

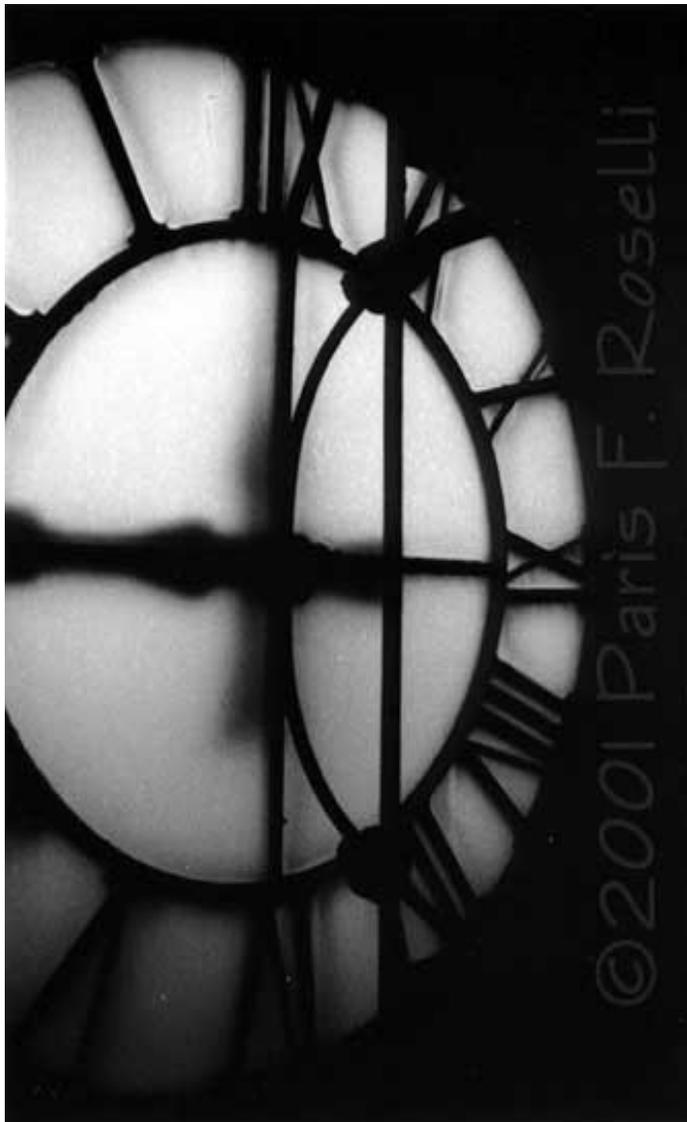
PATIENCE



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE,
PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GENEROSITY, FAITHFULNESS,
GENTLENESS, AND SELF-CONTROL . . .

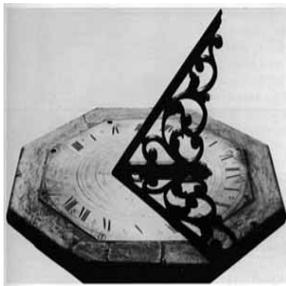
IF WE LIVE BY THE SPIRIT,
LET US ALSO BE GUIDED BY THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 5: 22-25



Lord, not you,
it is I who am absent.
At first
belief was a joy I kept in secret,
stealing alone
into sacred places;
a quick glance, and away—and back,
circling.
I have long since uttered your name
but now
I elude your presence.
I stop to think about you, and my mind
at once
like a minnow darts away,
darts
into the shadows, into gleams that fret
unceasing over
the river's purling and passing.
Not for one second
will my self hold still, but wanders
anywhere,
everywhere it can turn. Not you,
it is I who am absent.
You are the stream, the fish, the light,
the pulsing shadow,
you the unchanging presence, in
whom all
moves and changes.
How can I focus my flickering,
perceive
at the fountain's heart
the sapphire I know is there?

Denise Levertov



I WASTED TIME AND NOW DOTH TIME WASTE ME.
SHAKESPEARE ❖ RICHARD III

5



PATIENCE

LIFE ON THE VINE

“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until he receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.”

James 5: 7-8

The Theme

We shape our lives by the way we mark our hours, days, and weeks. Daily activities are constantly regimented by the clock and ruled by the new “virtue” of productivity—both of which challenge how we define and cultivate patience.

