

Developing Patience!

Did you hear about the teacher who was helping one of her kindergarten students put his boots on? He asked for help and she could see why. With her pulling and him pushing, the boots still didn't want to go on. By the time she got the second boot on, she had worked up a sweat.

She almost whimpered when the little boy said, "Teacher, they're on the wrong feet." She looked and sure enough, they were. It wasn't any easier pulling the boots off than it was putting them on. She managed to keep her cool as they worked together to get the boots back on -- this time on the right feet.

He then announced, "These aren't my boots." She bit her tongue rather than get right in his face and scream, "Why didn't you say so?" like she wanted to. Once again, she struggled to help him pull the ill-fitting boots off.

He then said, "They're my brother's boots. My Mom made me wear them." She didn't know if she should laugh or cry. She mustered up the grace to wrestle the boots on his feet again.

She said, "Now, where are your mittens?" He said, "I stuffed them in the toes of my boots ..."

If there ever was anyone qualified to write that **suffering developed patience** it was St. Paul.

He was unjustly tried and sentenced before the courts, jailed, beaten, flogged, on the run for his life, shipwrecked and finally chained to a Roman soldier 24/7 in prison before being finally executed. Out of that treasure trove of experience he writes these amazing words;

“Suffering brings patience, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings character, and character, hope. And this hope is not deceptive...”

During the pandemic I knew that many people were quietly suffering mental health problems due to the lockdowns and also due to the fears that Covid brought to us all. The pandemic was a very unusual time in our lives. We couldn't feel safe to get together, do funerals, hold church services, have a parties or visit people outside our family group. Covid forced us to slow down and learn patience like we never had to before.

What is fascinating is that all the major religions comment on patience as a very high virtue. War and Peace, written by Tolstoy, was famous for its tremendous length. Perhaps he learned something in that arduous process. He said that the two most powerful warriors are *patience and time*.

How many a city has fallen eventually to a long siege with these two warriors against them? When these two 'step up to the plate', things change.

Do we have a personal problem that is difficult to solve? Try Patience and Time!

John Dryden the poet laureate of England in the period of the late 16 hundreds was a very politically astute man. This is what he said about patience: "Beware the fury of a patient man!" He was arguing that we can be both furious and patient and that was a very powerful combination, the anger provides the fuel, the patience the continued pressure. *Beware of such a person he cautions!*

What exacerbates the problems we face is that we do live in what has become the instant society. We are the society of quick fixes, of pressing a button, of instant communication and texting and when things don't work or go slower than we would like, we get impatient.

When I was reading the biography of John Adams, one of Americas founding fathers, I realized that letters would often take

months to cross the Atlantic. Today we can communicate by phone and send documents electronically with perfect accuracy the same day and also in real time we can talk across the miles. But when we can't for some reason, when planes are delayed or denied due to climate change, or when we get impatient that the Internet crashes, due to overload, or that something we have ordered takes its time to come, we can get very impatient.

How many of us end up waiting for a spouse or our children to get ready for an event? You hate to be late and your spouse apparently cares less, as they hold you up. So, when you arrive late and angry, it puts stress on the marriage.

True, some people have a whole different sense of time. Contrast a small town and the sense of time there with that of the pulse of a big city. Retired people who do not have pressing agendas can be very frustrating to those who are terribly short of time and vice versa.

Some spouses work hard all day and come home exhausted. The other spouse has had a great day and is all ready to party and go out. The other spouse wants to just relax. If this happens often, then watch the frustration level rise!

When it comes to repairing things, how patient are we? I came across this rather amusing story about patience the other day.

When a man's printer began to grow faint, he called a local repair shop where a friendly man informed him that the printer probably needed only to be cleaned. Because the store charged \$50 for such cleanings, he told him he might be better off reading the printer's manual and trying the job himself.

Pleasantly surprised, the potential customer asked, "Does your boss know that you discourage business?"

"Actually, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but it's my boss's idea. You see people are so impatient when it comes to repairing things. So, we usually make more money on repairs, if we let people try to fix things, themselves, first!"

But St Paul, who suffered a lot for his faith says that we can be happy about suffering, if we view it aright.

St Paul had to learn patience just like the rest of us. He is very profound on this subject because he links several qualities together in a progression.

First of all, there is **suffering** of some kind that we have to deal with. One of the lessons of suffering is that suffering becomes our teacher in the school of patience. For instance, when we suffer from physical pain that we cannot cure, we discover that being impatient with it solves nothing; whereas patience can hold out the best *hope* for some kind of cure.

Then as St Paul says we must **persevere**. **Perseverance and patience** are like twins; they are not identical twins, but they can be born and grow up together. St Francis De Sales Catholic Bishop of Geneva in the 1600's once said that "patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish."

St Paul also argued that patience and perseverance build **character**.

An unknown author once said: Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny. –

St. Paul would argue that if we want to build a true character in ourselves and others we will not do so without suffering, patience and perseverance, because these things **make** our souls here on

earth. Suffering brings depth to the personality. Patience brings tolerance and humility and perseverance can bring a good result in difficult situations. As Winston Churchill once said of perseverance: “Never give in--never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.”

Once character has been built through suffering patience and perseverance, it connects us to a **hope** that is not deceptive, because it is a hope that has been through the fire.

What St Paul is arguing for here **is a process**, not a quick fix. It begins with suffering of some kind but ends with authentic hope. The glue in this process is patience. Without it there is no progress and suffering can become pointless when there is no hope. This is St Paul at his most profound.

