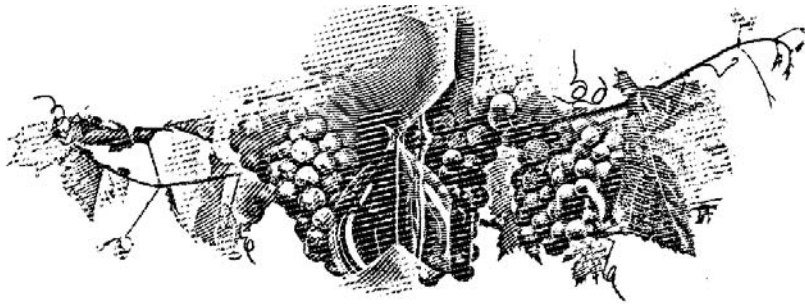


The Fruit of the Spirit Is Patience



SABBATH—JANUARY 23

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 6:3; Exodus 34:6; Mark 4:26–29; Romans 15:5; Ephesians 4:1, 2; James 1:2–4.

MEMORY VERSE: “You need to be patient, in order to do the will of God and receive what he promises” (Hebrews 10:36, TEV).

IN THE GREEK LANGUAGE, TWO WORDS EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF “PATIENCE,” another fruit of the Spirit. The first Greek word is *hupomone*, which means “an ability to continue” in a situation that cannot be changed. The second word, *makrothumia*, means “great” or “long-tempered.” It is the opposite of short-tempered, impatient, and easily frustrated. In general, it means to stay with things and not to give up when stuck with problems. The word usually means having patience with people.

A patient person is mild, gentle, and always the same in all situations. The real test of patience is not in the waiting but in how one acts while waiting. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:4, NKJV).

Reaching this point in one's life takes practice. It takes God's grace.¹ It also takes a willingness to put aside self and to surrender² to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The good news is that if we learn patience, we are in a position to receive many other blessings from God too.

1. grace—God's grace of forgiveness and mercy (kindness) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

2. surrender—giving one's self completely.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 24**PATIENCE IS ONE OF GOD'S GOOD POINTS (Exodus 34:6)**

One of the many Bible stories showing the patience of God was how He dealt with the city of Nineveh. The prophet³ Jonah recognized God's patience: " 'Lord, isn't [is not] this exactly what I thought would happen when I was still at home? That's [That is] why I was so quick to run away to Tarshish. I knew that you are gracious [kind]. You are tender and kind. You are slow to get angry. You are full of love. You are a God who takes pity on people. You don't [do not] want to destroy them' " (Jonah 4:2, NIV).

Note some of the other good traits⁴ in Exodus 34:6 that patience is joined with. God's grace, mercy, loving-kindness, goodness, and truth protect and support even the most hardened sinners in order to give them much time to change their lives around. If God struck out at people as quickly as humans often do, we would all be dead.

According to 2 Peter 3:8, 9, why is God patient with sinners? How has God exercised His patience toward you or toward others?

Suppose someone asked you how you would picture God in your mind. How would you describe Him? Your

answer should tell you a lot because how a Christian thinks of God shapes his or her worldview and how he or she treats others. If we think that God is angry and quick to punish, how would we treat others in the church and in our homes?



What does your picture of God look like?

How can we learn to do what the Lord calls us to do in Romans 15:5?

MONDAY—JANUARY 25**PATIENCE REQUIRED (Ephesians 4:1, 2)**

Read the good points Paul lists in Ephesians 4:1, 2 for those who are to "walk worthy" of the Lord. Among them is patience. How is patience joined with the other good

3. prophet—a man or woman who is a spokesperson for God. God gives a prophet special messages to give to His people. A prophet also speaks to God on behalf of His people. God may also give a prophet warnings about what will happen in the future.

4. traits—qualities or features, such as being honest and faithful, that make you who you are.

points listed by Paul? How do they feed into one another?

Church is a mixture of people from different backgrounds and cultures.⁵ It also includes people who are at different stages of spiritual growth. For example, some are more mature than others. Patience is necessary to be able to get along in situations where there are so many different kinds of people. It is a temptation⁶ for those who are mature to be impatient toward those who are not. For example, it took years for mature people to arrive at their present level of knowledge. But mature people often are unwilling to give immature people the same amount of time and study to reach their level of knowledge and understanding.

