

Farmville Baptist Church  
 August 2, 2020  
 Risk patience and perseverance, except when...  
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It has been way too easy to be impatient lately, hasn't it? Everyone is tired of the corona virus ó we are impatient to see our loved ones, to be free from masks, to resume school and travel and concerts and sporting events. Some of us are impatient that systemic changes are coming so slowly, others of us are fed up with the protestors and wish the authorities were being more proactive in restoring order. Here in our church, I imagine that some of you are impatient to call a new pastor. On a personal level, some of us are awaiting news about a new job, or the result of a medical test. Others of us are recovering from an illness or injury more slowly than we hoped. What is testing your patience these days?

In our fast-paced, instant gratification, high-stress world, it seems like almost everything has the potential to push our buttons ó from small personal inconveniences to escalating social and political issues. So what might it mean for us to Risk Patience ó and are there times when maybe we shouldn't?

Scripture has a lot to say about patience and perseverance, we heard just a few of the many verses earlier. As we begin to talk about patience and perseverance today, we need to understand that they mean different things, just as we learned recently that joy and happiness are different.

**Patience:** can be understood as the ability to accept delay or trouble calmly

**Perseverance:** refers to continuing on in spite of difficulty and lack of success.

**Patience:** is a form of tolerance or acceptance.

**Perseverance:** suggests overcoming challenges instead of mere tolerance.

**Patience:** usually does not suggest acting against the opposing forces.

**Perseverance:** suggests acting against them.

Thinking about the Scriptures and these two definitions raised lots of questions for me this week. First I wondered, when are we supposed to be patient and wait things out and when are we supposed to persevere? Let's start with the patience side of the equation.

When I think about situations that require patience, it seems to me that it is most important to exercise patience when things are beyond our control. This morning, people up and down the east coast can only wait patiently to see what Hurricane Isais will do to their homes and businesses ó the immediate outcome of that is out of their control. We have idea how long COVID 19 will continue to disrupt our daily lives.

If we break a bone or have surgery, there are things we can do to aid the healing process ó but much healing just takes time. When our company closes or downsizes, it is out of our control whether we are laid off or not ó and often we have to be patient when the search for new employment takes longer than we'd like. We have no control over when a loved one dies ó and we have to be patient with ourselves and with others as we move through the grieving process in our own ways and at our own paces.

These difficult times in our lives are when we can draw comfort from some of the verses we heard a bit earlier.

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer; and from Isaiah ó they that wait upon 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.

Throughout Scripture, we also find the promise that when we encounter these incredibly dark days, the ones that require our utmost patience, that God is there, walking through each day with us.

And here is one of the realities about these dark days ó they are the ones that build character, aren't they? We talked about this a few weeks ago when our focus was on joy. We heard the passage from James earlier ó the testing of our faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom (about how to handle the difficulty) you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (PAUSE)

This passage provides a natural segue way into the perseverance part of our equation. As I wrestled with the question of when do we have patience and when do we exercise perseverance, I realized that patience and perseverance are not mutually exclusive ó often we are called to do both at the same time.

If we been laid off, we have to be patient and trust that the right new job will come along, but we also have to work hard and persevere in seeking open positions, sending out resumes and applications, and following up on leads.

We may not be able to make our bones grow more quickly ó but by eating well, following our Dr.'s instructions, and persevering responsibly in therapy, we can certainly contribute to our overall healing.

Although folks along the east coast have no control over what the hurricane will do today, they and all of the others affected will need a great deal of perseverance to rebuild their homes, their businesses, and their lives. Sometimes we have to patiently bear up under the trial **and** persevere to work through it. (PAUSE)

I learned this week that there are two different words for patience in the New Testament. The first is what we've been talking about so far this morning ó the type of patience required to bear up under a burden or to remain steadfast in difficult circumstances.

The second word for patience is a compound word: makrothumia. The first part, makro means large or long ó think macro economics here. The second half, thumos ó means passion or temper. Literally, the word means long tempered ó or long fused ó as opposed to short-tempered or short fused. The King James translates the word as long suffering. It means that you are able to hold your temper for a long time before expressing your anger, it means that you have enough self-control not to have a knee-jerk reaction and seek retribution when someone wrongs you or when things don't go well.

It is this word for patience ó long-tempered or long suffering ó that appears in Galatians 5, and for good reason. This is not something that we can accomplish on our own ó it is indeed a fruit of the Spirit ó it is a work of God in and through our lives. In fact, this is the same root word that refers to God's long-suffering or long-temperedness with us. Through the work of God in our lives, we are to extend to others the same level of patience and perseverance to others that God extends to us. Makrothumia is also the word that is used in I Cor. 13 ó where it says that love is patient and kind. We are to view every person we come into contact with as a child of God, and we are to love them and have patience with them as such.

But let me be very clear here. While we are to be infinitely patient and loving with a person's character, I firmly believe that this infinite patience does not extend to someone's behavior. On a familial level, while we may genuinely love our spouse, I do not believe that God calls or commands anyone to persevere through situations of domestic abuse ó either physical or emotional. In fact, I think that misinterpretation and heavy handed preaching of the

passages that call for women to submit to their husbands has actually perpetuated abuse in far too many circumstances.

In dealing with a person who has a substance abuse problem, patience with a destructive behavior can and often does cross the line into enabling and co-dependency. Where is that line? I wish there were an easy answer here, but there isn't. In these cases, I have to circle us back to the book of James and his exhortation for us to seek wisdom from God (and I would add wise counsel from others).

This principle applies to larger issues facing our society as well. As we talked about early in this series, God calls us to love and pray for our enemies ó that includes politicians, protesters that have turned from peaceful marches to the destruction of private and public property, and dangerous heads of foreign countries. Yet at the same time, even while we love them, I believe that we are called to work with perseverance against the injustices that they perpetuate. It is hard work, and it gets discouraging when we don't see much progress, doesn't it? This is where I find the passage that we heard from Hebrews encouraging. Here it again: Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

This is hard work, friends. And here is another reality. Sometimes, perseverance is not in order. Sometimes despite our best efforts, churches or faith based schools that are doing good work have to close, some marriages need to dissolve (but probably not over half of them),

sometimes it is time to stop pursuing medical treatment when it is clear that no positive outcome will be achieved. Here, again, we must seek wisdom from God and counsel from others

Sometimes, we need to persevere, but we struggle mightily to wait patiently on God's timing. In Scripture, Abraham and Sarah got impatient waiting on their promised child and who can blame them and Abraham was 75 when God first called him and promised him children and he was 100 and 25 years later when Isaac was born. But in the middle of those years, they got impatient and at Sarah's suggestion, Abraham took Hagar as a second wife in order to bear a child and the conflict between the descendants of those two families continues today.

As a young man, Moses was short-tempered and killed the Egyptian who was beating a fellow Hebrew. As a result, Pharaoh sought to kill Moses and Moses had to live in exile in Midian for many years until the Pharaoh died.

The good news is that these folks, and countless others in Scripture, are considered heroes of our faith. Despite their humanity and their mistakes, God persevered with them, just as God will persevere with us and use us as we seek to be about God's work in the world. (PAUSE)

So what might it mean for us to risk patience? To be more long-tempered and more patient and loving with those around us? Where might God be calling us to persevere, and where might God be calling us to let go? As we've seen this morning, these are questions without easy answers. I'm grateful that we don't have to figure it all out alone and we can learn what it means to persevere together, while we trust God to grow the fruit of patience in us all.