

## The Prize of Patience

I sometimes call my wife from work to see how things are going at home. Usually she seems to enjoy getting the call but one day she seemed very angry, which was completely out of character for her. In a very sharp tone of voice she asked, "What do you want? Don't bother us right now – We're praying for patience!" Now, at the same time I could hear a bunch of her friends laughing in the background. It was then I realized that I had called on the morning when several ladies come over to pray and I had interrupted them right as they were praying for patience. From the laughter in the background I could tell that everyone really enjoyed me being the brunt of my wife's little joke.

I was reminded me of how often I ask God for patience and I want it NOW! I want to see positive progress in my spiritual life NOW. I want to see victory over the nagging sins in my life NOW. I want to see the men that God has given me to work with make progress in their lives NOW.

Often I view adversity as an adversary and don't realize that it is really a friend. Adversities and problems, that I would love to avoid, eventually bring the good result of growth and patience into my life. I wish that God would wave a magic wand and just grant the patience but things don't work that way. Unfortunately, patience is gained only by suffering and that is never comfortable. In the Apostle Paul we have an example of a man who suffered in so many ways. God's words to Ananias "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" were the beginning of over 30 years of suffering for Paul. He was the victim of assassination plots in Damascus (Acts 9:24) and Jerusalem (Acts 9:29). Driven out of Antioch (Acts 13:50), attempted stoning in Iconium (Acts 14:5) left for dead in Lystra (Acts 14:19). Beaten with rods, put in stocks in Philippi (Acts 16:23-24) and a mob tried to get him in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5) and almost killed him in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). In Jerusalem the Roman soldiers had to rescue him from a mob (Acts 21:40) and he was shipwrecked on Malta only to be bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 27:27-28:6). He was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years and imprisoned in Rome for two more years and eventually taken to Rome to be executed.

If I were Paul I would wake up each morning wondering what the day was going to be like. What's it going to be today God? Is it going to be a stoning or a poisonous snakebite today? It helps to put into perspective the everyday minor health issues I have or layoff worries at work.

Paul could have been really bitter about all this but the exact opposite was true. He was a great example of a man who suffered tremendously but that suffering produced all kinds of qualities in his life including, patience, character and hope. May we embrace and rejoice in suffering like Paul did and allow it complete its work in us. May we be willing to go through the process of difficulties to receive the prize, which will be the growth in patience we all seek.

RO 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

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