

“Patience is the Speed of Love”

Selected NT scriptures on ‘patience’

Dr. Anne M. Cameron

April 18, 2010

Second in a series on *Relationships*

My mother was diagnosed in 2003, early on-set. She was 54 and I was 23. I had gone away to college and just moved back to figure out my next move. . . . I quit my job and jumped into the jewelry business I had been doing on the side in order to free up my schedule and help care for her.

[Things were pretty confusing for her, but. . .]There was a night when she had this amazing, clear moment, and asked if I knew her — I realized that I didn't, and that I wouldn't. It was soon after that I found myself learning how to carry her up and down stairs in a wheelchair. I know her person is still there, even if I can't understand the words anymore, most of the time.

I realize about the time it takes. People often talk about the very first things they noticed going wrong, and then skip to the "she doesn't remember my name" stage. But there is a gap of about a decade of very slow, painful decline in that. . . . There hasn't been any choice in learning patience, no matter what my personality tends toward. I must be patient. Or, maybe that's where love comes in. Either way. I lose my patience; maybe those are the moments when the love comes in.¹

There is nothing like serious illness or disability to teach us patience. The Good News also speaks of patience. It is very clear about the value of, and the necessity of, patience in all our relationships, at all times, even the good times.

Until we are slapped with reminders, often painful reminders, of why we must learn and practice patience, most of us won't.

Why is this? Well, there are lots of reasons, but first among them I believe is our distorted notion that time belongs to us. I find myself saying “our time.” “My time is precious.” “Time is scarce.” “Time is money.” We guard

¹ Brittany Foster, regarding her mother, quoted in “Speaking of Faith”

our time, multi-task² in order to multiply our time (or so we think!), hoard it, withhold it. We burn the candle at both ends and we fail to rest, to slow down, to relax, or even to sleep. We admire people who get more things done in less time; not only that---we reward them.

We have **forgotten time is a gift**. Our time is not "ours." It belongs to God. God has given it to us. Without God, there is no time! So we forget it's a gift, and we package it like it's a thing. We have **artificially regulated** time. The concept of an hour was completely foreign to most people in the Middle Ages. Isn't that fascinating to think about? Now how many clocks surround us? I counted up seven in my house, not counting cell phones, the answering machine, the computers, or the clocks in our cars.

Our worship of productivity has also gotten us in trouble in the patience department. In our rush to get things done, we end up treating people as things instead of people. We finish sentences for others; we interrupt; we compose our responses to others instead of listening to them; we fire off emails, memos, text messages, lists. **We are so oriented to outcome, we completely miss the process**. The fact is, God cares about good outcomes, but God also cares about what kind of people we become along the way. The journey is at least as important as its end.

Many of us first taste the fruit of patience when we care for very small children, or even pets. It is impossible to rush a nursing infant, a toddling twelve month old, or a curious three year old. You simply cannot potty train a puppy in a few days! If we are wise (and maybe also blessed) we learn that slowing down, savoring the moment, and setting life at a different pace has its own incredible sweetness.

There is also a sweetness which comes with patiently caring for an elderly parent, helping her in and out of the car, matching a very slow pace to 'stop and smell the roses' of the time that is left. There is patience which is, admittedly, much more difficult: enduring a mental illness; awaiting the end of a prison term; doggedly hanging in there with a sick spouse. And perhaps the most difficult of all: to be patient with oneself.

Patience is salve to the wounds of hurt which erupt in a friendship; patience is delight for the one who feels left out; patience is balm to the bruised ego or the unemployed veteran; patience is the currency of love for everyone whom the world treats abruptly. *Which is everyone.*

² The word multi-task was not in common use until the 1980s. Coined in 1966 to refer to computer processing ability to handle more than one task at once (dictionary.com)

In his book, Fruits of the Spirit, Philip Kenneson suggests ways we might develop the rhythm of patience in our crazy-busy world. First, we continually remind ourselves our time is not our own. When we truly believe time is a gift, we are able to release our tight-fisted hold on it. We release ourselves from the bondage of the clock, from the tyranny of the immediate. Kenneson suggests not wearing a watch, having a clock-free day, or even a clock-free vacation! Take your watch off when you arrive home. Make sure you cannot see a clock when you are engaged in conversation. It helps you listen better.

We should also do things that do not have obvious outcomes. Daily prayer is a great example of slowing down, taking time, and allowing God to set the pace for even a short time each day. It is a strange period of what we might call "divine uselessness," simply sitting or kneeling quietly and intentionally in the presence of the divine.

Practicing the biblical mandate for Sabbath, even for just half a day each week, also helps us grow our capacity for patience. What does this kind of Sabbath look like? STOPPING. NOT DOING ANYTHING INSTRUMENTAL! Not errands, not gardening, not mowing or painting or fixing things! Not laundry and cooking and definitely not cleaning house! Sabbath is time set aside, to worship, time to rest, relax, to do nothing, to pray, to talk, to make love, to take a nap, to read for leisure, to play. It's okay if you just eat chips and guacamole for dinner. It's really okay!

TV, the internet, and activities that 'fill up our time' are not part of a Christian Sabbath. Start at 3-4 hours a week. You will be amazed at how pleasurable it is, and how long time stretches when you don't cram it full of activity. You will be amazed at what you begin to notice in your loved ones and in yourself. And then, with some practice, you can stretch your Sabbath rest longer so that eventually you are honoring a true Sabbath one day a week. This will, I guarantee you, grow both your patience and your faith. Your relationships will become more peaceful, and you will, too.

In the book Three Mile An Hour God, Kosuke Koyama says:

Jesus Christ came. He walked towards the 'full stop.' He lost his mobility. He was nailed down! He is not even at three miles an hour as we walk. . . . God walks 'slowly' because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to

which we are accustomed. It is 'slow' yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love.³

I close by sharing one more story of the connection between patience and love, as a woman talks about her aging father. . .

I have never loved people like my dad did. He had patience and affection for everyone — for people who told boring stories repeatedly, for people I thought were stupid, for people who were afraid of everything, for people totally full of themselves or so shy they could hardly talk. Dad loved people I could barely stand to talk to. He used to ask me to show patience, tolerance, compassion — and I'd promise to try — with no real sincerity.

So now I am trying to learn my biggest lesson from my dad, the lesson I am trying to live every single day. I'm finding people to love; I'm finding things to love in people. I am trying to love people like my dad always did. I am building my capacity for love now, so it can sustain me later.

And if, in the end, like my father, there is nothing left of me but my love, that won't be a tragedy. It will be my victory.⁴

Slow down. Be patient. To your delight, you will discover, it is the speed of love.

³ p. 7, "Three Mile An Hour God" by Kosuke Koyama

⁴ Alanna Shaikh, SOF Observed Blog