

# Contents

How to Nourish Your Soul 7

Introduction 9

## **Understanding Patience**

**Day 1:** Patience Is Waiting on the Lord 15

**Day 2:** Patience Is Steadfastness 17

**Day 3:** Patience Is Long-Suffering 19

**Day 4:** Patience Is Slowness to Anger 21

## **Why Wait?**

**Day 5:** God Is Patient 25

**Day 6:** God Commands Patience 27

**Day 7:** God's People Have Always Been Patient 29

**Day 8:** God Uses Your Patience to Bless Others 31

**Day 9:** God Rewards Patience 33

## **Cultivating Patience by Looking to Christ**

**Day 10:** Christ, Our Example 37

**Day 11:** Christ, Our Sympathetic Friend 39

**Day 12:** Christ, Our Power 41

**Day 13:** Christ's Glory, Our Hope 43

## **Cultivating Patience by Understanding Time**

**Day 14:** Time Is Short 47

**Day 15:** Afflictions Are Temporary 49

**Day 16:** Human Souls Have Eternal Value 51

## **Cultivating Patience by Understanding Your Circumstances**

**Day 17:** God Has Been Patient with You 55

**Day 18:** Every Moment of Your Life Has Value 57

**Day 19:** Trials Are the School of Patience 59

**Day 20:** God Designs Your Circumstances for the Good  
of Your Soul 61

## **What to Do While You Wait**

**Day 21:** Do Good 65

**Day 22:** Seek Wisdom 67

**Day 23:** Keep Loving 69

**Day 24:** Hold On to Hope 71

**Day 25:** Pray Persistently 73

## **Cultivating Patience in Specific Circumstances**

**Day 26:** Patient in Deferred Hope 77

**Day 27:** Patient in Affliction 79

**Day 28:** Patient in Stagnant Seasons 81

**Day 29:** Patient with the Weak 83

**Day 30:** Patient with People Who Sin against You 85

**Day 31:** Patient Together 87

Conclusion 89

Notes 91

Suggested Resources for the Fight 95

## How to Nourish Your Soul

*A LITTLE BIT every day* can do great good for your soul.

I read the Bible to my kids during breakfast. I don't read a lot. Maybe just a few verses. But I work hard to do it every weekday.

My wife and I pray for one of our children, a different child each night, before we go to bed. We usually take just a few minutes. We don't pray lengthy, expansive prayers. But we try to do this most every night.

Although they don't take long, these practices are edifying, hopeful, and effective.

This devotional is just the same. Each entry is short. Just a few tasty morsels of Scripture to nourish your hungry soul. Read it on the subway or the bus on the way to work. Read it with a friend or a spouse every night at dinner. Make it a part of each day for thirty-one days, and it will do you great good.

Why is that?

*We start with Scripture.* God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

*Our study of Scripture is practical.* Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read this devotional, you'll see the word *you* because Megan speaks directly to you, the reader. Each reading contains reflection questions and a practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you answer the questions and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

*Our study of Scripture is worshipful.* Maybe your experiences this past week included something like this: You got frustrated because you were stuck in a long line or in another traffic jam. You rushed through your daily Bible reading. You got annoyed as you were interrupted while working on a project. You felt frustrated as a friend or your child complained (yet again). If you look around your life, you'll find signs of impatience everywhere. That's why God's Word matters. Your sin makes you an impatient person. You can't grow in patience on your own. You need a Savior who is merciful, long-suffering, and patient with you and who, in turn, leads you to be grateful for him. What should your study of the Word lead you to? Worship of him. Every time you run into your impatience, it should be a reminder: "I can't do this on my own; I need Jesus to help me." You need a Savior who can rescue you from your sin and give you the gift of patience, not just one time but daily. As you study your Bible, you will learn that God has a lot to say about patience, and he will help you to grow in it.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. It will help to remind you of God's goodness and power and promises whenever you have to be patient. So work through it this coming month and then come back to it a year from now to remind yourself about what God and his gospel teach us about cultivating patience.

This devotional starts you on a wonderful journey of growing in patience. After you finish reading (and rereading) it, if you want more, you'll see additional resources listed at the end of the book. Buy them and make good use of them.

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

# Introduction

WE LIVE IN an impatient world. All around us, people are constantly seeking a fast track to fulfilled desire. Our friends and neighbors want what they want, and they want it yesterday. For Christians, too, the temptation to impatience is powerful. We know we should be patient, but we are tired of waiting.

