

BEARING THE FRUIT OF PATIENCE

We are told in James 5:7-8, *"Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. Like the farmer, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."*

Patience is a virtue that is sorely lacking in our society today, it is what the Bible calls "longsuffering" or forbearance. Let me be the first one to admit, I need patience. I tell the Lord all the time: "Lord, I want patience, and I want it right now!" How many of you have a problem with patience? Longsuffering is regardless of the circumstances; we are determined to live by faith, not feelings or emotions. We are determined to respond with grace rather than to react with grief or anger. Now the word for patience or longsuffering is a combination of two Greek words: macro, which means "long or slow" and thumia, from which we get the word thermos or thermal, which means "Anger." It literally means to be Long-Tempered as opposed to being Short-Tempered. In other words, patience is the ability to be slow to anger, rather than being quick-tempered. God is this way. Psalms 103:8 says: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy."

Patience is the ability to idle your motor when you feel like stripping your gears. Patience is not passivity, indifference or a fatalistic attitude toward life which sits back, twiddles its thumbs, and simply says: "Whatever will be, will be...." Patience does not mean that you never get angry. Patience simply means you are slow to anger, and quick to get rid of it. Too often we are just the opposite. We are quick to be angry, slow to get rid of it, and that is when the acid of anger turns into the burden of bitterness. Then we either hold grudges or try to get even. You know, sometimes we look like we are being patient when we're not. Some American soldiers during the Korean War rented a house and hired a local boy to do their housekeeping and cooking. He had an unbelievably positive attitude, always smiling, jovial and happy. So, they played one trick after another on him. They nailed his shoes to the floor. He just woke up, pulled the nails out with pliers, slipped on his shoes, and kept on smiling. They put grease on the stove handles, and he just wiped it off and kept smiling and singing. They balanced buckets over the door. When he opened the door, he got drenched and just dried off and never complained. Finally, the soldiers became so ashamed of themselves that they called him into the room they were in and said: "We want you to know that we are never going to play tricks on you again. We really do appreciate your patience." He asked, "You mean no more nailing shoes to the floor?" They said, "No more." "You mean no more grease on the stove?" They said, "No more." "You mean no more water buckets on the door?" They said, "No more." He said, "Okay Then, "Me No More Spit in Soup." Now the fact of the matter is, you cannot get away from people in life who are going to try your patience. The only way to learn to be patient with difficult people is to love them. Paul said in First Corinthians 13:4, *"Love suffers long."* You all know that the word of God tells us we are to love everybody. If you will love everybody, then you will be patient with everybody, which is why Paul said in First Thessalonians 5:14, *"We exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."*

I believe that God allows difficult people and demanding problems into our lives to develop us in Christian maturity. James said in the first chapter vv.3-4, "knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." God's goal for you is maturity, and patience may be a bitter plant, but it always bears sweet fruit. Full-blown patience makes for a full-grown Christian. Troubles and troublemakers are in your life to develop longsuffering, and you will never graduate to maturity until you go to the school of hard knocks and learn the discipline of longsuffering, which is patience, perseverance, and persistence. You see, it is by patience we see God's work in us, and it is by perseverance we learn God's will for us. It may be difficult to be patient and to wait on the Lord, but the wait is worth the reward. Isaiah 40:31 reminds us that, "Those 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." That's why James says in v.7, "Be patient until the coming of the Lord." My friend, the only reason the world is still here is not because God is powerless, nor is it because God is passive; it is because God is patient. He is long-suffering. Jesus is coming back. Make no doubt about it—that is His promise. But Peter said in II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." This sin-sick world has another day to repent and get saved because of the long suffering of God.