



PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE
James 5:7-12

One of my all-time favorite Broadway plays is **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF**. The play begins with the ‘fiddler’ balancing himself on a steep rooftop in the village playing his fiddle. The main character – Tevye – points to him and suggests that the fiddler symbolizes all the people of the village.

If you have ever thought about giving up – or said “What’s the Use?” – or “When will we ever beat Michigan?” or shouted out “This is not what I signed up for” then this sermon has a word for you today.

The fiddler is not out of place in the 21st century. Many of us try to balance the demands and responsibilities of family, careers, hobbies, church, and a host of other things. We try to stay 2 weeks ahead of the bill collector – and the pink slip at work. Here we are trying to maintain our balance. That is exactly what is happening in the lives of the people that Pastor James of Jerusalem is trying to support and encourage in their sacred journeys of faith.

As we open this portion of God’s word today in **verse 7**, James is encouraging his flock to be patient and persevere and not give up. Like a good farmer – he plants the seed – cultivates the soil – and waits for the harvest to come in God’s time. In the face of economic difficulties and spiritual detours and roadblocks – he urges them to stand firm in **verse 8** in their allegiance and commitment to almighty God. He knew their patience was growing thin and their fuse was short.

The Greek word used here for patience is a descriptive one. It figuratively means “taking a long time to boil.” **Think about a pot of boiling water.** What factor determines the speed? It has nothing to do with the size of the stove or the pot – but the intensity of the flame. Water boils quickly when the flame is high. It boils slowly when the flame is low. Patience “keeps the burners down.”¹

Now, I must be perfectly honest with you today. I could not have preached this sermon with the same authenticity 20 years ago. I am so patient with my grandchildren. I don’t ignore the misbehavior – I can just keep the flame lower and listen and wait. My daughter says it is because I have a **big “S”** on my forehead – meaning ‘sucker’ – but I just smile away. I believe I am more patient now because I have seen how much patience God has had with me.

In **Psalm 40** – King David writes, “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire. He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.” Now for the benefits of patience look at **verse 3**, “He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.”

James writes these words so the believers in Jerusalem and beyond will not allow cynicism to take over their lives. Like a good farmer, he wants them to put their hands to the plow and not look back. He wants to put a new song of faith back into their soul and spirit.

Sometimes a challenge looms so large – a mountain so high – that we are defeated before we even begin. Doug and I talked this week about church work – for which you need great patience. You can see a problem – and start out running at 60 m.p.h. and when the rock doesn’t budge or move quickly – you burn out. However you can start out at 10 m.p.h. and build firmly and steadfastly. If we can’t do everything then make sure the things you act upon are worth doing. Make sure you do your part. Every sermon I preach is incomplete. It waits on your response. What are you going to do with it? I could drive myself nuts worrying about it. However, God has promised me in **Isaiah 55:11** “so in my word that goes out from my mouth, it will not return to me empty – but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

William Shakespeare – who had great insights into life – shares, “How poor are they that have no patience.”

We further know in sacred scripture in **Galatians 5:22** that ‘patience’ is listed as one of the fruits or proofs that the Holy Spirit is at work in a believer’s life.

The most challenging verse of scripture is **I Cor. 13:4** – “Love is patient.” Perhaps Max Lucado is right when he shares, “Patience is the red carpet upon which God’s grace approaches us.”²

Without further chit-chat let’s dig in and see why patience and perseverance are key ingredients to live out our Christian faith.

FIRST, PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE PERFECT OUR CHARACTER.

Except for our Lord, Job, and the Apostle Paul – the greatest example of someone who allowed God to use these gifts for the development of their character and leadership abilities was our 16th President of the United States – Abraham Lincoln – perhaps our greatest president. “Born into poverty, Lincoln was faced with defeat throughout his life. He lost eight elections, twice failed in business and suffered a nervous breakdown.

He could have quit many times – but he didn't and because he didn't quit, he became one of the greatest presidents to sit in the White House.

Once, after losing an important Senate race, he said, 'The path was worn and slippery. My foot slipped from under me, knocking the other out of the way, but I recovered and said to myself, 'it's a slip and not a fall.'

He did not blame others or use his tongue to tear down others but to speak the truth of his convictions.

Yes, Lincoln was patient and persevered and because of it our nation survived its greatest crisis.

To be honest with you – if I were Lincoln I might have interpreted all those defeats to say **“What part of ‘No’ don’t you understand.”**

However, during this time God was patiently molding and shaping the character of Lincoln. Only a man with this depth and understanding of human life could lead a nation through its darkest hour. All those dark hours before, prepared him to have a vision of light when all seemed dark and lost. It was this balance that allowed him to stand firm in the tough times.