The Word

- ◆ **DAY 1: Read Exodus 34: 1-10 (*the second set of tablets*)**
Reflect on the way God is characterized in this passage.
- ◆ **DAY 2: Read Jonah 3-4 (*a second chance for Jonah*)**
Reflect on the way God is characterized in this passage.
- ◆ **DAY 3: Read Matthew 18: 23-35 (*parable of the unforgiving servant*)**
Note that the context for this parable is Peter’s question to Jesus about how many times to forgive someone. Why might this parable be called the parable of the “impatient” servant?
- ◆ **Day 4: Read 2 Peter 3: 8-15 (*purpose in God’s patience*)**
How does this passage compare with the two Old Testament texts above?
What is the purpose in God’s patience?
- ◆ **DAY 5: Read Chapter 4 in *Life On the Vine*** Pay attention to the connections that are made among patience, peace, and forgiveness. Consider what it means to say, “Christians are called to be patient for the sake of others”? After reading the chapter, work through the study guide on the following pages.

The Book

Most modern English translations render the fourth fruit of the Spirit as “patience.” Although such a rendering is appropriate, older versions offered a more vivid translation: “long-suffering.” . . . Scripture employs several different words that point to this disposition, words that are often translated as “patience,” “forbearance,” “endurance” and “steadfastness.” The Bible repeatedly encourages God’s people to endure hardship and persevere. But patience and forbearance are slightly different dispositions than perseverance, and they appear to be less desired and perhaps less admired by our society as a whole. To see this difference one has only to reflect on the noun form: patient. In English this noun refers not only to the character trait but also to the person under the care of a health professional. Indeed, the latter usage developed out of the notion during the Middle Ages that anyone suffering patiently was a “patient.” Hence, what “being patient” and “being a patient” have in common is this: both require that a person come to terms with yielding control to another.

(Kenneson, pp. 108–109)

The STUDY GUIDE

Exploring the Roots of Patience

Key to understanding the fruit of patience in this lesson, is understanding the many ways our lives are regimented by time. Consider what the phrase “wasting my time” means. Why do you think unexpected delays—traffic jams, doctor appointments, lines in the check out counter—become such obstacles to patience? How does your own relationship with your watch or a clock affect the way you think about and try to cultivate patience?

Recall the story of Jonah and the story of God’s giving the Israelites a second set of tablets in Exodus (see reading assignments). Look up and read Psalm 145: 8:

- ◆ How does each story’s portrayal of God’s patience support the claim of Psalm 145: 8?
- ◆ In each story, what does God’s patience or “long-suffering” make possible?

In the book, Kenneson makes two statements: (1) *“God’s patience—God’s slowness to anger—represents a willingness to yield control”* and (2) *“God doesn’t seem to be in a hurry . . . but instead waits patiently for us to respond to God’s initiatives in reaching out to us* (page 110).

- ◆ How do the story of Jonah and the story of the second set of tablets illustrate these statements?
- ◆ When has the story of your own relationship with God illustrated these points?

Examining the Fruit of Patience

Character of the Fruit

Read Romans 2:1-4 and 2 Peter 3:8-15 with these questions in mind: According to Paul, what is the purpose in God’s patience? And what does Paul mean by encouraging his fellow Christians to “regard the patience of our Lord as salvation”?

Kenneson notes that in both 1 Corinthians 13 and Romans 15 Paul says that the reason Christians are called to embody patience is the same reason God embodies it—for the sake of others. This connection between divine and human patience is illustrated in Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant. Recall the parable and consider these questions:

- ◆ What is Jesus condemning in the parable?
- ◆ In light of the parable, how should patience, mercy, and forgiveness be connected in our lives as Christians?

Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit

Examining how our culture shapes our lives, particularly in terms of understanding and managing time, may reveal why the fruit of patience is so difficult to cultivate. According to Kenneson, culture's view of time can be characterized in at least three ways: (1) as a resource to be carefully regulated, (2) as a possession to be hoarded, and (3) as the key ingredient in productivity.

Take a look at the three images of ancient timepieces on the first page of this Participant Guide, a sundial, and hourglass, and the bowl of a water clock. Then ask yourself,

- ◆ How would your experience of time and daily living be different if your day was governed by the rhythm of the sun, the sifting of sand, or the flow of water?

Bearing the Fruit of Patience in the World

Cultivating the Fruit

Daily living is for most people “constantly productive and incessantly busy.” Is that true for you? Does such a way of living make *being patient* feel like passivity? Kenneson suggests that cultivating the fruit of patience requires embodying a different posture toward time (see page 124). Consider what embodying a different posture toward time would look like in your life.

Reflect on the suggestions below and how they might be implemented, both in your church and in your life.

- ◆ During worship, remember that at the heart of the Christian story is a God who is patient, slowly and diligently at work to create a people who bear witness to him.
- ◆ Think of time as a gift rather than as a commodity—then look for ways to give that gift away rather than hoard it.
- ◆ Reclaim and practice Sabbath keeping. Try wasting your time with God.
- ◆ Cultivate some ways that resist the notion that fast is better. Walk when there is no reason to drive. Sit by a window. Bake bread.

What other ways can you think of to put priority on cultivating patience rather than productivity?