

Indeed, the Lord is good, and we continue in the series on the Holy Spirit and the life of the Christian. We began the series by looking at the Holy Spirit and Prayer and then the Holy Spirit and Worship, and we're going to spend this Sunday and next Sunday looking at the character formation that the Spirit is given to by God's design. For his son has told us, Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit comes as one who is both a comforter and a counselor--the one who both convicts and directs us to the only source of salvation, Jesus Christ himself. But it is by God's design that he, by his Spirit, forms the character of Christ in all those who follow him. So in Galatians 5:22-26 it talks about the fruit of the Spirit. This comes in contrast to what is, if you will, the fruit of living by the flesh or living by the sinful nature. We will get into that in due course, but together let's see then in God's word, Galatians 5:22-26.

Hear now God's word.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature 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 God. Thanks be to God. Please pray with me this morning. Father, we humble ourselves before you, and we thank you that you are present with us. By your promise you have said that you send your Spirit through the words of your son. This Spirit has come into the hearts of those who believe. But Father, you teach us in your word what the activity of the Spirit is all about, and that is instructing us, comforting us, directing us not to himself, but to Jesus Christ. So we pray that in this word that teaches us what the fruit of the Spirit is, we pray you would form in us what is pleasing to you, what brings you glory. We thank you for your grace and your power that is at work. In Jesus' name, amen.

Do you struggle with being patient? Think about this: what would your spouse or good friend or your sibling say about whether or not you struggle with patience? My guess would be that almost everyone in this room struggles with patience. In fact, I would imagine there's a fairly large percentage of those who are sitting here this morning who have experienced impatience already today. I know I have. My lovely daughter Caroline was wide-eyed and bushy-tailed at 6:30 this morning, came downstairs as I was reviewing my notes. She sat on the couch next to me and launched into a story that she was passionate about. Caroline, I wasn't thinking about your story this morning. I was thinking about what I needed to do. And I was thinking, just as surely as I was reviewing my notes on the sermon about patience, I began to feel—you guessed it--impatience. Perhaps you experienced impatience this morning as you were driving here and you forgot about the triathlon or didn't know about the traffic. Perhaps your family member for the thousandth time cannot seem to get themselves ready on time. See, here is the reality. I believe that much of the Christian life and the evidence of the work of the Spirit is often declared and seen and exhibited not in the mountaintop, extraordinary moments of life. I believe it is exhibited and demonstrated in the humdrum, in the mundane, and the everyday life that all of us live. But the problem is that we often forget that's where character is actually formed. So this morning we're going to look at the Spirit-wrought, character shaping power of God, particularly with the issue of patience.

Let me be clear that whether you're a Christian or not, you need to understand that Paul talks about the work of the Spirit in many different ways. One of the ways that he talks about it, particularly in the letter of 1 Corinthians, he talks about the gifts of the Spirit. You'll know, if you've ever read that portion of Scripture, (if you haven't, you can simply go there and look at the gifts of the Holy Spirit), he will note that there are some who have certain gifts of the Spirit and others don't. By the way, that's an

argument for why those who are in the body of Christ need one another. You have gifts that I don't, and we need one another. The head needs the feet like the feet need the head. So while some have one gift of the Spirit, another may not. But not so with the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is not, one person can have joy and another person not, or one can exhibit patience and another not. Now granted, we are all--if you're a Christian--all of us are on different parts of the maturity scale. But no Christian is off the hook for what the Spirit wants to do in forming the fruit of the Spirit.

