

WD August 22, 2022

“I Can’t Wait!”

“I can’t wait!” Depending on what context one may be in this phrase could mean a lot of things. If one is traveling on the road and needs a rest stop quickly this is not a phrase a driver wants to hear. If one is eager to see what happens next and is full of anticipation this same phrase means something completely different.

As you may have heard, my son and daughter-in-law are going to have their first baby. A couple of days back they invited us and her parents to join them for a 4-D ultrasound viewing of the baby. We could see the baby stretching his legs, his little toes, little bits of hair, moving around in real time. It was amazing. The little booger didn’t let us see his face too well but it was amazing. It was captivating to watch that little guy dancing around in there. The experience certainly turned up the anticipation of his arrival later this fall.

I would imagine that this was the feeling that Abraham and Sarah held in their hearts eagerly waiting for Isaac to arrive. They didn’t have ultrasounds, of course, but Sarah could mostly feel him kicking about like moms do. Abraham waiting his whole life, 100 years for that moment. It was a miracle for Sarah to bare a child at 90 years of age. Abraham’s patience was firmly planted in his trust in God.

Or consider Abraham’s grandson, Joseph. Joseph’s life was a marathon of patience and trust. For a dozen years at least, Joseph put up with being sold to slavery by jealous brothers, working for an Egyptian, speaking a language he previously didn’t know, conforming to a culture he didn’t know, surrounded by false idols he wouldn’t worship. Joseph endured a term in prison only then to rise to Pharaoh’s right hand. And later Joseph’s brothers, who once sold him into slavery, receive his mercy rather than his wrath.

There are others, but let us consider one more. Mary the mother of Jesus was a woman of patience and trust. When the angel announced her pregnancy with Jesus, she was quick to listen and slow to speak. From conception to her son’s resurrection, she remained faithful and patient.

For many I know patience is sort of placed upon us whether we wanted it or not. One of our members who has been in the hospital for over a month was supposed to go in with just a four day stay. He and I have talked often about how he has had to accept his circumstances and work with what has come. He has struggled with discouragement, physical set-backs, waiting for insurance to get their act together, and a fatigue only understood by someone with a long recovery. Yet, he has practiced patience mostly because that’s the only option.

However, his patience has not been a passive thing. He hasn’t just been doing nothing but waiting. He is working toward a goal of getting better. Becoming passive would not work in a long-term recovery. He has learned to enjoy visits from friends. He has learned how to care for himself and adjust that care as things change. He has learned to live with his limits and made plans to change a few things because the experience has given him a new perspective on life. He has made it a point to give thanks for his wife, who has been a trooper as she cares and advocates on his behalf. And together they have prayed and filled the time with scripture and devotions. The experience has brought them closer. He has been patience but not passive at all.

Consider for a moment Hebrews 12:1: “Therefore since we also are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”. The word translated “patience” in this verse means “endurance.” A Christian runs the race patiently by persevering through difficulties. In the Bible, patience is persevering towards a goal, enduring trials, or expectantly waiting for a promise to be fulfilled. In the case of Christians, it is the goal of our faith, which is to be with Jesus in eternal life. Patience is a part of life but it doesn’t just let things happen. It anticipates, plans, adjusts, and stays focused on the goal—being better, being saved.

James 1:2-4 also says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James too is telling us about perseverance as another word for patience—its patience in action. When we think of an action movie patience is rarely highlighted. But in scripture patience is highlighted often. Perhaps the most famous example is in the Parable of the Prodigal in Luke 15. That dad waited patiently, hoping and praying for his son to return. He was ready with the fattened calf and with the ring and the sandals.

Patience is part of the Christian experience and part of our Christian character. Patience was a big part of Jesus' own ministry, "enduring the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" -Hebrews 12:2. The cross was the ultimate display of patience.

What's more is what is hidden in the patience is often a time of discovery about oneself. One really finds out what kind of person he is when he has to wait for something. It then becomes a time of growth or refinement such as was the case with Job. When our patience is tested, by our children, or a difficult family member, or a contractor for example, we often we learn better how to endure what come next a little bit more equipped than last time.

For example, I've learned that contractors are rarely on the job when you need them to be. I've learned that patience can be rewarded with a decent final product. I've also learned that I have to be like the persistent widow of Jesus' parable and call often. I have learned that speaking respectfully goes a lot farther than mean or threatening. Recently, my driveway needed to be resealed. The company didn't show up the first day I had scheduled with them. For a company known for its dependability it felt disrespectful and disappointing. It caused me to doubt my choice. The second day they were scheduled to come I was told that their truck got stuck in a ditch. So, I went on with my plans for that day. At 5PM that day to their credit they finally showed up. They sealed the driveway and the job looks good. Patience won out. But all the way along my patience was tested. However, whether it is being older or just having dealt with it before, I didn't lose my mind or my temper at any point.

Finally, patience is liberating and rewarding. Waiting for things is a part of life. And usually, the best things take some time. Our garden is proof of that. We grew tomatoes from seeds this year and have had such an incredible harvest. Tomatoes, tomatoes, tomatoes, big and small. It's been liberating and rewarding to see them grow. We still had to do what we could to cultivate and water where we could and then we let the Lord do the rest. Things grow while we are patiently waiting for them—not just gardens but also God's people. God's grace is actively working in us even while we are patiently enduring. So may the Lord bless us to be patient and be blessed in our patience. In Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30