

Galatians 5:16-26; 1 Timothy 1:12-17 // Sharing in God's Patience

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[0:00] I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. And now we're in 1 Timothy. Today, I'm going to read verses 12 to 17, and you'll find it on page 1191 in the Church Bibles.

[1:29] In this passage, the Apostle Paul reflects on his own conversion and explains that Jesus' patience towards him wasn't just for his own sake, that's Paul's sake, but is a living example of God's patience towards every sinner who comes to Christ.

Verse 12. I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service.

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners.

[2:52] Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, good morning. Thanks, Michael, for reading. Let me add my welcome.

My name's Jonathan. If we've not met before, we'd be delighted to meet you after the service. Well, before we begin, let me just say a quick word about what we're doing this morning.

If you're a regular here at St. Silas, you'll know that our normal pattern is to work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, more or less. But every now and again, we take a step back and trace a theme across the Scriptures.

And that's what we've been doing with our summer series in The Fruit of the Spirit. So this morning, rather than staying in one passage, we'll be moving through a number of different places in the Bible as we think about patience or forbearance, as it was in the church translation there.

[4:14] So please do keep a Bible open. And we'll also have many of the key verses up on the screen as we go along. So let's pray as we come to think about God's word for us this morning. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your living word. As we come to think about it now, please send your Holy Spirit to open our hearts and minds and shape our lives.

Show us more of your patient character. Fix our eyes on the Lord Jesus and continue your work of bearing the fruit of patience in us.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, imagine I'm carrying a cup of coffee after the service. Somebody bumps into me and it spills everywhere.

Nobody goes, well, that was unexpected. I suppose the bump might have been unexpected. But the fact that coffee comes up out of the cup isn't unexpected. Why?

[5:21] Because coffee is what was in the cup. If it had been tea in the cup, tea would have come out the cup. If it had been iron brew, I would be in deep trouble with Christine, our cleaner.

It kind of would blend in with the carpet a little bit. Whatever's inside eventually comes out when life gives us a shove. And life has a habit of bumping into us, doesn't it?

A delayed flight, a difficult email, a child who suddenly can't find their shoes when you're already late for a church this morning. The question isn't whether you'll get bumped.

The question is what comes out when you are bumped. Well, listen again to Paul's description of the Christian life in Galatians chapter 5.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, or forbearance. Notice the picture that Paul chooses. It's an organic metaphor.

[6:25] Not a mechanical one. Not a tree. Rather, it is a tree, but not a machine. Fruit cannot be artificially manufactured. It grows.

And Paul isn't here describing what comes naturally to us. He's describing what the Holy Spirit produces in us.

And this morning, we're going to be thinking about one aspect of that fruit. Patience. Which means I should probably begin with a bit of a confession.

A few weeks before we went on holiday, some friends very kindly gave us vouchers to one of those fancy ice cream places in the West End.

You know the kind. Not a 99 Mr. Whippy from the park. A proper artisan gelato. Every flavor sounds like it's got a back story.

[7:20] There's amirino cherry. There's Madagascan vanilla with hand-harvested Himalayan rock salt. How to choose. Everything sounds incredible.

But finally, we make our choices and place our orders. Now, at that exact moment, Alice announces, me and the kids are just going to nip to the bathroom.

Now, even then, I remember thinking, well, that is an interesting tactical choice. But off they go. And seconds later, the assistant hands me the first ice cream.

And then the second ice cream and the third ice cream and the fourth ice cream. Suddenly, I'm trying to hold three ice cream cones and a tub. All of them melting at slightly different rates. I've got Oreo running down one arm. I've got cherry ice cream down the other. I'm trying to sort of carefully predict where gravity is going to strike next. And then I notice, to my horror, a queue.

[8:18] When we had arrived, there wasn't a queue. Now, the queue seems to be stretching halfway down the Great Western Road. The assistant says, can I scan your voucher?

Of course. Great idea. Excellent. The voucher's on Alice's phone, which she thoughtfully, in fact, had left with me. Unfortunately, it requires a passcode, which in that very moment, I cannot remember.