What is Paul's advice in Romans 14:1 and Romans 15:1 on how we are to deal with those who may be weak in faith?

Patience in the church is one thing. But what about patience at home? What are some of the things that make us impatient with other members of our family? How long should we pray for family members who are out of the faith? Have you ever known anyone who had to pray for a loved one for many years before the person gave his or her heart to the Lord? What are useful ways in which

we can learn to develop patience with family members? Why is death to self so important too?

Also, if we can learn to be patient at home, with those who are always “in our face,” then we will be patient with others too.

Think about how patient the Lord has been with you. How does this knowledge help you learn to show patience with others? If the Lord treated you as you treated others, what do you think your future's end would be?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 26**PATIENCE IN THE GOSPEL⁷
(2 Timothy 4:2)**

Preaching and teaching the gospel is one of the most difficult areas in which we can use patience. Most of us are too impatient with people who do not know the truth or who do not seem to care about it. But we live in a world full of false doctrine (beliefs) and hatred against truth. So, we must be very patient as we try to lead people to Christ. It is too easy to shake our heads and say, “Why do they not understand? The truth is so plain.”

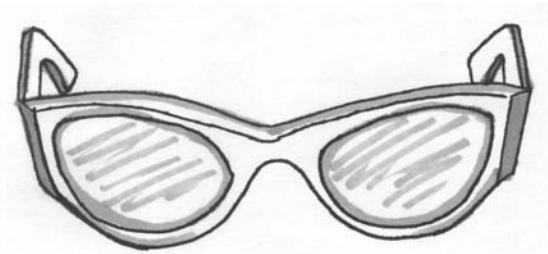
The truth always is plain to the person who is very open-minded to Bible teachings. Those whose minds are closed to the truth by false teachings and family ties have a harder

5. cultures—the ways that people live, dress, think, eat, and socialize with one another.

6. temptation—anything that can turn us away from God and that tries to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

7. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

time accepting the truth. This is why we must be patient as we try to open their minds.



The truth is always plain to the person who is not looking at it through glasses tinted by false beliefs.

What are some useful lessons about patience we can learn from this parable in Mark 4:26–29?

Suppose someone studies a certain Bible doctrine and does not accept it quickly. We may think that the person has rejected the truth. But it is often not true. Conversion⁸ can be a long process that could take years in some cases. Many of us might be eager to experience the fruit of our labors. But it does not always happen that way. What is important is that we must not become a “roadblock” to someone. We must not push so hard that the person gets turned off. Most important, we must never criticize or judge someone who does not accept fully the truths that we love at the time we think the person should. Your labors, your work for the person, could be an important step in a process that might not bear fruit for years. You just do not know. The important thing

8. conversion—the process in which a person accepts Jesus Christ fully and decides to change his or her life accordingly.

is not to ruin it all by being critical or judgmental.

What important point is found in 1 Samuel 16:7 that we should always keep in mind in connection with this week’s lesson?

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 27

PATIENCE HAS ITS LIMITS (Genesis 6:3)

No greater example of patience can be found than God’s patience toward sinners. But we must understand that even God’s patience has a limit.

The patience of God lasted for 120 years in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (1 Peter 3:20). But the time came when the people’s stubbornness wore out God’s patience. Then God destroyed the earth with the Flood.

What important principle (rule) do we find in Genesis 6:3?



The patience of God lasted for 120 years in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel in the wilderness, and the Jewish people in Babylon did many things that led to their suffering. According to Deuteronomy 31:27; Psalm 95:8; and Jeremiah 17:23, what were the thoughts and feelings of the people in each case that led to their suffering?

We might think that because God ran out of patience, this would give us permission to lose our patience too. But when we study the history of God's patience, we learn that God's patience was not for a day, a week, or even a year. Often generations would pass before His patience ended. This means that we do not have the right to lose our patience.

Is there a point where we can be justified (right) in losing our patience with people in a difficult situation? It depends on what that means. We might think that we have had enough of a certain situation and decide that it has to end. But that is not the same thing as being judgmental, unloving, or cruel. It might be time to take action. But that action must always follow the principles of kindness, love, and caring.

Think about situations in which you lost your patience for a good reason or a bad one. What was the difference between the two? What have you learned from these experiences? If you had to do them

over again, what would you do differently?

