

The Power of Patience

God's Handbook For Life, the Christian Bible, at the very beginning, tells us it is not good for man to be alone; we were made to be part of a community.

Genesis 2:18, 22-25 [NIV] *“The LORD God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” ... “Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman”, for she was taken out of man.’ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”*

The first relationship.

We are studying relationships for three reasons:

Relationships determine happiness

I'm sure that on consideration you will agree that relationships can be the source of our greatest pleasure or our greatest pain, make us miserable or marvellous.

Psychologists tell us that most emotional problems are rooted in wrong relationships.

Most suicides are the result of unhealthy relationships.

Our relationships determine our success ... or our failure

Headline in Management magazine *“The most important management skill an executive can have is the ability to get along well with other people.”*

Our relationships develop our character

Who we are a year from today will largely depend on two things:

- a) what we allow to come into our mind;
- b) the people we relate to and with.

1 Corinthians 15:33 [NIV] *“Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.”*

Relationships in society today are fragmenting fast, relationships between nations, races, religions or relatives.

There are few, if any, role models for us to follow; certainly we won't find any on television.

In our introductory study *‘What is the Main Purpose of Life?’* we saw that love needs to be the basis of all relationships, and as I have said often before, **Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship**, a relationship with our Creator God and our fellow man.

Unless and until we understand how God's Word defines love, we have no basis on which to build good relationships.

There is one chapter in God's Word, the Christian Bible *“His Handbook for Life”* or *“Handbook for Happiness”*, that is dedicated to explaining what love is.

We are going to use this chapter in this series on relationships one verse at a time.

Each a building block for good relationships.

1 Corinthians 13:4 [Living Bible] *“Love is very patient.”*

God is telling us that if we are to build big and healthy relationships the first thing we need to have is patience.

Why would God say that ?

He has had several thousand years dealing with people like you and I; and this requires Him to have great patience.

Greek word for patience is *“makrothumos”* which means literally *“to take a long time to boil”*. We have a *“long fuse”* not a *“short fuse”*.

This word is never used in any other way in the Christian Bible except in relationships between people.

If it is loving to be patient then it must be unloving to be impatient.

When I’m patient with my children, I’m loving them.

When I’m patient with those who hate me, I’m really loving.

Why is patience so vital to relationships?

Because everyone is different.

1 Corinthians 12:6 [Living Bible] *“There are many ways in which God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work in and through all of us who are His.”*

Everyone is an original. There is only one Pastor John [did I hear someone say *“thank goodness”*?]

If we are a parent with two or three children we know how different children can be, even with the same parents.

There are five ways in which we are different. How God has SHAPED us?

- a) Our **Spiritual** gifts. The special abilities that God gives us to serve Him by serving other people using these gifts.
- b) Our **Heart**. We are all motivated in different ways, we all have different interests.
- c) Our natural **Abilities**. Our physical skills and talents.
- d) Our **Personalities**. We all have different perceptions of life and situations. Different values. Some are shy, others extrovert. Some people like routine, others variety, etc.
- e) Our **Experience**. We all have different backgrounds and cultures.

Because God has **SHAPED** us in this way, there is nobody else in the world like you or I.

We are all very different and also very complex, and this can create misunderstandings.

We just cannot “figure each other out”, or we don’t know “where they are coming from”.

Sometimes my wife gives me that look that says “wherever did you get that idea from?”

1 Corinthians 2:11 [Living Bible] “No one can really know what anyone else is thinking, or what he is really like, except the person himself.”

We have all heard statements such as:

“Nobody can understand my wife!”

“Nobody can understand my husband!”

“If you had my boss you wouldn’t be able to figure him out either.”

Have you used any of these phrases in the last 30 days?

“I don’t understand the way he acts.”

“She doesn’t understand me.”

“He is on a different wavelength.”

“She doesn’t make any sense.”

“How can you think that way?”

“My parents are from another time zone.”

“Why do I have to tell you 48 times before you do it?”

“Why won’t she talk to me?”

“Why do you get so emotional?”

Can you relate to any of these?

My wife said to me the other day “I know you think you understand what you thought I said, but I’m not sure you’re aware that what you heard is not what I meant.”

