

Patience

You know, it's funny. I hear folks in church warn each other not to pray for patience because God might say "OK, here's lesson one." Suddenly your patience is tried until you crack and things just don't affect you like they used to. Well for those of you worried about praying for patience, I dare you to pray for the wisdom to teach patience to the body of Christ. It's been quite a week.

Proverbs 19:11 - "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." When I'm asked to teach on a topic I typically try to start by researching and studying some scripture quotes and base my personal stories on what I found in scripture. I found this one right away at the beginning of the week and got all puffed up and thought yeah, that's right! I'm so patient because I'm so smart! Er, I mean wise! Yeah, I was really asking for it this week. Can you say pride issues?

Ecclesiastes 7:8 - "The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride." Before long I found this verse and was quickly reminded that pride and patience don't go together. If my heart is full of pride I have no ability to be patient with all of those "lesser" people who aren't as good at everything as I am. I can honestly say I've been taken down a few notches this week. Everything that pushes my buttons and irritates me has been thrown at me. Mostly do to with other drivers on the road because that's still a place I struggle with pride issues. I consider myself a pretty skilled driver and all week has put me at the seeming mercy of other drivers. My patience was dropped and my frustration and pride were skyrocketed into a climax on Thursday.

My test started at 6:30 am as I piled into a co-worker's vehicle with 5 other co-workers and we headed for Columbus. For those who don't know, I am not a morning person. I had been up at 5 am and I don't typically get out of bed until a little after 7. Also, I'm a horrible passenger. Just ask my wife. I'll watch traffic around the car, check your mirrors, and use my "air brake" if I think you're not slowing quickly enough. I was a wreck the whole way to the conference. I could nitpick about a dozen things that went wrong and I could probably convince you that this person should have their driver's license revoked. But that isn't and wasn't the point.

On the way back it got worse. There was an accident on the Interstate that some of you may have heard about on the news. It shut down the Interstate for a couple hours. We were stopped for about 45 minutes. Of course, we could have been moving sooner if the driver had taken my advice sooner (we finally got off by going the wrong way up the on-ramp). I was so frustrated watching dozens of other vehicles do this and knowing (after suggesting we do the same) that my co-worker was not comfortable doing that. My pride and frustration was boiling over and it was all I could do to keep my mouth shut as much as I did. So much for my admirable patience. In the end she conceded and did it anyway which, of course just added to frustration and pride. After all, that just proved I had been "right" all along.

When I got home at about 8:30 pm I soon discovered my lesson wasn't over yet. Someone had hit our parked station wagon and the van behind us. Another one of "those" drivers who didn't pay enough attention had now done what I consider that absolutely most ridiculous thing you can do. They hit a parked car. I was on the edge of exploding. I checked the damage, agreed it wasn't worth worrying about, (we got a dent, the van behind us broke an axle) went inside to eat my left-over pizza, broke down, and prayed. I thanked the Lord for the lessons I had been taught and repented of my pride and impatience. But I still didn't understand what all of this had to do with teaching patience.

Matthew 7:3-5 - "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." For once, it really was all about me. How can I stand here in front of you to teach about patience and allow myself and so many of you to think that this is something I've conquered when I'm really blind to my own impatience and pride? I confess to you all that patience is not something I have conquered and I still struggle with it. Mostly due to my own self-pride. And now that I've confessed my weakness, I'm ready to reveal what insights the Lord gave me after my week of trials.

I teach folks who are completely blind, or just don't see so well, how to use computers. When I teach, I'm working one on one with a person and we are both sitting at the computer. My student is in front of the keyboard and I am positioned so I can see the screen and keyboard at the same time in case I need to help give directions on where an obscure key is. When my student is struggling on an assignment, or taking too long to accomplish something that I could do in a split second sometimes it's very difficult for me to restrain myself and not just grab the mouse and do it for them. What really stops me?

If you really want to look for patience watch a parent with a child. Not on the bad days where everything has fallen apart but in normal day to day life. Slowly teaching a child basics like how and when to say please and thank-you. How to put a sock on or tie a shoelace. I don't know about you but I've never heard of a child doing it right the first time. Day in and day out parents are faced with the choice of being patient and letting the child do a task independently (but very slowly) or doing it for them so it's done and over with quickly. Aside from wanting them to learn, what other reason do you have to be patient with them as they learn?

Have you ever watched an older child teach a younger sibling how to play a game? I always laugh because it doesn't take long to see the real intent of "showing" them how to play the game. The intent is to play it for them because it's not really about teaching at all. It's about playing the game themselves and almost taunting the younger sibling. "Here, watch how you do this." "Here, give me the game and I'll show you how to do that part." They could, of course, just explain it and let the younger one continue to play but, again, that isn't really where their heart is, is it?

It is easier for me to be patient with someone I know and love than someone I don't know or someone I don't like. That's a hard one for me because I've always looked at patience as a skill. It shouldn't matter who the skill is practiced on. I'm a skilled computer geek and it doesn't matter what computer I'm using. Some computers may need more work than others but my skill isn't any different. If two different computers have the same problem and I need to use the same skill to fix the problem it doesn't matter if one is my personal computer and the other belongs to some guy who said "Hey can you fix my computer?". And yet, I can be patient with a quirk in a friend or loved one that I won't tolerate in a stranger. And it's very tempting to say "Well then the problem is with the stranger. Nobody can put up with him!" But the problem isn't him, it's me.

You see, patience isn't a skill that can be taught. It's an overflow of your Love for other people. That Love can be hindered by pride, foolishness, greed, all of the things that are not of God and block our ability to show God's love to one another. If you find yourself becoming impatient and frustrated with

someone I encourage you to stop and look at yourself. What is stopping you from loving this person? Is it because you have trouble loving a stranger? Is it because your pride is telling you that you could do it better or faster? Does your greed make you impatient with the person who gets the last cookie on the table because they've had more than you and you want your "fair share"?

When I started my lesson I tried to define patience so I could give accurate examples. But I kept coming up with more definitions and more examples and they were all completely different and seemed to have completely different causes and solutions. The truth is, patience is as varied as Love and can be shown in as many ways. It can also be blocked or impaired by as wide a range of sin in your heart. What makes you impatient?