

# How to Be Patient... RIGHT NOW!!

*by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle*



## Prayer of Illumination

Lord God,  
help us turn our hearts to you  
and hear what you will speak,  
for you speak peace to your people  
through Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.

## Epistle Readings

### James 5:7-11 (NRSV)

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

## Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – How to Be Patient... RIGHT NOW!!

One of my favorite Dr. Seuss books is “*Oh, the Places You’ll Go!*”

You can get so confused that you’ll start in to race  
Down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace  
And grind on for miles across weirdish wild space,  
Headed, I fear, toward a most useless space.  
The Waiting Place... ...for people just waiting.  
Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come,  
or a plane to go or the mail to come,  
or the rain to go or the phone to ring,  
or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or a No  
or waiting for their hair to grow.  
Everyone is just waiting.  
Waiting for the fish to bite  
or waiting for wind to fly a kite  
or waiting around for Friday night  
or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake or a pot to boil,  
or a Better Break or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants or a wig with curls, or Another  
Chance.  
Everyone is just waiting.

Yes, the world is waiting right now. We’re waiting right now.

Waiting for stimulus checks  
or quarantine cuts at the barber or hair salon.  
Waiting for test results from the doctor  
or waiting for a vaccine.  
Waiting for worship together in the sanctuary.  
Waiting for our business to re-start.  
Waiting to get more hours at work.  
Waiting for when we can just get to a “new normal.”

This is especially hard for us Americans—we’re a culture obsessed with time. We have lots of clocks everywhere—on our phones and on our wrists, on our walls and our computers and in our cars.

We have sayings like,

"Time is of the essence."

"Time is money."

"Time keeps on tickin'..."

"A stitch in time saves nine..."

(*What does that mean anyway?* 😊)

We treat time like a commodity.

We spend time. Buy time. Invest time.

Manage time. Waste time.

We feel bad about stealing someone's time.

We think productivity, not patience, is a virtue.

We describe our food even by time—fast food.

We like getting our stuff fast—Amazon Prime—*can I get an Amen?*

We're only a few swipes and clicks away from watching just about any movie or show we want to see, whenever.

We expect, no demand, instant results with minimal or no effort involved.

So, when we're impatient,

- we rush things,
- we don't think things through,
- we're less apt to consider the options or count the cost.

When we act too quickly with not enough information, we get ourselves into trouble.

When we're impatient, we also get cranky. We're not fun to live with. We grumble about people, people who are too cautious in the pandemic, people who are too cavalier in the pandemic, annoying people we have to shelter with. God, give me patience and give it to me RIGHT NOW!!!!!!!

What we need to do is reframe how we view time and those around us.

So what really is patience?

Patience isn't passivity or resignation to fate. No, patience is a strong word. Bruce Lee called patience "controlled strength." One Bible dictionary defines it as "God-given restraint." In the Bible the words patience and endurance are interchangeable.

Patience stays steady in the face of provocation. Patience remains faithful, not flummoxed—when the fecal matter hits the fan. Patience is about staying alert, prepared, poised, and hopeful in seasons of waiting or suffering. Axel Rose was right:

"Take it slow... It will work itself out fine.

All we need is just a little patience."

Patience literally means being "long-tempered," instead of short-tempered, short-fused, or just plain short with others. Patience is... long-suffering. Patience thinks about the long-term and the long-view

of things, not just the short-term results and gains. Patience is also a people word. Patience is not only grace towards the difficulty of our circumstances, but it's grace towards our neighbor, towards ourselves. Patience reminds us of the words of Jesus,

"Judge not, lest ye be judged."

Patience isn't judgy.

1 Corinthians 13, the great Love Chapter, says,

"Love is patient"... and love "endures all things."

I like what theologian Philip Kenneson says about patience,

"Only by patiently forgiving one another do we have any hope of being that community which God has called us to be."

Thank the good Lord God is patient with us. The Lord is compassionate and merciful and SLOW to anger.

Patience helps us enjoy not only the destination, but the journey. Patience helps us appreciate not only Point B, but also Point A and the line that gets us to Point B. Sometimes it's straight like a bee line... and other times it's more like your tangled-up earphone wires that take a little while to get sorted out. Patience knows that the way and the means are just as important as the goal. So you don't cut corners. Patience isn't the same thing as procrastination, rather it values good process... even if it takes a little longer than we'd like.

