How can I point them to Christ and encourage them to be faithful through this time?

Saturday

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

1 Timothy 2:1-2

As we have the opportunity to learn patience and endurance throughout this week, we have more time to pray. We certainly should pray for our own family and for our church. But Paul reminded Timothy to pray for governmental leaders as well. Certainly many leaders in government do not follow God's Word, and certainly we don't agree with everything that they say or every decision that they make. But that does not excuse us from praying for them. It can be easy to sit back and grow discouraged when we see public leaders reject what God has said. It can be easy to bemoan how wrong others are. But that's not what God calls us to do. He calls us to pray for those leaders. As we have opportunities, we can also be involved in bringing about change and in teaching others to follow Christ. But whatever else we might have the opportunity to do, we can always pray for them. We should pray for the salvation of those in leadership, praying that they would humble themselves before God. Like anyone else, their greatest need is their need of salvation. Let us pray that God would use these difficult circumstances to turn many to Him, including these political leaders.

We are living in a difficult time, and many do not know how to react. Those in leadership need to make many difficult decisions. Those decisions affect many aspects of our lives, including not only our church life, but also our family life, education, work, and finances. Let us pray that God would give these leaders the wisdom to make the best decisions for our nation and our communities. Let us also pray that they would make decisions that enable us as believers to live peaceful and quiet lives as we seek to honor God and represent Him to those around us. As we have time to pray while learning patience this week, let us pray for our governmental authorities.

1. How much time do I spend praying for the leaders of our nation, state, and local community? In addition to the salvation of these leaders, for what specific things can I pray for them?

2. What does it mean to be "dignified in every way" as we live peaceful and quiet lives? How does this character quality affect the way that I view and speak about those in authority over me?

3. We should certainly pray for wisdom for the leaders God has put in place in our lives. But we also need wisdom in our own lives for how to live and how to help and take care of our own families. In what areas of my own life do I need wisdom right now?