Now before I get anywhere within reach of this text, I need to give you the biblical background to what's in the image that the Scriptures understand with regard to fruit. You can find in places like Jeremiah 17 where it talks about a human being like a tree--that all of us are like trees that are planted in the ground. And like with trees, they're going to experience different seasons--seasons of great rain and fertilization. Other times they're going to experience great difficulty in trial—a desert-like, dry experience. They experience heat. So all of us are like trees, and every one of us are going to experience the heat of life, be it circumstances, be it people, be it all kinds of struggle and suffering. But it is when that heat comes that the tree is seen for what it actually is, because that's where the tree demonstrates where its roots are set. Jeremiah says that when a man, who is a tree, has roots that are set in living water, that even when heat comes, it will produce green leaves. So we can tell and also self-evaluate and ask what kind of leaves do we have when heat comes? This is the Bible's way of saying--in the Old Testament version--what fruit of the Spirit looks like. We hear it in Jesus's words when he says to the woman at the well, the water that I give you one will last forever. It'll well up within you, springs of eternal life. That's in the context of talking about the Holy Spirit. So the Spirit roots the Christian, because it is God's presence in our lives by God's promise and gift, and God's promise of Jesus Christ. The promise to the Christian is that those who profess faith in Jesus Christ receive God's empowering presence, his Holy Spirit. And by that Holy Spirit, we are--by faith, by God's presence and power--connected, rooted into living water, that is, Christ.

And so therefore we are given Scripture to give us the ability to assess what kind of fruit is being produced--not gifts, but fruit; not this Christian, but not that one--but every Christian. While Jesus finds us as sinners, he never leaves us where he finds us. He brings us to himself, gives us his Spirit, and means to make us new people with new character, new ways of responding. Patience is one of those. So let's look together and think about patience, particularly in this outline: What is patience? Why do we 'lose' patience? Finally, how do we develop patience? What is patience? Why do we 'lose' patience? And how do we develop patience?

What is patience? Biblically speaking, if you were to take the whole corpus of Scripture and try to come up with a settled definition of what patience is, many commentators and scholars would agree, and pastors would say, that patience is the ability to endure discomfort without complaint. The endurance in the midst of discomfort without complaint.

Now there are varieties, if you will, of patience that are demonstrated for us throughout Scripture. Here are some of the varieties. There are three that I've outlined here. The first variety is one where we have to face people. Because all of us will agree that the problem is that people are annoying, right? We have to face people. That's something the Scriptures know all about. When patience and endurance are needed is when we are dealing with people. This is why Jesus spends so much time talking about what in the world you do with regard to your enemies. Love your enemies. It's talked about in various places as well in the Old Testament, of how in the world do we deal with human beings. That's one variety of applying patience: enduring discomfort of living with other people.

Connected with that are circumstances. All over the Scriptures it talks about, particularly Paul talks about what he's learned with regard to contentment--what it's like to be without and what it's like to have plenty. He's learned what it means to be content in Jesus Christ. What he saying is he's learned how to be patient, to exhibit endurance regardless of the circumstances.

So that is a first variety: facing people and its circumstances.

There's another variety--that is facing boredom. If you think facing boredom isn't a test on patience, I would beg to differ. And if you don't see in the Scriptures, let me simply remind you to use your imagination when you read Scripture. I was with our junior high ministry on Friday night as we were talking about the life of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, who lied about it. He was separated from his family. He was carted off to Egypt where he was sold into slavery, and he would end up in jail. He was forgotten about. He was lied about. He would reach a prominent place of service serving a man named Potiphar whose wife tried to make a move on him, and then when he resisted it she lied about it, and he would end up in prison again. Now just use your biblical imagination and think to yourself, Do you think he was struggling with the boredom of being in jail? How would he be able to uphold and to be able to endure such discomfort? Boredom and facing boredom is all over. Again, using our biblical imagination, even though God's promise to Noah was certain—really? Day after day, building the boat, enduring hardship, enduring the sneers of other people. Can you imagine what it was like to swing the hammer for year upon year, waiting for the reason why God was instructing him to build the ark? Was patience and endurance needed? You bet it was. Because facing boredom isn't just a contemporary problem. It's been around ever since there've been human beings. The Bible wants us to face boredom with endurance.