Sometimes, we are tired of waiting on God to grant healing, to give financial stability, to bless us with children or a spouse, to prosper our work, or to lessen our afflictions. We long for the day when our loved ones come to faith or our church begins to grow, but God seems to be delaying. We don't know how long we can continue to live in hope.

Other times, we are tired of bearing with others: the annoying church member, the immature child, the imperfect spouse, the needy friend, or the hostile coworker. No matter how often we repeat ourselves or speak kindly to them, these people seem intent on frustrating us. We may be ashamed to admit it, but we secretly wish we didn't have to constantly interact with them. In other cases, we want the people we love to change for their own good—to conquer their addictions, to develop productive habits, or to know Christ more—but the transformation seems to be happening excruciatingly slowly, if at all. We'd like to be hopeful, but as time passes, we feel like giving up.

Impatience is bad enough on its own, but once it seizes our hearts, it quickly produces additional sins. Looking for a way to get what we want *now*, we run headlong down disobedient paths. Like King Saul, who got tired of waiting for God's priest and rashly offered the sacrifice himself (see 1 Sam. 13:8–15), we grasp at any means to end the wait. We accumulate credit card debt, marry unbelievers, accept unethical business practices, fall into sexual

sin, compromise the gospel message, and manipulate others in order to fulfill our desires on our own schedule. We seethe with envy when friends and neighbors receive the very thing we've been waiting for, and we lash out in anger toward anything and anyone who stands in our way. Our honking horns and harsh words are symptoms of our daily unwillingness to wait a moment longer than we deem necessary. More quietly, but no less destructively, our impatience also creates anxiety in our hearts. When God appears slow to act, we worry that he never will. Our doubts about God's trustworthiness begin to shake our faith. We focus on our own timetable and fret with every seemingly unproductive day that passes.

This impatience harms others. The people in our homes and workplaces instinctively start to approach us with fear—not knowing when we might explode in their direction. They notice our lack of trust in God's sovereign timing and begin to eye their own calendars and circumstances with worry. Perhaps, they think, God isn't who he says he is after all. Our friends and neighbors also witness our immoral shortcuts and consider whether they might be justified in doing the same. Like the people of Israel who led each other into disaster, impatiently presuming to enter the land when God had told them to wait (see Num. 14:39–45), we can easily cause those around us to sin.

Thankfully, God's redeemed people don't need to be captive to impatience. Because of Christ's perfect obedience, his death on the cross, and his resurrection and ascension, we are no longer slaves to our sin (see Rom. 6:17–18). And because his Spirit lives in us, he cultivates the spiritual fruit of patience in our lives (see Gal. 5:22). What's more, we serve a God who is himself long-suffering—when we confess our impatience, we find that he is full of grace for short-tempered people (see Ex. 34:6).

Over the next thirty-one days, we'll be studying how to grow in patience. Simply put, patience is faithfulness over time. It's the diligent practice of godliness while you wait—whether you're

waiting on people, on circumstances, or, ultimately, on God. It's waiting well. It's waiting with hope.

On each day this month, we will meditate on what the Bible says about the blessing of patience and the danger of impatience. Only the Word of God, accompanied by the work of his Spirit, can inform our consciences and compel our actions. For this reason, it's important to prayerfully read the Scripture verses at the beginning of each devotional and also to look up other referenced texts. It may be tempting to skip and skim. Don't. The Lord changes our hearts as we meditate on his Word.

Beginning with a biblical vision for waiting well, we'll examine various aspects of patience (days 1–4) and answer the question *What, exactly, is patience?* Then we'll consider why we should wait (days 5–9), unpacking biblical incentives for patience. Next we'll look to Christ to teach us about patience (days 10–13). We cannot presume to understand patience apart from Christ or to practice it without his help. We'll continue by seeking to develop a right understanding of time and our circumstances (days 14–20) and establish godly priorities for what we should do while we wait (days 21–25). Although we may often think of patience as passive, we'll discover that it actually requires diligent activity. Finally, we'll learn to pursue Christlike patience in several circumstances that commonly tempt us to impatience (days 26–30) and conclude with a look at how our own experience of waiting can help other impatient people (day 31). Through his Word and his Spirit, we'll see that God has given us everything we need to wait with hope.

You may want to use this devotional on your own as part of your daily prayer and Bible reading. Or perhaps you'll use it under the direction of your pastor or another counselor as part of a plan to fight the sin of impatience in your life. You may also want to use this book with a friend or a small group, encouraging one another and holding one another accountable for waiting well in all the large and small trials of life.