1 Thessalonians 5:14 [Living Bible] “...be patient with everyone.”

We say “that is an impossible demand”.

How can I do that ?

Impatience comes from misunderstanding and misunderstanding comes from four wrong assumptions or misconceptions that are very common in society.

a) Words mean the same thing to all people.

This is **not** true.

The 500 most used words in the English language have 14,000 different definitions.

Some of those words have over 100 different meanings.

b) There is only one right way to see things.

That causes problems, for we all know that this is **not** true, we can see things from a very different viewpoint to other people.

c) My way is the right way to see it.

We feel this is the easy way to solve differences.

My side of the argument is clear, your side is confusing.

My side of the issue is logical, your side is irrational.

My frustration is justified, yours is unwarranted.

My side of the conversation makes perfect sense, your side “the lights are on but nobody is at home.”

d) I can figure out your motives

We can’t, for people are motivated in many different ways.

Even the same person can be motivated in a different way today than they were last month, because they have received new understanding of facts.

I can’t figure out my own motives half the time, let alone someone else’s.

To be patient with everyone is impossible we say, even if it is a command from God.

Have you heard the verse:

*“To dwell above with those we love
Oh that would be a glory
But to dwell below with those we know
Well, that’s another story.”*

How do I do what seems impossible ?

God never commands us to do anything without showing us how to do it.

How to be more patient with people

Remember how patient God is with me

This is the starting point.

1 Timothy 1:16 [Living Bible] *“God had mercy on me so the Christ Jesus could use me as an example to show everyone how patient He [God] is with even the worst sinners, so that others will realise that they too can have everlasting life.”*

We will never have to be more patient with anyone else as God has been with us.

Remember Paul was a rebellious murderer who killed Christians, including Stephen.

He was a fanatic trying to destroy the Church of God.

But God turned Paul around showing just how unlimited His patience is.

Next time we shout at our children and tell them *“to grow up”* remember God is saying the same thing to us. *“Grow up”*. Grow up into patience.

Or when we tell our children to *“hurry up, why is it taking you so long?”*

Most likely God is saying the same to us. *“Why is it taking you so long to get in harmony with My Plan for your life?”*

“Why is it taking you so long to clean up your language or give up that un-loving habit?”

Romans 15:7 [NIV] *“Accept one another just as Christ accepted you.”*

The reason we are to accept other people as they are is because that is just how Christ accepted us.

Learn by listening

Proverbs 19:11 [NIV] *“A man’s wisdom gives him patience, it is to his glory to overlook an offence.”*

Proverbs 19:11 [Living Bible] *“A wise man restrains his anger and overlooks insults. This is to his credit.”*

Proverbs 19:29 [NIV] *“A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.”*

Proverbs 19:29 [Living Bible] *“A wise man controls his temper, he knows that anger causes mistakes.”*

The key to patience is understanding and we gain understanding by listening.

Listening to God by reading His Word and listening to others so as to understand them more, what makes them “tick”.

When we fail to try and understand another human being, we cannot have any valid relationship with them, for all relationships are based on understanding.

This also applies to God and our relationship with Him.

Understanding is the foundation we build a relationship on, misunderstanding breaks down any relationship.

One of our deepest needs is to be understood by at least one other person.

We even come to understand who we are and why God made us through a dialogue with God and other people whom He has created.

God created us with a deep need for relationships, and meaningful relationships are the product of understanding and the “fruit” of understanding is patience in that relationship.

How can I better understand the people I need to be more patient with?

Behind impatience is anger and behind anger is hurt.

When I see someone angry with me and I look behind the anger for a hurt I can then become more patient with them.

How then do I “see” that hurt behind their anger?

Proverbs 18:13 [Good News Bible] *“Listen before you answer. If you don’t you are being stupid and insulting.”*

Not just hearing people but listening to what they are trying to express.

We have two ears and one mouth so we should listen twice as much as we speak.

Did you know that the bullfrog cannot hear himself croak?

Every time he opens his mouth to croak a muscle blocks off his ears so he cannot hear the obnoxious noise he makes.

I think God is telling us something when he created the bullfrog: **we cannot listen when we have our mouth open.**

How do you rate as a listener?

... on a scale of 1 to 10.

Most of us think we are good listeners.

