

“Patience in a Time of Irritability”

Fruit of the Spirit

Downtown

June 19, 2022

Good morning, Happy Father’s Day to all of our fathers. We are thankful for you and the role you play in the lives of your families. Our hope is that today is a blessing to you as you seek to bless your families every other day of the week. Like all holidays, Father’s Day can be a mixed bag of emotions. Some feel thankfulness and gratitude, others feel grief and sadness as their dads are no longer with them, others feel hurt and pain because their fathers failed them in a myriad of ways, and still some feel a longing to be a dad and that has yet to be realized. As a church we want to meet people where they are, so wherever you are today we are glad you are here.

Last week we began a series on the Fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5 and focused on Love, the first one listed. This summer we are working our way through this list, but not necessarily in order. Today I will be talking about the Fruit of the Spirit Patience.

Sometimes patience or the process of becoming more patient gets a negative connotation. If your grandparents are involved in church, you have probably heard one of them say, be careful what you ask for. “Don’t pray for God to teach you patience—you won’t like what he’ll put you through to learn it!” Or maybe one of them said I made the mistake of praying for patience and God answered in the most unfortunate way.

Today I hope to highlight the beauty of patience. How God is so patient and gracious to us and how wonderful it is when patience exists in relationships.

Galatians 5:16

¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

When Paul introduces the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, he juxtaposes them with the works of our flesh, or our sinful, self-reliant nature divorced from God. The fruits that are produced in us as we seek to put our flesh to death and instead walk in the Spirit.

2 things in competition: walking by the Spirit vs gratifying the desires of the flesh. Today I want to contrast fits of anger, one of the works of the flesh vs patience.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: ... fits of anger...

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is ... patience

The reason I specifically want to juxtapose these two is because in the Greek they both share the same root word, they are interconnected ideas...

Let's start by defining fits of anger.

Works of the flesh are Fits of Anger

*The greek word for **Fits of Anger** is **Thumos** and it means: passion, heat, anger that boils up and soon subsiding again*

The image of boiling up quickly and then also quickly subsiding is a key to understanding this word. It's different from another Greek word **Orgizo** which is translated as anger or wrath. Thumos is quick and volatile, meaning it comes and goes like the wind. In other words, it's often trivial. So for clarity as we move forward I want to refer to Thumos as irritability, edginess, or being easily provoked.

Sometimes you preach out of strength and other times you speak out of weakness. **Me at Carowinds** in line to order my food and need my phone and must go back to the end of the line

Thumos, I was pitching a fit like a toddler, like a hormone crazed teenager going through puberty, like a grumpy old man, or shall I say, like a Karen. It is baffling, humbling, and embarrassing how quickly my inner toddler, teenager, grouch, Karen can come out. And I think it's me going 0 to 60, when really because of my flesh it's really that I'm at 55, so all it takes is a little bit of gasoline to hit the mark. I can boil over.

Marked by Thumos - Hypersensitive people. The kind of person you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around? Someone who is easy to bother and offend and makes you pay for any perceived slight or wrong doing? People who are hard to like. Hard to have a relationship with. Their concern is for themselves and are in quick opposition to anyone who interferes.

Thumos can mean quick tempered or short fused. A hot head that pops off at any moment. It can also take other forms. Your irritability might show itself in withdrawing from people. When you are irritated you give people the silent treatment and shut down. One of the guys on the teaching team said that when he is irritable he withholds acts of kindness.

So I have 3 diagnostic questions to help you see it in your own life. Everyone can probably easily name an irritable person in your life, but I want us to name our own irritability.

1st question: On a scale of 1-10 how easily do people get under your skin.

- Are you easily provoked with a reaction always ready at hand?
- Would you describe yourself as placid and not easily irritated?
- Or might you say you are simmering waiting for any excuse to boil over?

2nd questions: How do you express your irritability?