The final variety I want to outline is facing suffering. Suffering can come in various forms, but obviously, just broadly speaking, physical suffering, sickness, long-term illness, persecution from others, but also psychological suffering. There are many of you this morning that are facing psychological, physical, relational kinds of attack and circumstances. How in the world do you face it? How do we have patience in the face of these things? This is important for Paul, because he has been spending the first four chapters talking about who we are in Jesus Christ by saying what Jesus Christ has done. And so he says in the fifth chapter, if you believe in Jesus Christ, therefore, as those who have been bought with a price and through Jesus Christ have received the Spirit, this is how you ought to live. And this is what the Spirit means to form in us. And he means to form patience in the face of dealing with human beings, circumstances, boredom, and all kinds of suffering.

But then why do we lose patience? You see, even the very phrase 'I'm losing my patience with you'-- that phrase that we use in English--has embedded within it, I think, a false understanding of the human being in relationship to patience. Saying that phrase seems to imply that on a given day I start the day with a full tank of gas, that is, patience, right? So I move out into my day, and then slowly, but surely people, boredom and suffering is sucking the gas of patience right out of my life, as if patience is something that is innate to the human being. I will tell you, neither patience, nor any of the other fruit of the Spirit, are innate to the human being. This is Paul's issue.

Paul says two things I want to draw your attention to in regard to why we lose patience. The first problem is the problem of our nature. This is something that Paul speaks about just prior to the text that I read. If you have your Bibles look at Galatians 5, verses 16 and following. He says, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Just so we don't think that that's just a cliché that Paul gives, he unpacks and understands just how difficult that is. He says, "For the sinful nature"---and here he's talking about our nature as human beings---"the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature." He's talking about within our nature there is a battle. He says, "They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." What he's saying is, for a Christian who has received the Spirit, you've now received God's empowering presence by whom you can live a different way.

But he's also saying something very powerful about human nature. We do not have the power within ourselves, the self-discipline, the mental strength to achieve these things on our own. Even though

there is no law against these things that he lists, we can't do it on our own. Why? Because, he says, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious." Now hear the outline of what he says human beings are naturally given to: "Sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry, witchcraft..." and then listen to this group of words, "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, and the like." Now if you just take that phrase--"Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension and factions"--you just described every day driving on the Baltimore or Washington Beltway. What he is saying is, by nature this is our setting. And bound up within all of those, what finds itself threaded throughout those things is impatience with others, impatience with God. Our default setting, which is my second sub point, is impatience. That is the default setting. Why is it our default setting? We must come to terms with the fact that we don't lose patience. It was never ours, because by default we are out for one thing, by and large, we're out for number one: us.

Last week I quoted from a man, David Foster Wallace, who in 2005 gave a profound speech at Kenyon College. It was his only public address. I give you this illustration as he talks to these college graduates, and by extension, I would commend it to our high school graduates and anybody who can hear me. He gives this illustration from everyday life. Here's what he says.

In an average adult life on an average day you get up in the morning and you go to your challenging white-collar college graduate job and you work hard for nine to ten hours and at the end of the day, you're tired, you're stressed out, and all you want to do is go home and have a good supper and maybe unwind for a couple of hours. Then hit the rack early because you have to get up the next day and do it all again. But then you remember there's no food at home, you haven't had the time to shop this week because of your challenging job. So now after work you get in your car, you suffer through very bad traffic, so getting to the store takes way longer than it should. And when you finally get there, the supermarket is very crowded because of course it's the time of day when all the other people with jobs like you are also trying to squeeze in some grocery shopping. And the store is hideously, fluorescently lit and infused with soul-killing Muzak or some form of corporate pop and it's pretty much the last place you would ever want to be. But you can't just get in and quickly get out, you have to wander all over the huge overlit store, the crowded aisles with all kinds of people, maneuvering your junky cart through all of these other tired, hurried people with carts. And of course these aisles are filled with glacially slow people and the spacey people and the kids whose attention spans are seconds long--all who block the aisle and you have to grit your teeth and try to be as polite as you ask them, please, can I get by you? And eventually they finally get out of the way and you get all your supper supplies, except it turns out that there aren't enough checkout lanes open at the end of the day rush and so the checkout line is incredibly long.