We may be good hearers but that doesn't make us good listeners.

I heard a story recently of one man who decided to do an unscientific survey of how well people listen.

At a large wedding he attended as a guest, he went down the receiving line and greeted each person with a warm smile and said "*the alligators are loose*" and everybody just returned the smile and said "*thank you*". One lady even said "*Oh, you really think so? I made them myself.*"

Research has shown that only 7% of the meaning of what we say is communicated in words. 43% comes from how we say it (vocal tone, pitch, rate of delivery, etc.)

The remaining 50% is communicated by non-verbal language (facial expressions, hand gestures, body language, etc.)

This is why it is so difficult to communicate ideas over a telephone (impossible I feel to an answerphone) because we cannot see how the other person is reacting to our words.

What does this mean?

Our eyes are as important to our listening as our ears.

Husbands, has your wife ever said to you "*why don't you look at me when we talk?*" or "*Come out from behind that newspaper.*"

Maybe she has a point.

Make allowances for one another

Everybody has "*bad hair days*". We are all irritable at times depending on the day or the time of the week, time of the!

It is called P.M.S. in ladies. In pastors it is also called P.M.S. [Pre Message Syndrome].

I know what we are talking about is really important, so ladies please don't write me letters.

On the other hand, most men are temperamental too: 90% temper, 10% mental.

"Do you wake up grumpy in the morning?" "No, I let him sleep on."

We all have bad days, OK !!

Sometimes you won't want to get near me with a 10 foot pole.

The Christian Bible, our Handbook For Life, says we should make allowances for one another.

Ephesians 4:2 [Living Bible] "*... be patient with each other, making allowances for each other's faults, because of your love.*"

Proverbs 12:16 [Good News Bible] "*...sensible people will ignore an insult.*"

Let the insult fly past for we all have bad days.

Treat others the way we would like to be treated

That is not new – it is the “*golden rule*”.

Matthew 7:12 [Jerusalem Bible] “*Always treat others the way you would like them to treat you.*”

This single verse could save most marriages that are “*on the rocks*”.

This is very easy to understand but it is very difficult to practice.

Philippians 2:4-5 [Phillips Translation] “*None of you should think only of his own affairs but consider other’s interests also. Let your attitude toward life be that of Christ Jesus.*”

Can we name the top four interests of each member of our family?

Sometimes we get so pre-occupied with ourselves and so caught up in our own little world.

A recent report stated that most divorces occur because couples lack the awareness or the skills to meet their mate’s needs.

If we care we will be aware.

This series is aimed at increasing our awareness and skills to meet others’ needs and thus strengthen relationships.

It is not easy or natural to see things from other people’s viewpoint.

It takes effort and God’s help.

We need to walk a mile or two in the other person’s shoes before we react to what they do or say.

The last part of this scripture is the real key to patience.

Philippians 2:5 [Phillips Translation] “*...let your attitude towards life be that of Christ Jesus.*”

It takes God’s Power in our life to be patient with everyone.

How do we get this “*attitude of Christ Jesus*”?

Only by having Jesus Christ in our lives.

Instead of asking God to change others who are hurting us, start by asking God to begin to change our attitudes to others.

Then see the dramatic change that will happen to them as time goes by and we change our attitude towards them to one who is patient with them even as God has been patient towards us.

Proverbs 27:19 “*As we are able to control our own reflection in water, so we can also affect the attitude of others.*”

Love is patient or inexhaustible: it never runs out; it never gives up.

This love is shown by the father in the parable of the lost son.

Luke 15:20 [Living Bible] *“So he [the son] returned to his father, and while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming, and was filled with loving pity, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”*

This father’s patient love for his son found him always waiting for his return.

Never could he have turned his back on his rebellious son to have seen him a long way off.

He was waiting and hoping.

What a need there is for this loving patience within any Christian fellowship, home or work place.

We all at times do foolish things just as the rebellious son in the parable.

In God’s Eyes we often like children fight and squabble over things that seem so important in our eyes, while forgetting the very thing that is important in God’s Eyes – patient love.

We feel hurt, resentful, irritable or frustrated with the weaknesses, faults and failings of others, **not** having or applying love towards them, the love that never stops loving, that never runs out.

Love that is patient.