Now, outwardly, I'm smiling, trying to maintain the facial expression of a man who is absolutely coping. Inwardly, not so much.

Eventually, the phone unlocks. The voucher scans. And at that precise moment, of course, Alice and the children reappear. Fresh as daisies. Smiling, relaxed.

Blissfully unaware of my ideal. Brilliant. The ice creams are ready. Now, I won't tell you exactly what was going through my mind at that particular point.

[9:19] But I'll tell you one thing. I thought to myself, you know what? I'm not sure if I'm the right person to be preaching this sermon on patience in a few weeks. And later, during the holidays, I started wondering whether Martin hadn't strategically planned a series, Love, Joy, Peace.

Jonathan, he can do patience. Apparently, an area for spiritual growth had been identified. And Alice certainly thought so. She reminded me of it several times during the holiday.

But here's the thing. That afternoon didn't make me impatient. It exposed the impatience that was already there.

That's what life's bumps do. They don't create what's inside us. They reveal what's already there. And that's uncomfortable. Because if it's impatience that spills out, where does patience come from?

When we hear the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, our instinct is immediately to ask, How do I become more patient? But the Bible begins somewhere else.

[10 : 31] Before the patience is ever the Spirit producing that characteristic in us, it is God's own character. Before patience becomes fruit, it is the root.

So firstly, the Father reveals God's patience. If patience is rooted in God's character, where does God choose to reveal it?

Well, at one of Israel's darkest moments, as Derek's already alluded to in Exodus chapter 34. You can find that on page 93 in the Bibles.

Exodus 34.

Exodus 34 verse 6. Then the Lord came down and he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

[11 : 53] Compassionate. Gracious. Slow to anger. This is how God introduces himself. And as Derek's mentioned, the rest of the Old Testament keeps on returning to those very words.

I've listed some of the references in the service sheet. You can go home and look them up at your leisure. But again and again, God's people remind themselves, This is what our God is like.

Patient God. Now what does slow to anger mean? Literally, it means long-tempered. We're used to doing the opposite.

The short-tempered person. We all know someone with a short fuse, a careless word, a delayed train. Somebody cuts them up in traffic. They're off. They explode. Well, God is not like that.

He has every right to be angry at our sinfulness. Yet he is never irritable. He never loses his rag. And his patience flows from his steadfast love for his people.

[12 : 59] Now don't misunderstand. God is not indifferent to sin. Verse 7 says that he will not leave the guilty unpunished. He is perfectly just.

But he is not a God who delights in judgment. He is slow to anger. He gives space for repentance. And that helps us, I think, understand something else.

Have you ever wondered why Jesus hasn't yet returned? Why evil still flourishes? Why justice often seems so delayed?

Well, listen to Peter. In his second letter, chapter 3 of 2 Peter. Find that on page 1224.

It's up in the slides as well. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years. And a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.

[14 : 04] Instead, he is patient with you. Not wanting anyone to perish. But everyone to repent. So some of Peter's readers were asking, they were getting impatient with God.

They were asking, what is he doing? Why is he taking it so long? Peter says, you're thinking about time the wrong way. God isn't pacing up and down heaven, anxiously watching the clock.

He is patient. Patient because he is merciful. He knows the reality of eternal judgment far better than we can get our heads around.

And he wants people to be saved. So every day that Jesus delays is another day of mercy, another opportunity.

I thank God for that. As many of you know, there was a long season where I wandered far from the Lord. And looking back, I marvel at how patient he was with me.

[15 : 11] He was patient. He didn't give up on me. And perhaps for many of us here, we could tell similar stories. You look back and you think, I cannot believe the patience of God towards me.

And yet he didn't let me go. He was patient. So thank God that God is patient. And if you're here this morning and you're not yet a Christian, you wouldn't yet call yourself a Christian, perhaps you've drifted a long way from the Lord yourself.

