

## Week 12 Day 4 | *Fruit of the Spirit: Patience*

When we talk about patience, we typically categorize it in one of three ways. Most commonly, we think of patience in terms of *how we wait for something to happen*. When we are excited about a trip, we have a hard time being patient for it to begin. When children want something, they can be impatient as they wait. We are eager for fitness results and have a hard time when they don't come as quickly as we want. Most often, dealing with patience is merely *waiting on the future*.

We also think of patience in terms of *dealing with the behavior of other people*: "They really tried my patience!" We complain to our spouse or friends after a hard day. Our children's or a roommate's actions can be taxing on our ability to deal with them in a calm, productive manner. Even the performance of our favorite sports teams can cause undue anxiety, as we root for their success. Enduring these kinds of situations can often be harder than waiting on the future.

Waiting is linear, actually requiring very little from us. Behavioral patience, on the other hand, requires an internal response (something we can control) to an external action from someone else (something we can't control).

Another way to think of patience is in terms of God's timing. This is really a combination of the first two forms of patience. It requires *waiting on a future event in which we've specifically asked for God's involvement*—His "behavior," if you will. Take, for instance, when I was single. Waiting for God to bring Kim into my life took spiritual and emotional maturing in my life.

There are many examples of waiting for God. When we pray for the salvation of family or a friend, we have to experience a different kind of patience. When we ask God for direction with a ministry opportunity, or seeking wisdom for a business venture, or praying for the return of Jesus Christ—all these require this third kind of patience: waiting on the Lord.

Yet there's a type of patience that usually goes unexamined: *patience with ourselves*. We know we need to have more patience waiting, with the behavior of others or with God's timing. That's not the same as having patience with ourselves.

Having patience with yourself is a key factor in your ability to grow spiritually and emotionally. It certainly helps with your fitness. Too often, however, we will extend patience to everyone except to ourselves. For example, was there ever a school subject that had certain aspects you struggled with grasping? Perhaps math wasn't your strong suit. The fundamentals made sense. Then, the teacher started including letters in the problems instead of just numbers . . . and your brain exploded. You didn't understand it the first, second, or tenth time. Quickly, you deemed yourself dumb.

Maybe you're trying a new discipline and it's just not sinking in. My wife is gifted at many things; however, cooking is not one of them. (She has given me permission to say this, by the way). She's made great strides. Even still, sometimes ingredients accidentally get left out of the recipe and she feels like a failure. Or, maybe she's followed the recipe perfectly but it's just not a family favorite. Rather than blaming the recipe, she blames herself . . . giving herself no grace and offering herself no patience. It makes me sad when I see her beat herself up over it. In fact, whenever we fail to be patient with ourselves, it affects those around us on some level. We don't like seeing people hurting, perhaps especially when their pain originates from messages they're telling themselves.

An amazing benefit of improved fitness is that it helps you improve emotionally as much as it does physically. As you get stronger or faster or lighter or whatever, you grow emboldened, empowered, and confident. You get emotionally stronger. The path to that kind of growth, however, requires patience with yourself. When you can barely do five pushups, what internal message will you tell yourself? When you cave on your nutrition, what voice will you hear?

Or when you start an exercise program or eating regimen over and over for the umpteenth time? Will you approach it from a place of doubt or will you give yourself room to grow from your previous defeats? Your ability to be patient with yourself will help determine the outcome.

What's interesting about patience is the degree of helplessness we feel when we're trying to exercise it. We can't speed up time. We can't control other people's behavior. We can't mess with God's calendar. Our knee-jerk reaction to our own personal failures is part of living in a fallen world.

However, God wants us to recognize our helplessness when it comes to being patient! Our failure moves us away from relying on ourselves and moves us toward relying on Him.

The more we rely on Him, the more fruit we bear. That fruit is powerful, able to develop patience, including patience with ourselves:

*"May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy . . ."*  
—Colossians 1:11 (ESV)

We aren't supposed to rely on ourselves, because apart from Him we can do no good thing. So, accepting our helplessness is healthy! It presents us with a great opportunity to be humbly obedient. We can rely on the Holy Spirit to empower our lives, trusting God to take care of the results.

Furthermore, as you depend on the Holy Spirit to bear fruit, remember that the Lord has been patient with you. Who, then, are you not to be patient with yourself?

The Holy Spirit is more than able to bear the fruit of patience in your life: patience with the future, patience with others, patience with God, and patience with yourself. Just remember, God's timetable is not our timetable. Allow Him to slow you down so that you can recognize His providence. When you do, He will strengthen you to endure in your fitness and your faith.

### Prayer

*Father, thank You for the incredible amount of patience You have shown me throughout my life. Will You forgive me when I am impatient with others, with myself, and worst of all, with You? Please help me always rely on Your Holy Spirit within me to work Your will for my life. Amen.*

### Meditation

I will trust that the Holy Spirit will produce patience in me.

### Daily Spiritual Exercise

Today you will focus on the fruit of patience. Remember, these are not "fruits of ourselves." These are the outcomes of the Holy Spirit working in and through our lives.

As you are focusing on the fruit of patience, pray for wisdom. You may need help in discerning whether you're working out of your efforts or allowing the Holy Spirit to work.

Also, be sure to be teachable. Sometimes we are being taught a lesson we don't want to learn. If we are truly open to the Lord working in our lives, however, we need to humbly receive all He wants to teach us.