

## Love is Patient

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Love is More than a Feeling

John 11

People hate to wait. Do you know that there is a whole field of research on the psychology of waiting in line? Apparently, it started in the 1950's when a high-rise office building in Manhattan had problems. The tenants in the building complained that they had excessively long waits for the elevator, especially in the morning when people arrive at work, at lunch, and in the evening when people left the building.

Engineers looked at the elevators and said, "There's really nothing we can do to speed up the elevator service." The building manager was desperate to keep his tenants so he turned to his staff for suggestions. One employee said, "People are just bored" and he recommended that they install floor to ceiling mirrors near the elevators so people could look at themselves and each other while they were waiting. This was done and the complaints went to zero. This is why we have mirrors by elevators – to keep you occupied with yourself and how you look and distract you from the waiting time.

Based on this, companies have figured out a multitude of ways to distract us while we wait. That's why there are TV screens at airports, magazines in doctors' waiting rooms, little knick knacks and magazines near the checkout aisles at the grocery store. Disney is the master at entertaining people while they wait in line. The line for one Toy Story-themed ride at Disney World, for example, features giant murals and oversized toys and a five-foot tall animatronic Mr. Potato Head who talks to you while you wait in line.

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Picture

Tom Wright, the great New Testament scholar, said in one of his commentaries that the story of the world is a story of waiting. We wait for the healing of our loved ones. We wait for the healing of our marriages. We wait for peace in our world. We wait for justice to be done. We wait for our prayers to be answered.

A few weeks ago, I started a series titled, "Love is More than a Feeling". Jesus gave his followers two great commandments: to love God with all of our being, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We find ourselves in situations where people try our patience. We find ourselves in circumstances that try our patience. How can we fulfill Jesus' command to be more loving people while we wait? That's what I want to talk about today in a message that I titled "Love is Patient". Let's pray.

In the so-called Love Chapter, that we looked at a couple of weeks ago, 1 Corinthians 13, the Apostle Paul defines love this way:

Slide 1 Corinthians 13:4

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

The King James Version says love is long-suffering or, as one commentator puts it:

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Love patiently bears with provocation, and is not quick to assert its rights or resent an injury.

Love is long-suffering. Being long-suffering is not just with our enemies. Being long-suffering is with people who are near to us – our own family members, our spouses, our friends, people in our immediate circle, our co-workers. We’re talking about being patient with elderly people who repeat the same story several times and self-centered people and people who have made terrible choices. The word that is translated “patient” in English can more literally be translated:

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Long-tempered

We don’t have a word like that in English, but it’s a good one. Long-tempered. Love is the opposite of being short-tempered. You can’t be loving and be short or curt with people. You can’t be loving and have a short fuse. Paul says that love waits with a long fuse.

Why should we wait patiently?

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Our call to wait patiently

One reason we ought to wait patiently is because we serve a God who is patient.

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God is patient

Over and over again in the Bible, God is said to be patient. Let’s read this:

Slide Psalm 103:8

ⁱThe LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.

In calling us to patience, the Bible is simply calling us to imitate the character of God. Consider the patience of God's love. God does not hold our sins against us or condemn us for our impatience or destroy us before we have a chance to repent. Instead, he patiently waits for us to ask for our sins to be forgiven. Friend, are you in touch with how patient God has been with you? Have you ever been aware of the reality that God has held back his hand of judgment and given you time to repent? Are you in touch with how long God's leash has been in your life? God allows us to run a long way away from him before we feel his choker chain pull against our necks.

If God has been incredibly patient while we offend him, sometimes for years sometimes for decades, can't those of us who know the Lord put up with an annoying person for a few minutes or a traffic jam for an hour or a cancelled flight for a few hours?

Why should we be patient? Because God has been patient with us and we're called to imitate God and God is patient. Why should we be patient? Because Jesus has been patient with us and we're called to imitate Jesus. And Jesus is patient.

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Jesus is patient.

In fact, the Apostle Paul said that he is a living example of the patience of Jesus.