SECONDLY, PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE ALLOWS US TO OUT-THINK AND OUT-WORK THE POWERS OF DARKNESS.

We labor against a tough foe. Martin Luther said, “On earth is not his equal.”

When I toured Westminster Abbey in 1998, I went to the spot where William Wilberforce is buried in their Hall of Fame. There was a movie released last year telling his life's work and witness.

William Wilburforce was converted under the preaching ministry of John Wesley – and also journeyed with John Newton who wrote “Amazing Grace” to fight for the end of the slave trade in his native land. He was a member of the House of Commons and used his political office to fight for this cause. On his grave marker it reads, “He removed from England the guilt of the African slave trade and prepared the way for the abolition of slavery in every colony of the Empire.” It took him 19 years to reach that goal in Great Britain and another 37 years more to reach the goal in the Greater British Empire. That is what I call patience and perseverance.

Fighting the good fight is not a 100 yard dash – but a marathon – a life's journey. This is why Paul urged Timothy and us to finish the course. Leave the harvest to God. Paul further shares in **II Thessalonians 3:13**, “Brothers, never tire of doing what is right.”

THIRDLY, PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE IS A WAY WE PUT OUR FAITH INTO ACTION.

We already learned from James in **chapter 2:14-26** that faith is a living reality – not just polite talk.

Charles Bradlaugh was an avowed infidel who stirred London more than a generation ago with his attacks on the Christian faith. He challenged a Methodist preacher, to debate the truth of the Christian faith. The preacher accepted readily – with one condition. He would bring with him to the debate one hundred men and women who would be witness of the redeeming love of God and what it can do in the human heart. They would give evidence and they could be cross-examined.

They would be persons reclaimed for Christ – from the power of sin and evil. They would be folks who were walking in newness of life. They would be witnesses of the transforming power of God in Christ. But Hughes asked that his challenger – bring a group of person who had been similarly helped by the gospel of atheism and infidelity. Needless to say, the debate never came off. The preacher was there with his hundred transformed persons, but Bradlaugh never showed up. And the meeting turned into a testimony time, as redeemed persons bore witness to the power of God in their lives through Christ.³

James knew that when faith was engaged in service to her Lord as He taught in **Chapter 2:14-26**, that the Christian faith would always win out. There is pleasure in sin for a season – but NOT for the long haul. God’s truth will always expose the darkness and defeat it. Just like wealth, which is exposed in **verses 1-6** before – anything but the truth will not last. Love can be crucified – but it cannot be defeated. This gives us the balance we need to live in times of trouble and triumph. We live in hope of the second coming – not despair.

FOURTHLY, PATIENCE IS A REFLECTION OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

God does more than expect patience from us – he offers it to us.⁴

I think now of James who actually wrote this timeless epistle. God was certainly patient with him. He waited patiently for James to place saving faith in Christ Jesus. We know from **I Cor. 15:7** that James only became a believer after the death, burial, and resurrection of his half-brother Jesus. God, in **Luke 15**, waited for the prodigal son to return to his senses.

If you want to think of patience with a capital “P”, think about Peter. How many times did Peter insert the foot in the mouth?” The Lord never stopped loving him.

Listen closely. God does not practice great patience because he could not compel us to his will. God practices patience because he lovingly respects the will of those he has made in his own likeness.⁵

God wants us with our free will to voluntarily surrender to his way – truth – and life. Love is patient.

On June 23 the Montgomery Biscuits were playing the Mobile Bay bears. Matt Elliot was the relief pitcher for Mobile. He made a bad pitch in the 8th inning that allowed Montgomery to tie the score.

Elliott has a temper. He went to the bathroom between innings and slammed the bathroom door so hard that he broke the lock on the door. He was locked in the bathroom for 48 minutes!!

When the 9th inning began, nobody could find Matt Elliot. They delayed the game 8 minutes. Then they had to give time for a new pitcher to warm up. Elliot was still beating on the door of the bathroom trying to get out. He blew a save in the 8th inning, was still locked in the bathroom the 9th inning, and Montgomery scored and won the game in the 9th.⁶

Many things can be lost or won on how we use or did not use the spiritual gift of patience. May God use us to open doors for others to see the Christ at work in us.

Amen and amen.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz
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ENDNOTES

¹ Max Lucado, **A LOVE WORTH GIVING**, W Publishing Group, 2002, page 15.

² Lucado, Ibid, page 15.

³ Hoover Rupert, **AND JESUS SAID**, Abingdon Press, 1960, page 121.

⁴ Max Lucado, ibid, page 17.

⁵ Radio Bible class, **DISCOVERY SERIES BOOKLET: “What Does the Bible say about patience,”** page 8.

⁶ John Ed Mathison, **FRAZER UMC, “The Pastor’s Column,”** September 9th, 2007.