- Are you quick to snap at your kids? Or is your reaction internal and rather than snap at them, you withhold affection and attention?
- Do you withdraw from your wife? Or do you insult and cut down your husband?
- How often do you give your friends the silent treatment? Or are you more likely to talk behind their backs?

- Do you withhold love and affection or do you attack with words, tone and volume? Are you passive aggressive, do you attack with verbal jabs or do you pout? How do you let people around you know that you are irritated?

3rd question: What triggers your irritation the most? When are you the most impatient?

- Driving in a car, waiting in a grocery line.
- At work, at home
- Kids who don't listen and obey me immediately.
- People who aren't self aware.

I was listening to a podcast about the psychology of money and how to invest. The guy referenced Charlie Munger (business partner of Warren Buffett) and some of the cognitive biases that have been helpful for him to understand investing. The one that caught my attention is called the fundamental attribution error.

“The fundamental attribution error refers to an individual's tendency to attribute another's actions to their character or personality, while attributing their behavior to external situational factors outside of their control. In other words, you tend to cut yourself a break while holding others 100 percent accountable for their actions.”

- Patrick Healy, HBR

Quick example:

- Someone running a yellow light when I want to turn, come on dude are you kidding me. How could you be so selfish
- Verses I am running a yellow light when someone else is waiting to turn. I need to get somewhere fast. I have the right away, I am in a hurry, not my fault

I have a legitimate excuse, reason, circumstance for why I did what I did. You however have a character flaw. I am a good person who did a bad thing for a reason. You are a bad person doing bad things.

When we think this way, then we will not be a very patient person. You will only view people in the negative and assume bad motives. It's not charitable, not loving, not kind, and definitely not patient. And this way of thinking is rooted in a heart problem.

Summary for me: I am most irritated by people and circumstances that prevent me from doing what I want, when I want, and how I want. Most of us are most irritated by people and circumstances that prevent us from doing what we want, when we want, and how we want.

Because ... My highest value is me and my own self-interest, therefore I don't make space for people.

Another reason I think I get impatient and angry is because I - consciously or unconsciously - don't trust God and his timing. Life is not what I want, things didn't turn out the way I want, God didn't deliver how I hoped. My irritability increases. I am simmering, I am edgy, I am already frustrated before anything or anyone comes into my life.

Over the years of LifeGroup and confession, I have learned that one of the warning signs of being unhealthy for me is when I am quick tempered or impatient with people. Displays of unmerited reaction. As in I am over reacting to the situation. My level of frustration does not match the situation. I know something is up and something is off. I know I am not doing good and need to spend time with Jesus figuring things out.

My irritability can be traced back to a lack of love for people and a lack of trust in God.

Fruit of the Spirit is Patience

Makrothumia (μακροθυμία) - Patience towards others, forbearance, **longsuffering**, slowness in avenging wrongs

Patience is the combination of two words. **Makro**, which means being long and **Thumia** which is just another form of the word **Thumos** which as we talked about earlier means passion, heat, anger, or boiling point. So patience is to be long to become passionate, long to heat up, long to anger or long to irritate. Long time to boil. It takes a long time for you to become irritated. Long-fused instead of short fused.

Patience is not indifference or apathy. Please don't miss hear me, I don't want you to think I am just saying, "sit back and relax, stop being so uptight and serious."

Indifference is a counterfeit to patience. It might look the same but it is wildly different. Keller even calls indifference a mild form of hate.

You see, an indifferent person may look patient and say, "It's none of my business." What that means is, I don't want to get involved. It's a lazy way out. You look very patient, but what you're really saying is, "That's not my problem. That's your problem. It's none of my business." That attitude, which some of us have down very well, either we've learned it from other people or it's just in our temperament, is not patience. It's indifferent, and indifference is a mild form of hate.

Romans 12:11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Titus 2:14 Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Patience does not in any way refer to indifference. Patience means you don't lose heart. You persevere patiently and bravely endure misfortunes and troubles. Patiently and bravely bearing the offenses and injuries of others. To be mild and slow in avenging, to be long-suffering.