Slide 1 Timothy 1:15-16

<sup>15</sup>Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.<sup>16</sup>But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

Do you say that about yourself? Can you say with all sincerity, "You know what? I am exhibit A of the patience of Jesus." You know, the closer you get to Jesus, the more you grow in your relationship with Jesus, the more you get in touch with yourself. It's impossible to know Jesus well without knowing ourselves well. And the more we get in touch with ourselves, the more we get in touch with our sin. That's why the Apostle Paul, who walked so close to Jesus, said, "I am exhibit A of Jesus' patience with sinners." Every follower of Jesus ought to be able to say that about themselves.

Why should we grow in patience? Because the God we are called to imitate is patient, and because Jesus who we're called to imitate is patient. If the resurrected Jesus enters our personalities and reshapes us, he will make us more like himself.

So, what is the connection between love and patience? One good place to learn the connection between love and patience is found in the gospel of John. In John 11, we read the story of Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. But in that same story,

we see Jesus taking his sweet time before doing so. Through the story, we read about Jesus' loving patience, and he shows us why we need to be patient. Let me read part of the story:

Slide John 11:1-7

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup>(This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) <sup>3</sup>So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

<sup>4</sup>When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."<sup>5</sup>Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup>So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,<sup>7</sup>and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

In this story we read about a man who was on his death bed. His sisters sent word to Jesus.

Slide John 11:3

So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

In other words, "Jesus, the situation is critical. If ever we needed you to answer one of our prayers and to intervene in a family member's life it is right now!"

From our perspective, verses 5 and 6 hardly make any sense at all.

Slide John 11:5-6

<sup>5</sup>Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup>So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,<sup>7</sup>and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

We might have expected the text to read:

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Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he dropped everything and rushed off to heal him!

Jesus deliberately delayed answering the sisters' prayers. How do you respond to God's delays in your life? You're praying and praying, but nothing seems to be happening. Your desperation grows. Your frustration grows.

What are our reactions to God's delays?

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Our reactions to God's delays

Almost always, God's delays lead us to mistrust of God. When God does not work according to our timetable, we mistrust him. We doubt him. Among other things.

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We doubt God's control

Lazarus dies and note the reactions of his two sisters, Martha and Mary.

Slide John 11:21

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Mary echoes her sister's reaction.

Slide John 11:32

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Have you ever desired to rewrite the past? Have you ever fantasized about what life would be like if you'd made different choices at a particular crossroad in your life? If you had gone to a different college? If you had married a different person? If you had taken a different career path? "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

The fantasy of the rewritten past is what's behind the "Back to the Future" movies. How many of you have seen "Back to the Future" with Michael J. Fox?

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Movie poster

Michael J. Fox travels back in time in a De Lorean to the very moment when his father's and mother's romance was about to be kindled. By interfering with the past, he sets history on an entirely different course so his present is infinitely better than it otherwise would have been.

How would you like to rewrite your past so that your present is better? Perhaps you've had trouble with one or more of your children and you wish that you could go back in time and change the way that you parented them or what you said to them or what you did with them. Maybe you have regrets because you worked too many hours, or you were too uninvolved, or you were too permissive, or you were too strict.

Maybe you regret quitting school too early. If only I hadn't quit. If only I hadn't fooled around, I wouldn't be stuck in this dead-end job. If only I had finished college and gotten my degree. Perhaps you regret your first exposure to pornography on the internet or your first encounter with drugs, the first pill you took, the first time you got drunk, the thing that started you on the road to addiction. If only. If only my son or my daughter never got involved with that crowd. If only I had worked on my marriage and not quit on it. If only we had a different President or if I had a different father or a different coach. If only I had known Christ earlier in my life. If only I hadn't disobeyed God when I knew what he wanted me to do. If only I hadn't been so rebellious.

We live in a world where we all have lots of regrets regarding what we could have and should have done differently or what someone else might have done differently. But in this fallen world of sinful choices and unwise decisions and accidents and unexplainable tragedies, we followers of Jesus must always hide this truth in our hearts: God is still in control!

Throughout John 11, Jesus is in total control, even when he doesn't seem like he is. Jesus knows the end of the story from the beginning. When he first hears that Lazarus is sick, he declares that his sickness is not unto death. Two days later, Jesus is in control even though Lazarus is dead. So he says:

Slide John 11:11

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

Everyone was saying, "What's the point? Lazarus is already dead." The Creator of life, the one who calls himself the Way, the Truth and the Life, the one who would come back to life after he was dead was busy working out his plan, even if it would take a miracle. Not even death challenges Jesus' sovereign rule. God is in control!