Don't mistake God's patience for indifference. His patience is an invitation. An invitation to come to him, to repent, to receive mercy.

But the story doesn't end at Mount Sinai. God's patience doesn't remain words spoken to Moses in Christ. God's patience puts on flesh and enters into history.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is astonishingly patient. Patient with crowds. Patient with sinners. Patient with disciples. He never quite seemed to get it. Just think of Peter.

[16 : 26] He's always speaking before he thinks. Usually putting his foot in it. In Mark 8, Peter even goes so far as to rebuke Jesus. In Matthew 4, he steps out into the water and immediately begins to sink when he takes his eyes off Jesus.

In Gethsemane, Jesus asks him just to stay up and watch and to pray. Peter falls asleep. And then at the night of his arrest, he denies his Savior three times.

Yet Jesus never gives up on Peter. Corrects him. Rebukes him. Brings him back to himself. And then John chapter 21, entrusts him with his precious flock.

Peter's story isn't ultimately about Peter. It's about the patience of Jesus. But perhaps nowhere is Christ's patience more clearly displayed than in the Apostle Paul.

So turn with me back to 1 Timothy chapter 1, which Michael just read for us on page 1191. 1 Timothy 1.

[17 : 35] Paul never gets over the fact that Jesus saved him. So look how Paul describes himself in verse 13. 1 Timothy 1, 13.

I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.

This isn't somebody who was sitting on the fence, looking in on the Christian faith from the outside, thinking about, what do I think about Jesus here?

He was radically, violently opposed to Jesus, dragging Christians from their homes, standing over Stephen's execution, approving of every stone thrown at the martyr.

If anyone looked beyond saving, it was surely Paul. And yet, Jesus met him, not with judgment, but with mercy.

[18 : 30] Listen to verse 15. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst.

Paul doesn't minimize his past. He calls himself the worst of sinners. And yet, by the grace of our Lord, he says, grace was poured out abundantly, super abundantly on me.

Well, isn't grace a wonderful thing? Christ doesn't love us because we deserve it, but because of the kind of a saviour he is, a patient saviour.

And years into following Jesus, when he wrote this letter, Paul's awareness of grace has only grown deeper. The closer he comes to Jesus, the more amazed he is that Jesus should love someone like him.

Have you ever had one of those moments? Perhaps just reading your Bible or praying. And suddenly, you become freshly aware of just how patient Jesus has been with you.

[19 : 48] You ask God to remind you this week of just how patient he has been with you throughout your life. And then, in this amazing verse, verse 16, Paul tells us why Christ saved him.

But for this very reason, I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example.

Why did Jesus choose Paul? Why did Jesus pick Paul for his team? Not because he saw potential. You know, this guy Paul, he's pretty bright.

He's quite kind of academically gifted. He'll write half of the New Testament. That's not the reason given, at least not here. Paul says, Christ saved me to display his immense patience.

Paul isn't the exception to God's patience. He isn't a one-off. He's the demonstration of God's patience. So that everyone could look at Paul's life and know that nobody is beyond the reach of Christ's grace.

[21 : 06] So imagine Paul in God's display cabinet. I think that's the picture here. Paul in God's display cabinet. Not so that people could admire Paul, but so that they admire the patience of Christ.

Every time someone kind of walks past and says, surely not him, God says, exactly. Every time someone thinks, I've gone too far this time, God says, look at Paul.

Every time you're tempted to think, surely Jesus couldn't forgive someone like me. God says, look at Paul.

If Christ could pursue, forgive, transform, and use a violent persecutor of a church like Paul, then nobody here this morning, nobody here this morning is beyond his grace.

And neither has Christ's patience run out with you. Notice something else. Paul's writing these words years after meeting Christ on the Damascus road.

[22 : 14] Christ's patience wasn't exhausted the day that Paul was converted. It accompanied him every step of the way afterwards. Perhaps somebody here needs to hear that this morning.

Perhaps you're feeling that you've really let down God this time. You feel you've disappointed God. Still battle the same sins. Still battle the same failures. Well, God's patience hasn't run out.

