

# Voices: Patience, A fruit of the Spirit for a pandemic

June 15, 2020

"I'm done. I can't do it anymore. These kids are driving me crazy."

Are similar words being voiced in your home right now? They are in the Chandler house.

If you don't have kids, there are plenty of others who could try your patience. Perhaps your husband has let those dishes sit in the sink too long. Maybe the new puppy is having trouble potty training. Perhaps figuring out Zoom Bible study has you wanting to pull out your hair.

We can laugh, but running out of patience isn't funny. Have you ever lost your patience? The results aren't pretty. The worst results are things like divorce, verbal abuse or even physical violence.

What causes impatience? According to Paul, it's our sinful nature. Humanity left to itself is governed by the flesh. In Galatians 5:16-21, Paul lists several manifestations of the flesh. Notice one of them is "fits of rage," the opposite of patience.

The Christ-follower, however, has an advantage. Upon belief, we are gifted with the fruit of the Spirit, who begins a process of transformation. The more we walk by the Spirit, the more the fruit grows, helping us move out of the flesh. We simply find ourselves more loving, more joyful, more peaceful and more patient.

# God's patience with us

In the New Testament, there are two Greek words for patience. The first is *makrothymia*—self-restraint that does not quickly counter a wrong. The second is *hypomonē*—the temperament that does not cave easily under suffering.

*Makrothymia* has more to do with patience for others. *Hypomonē* is the ability to endure or suffer long. In Galatians 5:22, Paul uses *makrothymia*.

All throughout the New Testament, the uses of *makrothymia* support this definition. See Romans 2:1-4, for example, where Paul defends his view that God makes salvation available to Jew and Gentile alike.

There's no moral difference between a Jewish person and anyone else. We all are in need of grace. Any Jewish person who judges another, therefore, shows contempt for God's patience and is subjecting themselves to judgment. Considering Israelite history, God could have wiped them out many times, yet didn't. Instead, he displayed kindness and patience repeatedly.

I'm willing to bet God has done the same for you. The overall New Testament message is that God has displayed an immense amount of patience for all of us.

Therefore, how can we not share that same patience with others?

# Our patience with others

This is a second thing the New Testament teaches about patience. Since God has an immense amount of patience with us, we should display an immense amount of patience with others.

In Ephesians 4:2, the word “bearing” means “to hold up.” That’s what bearing with people often feels like.

Remember the movie *Weekend at Bernie’s*? One character dies, and the others parade him around like a puppet, pretending he’s alive. Sometimes, that’s what it feels like to bear with people.

Sounds hard, right? How can we do it? In two ways, love and humility.

Notice Paul tags “love” on to the end of Ephesians 4:2. The love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:7 NRSV) and is working through us is the only way we are able to bear with one another.

Humility is remembering specifically what terrible sinners we are. Read what Paul says about himself in 1 Timothy 1:15-16, and it all makes logical sense. We are sinners, unworthy of God’s grace. The consequence is death.

However, God is patient. He loves and desires to be in relationship with us. So, even while we were sinners, Jesus died for us. His immense patience now is on display in our lives as an example to others of his love.

## **A proper understanding of patience**

But what difference does patience actually make? Impatient children and adolescents often are told they should acquire more patience simply because it’s a virtue. That’s it. We should be patient because it’s good to be patient. Surely, there’s more to it.

Granted, learning patience as a child helps us manage those frustrating areas of adulthood, like standing in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Certainly, teaching our young how to be patient will help develop them for healthy adulthood.

Yet, that's the problem. It will help *them*. Patience often is taught as a means of helping yourself. That's not what *makrothymia* means. Paul says patience is for others. The reason we display patience is because it is through immeasurable patience that salvation is made possible.

When Paul says Christ displayed an immense amount of patience, think about what that meant. From heaven, Christ descended to be born an infant. He endured puberty as a pimply 13-year-old. He rejected Satan's temptation of immediate world dominion. Although perfect, he wore the filth of humanity's sin on the cross.

*Makrothymia* is not about us. *Makrothymia* has a salvific end for others.

Patience is difficult. Patience requires that I move slower and stop in order to help others. And there's the rub. At its core, impatience is selfishness. *Makrothymia* requires *selflessness*.

## **The need for patience now**

The second reason we should display patience is that no community can survive without it. All relationships require it—marriage, family, friends and coworkers. Furthermore, your church needs it right now.

If you want to help your church make it through the coronavirus pandemic, it needs your *makrothymia*. For your church to successfully reopen, it needs patience. There is going to be something you disagree with in that process.

You may think some things an overreaction. You may even be tempted to fall into a fit of rage over it. Can you be patient anyway?

Remember: It no longer is you who lives, but Christ who lives in you. It will be obvious who is walking by the Spirit and who is gratifying the desires of the flesh based on your reactions during these days.

What difference does *makrothymia* make? It makes all the difference. Salvation and community are not possible without it.

*Ryan Chandler is the pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Orange, Texas, and blogs at [cassryanchandler.com](http://cassryanchandler.com). The views expressed are those solely of the author.*