Cultivating Patience

Today we are continuing our look at the Fruit of the Spirit. How can we cultivate these fruits, in a world that is dead set against them? Today’s topic is patience!

Let me ask you, what is your initial reaction when the Wi-Fi goes down? When you’ve spilled that can of paint? When Menards is out of the size you need, but they can order it? When you need to go to the DMV? When the important stuff on your computer is somehow no longer there? When break lights are all the eye can see? And why? The accident is cleared but everybody needs to slow down to gawk!!

Sometimes it seems like life is made just to try our patience. We’ve all had those days or…weeks. Unforeseen inconveniences come along and completely derail our day. But there is a saying I heard as a kid: Patience is a virtue…. waiting won’t hurt you. Take a deep breath and count to 10…Try to put things into perspective. But who has the time to count to 10 and think about perspective? We have places to go and things to accomplish. In fact, I wonder how many times during this service your mind got to thinking about what you have going on after church. Thinking about your do-to list or your plans. And I suppose that’s natural. I point it out not to make anyone feel bad, but rather to show a truth: church, a worship service, coming together to sing and listen to a sermon, does not feel productive. We walk away thinking about what we need to accomplish with the rest of the day, but we certainly don’t feel like we are accomplishing anything while we are here. It’s hard not to feel that way. Our culture is constantly asking: What do you have to show for your time?

But think of God’s character. In Psalm 103:8 we read, “The LORD is compassionate and merciful, very patient, and full of faithful love.” God is very patient! Some versions say the he is “slow to anger.” How many of you have read the Old Testament…like all of it, all the way through? Now I admit, it takes a little patience to get through some of the Old Testament. But there is a fallacy out there, a flat-out-lie that tries to separate Jesus from the Old Testament. The OT God is a jerk…he is mean and judgmental. Jesus is the good version. Jesus is love. I hear people summarize the Bible in this way and it just makes me cringe because it you have read it; you know the truth! God is slow to anger…over and over again he pleads with his people. He sends prophets, and he waits. He sends more prophets and he waits. He sends some consequences and he waits…Do you see? God is love. God says in the book of Ezekiel, “Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked? Says the LORD God. Certainly not! If they change their ways, they will live.” God is rooting for us. He is slow to anger. He wants us to live! His patience allows us to grow in our patience.

When think thought this question, what do you have to show for your time? we are pretty much dealing with three issues here: Control, which we mentioned and productivity, but our view of control and productivity is directly tied to our understanding of time. We measure time in hours, minutes and seconds. We quantify time like it is some sort of commodity. We treat it like something we can control in our quest to produce results. And think about how we speak about time: We spend time, we save time, we invest time, we can waste time or manage time, we even speak about buying time. We like time to be under our control, to be well used so we can answer that haunting question: What do you have to show for your time?

Being patient, moving slowly, feels wrong…it feels like weakness to us. Doing nothing feels like death in many ways. We feel the need to keep on moving, to stay busy…But to what end? Who or what are we serving on our frantic pace? God has called us to be still, he instituted the Sabbath as a day of rest, Jesus said we cannot serve both God and money and hey, time is money right?

We live in Minnesota, we live in a cabin culture. Most families have some spot up on some lake somewhere. We go to the cabin to get away right. To produce nothing, to take it easy. We decorate out cabins with Hobby Lobby artwork like: But here is one I came across: Time is slow here, a friend rather than a master. Who is our master? God almighty or the Clock almighty? Whom do we serve? Time or our Creator who is above and beyond our conception of time? Maybe God is calling you into his cabin, a place of rest, a place where we can be released from the tyranny of time and live into the patience that the Spirit is working in us.

Let’s think about this from God’s perspective…he is outside of time, he is infinite. The Bible declares that a day might as well be a thousand years. But God Created, He spoke and the universe came into existence, and that first day, was followed by a second day, and the repeating cycle of day and night creates history…or the passage of time. Days continue to pass and we experience age and decay. We all know our mortality…we understand that we only have so much time…But of course, from God’s view, this is an incomplete notion. Yes, we experience time, and yes we will all pass away, but that is not the end of the story. God himself has given us ultimate freedom! We will indeed live forever! But think about how this reality came about. God the timeless Creator, yielded control. God the timeless creator subjected himself to the ravages of time. We see the long-suffering, patient, reckless love of God when we look to the cross. The Creator hanging on a tree on behalf of his creation. He was dead for 3 days…what a long 3 days it must have been. What kind of God goes to such lengths? What kind of all-powerful God gives up power? 2 Peter 3

For God, time is but a tool, a tool with a purpose. We normally live with tomorrow’s schedule in mind…yet another to-do list, but God is using time to bring about the consummation. He is coming back for his bride, that is the whole point of it all. So in the meantime, while we wait patiently, our job is to bring as many people into this kingdom as is possible! This is the production that matters! It’s the one thing we cannot do in heaven. When all this is over, we will still worship God and serve him. We will still love and enjoy one another, but when time is up, when Christ returns, we will no longer have the chance to interact with unbelievers, to share the love of Jesus, to tell them about the Kingdom of God. This is our present calling: to declare to this world the glorious future of the God of history.

So in a world obsessed with productivity, here is how you cultivate patience…

* Give up control. It’s an illusion anyway.
* Do not allow time to become your master. Enter into God’s cabin time. Rest in his presence, allow him to refuel you. Don’t depend on a lakeside getaway to find rest.
* Prioritize people. They are what matters, and we are here now to declare to them the future glory of the king of history. Put people on your calendar! Spend time on your neighbors and co-workers. Spend time praying for them, spend time talking to them, listen to their story and share with them your own.

When we live this way, when we live to make disciples, the tell others about the future glory of the king of history, then when the day of the Lord does finally arrive, we can have a ready answer for that question: what do you have to show for your time?