The God, the Jesus who patiently bore with Peter, patiently bore with Paul, is the same Savior today. The patient Savior who bears with us.

Still he forgives. Still he restores. Still he welcomes you. Not because your sin is small, but because his patience is immense.

So if you belong to Christ, your standing before God doesn't rest on how well yesterday went. It rests on Christ's finished work.

[23 : 14] That means your story, like Peter's, like Paul's, is in large degree a story of the patience of Jesus. Thirdly, the Spirit grows godly patience in us.

Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience. So how does that patience begin to grow in our lives? Not by trying harder in our own strength, but because the patience we've seen in the Father, embodied in the Son, is now reproduced in us by the Spirit.

The Spirit is cultivating in us the family likeness. You could put it like this if you want the sermon. In a nutshell, the patient God patiently produces patience in his impatient people.

The patient God patiently produces patience in his impatient people. Now what does that look like? What does that actually look like? The Bible shows patience growing in two directions.

Upwards, waiting on God. And outwards, bearing with God's people. Forbearing with one another. Now here's the thing.

[24 : 29] Nobody drifts into patience. You don't wake up one morning and suddenly discover you're now a patient person. God has a school for teaching it.

And James tells us where to enroll. In the first chapter of James, I'll just read it for us. Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Do you notice where the classroom for patience is? Trials of various kinds.

Waiting. Disappointments. Disappointments. Frustrations. Difficult people. That's where the spirit quietly gets to work in our hearts. So let's think about them in turn.

The vertical movement first. The patience that trusts God's timings. So we think of it as opposite impatience. We might picture somebody kind of tapping their foot in a supermarket queue.

[25 : 33] But Paul has something much deeper in mind in Galatians chapter 5. 1.1.72 if you want to follow that again. At heart, impatience says, I want things on my timetable, not God's.

That's what impatience is. I want things on my timetable. I want it here. I want it now. Not on God's timetable. I think that's why impatience so very often spills over into the works of the flesh that Paul's just listed before the fruit of the spirit.

We become angry because someone delays what we wanted. Envious because someone else receives what we've been waiting for.

We look for escape because we don't want to endure the pain any longer. We grasp at shortcuts because we don't want to wait for God's good gifts in God's good time.

That's why impatience is rarely an isolated sin. It has deep roots. And that's why God doesn't merely trim the branches.

[26 : 51] He changes the roots. And one of his favorite classrooms is waiting. Listen to the opening words of Psalm 40. I waited patiently for the Lord.

He turned to me and heard my cry. Now the psalmist here isn't pretending that everything's been rosy in his life.

He's in what he calls a slimy pit. And whatever it is that's been going on in his life, he knows he's stuck in a rut. He doesn't know how or when things will change.

Maybe that's something you can relate to. But notice he isn't simply waiting for circumstances to improve. He's waiting for the Lord.

Now there's all the difference in the world. Circumstances change. The Lord does not. And you could say that patience is faith stretched out over time.

[27 : 59] Patience is faith stretched out over time. It's trusting God's goodness when God's timetable isn't the same as ours. And that can be really hard.

And some of you know exactly what that feels like. Because that's what you're going through at the moment. Waiting for exam results perhaps. Waiting for work. That's waiting a long time.

Waiting for the grief to soften.

Waiting for somebody you love to come back to Christ. Some waiting lasts days a week. Some lasts years. Some waiting lasts a lifetime.

Well perhaps that's where you're at this morning. You feel as if your life has been put on hold.

You're in a bit of a limbo. The psalmist understands that.

[29:04] He doesn't know when God will answer. But he does know who God is. Patience doesn't presume to know God's timetable.

But it trusts God's heart. And James tells us that the testing of our faith, this testing produces perseverance.

We all want mature Christian character. We'd just rather not attend the classes. Yet the waiting that you're experiencing today may be exactly where the Spirit is quietly producing in you the fruit of patience.

Be assured of this. God isn't wasting your waiting. He's doing something beneath the surface that you may not yet be able to see. You may not see for years to come.