Patience is not a lack of care, but a means for caring for people. To walk in step with the Spirit is to be patient and slow to irritation, to make space for other people.

One of my favorite examples of patience happens in marriage. In premarital counseling we go through the book WSSID. The gospel applied to relationships and marriage is the specific relationship it is applied to. One of my favorite chapters in the book teaches on **forbearance**. It's a predisposition to forgive and

show grace. I know my spouse's weaknesses and she knows mine and we are ready to forgive and to give grace. We don't have to confront every issue. Doesn't mean we don't confront, in fact we should probably confront one another more than anyone else. It means we are able to give each other the needed space to grow and change.

As the heat rises so does patience and forbearance.

1 Corinthians 13, the famous passage on love from the Bible, a wedding favorite - tells us the very first characteristic of love is that love is patient. Agape, as we talked about last week, is patient.

Which makes sense, if agape means radical self-giving love, a love that is so committed to another person that they will do anything for them. A person who serves with purely unselfish motives, not hoping to get anything out of it, but simply wants the other person to flourish.

Of course, love has a high boiling point. Love has a long fuse. Love is not easily provoked. Love is slow to irritation. Love makes space for people. To grow in patience is to grow in love.

Let's look at **Exodus 34:6** to examine God's character and how patience is a defining characteristic of who God is.

This is the character and nature of God straight from God Himself. On Mount Sinai - Moses is with God and he asks in Exodus 33:17 - "Lord, show me Your glory." Show me who You are. Reveal Yourself to me.

This self revelation of God is actually one of the most repeated verses in the whole Bible - over 10 times this verse comes back up in other places. Biblical scholars consider this, besides the incarnation of Jesus - God taking on flesh - as the highest point of divine revelation in the entire Bible.

This is how God describes Himself:

Exodus 34:6

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

And this revelation of God's character is crucial to us understanding the fruit of patience. So let's take a minute to break down these two phrases:

1) God is slow to anger.

Our default view of God in the Old Testament is that He's just full of smite. He's waiting up in heaven with a lightning bolt for somebody to mess up so he can just go "AHA! I KNEW IT. SMITE!" But that's not who God is. God is slow to anger.

Slow to anger is expressed in Hebrew as “long of the nostrils.” When someone is angry, he flares his nostrils, like a raging bull. God’s nostrils take a long time to flare. He is patient, he is slow to anger.

That’s abundantly clear given the context of this passage. The quick summary version of Exodus 1-33 is:

- God’s people, the Israelites are living as slaves in the land of Egypt. It’s a brutal, harsh reality. God wants to raise up Moses to lead His people out of the land and into freedom. Moses starts whining and complaining - “I’m not good at public speaking. Send someone else.”
- God stays patient. Gives him a helper in Aaron. They go, God does His thing with some plagues. The Israelites are delivered and brought out of Egypt and into freedom. YAY! Should be celebrating right? Sort of. Then the Israelites start complaining - they’re hungry. They’re starving without food and water in the desert. Start wondering if it’s better to go back to Egypt.
- God stays patient. He sends them bread from heaven and water from a rock. AWESOME! Should be celebrating right? Sort of. The bread is bland and boring, start complaining again.
- God stays patient. He calls Moses up to meet with Him. They meet together for a long time - God is outlining an entire societal system where God’s people will flourish in the presence of God. BUT...it’s taking too long. So the people gather together all their gold, burn it down and make it into a statue of a cow and start worshiping it. Moses comes down the mountain, furious.
- God stays patient. Calls Moses back up in Exodus 33. And here’s where He declares about Himself - I am slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

God is patient.

And we can wrongly think that God is irritable like us. Like He’s just waiting for us to screw something up so He can get angry and lash out and rain down His vengeance.

God is slow to anger. The holy God that we worship has patience for sin and sinners even when we rebel, when we revile, when we mock, when we scorn, when we reject. He is patient, he forebears, he makes space for us.