Patience trusts that God is good and God is at work, even in lousy or delayed circumstances. Jesus says in the gospels,

"By your patience you will gain your lives."

And James, the brother of Jesus, says in our passage,

"those who persevere (*i.e. those who are patient*) will be blessed."

In other words, patience is about delayed gratification, rather than instant gratification. Spirit-shaped patience trusts and acts according to God's time and God's timing. God's time zone is different than our time zone.

Humans live by chronos time—which is stopwatch time.

But God works by kairos time—God's timing for the right season, the right moment.

As Peter says, NEVER FORGET—for God, "*one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day.*"

Because of these chronos and kairos time differences, Henri Nouwen says we will inevitably be faced with "strange periods of uselessness." This is not wasted time.

One of my favorite books this year has been *"Think Like a Rocket Scientist"* by Ozan Varol. In it he says,  
"get bored more often."

We are perfectly poised to follow his advice in the quarantine. Ozan shares about an epiphany in his life: he couldn't remember the last time he was bored. Gone were the days when he would daydream or just twiddle his thumbs. Now every second was stuffed and crammed with activity—checking email and social media, reading news, texting, doing stuff.

He writes that boredom became for him "a bitter cocktail of agitation, impatience, and despair." He felt guilty if he experienced any tranquility in his life. He then quotes a 2014 psychological study where college students were given 15 minutes to just be by themselves—no cell phone, no music, nothing—just themselves alone to think. However, they did have one option—they could self-administer electrical shocks with a button. 67% of men and 25% of women chose to shock themselves rather than sitting undisturbed with their thoughts. One person delivered an astounding 190 shocks to himself in a fifteen-minute period!

The lesson? If in this quarantine you're wanting to shock yourself, be patient with boredom. Stay with it. There is a purpose. Boredom actually stimulates creativity and breakthrough ideas. Put spiritually: Observe and enjoy Sabbath. A day of rest. Periods of rest during your day. Take a time out for a breather and let God take care of the thing. Acknowledge that God is Lord of time.

Patience helps us relax and let go—a watched pot never boils. If God is behind your timetable, reframe it as God's patience, instead of God's slowness. When we get impatient, we become hasty and hastiness is a form of pride where we think we know the timing of things better than God. But patience humbly waits for God's timing. We can tolerate the uncertainty and frustration.

Think of the farmer, who knows and lives with the different seasons. The farmer knows some things can't be controlled, like what the weather will be. But the farmer can control other things, like: weeding, plowing, planting, watering. And then he waits. He trusts that the rains will come. He waits for the crop to grow, the fruit to bud. He doesn't collect it too soon... or too late. It will come.

As Christians, we're like farmers. We don't force things. Patience has a wait and see attitude. Patience is like waiting for fruit to ripen before eating. We're willing to bide our time if that avocado is just too hard. It's worth the wait for it to be a little softer. Not too soft though.

Learn to live with the rhythms of the seasons. Look to the prophets for a pattern of patience and faithfulness in the midst of suffering. The prophets trained their eyes to see the truth behind the way things were.

Also, as the KJV puts it, remember "the patience of Job." But in many ways Job wasn't patient. He complained to God—a lot! He challenged his friends. Yet despite this, Job never lost faith in God. He resolutely cried out in his pain and loss:

"I know that my Redeemer lives!"

Job shows us true patience, true endurance, true honesty.

Like the Psalmists, we can say, “How long?” and still be patient.

In the old days of sailing, a ship had to wait for a flood tide before it could sail into port. The Latin phrase for this status of waiting was called “*ob portu*.” *Ob portu* was an active waiting where the ship was positioned facing the port, prepared and ready to sail into harbor at just the right time. Impatience or going too early could leave you literally shipwrecked and drowning. We get the word opportunity from *ob portu*.

We are in an opportune moment Immanuel. The Bible shows us that God works through the long periods of our lives—those *ob portu* chapters—where nothing seems to be happening. They’re not wasted days or months or years. Our *ob portus* involve patient waiting for that opportune moment of God’s green light—the right place at the right time and the right reasons to act.

These seasons of delay, waiting, or the mundane are important in our character formation—they’re *ob portus*. They protect us.

Be patient. Trust. Wait. When the light is red—stay. Resist the urge to run the red light. And then when God gives you that divine green light—put the pedal to the metal.

Amen.

Sermon Artwork: “*Waiting for Fruits*” by Zlatko Prica, 1958

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