Jesus tells a story about a patient farmer. This is a story about our frustrated hopes. The farmer sows his seed and then goes on with his regular life. There is no frustration here or impatience. The farmer does not go out into the field and dig up the seed by the roots and examine it to see how it is growing. He appears to do nothing except one very important thing. *He waits patiently*. This is an active watchful response because when it is time to harvest, he wastes no time.

To every thing there is a season says Ecclesiastes, a time for everything under heaven. This farmer knows that and waits patiently. The Kingdom of God, which means the rule of God in this world, is like seed buried in the ground. God’s will, will be done on earth as it is in heaven, because the seed is sown in history. Trust that. Be patient. Peace will come to the earth and the meek shall inherit it!

The great religious traditions, including our own, all teach the golden rule. At the base of that rule is that we are to love others as

ourselves. When it comes to patience therefore, we are to be patient with others and also with ourselves. Frances de Sales says: “Have patience with all things, but first with yourself.”

The phrase is often used in the Bible *Take courage!* just like it is something on a shelf that is available. I think that Patience is in the same category. We can *take patience down off the shelf and use it in our lives!* We can *decide* to be patient in the same way that we can make a decision to be happy!

They say that when Michelangelo sculpted from marble, that the pieces he chiseled flew off very rapidly at the beginning. It was amazing how quickly he sculpted. But then there came another stage when it was the all-important details that mattered. Perhaps like me you have visited St Peter’s in Rome and looked at the Pieta. When I did, tears came to my eyes. How could anyone have ever sculpted such a lifelike image of a mother holding her dead son with such pathos, *in marble* with an emotion that was palpable? Here is how, from the lips of the master himself: “Genius is eternal patience.” he said

Bill Marriott’s secret that enabled him to build all the Marriot hotels:

“Failure? I never encountered it. All I ever met were temporary setbacks.” In other words, persevere!

As *St Paul* says: Suffering brings patience, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings character, and character, hope. And this hope is not deceptive.”

In other words, patience works in the real world. It can make all the difference! I guess that is what Benjamin Franklin meant when he said “He that can have patience can have what he will.”

June Cerza Kolf facilitated a bereavement support group for elderly widows. One day a very pregnant woman and her husband joined the group for support. The elderly widow's faces softened as they tried to make Ginny and Bob her husband feel welcome.

Soon Ginny's story tumbled out. She had put little 2-year-old Shawna down for a nap, when suddenly she heard her cry out in a most abnormal way. Ginny who was a registered nurse, checked for a blockage in her throat and then took resuscitation measures. The paramedics came and took her to the hospital. Shawna stopped breathing several times and was resuscitated successfully. At last, she seemed to be out of danger and was placed in a special unit of the hospital. A few minutes later she stopped breathing again and could not be revived. The whole episode took about 4 hours.

Bob had been away and was travelling home by plane so Ginny had to go to the airport to break the news. Neither Ginny nor Bob could describe their agony to the group. But the group wept with them.

As the couple attended the support group, a subtle change began to take place in these elderly widows. They no longer focused on their personal grief. Instead, they were reaching out to Ginny and Bob. Since Ginny had a new baby coming, one woman began to knit a pair of booties, another embroidered bibs. They started to serve nutritious snacks instead of the usual brownies and cookies when they met.

One evening Ginny said that she was close to having the new baby. But she was very afraid of going to the hospital, the place where she had lost Shawna. After Ginny and Bob left the room the conversations began and they asked a key question that all of us need to ask when we have a significant loss. **What can I do to help someone else?**

One woman suggested that they take Ginny over to the hospital in advance and help her get over her terror. Someone else suggested that they all pray for Ginny and Bob. That is what they all did, right then and there.

Then June consulted with psychologists and therapists about the idea of taking Ginny to the hospital in advance and they all agreed that it would do no harm. June called the hospital, explained the situation and got permission for free access to all areas.

Three of the widows and June agreed to a plan. If Ginny agreed they would meet at the hospital and return to the rooms where Shawna had been and then go up to the maternity ward and look in the nursery window.

June phoned Ginny with the plan and there was a long silence... then June heard this very small choked voice: "You couldn't have called at a better time. Today would have been Shawna's third birthday. I have been praying all day long asking God to help me look forward to my baby's arrival."

When they met the following day, Ginny was extremely nervous. They walked up to the lobby and had to stop because Ginny said her heart was racing and she felt claustrophobic.

They left the building and June bribed her with an ice cream cone. June said: "I have never known a pregnant woman turn down an ice cream cone."

June decided to be very patient with Ginny and not push her. So, they met once a week for their hospital walk abouts. Ginny, although suffering, was immensely courageous. She was doing her fears. At times she clutched June's hand and June would see the perspiration bead on her upper lip. But after the first trip she never

again turned back. She **persisted**. June said it was more than the ice cream cone that kept her going...

Eventually the day came when she did not grip June's hand quite so hard and then one week she actually smiled. That day she was given a double dip of chocolate mint her favorite ice cream!

A week later Bob came to the meeting alone. He had a bouquet of white roses tied with a blue ribbon and a large color photo of his newborn son.

He shared that Ginny had gone into the hospital with hope and confidence the night that the baby was born. He felt that a miracle had taken place and so did the group.

But June soon realized that two miracles had taken place. The group continued to meet for a few more weeks but June knew that it was not needed any more. The widow's wounds had been gradually healing as they patiently and persistently had reached out to Ginny week after week, and that had brought about healing and hope in their own lives too.

Ginny, Bob, June and the widows knew as St. Paul did **from the inside**, the meaning behind these amazing words: "Suffering brings patience, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings character, and character, hope. And this hope is not deceptive."

Thanks be to God!