With all of these traffic jams and crowded aisles and crying children, and long checkout lines it gives me time to think, time to pay attention, because if I don't, I'm going to be miserable, because my default setting is that situations like this are really all about me. About my hungriness, about my fatigue, about my desire to just get home, and it's going to seem as if all the world--like everybody else thinks--is just in my way. This thinking is my natural default setting. It's automatic, unconscious, and it's the way I experience the boring, frustrating, crowded parts of adult life. When I'm operating on the automatic, unconscious belief that I'm at the center of the world, then my immediate needs and feelings are what should determine the world's priorities.

It isn't just that our default setting is impatience, our default setting since Adam and Eve is that I am the center of my existence. I am number one. This is why James says, why do you quarrel and fight with each other? Because you desire, and you do not get what you want because other people, frankly, are in your way. God was in Adam and Eve's way. God simply gave them over to their nature. Since then we are separated from God the Father, because really we want to be God.

Those arguments with my daughter, that impatience welling up within me--even when I'm preparing for a sermon--is me just saying, don't you see, you're in *my* way. And so dissensions, quarreling, backbiting, revenge, hatred, and dissension and factions multiply. Paul says this is what is innate to human nature. But God, by his grace, has sent his son.

If this is our default setting, then how do we develop patience? Patience is not a discrete character virtue. It represents a complex way of living that is based on humility, generosity, kindness, and love. In fact, it sounds a lot like the fruit of the Spirit. In fact, none of these fruits are ever discrete in and of themselves. Notice what he puts at the head, verse 22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love..." You see, love then finds its thread to every one of these fruits. Joy is simply love singing. Peace is simply love at work in relationships. Gentleness and kindness are simply love demonstrating other-centeredness. I could go on and on. These are all represented together.

But how, then, do we develop this patience? Well, Paul tells us, and I'll give you these three quick points. 1: We need to remember. 2: self-control. 3: Jesus as patience. Notice what he says here. He says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."

How do we develop patience? First, it's by remembering. Remembering. Remember that those who profess faith in Jesus Christ are not left to their own strength and power. God has given you his Spirit to be his present power with you. So when you wake up in the morning you don't wake up with a gas tank full of patience. We must again, by God's Spirit, be drawn again to Jesus Christ. That's the Spirit's job. The Spirit never takes us---we read earlier---he never takes us to himself. He takes the word which God gives him, which we have, and he takes that word and brings us to Christ. We remember that in and of myself I am not a patient human being full of love, joy, peace, and all of this. I am by nature one who is out for himself. So, by God's Spirit, I need to remember what Christ has done for me. And I can only demonstrate patience, I can only see the fruit, as I go again in the morning saying, Lord Jesus, by your Spirit, help me to remember where my source of strength--where the living water is to be found. It's not in a gifted, successful, nice personality kind of life, it's not a zip code, a race or gender thing. It is only a God-wrought, Holy Spirit empowered way of living. We need to remember it is from the Spirit where we get the strength, not from ourselves. Because he says to them, those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the sinful nature. What does he mean? It means, then, I'm making a choice, empowered by the Spirit, to say no to me being first and foremost. It's saying YOU--you're the one who is in charge. You are the one who created all things from nothing. This is the day you have made, not that I have made. My life is a gift from you, not my ability to live a well-lived, organized life. So remember that it is by the Spirit that we crucify the sinful nature, because of Christ--what he has done definitively on the cross in our place, was raised on the third day, and has given us his Spirit. Everything we need for life and for godliness is found in Christ alone, by His spirit. We must remember.

