

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

Introduction

One morning this past spring as I was driving my youngest son Thomas and his friend Nathaniel to school, we had to stop at a traffic light at the end of the highway exit ramp. This was typical. What wasn't typical was the extended wait at the light. After about one minute waiting, it seemed that the Holy Spirit gave me some insight, and I said to the boys something like this:

"Boys, I think that God is trying to teach me patience this morning, so don't worry, I've got everything under control."

After about another minute waiting (it was getting difficult not to keep looking at the clock above my dashboard), I started thinking that if the light didn't change soon that the boys might be late for school. "No problem, I can do this," I thought. "God is just teaching me patience." Well, after about another minute waiting (for a grand total of **THREE** minutes), I drove through the **RED** light into the intersection. At that moment, the light turned green, and it was as if the Holy Spirit spoke to my conscience, saying:

"Michael, you just failed your patience test."

So, I confessed my sin to God, received forgiveness, and then explained to Thomas and Nathaniel how important it is to not be impatient! A few minutes later I dropped off the boys at school ... early!

Now, if only all the trials of life were always this simple! The truth is that life is filled with significantly more difficult circumstances that test our patience, many of which some of you are experiencing today: unemployment, chronic pain, chronic illness, depression, sorrow, addiction, an unbelieving spouse, a broken marriage, unruly children, an overbearing boss, etc. Christians shouldn't be surprised at the presence of difficult circumstances throughout life. For example, consider what James the brother of Jesus once wrote (James 1:2):

"My brethren, count it all joy **when** you fall into various trials."

James didn't write **if**, but **when**, as if to indicate with absolute certainty that if you are a Christian, you should expect to periodically (or perhaps even regularly) experience some form of trial or difficult circumstance that requires the exercise of patience.

So then, the questions I would like to focus on today include:

1. **What** does it look like to practice patience?
2. **Why** should we practice patience?
3. **How** is the practice of patience possible?

PRAY

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

The Context

Roughly three thousand years ago the prophet Samuel declared that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:13-14). While this is true, we also know that David was a man whose heart was prone to wander. Whether it was because of David's determination to follow the will of God, or to the folly of his own sinful desires, or the evil intentions of others, David was often in a difficult circumstance. When David was inspired to write Psalm 40, he was reflecting on at least one (but likely several) of these circumstances when he wrote (Psalm 40:2a):

"He (God) brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay."

David was, metaphorically speaking, in a miry pit. It was miry: muddy, sticky, and difficult to maneuver in. And just as Joseph was cast into a literal pit (an empty cistern) and needed someone outside of the pit to free him (Genesis 37), David had experienced some difficult circumstances that required outside intervention. He further explained (Psalm 40:12):

"For innumerable evils have surrounded me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up;
They are more than the hairs of my head;
Therefore, my heart fails me."

David points to two sources of his difficult circumstances:

1. *Innumerable evils had surrounded him.* Apparently (see Psalm 40:14), there were many people who sought to destroy his life, who wished him evil.
2. *His iniquities had overtaken him.* David was painfully aware of his sinful nature and the havoc that it brought into his life.

And what was the consequence of this? His heart failed him.

Have you ever felt like this?

I have.

Back in the Fall of 2004, HCC went through a *Purpose Driven Life* ("PDL") campaign. Many from HCC were very involved in numerous aspects of the campaign, and I was one of them. For instance, in addition to serving on three ministry teams, I co-hosted a small group Bible study at the Reading Public Library with John Falkenstrom. All things considered, ministry-life was extremely busy.

Over the same period of time, my situation at work ("Company X") had become increasingly complicated. I had come to realize that certain ways in which

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

Company X operated were unethical. So, I refrained from some assignments, and tried to engage the executive team in a dialogue in an attempt to change the situation. Consequently, my work-life became increasingly uncomfortable.

The day after my first PDL small group, my father (who had been experiencing a decline in health for some time) experienced a seizure of some sort and was hospitalized. Other difficult situations also arose with my personal health and in the lives of my extended family members.

Before the PDL campaign ended, I came to believe that my circumstances at work would not change, and that the Lord was prompting me to resign from Company X. After talking and praying with my wife Cris, and despite not having either a new job or a financial cushion, I resigned. A week after the end of the PDL campaign, I was unemployed, and my father had passed away.

Call it what you will, but those few weeks and those that followed were extremely difficult: I was physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually on the brink. I was in a horrible, miry pit. On top of it all, Cris was really getting tired of bumping into me constantly around the home! ☺

Have you ever been in a difficult circumstance, a horrible, miry pit, because of some *external source*? Or have you ever been in a difficult circumstance as a consequence of *your own sin*? I would hazard to guess that many of us feel like we're in a miry pit RIGHT NOW. So then, a valid question to ask is this: when facing a difficult circumstance:

1. What does it Look Like to Practice Patience?

In Psalm 40, David explained what *he did* during his difficult circumstance; he wrote (Psalm 40:1):

“I waited patiently for the LORD.”