You can grow crafts in a week if all you're looking for is something green quickly. But if you're wanting a solid oak, something that will stand through the storms, that takes years and decades.

[30:17] God isn't in the business of growing spiritual crests. He's growing oaks of righteousness. Of course, not all God's lessons come through our circumstances.

Some come through people. Which brings us to the second direction in which the Spirit grows patience. Patience bears with God's people.

And Paul says in Colossians 3, verse 12, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Notice he doesn't simply say, be patient.

He shows us what that patience looks like. Bear with one another. That's a telling phrase, isn't it? It's a wonderfully realistic phrase because it assumes something.

[31:17] It assumes that sometimes people are difficult. Sometimes they misunderstand us.

Sometimes they disappoint us or irritate us, just get on our nerves. And if we're honest, sometimes we're that person.

We're the person that somebody else has to bear with. You know, I once heard someone describe their experience of coming into church like this. They were very conscious, deeply conscious of two things.

First, they were painfully aware of their own sins and failures and shortcomings. And then secondly, as they looked around, they mistakenly assumed that everybody else around them had their lives sorted.

That's never true. Every church is full of people still battling sin, still needing grace. We're a family of sinners saved by grace.

That's why Paul says, bear with one another. Now, patience doesn't pretend that sin doesn't matter. Jesus confronted sin, but he never gave up on people. And Christian patience refuses to give up on people either.

[32:27] That's what Jesus teaches Peter. Peter asks, how many times should I forgive? Seven times, Jesus says, no. Seven times, 70 times. In other words, don't keep score. Keep extending grace, because that's what you've first received.

Every act of patience that we're able to show to one another is simply passing on what we've first received from Christ. And again, James helps us here. The testing of your faith produces perseverance.

See what that means. Those difficult people in your life who just rub you up the wrong way, they may not be obstacles to your discipleship.

They may be one of the means that God is using to grow you right now. It's often our prayer, isn't it? Lord, make my life easier. Maybe we coach it in less explicit terms than that, but that's basically the substance of it, isn't it?

Lord, make our life easier. Help me through this. Take this situation away. But God is far more interested in making us holier.

[33:33] Now, Charles Spurgeon, the Victorian preacher, once painted a magnificent picture. He said that everyone admires the weather-beaten sailor. Face bronzed by years at sea, skin like old mahogany, steady, solid, dependable.

But, Spurgeon said, nobody becomes that kind of sailor by staying in the harbor. Harbors are comfortable. They're predictable. It's the storms that produce a seasoned sailor like that.

That's what shapes the sailor. And the same is true spiritually. Patience is forged in disappointments and frustrations and difficulties and loving people who aren't necessarily easy to

love all the time.

And says Spurgeon, when mature Christian character finally appears, it's worth every storm that helped produce it. Because God isn't simply interested in getting you safely into heaven.

He's wanting to make you look like his son on the way there. So we're not to be surprised if he does some of his best work in and through the storms and through difficult people.

[34 : 49] You know, even our hardest conversations, they can be marked by remarkable patience. Because we never forget the patience that Christ has first shown to us.

And one day, perhaps even tomorrow, life might bump into you. Something will spill out. By God's grace, may it not simply be our natural temperaments, may it be the family likeness.

Because the Father has shown us his patience, the Son has embodied his patience, and the Spirit is patiently growing that same patience in us. The patience of Christ.

Amen. And let's pray. Father, we praise you that you are the God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Thank you that you have shown your patience to us in the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself for us while we were still sinners. And we thank you that by your Holy Spirit you are patiently at work in us, making us more like your Son.

[36 : 10] So for those of us who are in a season of waiting, help us to trust your heart when we cannot see your timetable. For those facing difficult people or difficult circumstances this week, give us grace, Lord, to bear with one another in love.

And may St. Silas increasingly be known as a church where the patience of Christ is seen. Not because we are naturally patient people, but because your Spirit is bearing his fruit among us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.