2) Abounding in steadfast love

When God says he is abounding in steadfast love he is saying that he is loving and generous with an enduring commitment. Promise keeping loyalty motivated by deep personal care. Not about the value or merit of the other person but an expression of character. God is committed to a people who are not committed to him. His faithfulness and love to them is rooted in his character and not theirs.

So not only is God delayed in His anger, but He is the exact opposite in His love. Here’s how Pastor Dane Ortlund puts it.

“Unlike us, who are often emotional dams ready to break, God can put up with a lot. This is why the Old Testament speaks of God being ‘provoked to anger’ by His people dozens of times. But not once are we told that God is ‘provoked to love’ or ‘provoked to mercy.’ His anger requires provocation; His mercy is pent up, ready to gush forth. We tend to think: divine anger is pent up,

spring-loaded; divine mercy is slow to build. It's just the opposite. Divine mercy is ready to burst forth at the slightest prick."

To be angry God has to be provoked. To love...that just flows out of him. He is Love. Angering God takes some work. Getting him to love...he already was.

Does God have righteous judgment for sin and sinners? Yes. If you read the book of Exodus you'll see this. There are several times in the book - both by the Israelites and the Egyptians where God is provoked to anger. But He is not easily or quickly provoked. He is patient with his people who are unrighteous, rebellious, stiff necked, wicked, evil. But that's not what God is most fundamentally about. It is not what is central to Him. What is central to Him is His being slow to anger and abounding steadfast love.

This is God's deepest heart. He longs to be in a relationship with us, longs to walk with us, longs for us to be in His presence. Has an overflow of love He wants to lavish on us. In his patience, He is not just neutral → He is ready to bless, ready to care, ready to love.

God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord has always been patient with sin and sinners. Always slow to anger, always abounding in steadfast love, always ready for new mercy and forgiveness and grace.

Jesus embodied the patience of God. He entrusted Himself to His heavenly Father - perfectly patient for the sinners who betray Him, mock Him, abuse Him, and kill Him. Perfectly patient with the plan of God for the cross and the grave.

And on that cross we are given the full picture of God's heart for us, as Jesus, the Son of God hangs on a tree, taking the full wrath of God you and I deserve as God's enemies - we see the most beautiful, compelling, overwhelming picture of what has always been true → "God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

The cross confirms what has always been true → God's patience for sin and sinners.

This is our God whom we are called to follow and the more we follow the more we are conformed into his image. We seek to be like him and in seeking he changes us.

Conclusion

We can easily be a people of reactivity, impulsivity and immediacy. We want it all and we want it now. But God is patient. And His patience creates time and space for growth, maturity, change, and redemption. This is how God has always been and always worked towards sin and sinners. He gives space. He is patient such that it would lead to our repentance, our growth, our restoration.

This is where our patience begins, God's patience toward us. God is not irritated with us. He is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. We are now called to treat people the way we have been treated.

We are called to patience. To lower our boiling point. To be less reactive. To make space for people. To actively love people in spite of themselves.

So when your kids aren't behaving and you are tempted to snap or withhold affection. Before you react, ask the question, “Why am I so irritated right now?” Are my reactions motivated by love and commitment to them or is my reaction rooted in self interest? I am not saying you don't correct or discipline (do not ignore you kids disobedience), I am saying patient parenting comes out of love and care not frustration and irritation.

Or when your spouse forgot to do something for the umptenth time and you are ready to belittle or withdraw from them. Before you react, ask the question, “What does my irritation say about my heart posture toward my spouse? Is this how I want to be treated? Is my response motivated by love or retaliation? Am I doing what is best for you or am I getting back at you.

When someone prevents you from getting your way or accomplishing your task and you are ready to rage. Before you react, ask the question, “What are ways that God has been patient, slow to anger and abounding in love for me?”

Patience isn't formed overnight. It takes time and the work of God's Spirit in us. But let's continue to cultivate patience as we actively love one another.