By means of application, what should *we do* in our difficult circumstances? We should *wait patiently*. But what does it mean to “wait patiently?” The Hebrew and Greek words behind this phrase provide some insight.

יָחַל (kā·vā'). The Hebrew words used for *wait* and *patiently* in this verse are from the same root word, kā·vā' (kah-vah) (Strong's H6960). This is the only instance of them being used in this way (together) in the entire Old Testament, as if to emphasize the importance of this text. Kā·vā' (kah-vah) implies that to *wait patiently* involves *hope, with anticipation of deliverance*.

ὑπομένω (Hü-po-me'-nō). The Greek Septuagint likewise uses two forms of hü-po-me'-nō (hoo-pah-man-oh) (Strong's G5258) for *wait patiently* in Psalm 40:1. Hü-po-me'-

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

nō (hoo-pah-man-oh) is derived from the words hū-po (hoo-pah) --- meaning *under* or *underneath* --- and me'-nō (man-oh) --- meaning to *abide*. So, the word hū-po-me'-nō (hoo-pah-man-oh) indicates that to *wait patiently* involves *willfully abiding in subjection and/or submission*.

μακροθυμία (mä-kro-thü-mē'-ä). A related word to hū-po-me'-nō (hoo-pah-man-oh) also often translated as *patience*, *endurance*, or *longsuffering* is mä-kro-thü-mē'-ä (ma-craw-thoo-me-ah) (Strong's G3116), which is derived from the words mä-kro's (ma-cross) --- meaning *long lasting* --- and thü-mo's (thoo-moss) --- meaning *boiling*, *passionate anger*. So then, the word mä-kro-thü-mē'-ä (ma-craw-thoo-me-ah) indicates that to *wait patiently* also involves the *withholding of anger or retribution for a long time*.

In many difficult circumstances we have no choice and must wait for relief or the difficult circumstance to end. In some other cases, we could act, perhaps hastily, in an attempt to end the waiting, and often to the detriment of ourselves and/or others.

Consider, for example, the patriarch Abraham. While still named Abram and without children, God promised him that his descendents would one day be exceedingly numerous (Genesis 15:1-5). But Abram and Sarai were elderly, they were concerned about not having a son to whom they could bequeath an inheritance, and they had doubts. So, instead of patiently waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled, Abram took Sarai's advice; he took Sarai's maidservant Hagar as a concubine and she bore him a son: Ishmael (Genesis 16:1-16). God didn't fulfill His promise to Abram for another fourteen years (see Genesis 16:16, 17:1, 17:17-19, and 21:5). Abram and Sarai needed to wait patiently for the Lord, but they didn't. The consequence of their impatience and doubt was Ishmael, a boy who would later become the patriarch of twelve tribes whom God said would live in hostility toward every man (Genesis 16:12). Psalm 83 indicates that by the time of David the Ishmaelites were largely hostile toward God and the people of Israel. And so it is to this day.

Have you ever acted impatiently, in haste, to the detriment of yourself or others? When facing a difficult circumstance the key is not to wait impatiently, or to wait with anxiety, or to wait in anger, or to act impulsively, but to *wait patiently*, i.e., to:

- *Willfully abide in subjection and/or submission to the difficult circumstance;*
- *Withhold anger or retribution for a long time; and*
- *Wait in hope, with anticipation of deliverance.*

The question is:

How do we wait patiently?

That is to say:

What does it look like to practice patience?

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

According to David, we need to wait “for the LORD (Psalm 40:1).” Don’t focus on something or someone of this world; focus on the LORD. Remember, He is not a god, He is not a lord, He is “the LORD.” He is our sovereign and infinitely powerful God who loves us and for whom nothing, absolutely nothing, is too difficult (Hebrews 12:1-2):

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with *endurance* (*hoo-pah-man-ay*) the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured (*hoo-pah-man-oh*) the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

What does it look like to practice patience?

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus; wait “for the LORD (Psalm 40:1).”

But what does it look like to wait patiently for the LORD?