Number 2: self-control. Self-control, biblically defined, is not taking our will and trying to overpower our emotions. So many people think that self-control is stuffing emotions and allowing our volition, our will, to have sway. I don't know about you, but that does not work for me. If that were the case, we would not need Christ, we would simply need Doctor Oz. What do we need? Our problem is that we cannot discipline ourselves, because, as Plato said, you can't be both the master and the slave. But if I'm out of control how do I bring *myself* under control? It doesn't work, except maybe for a time. But at the end of the day, I have to have something else that moves both my emotions and my will in a new direction. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians when he talks about running the race. He says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last..." Ladies and gentlemen, whether the first person who won the race triathlon across the street today or the last person across the finish line, I will tell you, they disciplined themselves not

because training in three sports is incredibly fun to do. It's because they had a goal. They wanted to win, or they wanted to finish, and some didn't even want to do it for themselves--they were doing it for a loved one who is struggling with cancer or diabetes or multiple sclerosis. They are showing us what biblical self-discipline and self-control is all about. It's not about you controlling yourself. It's about having a new desire, a new passion, and that can only be Jesus Christ and him crucified and raised to glory. If I am only working for myself and trying to discipline myself, it's only going to work for a time. I need an all-encompassing new expulsive power of a new affection. And the Spirit means to bring us into contact with that one, Jesus Christ.

He says since you live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. What is the spirit doing? What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit? What is the Spirit doing? He is not glorifying himself. He wants to bring glory to the risen Christ. And so to be in step with the Spirit means allowing the Spirit, praying for the Spirit, to give us a new love and passion for Jesus Christ and his glory. But then how do we do that? It is about patience, but it's not ours.

I close with this. On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus came and celebrated the Last Supper with his followers, with his disciples. And on the next day he knew that he would be crucified. The very men who were surrounding that table, by and large, all left the shadow of the cross and left Jesus there. Jesus has exhibited patience towards us. Jesus--though he knew he had come by the will of the Father to die for us, that we might have eternal life--in his teenage years, in his adult life, was a carpenter. Though he knew he had come to be a Messiah, he had to learn carpentry. Have you done carpentry? It is hard work. You can bet Jesus faced the temptation--just as surely as you and I do--the temptation to be impatient and to be bored at something that doesn't involve us. And yet he was patient. When Jesus, over and over again, was teaching his disciples what he had come to do, they were not believing. When they wanted a demonstration, even after his resurrection, he said here are my hands, touch them. Here is my side, touch my side. He always exhibited patience. He never berated his disciples. Yes, he spoke directly to them. Yes, he disciplined them, but he did not berate them. He didn't show that impatience. The point is, God is all about patience. For this is the day of God's patience, where he continues to demonstrate his grace. Rather than judging us in our sin, he gave us his son, that we might be forgiven our sins.

You see, patience isn't the goal--Christ is. And if I am drinking in the patience of Christ bent towards us and towards me, then that will increasingly, by God's Spirit's design, make you a more patient person, because those to whom mercy has been shown, those to whom patience has been shown--are those who will learn to be merciful and to be patient. Why? Because that is God's grace. Because his son took our sin on himself, that we might have eternal life, to be free from the pettiness and impatience and self-centeredness that so easily invade our daily lives. The only way out is through God's Spirit-designed, powerful work of the patience of God through his son, Jesus. May God make us more and more a people of patience because we glory in the patience he has shown us through his son, Jesus.

Let's pray. So Father, we ask you this morning, may we drink deeply of the grace of your patience, your long-suffering grace that sent your son to die in our place that we might have eternal life to be made new. Father, I pray for any here this morning that do not know you, that know that what I'm speaking about is so very true--that we are caught up in ourselves. But you long to free us from the slavery to self and the brokenness that is caused by the sin that so easily entangles. Rescue all of us--Christian and non-Christian alike--from ourselves through the grace and work of Jesus. That by your Spirit we might put to death and crucify the sinful nature and live in step with the Spirit, who directs us to the glory and to the majesty and grace in Jesus. In his name we pray, Amen.