

Enduring Life's Challenges With the Right Frame of Mind

What triggers impatience in you?

- Some of us get impatient with trying circumstances.
- Some of us get impatient with the people around us.
- Some of us get impatient with both!

No one doubts that patience is a virtue—even the unchurched and non-religious would agree—but for the follower of Christ, patience is more than just a commendable virtue; it is an expected characteristic. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

Ooh, that smarts, because for many of us, impatience is so easy to come by. We are naturally drawn to a “me first” attitude, and if something gets in the way of what we want *right now*, then impatience rears its ugly head.

In the Greek New Testament, there are two words used for patience. Many translations translate both as patience; others distinguish between “patience” and “longsuffering.” It’s easy to treat the words as synonyms, but there is a subtle distinction between them.

- Patience is the Greek word *hypomone*, a compound of two words literally meaning “to remain under.” It might also be translated as endurance. It means to remain under (endure) difficult circumstances. Vine defines it as bearing up courageously under suffering.
- Longsuffering is the Greek word *makrothumia*, a compound of two words literally meaning “long (or far) wrath.” It carries the idea of temper, keeping your cool in unfavorable circumstances.

Both words appear in Colossians 1:11. Paul was praying we would walk worthy of the Lord “...being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance (*hypomone*) and patience (*makrothumia*), joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light” (Col. 1:11-12).

Placing both forms of patience appear together means we are to endure with the right frame of mind.

Another distinction might be made between patience and longsuffering. We are patient in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, and we are longsuffering when people are involved. We all have those people in our lives that are just plain annoying. They get on our nerves. They “try our patience.” Instead of giving in to the temptation to bop them on the head, we choose to “suffer long” and keep our wrath far away from whatever they do that annoys us.

So whether your circumstances are wearing you down or it’s the people in them, stand strong and endure with the right frame of mind. And don’t bop anyone on the head.

I think one of the worst circumstances I could find myself in would be languishing in prison when I’m innocent. I wouldn’t be abandoned though. My family would rally behind my innocence. Lawyers and the appeals process would kick in. But in Genesis 40, Joseph was an innocent man thrown into prison, only he had no family support. He had no lawyer or process for appeal. He was assumed guilty, and that was it.

Joseph needed patience. When he correctly interpreted the cupbearer’s dream and asked the cupbearer to speak on his behalf when he was once more serving Pharaoh, the cupbearer forgot. Many of us would impatiently scream for justice, but Scripture records no anger, bitterness, nor impatience on Joseph’s part. What good would it have done?

I can ask the same thing of myself: What good does my impatience serve? My impatience won’t change circumstances beyond my control, nor will a short temper directed at someone make the situation better. Quite the opposite: an impatient, short-tempered response spews emotional shrapnel all over those in my line of fire.

Patience, though, wins the day. Patience reflects a trust in God. I may not like my circumstances, but God is still in charge. I may not like the person I’m short tempered with, but God does, and I am to love the person even as God loves me. God has been longsuffering with me—withholding His wrath when I fully deserved it—and I can show the same even-tempered grace to others.

That kind of patience comes from humility, and humility comes as we surrender to the lordship of Christ. I can truly be patient when I acknowledge that the world does not revolve around me, my plans, and my timetable—and that takes humility.

- “Be silent before the Lord and wait expectantly for him; do not be agitated by one who prospers in his way” (Ps. 37:7).
- “Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another” (Ron. 15:5).
- “... Walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:1-2).