David provides the answer to that question throughout Psalm 40:

- | | | |
|-------------|---|---|
| Psalm 40:3 | - | Sing praises to God! |
| Psalm 40:4 | - | Trust Him! |
| | | Reject the proud (including the pride within)! |
| | | Cling to the truth! |
| Psalm 40:5 | - | Identify personally with the Lord MY God! |
| | | Remember His many wondrous works! |
| Psalm 40:7 | - | Go to Him! |
| Psalm 40:8 | - | Delight in doing His will! |
| Psalm 40:9 | - | Proclaim God’s good news, His gospel, without restraint! |
| Psalm 40:10 | - | Declare His faithfulness, His salvation, His lovingkindness, His truth! |
| Psalm 40:12 | - | Acknowledge your sins, and let your failing heart yield to confession and forgiveness, for: |

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).”

- | | | |
|----------------|---|--|
| Psalm 40:13 | - | Cry out to God, and God alone , for deliverance! |
| Psalm 40:14-15 | - | When an enemy or enemies confront you (1 Peter 3:15-16): |

“sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.”

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

- Psalm 40:16 - Seek God!
 Rejoice and be glad in Him!
 Love His salvation!
 Continually praise the LORD and magnify His name!
- Psalm 40:17 - Humble yourself and acknowledge your need!
 Remember your personal relationship with God through Jesus!

Amen! Those are some ways in which we can practice patience. Think of the last time you were in a difficult circumstance that required the practice of patience. To what extent did you do these things? Is this how you typically practice patience? Regardless, this begs the question:

2. Why should we Practice Patience?

David also provides an answer to that question for us throughout Psalm 40:

- Psalm 40:1 - God inclines toward us!
 God hears our cries!
- Psalm 40:2 - He's brought us up out of horrible pits before, He'll surely do it again!
 He sets our feet upon The Rock and Chief Cornerstone,
 Christ Jesus (Acts 4:10-12)!
 He establishes our steps!
- Psalm 40:3 - God puts a new song in our mouths!
- Psalm 40:5 - God has done and will continue to do many marvelous works!
 He thinks about us and our circumstances!
- Psalm 40:6 - God frees us from the burdens of ceremonies and legalism!
 He opens our ears to hear!
- Psalm 40:9 - He knows us, personally and intimately!
- Psalm 40:11 - God bestows His tender mercies which are new every
 morning, for great is His faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22-24)!
 He preserves us with His lovingkindness and truth!
- Psalm 40:13 - God is pleased to deliver us!
- Psalm 40:17 - The LORD thinks upon us!
 He is our help!
 He is our deliverer!
 He is our God!

Amen! These are some of the reasons *why* we should practice patience! Now then ... all of this seems pretty good on paper, but when the rubber hits the road:

3. How is the Practice of Patience Possible?

Surely you and I can sustain some momentum on our own for a little while, but eventually we'll lose heart and run out of steam. Do you recall my "testimony at the traffic light?" I only survived **THREE minutes** on my own strength. The truth is, waiting patiently for the LORD through a difficult circumstance isn't possible through your

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

own efforts. The secret to *waiting patiently*, to doing all of the things that David mentions in Psalm 40, is tucked neatly in the middle of Psalm 40 in verse 8, where David wrote:

“Your law is within my heart.”

And how does God’s law get within our hearts? Make the LORD your trust (Psalm 40:4). The secret to waiting patiently is internal; it’s the posture of your heart. For it’s God Himself who writes His law on the hearts of His people when they place their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:9). The apostle Paul well-articulates these interdependencies (Romans 5:1-5):

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance (*hoo-pah-man-ay*) and perseverance (*hoo-pah-man-ay*), character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

According to Paul, Christians are able to experience and practice patience in difficult circumstances because *God has provided His Holy Spirit to us*.

And “the fruit of the Spirit is

Love,
Joy,
Peace,
ma-craw-thoo-me-ah (Longsuffering or Patience),
Kindness,
Goodness
Faithfulness,
Gentleness,
Self-Control.

Against such there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23).”

Therefore, whenever you’re experiencing a difficult circumstance (James 1:2-4), count it all joy, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (*hoo-pah-man-ay*). But let patience (*hoo-pah-man-ay*) have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Back in the Fall of 2004, at the end of the *Purpose Driven Life* campaign, I was unemployed and without a source of income. So, what did I do?

The Practice of Patience

Psalm 40

“I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.
He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps (Psalm 40:1-2).”

On December 29th, *on my birthday*, God granted me an interview for a job that I later received and still have to this day. Thank you Jesus!

Conclusion

Evidently, as you now know because of my failed three minute test at the traffic light, I still have room to mature in the practice of patience. As such, the Lord continues to provide me with opportunities, both easy and difficult, to practice patience.

But what about you? Are you experiencing a difficult circumstance? Then focus on the practice of patience (Zechariah 4:6):

“Not by might.
Nor by power.
But by (the Holy) Spirit (of God).”

Amen.

PRAY