THURSDAY—JANUARY 28

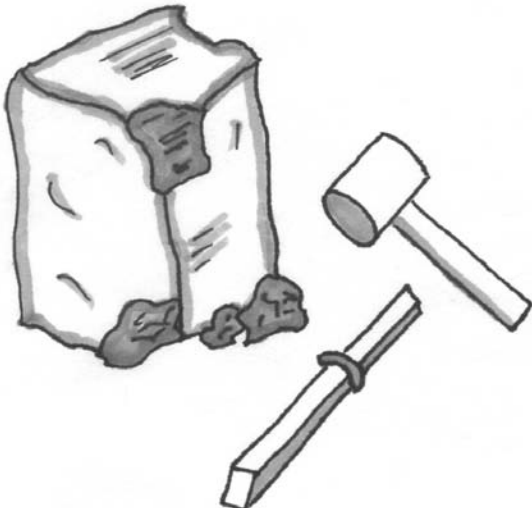
HOW TO DEVELOP PATIENCE (James 1:2–4)

What has been your own experience with how true James 1:2–4 is? What have you learned from the different troubles you have faced that has helped you become a better person who shows the character⁹ of Jesus?

The Greek word for “trials” or “temptations” is the word *peirazo*. In a deeper sense, *peirazo* also means “proving” or “testing.” The devil tempts us to do evil. The tests and trials that God lets us have in our lives are for the purpose of developing our character.

“The trials [tests] of life are God's workmen, to remove what is not pure and the roughness from our character. Their whittling, chiseling, and polishing is a painful process [method]. It is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone [your life] is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no worthless stone does the Master give such careful, thorough attention [care]. Only His worthy stones are polished and shining, the same as a palace.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, page 10.

9. character (of Jesus)—who Jesus is; having and understanding the character of Jesus is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God's law (Ten Commandments) shows us Jesus' character.



Trials are the tools that God uses to remove what is not pure from our hearts.

But this does not mean that every trouble we face is God's leading. Often we bring suffering upon ourselves through disobedience and rebellion.¹⁰ Often troubles and suffering are just the results of what it means to live in a fallen, sinful world where we have an enemy who hates us (1 Peter 5:8). What does this mean? This means that if we surrender ourselves to the Lord and accept Him fully in faith and obedience, we can become better Christians. That is, if we let God do His work in us. No one said it would be fun. Life here often is not fun. But we are given the wonderful promise: "I am sure that the One who began a good work in you will carry it on until it is completed. That will be on the day Christ Jesus returns" (Philippians 1:6, NIV).

10. rebellion—a fight or struggle against any kind of power.

11. repent—to say you are sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

12. punishment—a penalty (price to be paid) for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

FRIDAY—JANUARY 29

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "In His work with humans [men, women, and children], God is very patient with stubborn sinners. He uses His chosen methods to call men back to Him and offers them His full pardon if they will repent.¹¹ But because God is very patient, men make wrong use of His mercy. 'Because the sentence against an evil work does not take place speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.' The patience of God should soften the soul but has a different influence upon sinful men who refuse to accept God. It leads them to rebel [war] against God's control and become more stubborn. They think that the God who has been so patient with them will overlook their sins. If we lived in a world of quick punishment,¹² sins against God would not happen so often. The punishment may be delayed, but it is sure to come! There are limits even to the patience of God. The limit of God's long-suffering may be reached, and then He will surely punish. And when God does punish the stubborn sinner, He will not stop till He has made a full end."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 3, page 1166.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① To say that God is patient is not the same as to say that He overlooks

sin. What is the difference between patience and overlooking sin? Why is it easy to confuse the two?

② As we study the life of Christ, how does He show what patience means? What are some powerful examples of patience that He gives? What examples does He give of situations in which patience was no longer proper?

③ Think more about the question of suffering and character. Sure, suffering can make our character better in many cases. At the same time, what happens when suffering makes peo-

ple bitter, turns them away from God, and makes them doubtful? Have you ever known that to happen to someone? If so, what can you learn from that experience?

④ Besides troubles, what are other ways the Lord can teach us patience? How have you learned (or are still learning) the lesson of patience?

⑤ Is there someone you need to apologize to because you do not have patience? Why not humble yourself? Why not humble yourself and apologize and make things right? Is that not what being a Christian is all about?