For impatient people, thirty-one days to cultivate patience may seem like a long time. In truth, it will probably take a lifetime. But out of obedience to the Lord, we “put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12). We rely on his Spirit, trust his grace, meditate on his Word, seek his forgiveness, and “put on . . . patience”—day after day after day, hoping for that glorious day when we will be made like our perfectly patient Savior forever.

# UNDERSTANDING PATIENCE

Over the next few days, we'll look at how the Bible defines patience, as it relates to both our circumstances and our relationships. Having a clear, constructive understanding of patience will equip us to cultivate it in our lives.



## DAY 1

# Patience Is Waiting on the Lord

*I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. (Ps. 40:1)*

WHAT IS PATIENCE? It may be a familiar word, but I suspect we're more likely to define it by what it's *not* than what it *is*. Patience, we think, is not pacing the room while I wait for that important phone call. It's not fussing at my dawdling teenager or honking at the elderly driver in front of me. Patience is not grumbling, fretting, or exploding when I experience a delay. But the Bible also presents patience as a positive virtue. It's not merely the absence of sin; it's the pursuit of righteousness. Today we'll see that patience is waiting on the Lord. The Lord is sovereign over the circumstances and people in our lives; ultimately, he is the one who causes us to wait, and he brings our waiting to an end. We practice patience by looking in faith to him.

In Psalm 40, David is stuck. He's trapped in a "pit of destruction" and floundering in a "miry bog" (v. 2). The psalm doesn't explain exactly what David's swamp was; it could have been a work struggle or a relational mess. It could have been both. But, whatever the circumstances, David's response was to cry out to God and then wait. And because he studied God's Word and works (vv. 5, 7–8), meditated on God's kindness and mercy (vv. 6, 11), and diligently participated in corporate worship (vv. 9–10), David waited with hope. We can learn from his example. Whether we are stuck in unmet desires or tangled in financial worries, we can call on our Lord. We can seek to know him as he is revealed in his Word. And we can trust he will do what is best.

In the end, God always keeps perfect time.<sup>1</sup> He never underestimates the amount of time it will take to accomplish a goal

or to bring about a certain result. He never misjudges his own ability; he never miscalculates the moment to act. Because he is sovereign over all, his plans and purposes unfold precisely when they should, at the very moment he decreed from eternity past. Every one of God's works happens exactly on time.

This is why David could say in another psalm, "Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!" (27:14). Our souls should be encouraged when we realize it's God we're waiting on. Unlike fallible people, God has never had to rush in and say to anyone, "I'm so sorry I kept you waiting." If the Lord delays, it's not because he miscalculated. We can wait with hope, knowing he has wisely determined that this precise period of waiting is the best thing for our good and his glory.

Let your heart take courage.

**Reflect:** How do you typically define patience? What do you think it's *not*? What do you think it *is*?

**Reflect:** Read Psalm 27. What are some of the difficult situations David describes? Can you relate? What does David say he is seeking in the midst of trouble? How does seeking God reorient your perspective while you wait on him?

**Act:** No matter what you are waiting on today, you are ultimately waiting on the Lord. Cry out to him, seek him in the Scriptures, and ask for the Spirit's help to trust that he will act at just the right time.

## DAY 2

# Patience Is Steadfastness

*You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. . . . As an example of suffering and patience, brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. (James 5:8, 10–11)*

IN 1858, John G. Paton and his wife arrived on the South Sea island of Tanna, hoping to bring the good news of Christ to the island's yet-unreached population. A few months later, Paton's wife and infant son died, leaving him alone among a hostile, cannibalistic people. As he labored, Paton suffered debilitating illnesses, mistreatment, robbery, and repeated threats to his life. He nevertheless traveled the island, preaching the gospel and constantly praying for the Lord to work savingly in Tanna. After three years, he had to flee to Australia for his life. He had witnessed only a few conversions.<sup>1</sup>

Patience is rarely glamorous. In biblical terms, patience often means “steadfastness” and “endurance.” It's a virtue for Christians stuck in dead-end jobs, living with chronic illness, plagued with spiritual doubts, or beset by sin. When today feels like a discouraging repeat of yesterday, you need patience.