This is one of the main things that we need to remember whenever we start to get impatient – when we're impatient standing in line, we're impatient with the progress of change in our marriages, when we're impatient with God's delay in answering a prayer – God is still in control. Those who love and trust God, trust in his control over all things, including timing.

John Sanderson, in his book on the Fruit of the Spirit, says this:

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"Our resentment is against the timetable which the sovereign God has assigned to us, a schedule based on a plan of which we are usually ignorant. It is this ignorance that brings about our frustration, the seeming senselessness of delay, loss or failure. But this

is the reason why impatience is such a noxious weed that it leaves God out of our thinking.”

Whenever we find ourselves getting impatient, it’s usually because we are leaving God out of our thinking. While I’m waiting in line, waiting for change, waiting for an answer to prayer, while I’m waiting for a breakthrough, I will remember that you, Lord, are in control.

Not only do we doubt God’s control when we’re forced to wait:

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We doubt God’s love

When God’s timetable is different from our timetable, we doubt that God loves us. We begin to believe that God doesn’t care at all! Why should I care about him when he doesn’t care about me? So many people walk away from the Lord when the Lord delays and doesn’t work according to our timetable. So many people become bitter toward God when in our impatience and unbelief we think, “If God cared, he would do something. He would have answered our prayers. He would not have made us suffer loss as we did. The Lord would not make us wait while a loved one suffers.”

But three times in this text, we read of Jesus’ love for Lazarus and his sisters.

Slide John 11:3

So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

Slide John 11:5

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Slide John 11:36

Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

When we suffer, when we wait, when God delays answering our prayers, it’s tempting to think in our impatience that God doesn’t love us. But the Bible assures us that we are always loved by God and nothing can separate us from his love. Here’s what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans:

Slide Romans 8:38-39

<sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Apostle Paul starts with death. Death is the most fearful thing we face because it threatens to divide us from those we love. But even death cannot separate us from God's love. In fact, for the Christian, death actually unites us with God's love forever.

I read a story about a young pastor who was called to the bedside of an old woman who was at the end of her life. When he tried to comfort her by muttering something about how sorry he was that she was going to die, this old Christian woman interrupted him and said:

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"God bless you, young man. There's nothing to be scared about. I'm going to cross over Jordan in a few hours, and my Father owns land on both sides of the river."

Death cannot separate us from God's love. But what about life? This may seem like a strange question to ask, but for many people life is crueler than death. Some people prefer death over life. But Paul reminds us that no matter what we suffer in life, God's love is still with us.

Having considered life and death, Paul mentions angels and demons. No matter how terrible the spiritual attack is on us, spiritual powers can't separate us from God's love. Demons can tempt us to believe while we wait that God doesn't love us. But Paul says that nothing can separate us from God's love. Paul mentions time – he says neither the present nor the future – in the present you may have no end to problems, you might be afraid of the future, afraid of what you may have to go through in the hospital, in old age, in your marriage. But Jesus Christ is the Lord of time. He is the ruler of this life and the life to come. We are loved with an everlasting love.

Paul has considered death and life and demons and time – how about space? He says neither height nor depth. In other words, there's no place in the entire universe that can separate us from God's love. No matter where we go, God is there. Therefore, his love is there for you. That's what gives missionaries incredible courage to go to some of the most dangerous places in the world. Because God will be there.

Just in case you wonder if something was left out, Paul adds the phrase "nor anything else in all creation". In other words, there is absolutely nothing that can separate God's children from God's love. No bad marriage, no broken engagement, no bad news, no disappointment, no downturn in the economy. Nothing in this creation can separate us from God's love.

Friend, if you hide these two things in your heart – God is in control and God loves me at this moment – you can grow in loving patience whatever situation or delay you may experience. Let's pray.



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Love is More than a Feeling

John 11

- I. Our call to wait patiently
  - A. God is patient
  - B. Jesus is patient
  
- II. Our reactions to God's delays
  - A. We doubt God's control
  - B. We doubt God's love