Writing to churches experiencing hardship, James exhorts believers to be patient, to establish their hearts, and to remain steadfast. Steadfastness is faithfulness in difficult circumstances. In other parts of his epistle, James explores ways that such steadfastness is essential to the life of faith: The steadfast person is better able to act wisely (1:5–8), to withstand temptation to sin (1:12–15), and to practice righteousness (1:19–25). Like the Old Testament prophets, the steadfast person can proclaim Christ in the face of opposition and while seeing little fruit (5:10). Like Job,

the steadfast person can trust God in the midst of physical suffering (5:11). Like Elijah, the steadfast person can keep praying even when he or she feels weak (5:17–18). And practicing steadfastness produces further steadfastness (1:2–4). James’s teaching affirms that patience is not an optional discipline. To glorify God in a fallen world, Christians *need* patience (see Heb. 10:36).

Having called us to patience, James encourages us in our calling by lifting our eyes to the future: “The coming of the Lord is at hand.” Even a hostile work environment or yearslong struggle with spiritual depression has an expiration date. One day—a day that is so close James says it’s “at hand”—the Lord will return and our faithfulness will not have been in vain.

For the rest of his life, John G. Paton continued to pray for the Tannese people and asked the church to pray for them too. Thirty-four years after he left the island, the Lord raised up a new missionary. Under the preaching of Paton’s son Frank, the Tannese people finally embraced Christ. The prayers of one generation were answered in the next, and, in eternity, father and son will both be commended for their steadfast endurance.

**Reflect:** “You have need of endurance,” writes the author of Hebrews (10:36). Do you think of yourself as needing endurance? When you understand that patience is essential, how does that influence your desire to cultivate it in your own life?

**Reflect:** Read Job 1. How were Job’s trials an opportunity for him to practice steadfastness?

**Act:** A circumstance we can easily bear for a single day will often seem overwhelming if we think about having to bear it for the next twenty years. Heed the words of Jesus: “Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt. 6:34). Don’t focus on tomorrow. Seek the Spirit’s help to remain steadfast today.

## DAY 3

# Patience Is Long-Suffering

*I . . . urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1–3)*

WHEN WAS THE last time someone sinned against you? It probably wasn't long ago. In hundreds of ways, even among other Christians, we experience mistreatment. Peter, too, knew first-hand about being repeatedly slighted and elbowed by his fellow disciples, and so he asked Jesus whether there was a limit to what he could be expected to endure: "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" (Matt. 18:21). In reply, Christ commands patience beyond anything Peter imagined: "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times" (v. 22).

As we define patience, we see today that patience is long-suffering with people who sin against us. In today's verses, Paul exhorts the members of the church at Ephesus to "walk . . . with patience, bearing with one another in love." Paul and Jesus shared the same realistic view of the Christian life: Being sinned against is inevitable. We can count on being sinned against many, many times. We ought not to be caught off guard when someone speaks untruthfully of us, when someone cuts us off midsentence in order to focus on themselves, or when someone fails to see our need for help and prayer. Because we live in a fallen world among sinful people, we will regularly get hurt.

The surprise is not that we are sinned against. The surprise is the patient way that God's people react to their injuries. The people of this world are quick to seek personal retribution for

the smallest insult. Like Lamech, who boasted about murdering someone who merely hit him, the revenge of the ungodly is “seventy-sevenfold” (Gen. 4:24). But God’s people do the math in a different way. When we are sinned against—even repeatedly—we bear with others and forgive them “seventy-seven times” (Matt. 18:22). As many times as an ungodly person would have struck out in revenge, a Christian reaches out in love.

This life of patience, says Paul, is conduct “worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” God calls us to salvation, and behavior that is “worthy of the calling” is not, of course, behavior that *merits* this calling. Instead, it is behavior *shaped by* our calling and behavior that therefore *glorifies* the One who called us. When people who belong to Christ act like people who belong to Christ, we exalt Christ in the world. While our ungodly neighbors may snap at every offense, God’s patient people work hard to bear with others, maintaining “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”—and magnifying the gospel as we do.

**Reflect:** Are you surprised when people sin against you? How might your response to mistreatment change if you assumed mistreatment would be a regular part of your life and prepared in advance to respond?

**Reflect:** Read 1 Corinthians 13. How has Christ demonstrated love toward you that is “patient and kind” and “not irritable or resentful”? Ask him to produce this kind of love—one that “bears all things” and “endures all things”—in your heart.

**Act:** Think about an interaction today where someone is likely to sin against you: a rude coworker, a thoughtless church member, a grumpy neighbor. Prepare ahead of time for how you will respond patiently when you are mistreated.