

# IMPATIENCE

Several months ago I sent you an email asking you to list your biggest complaints about yourself, your life, your marriage, your job, and several other topics.

You had three top complaints with yourself.

The one we looked at last Tuesday/Sunday: procrastination.

The one we'll address next week: pride.

And the one we're talking about today: impatience.

Some of you simply said,  
I need to be more patient.

Others said:

I'm too quick tempered.

I'm generally irritable.

I can't control my anger.

I overreact to everyday events.

I'm frustrated by things around me I can't control.

Here are a few of my favorites answers from the survey regarding patience.

The only time I'd be considered patient is if I was admitted to a hospital.

I hide it pretty well but it causes a lot of internal stress.

I don't think this next guy realized he was confessing to being impatient, but you be the judge.

Quote: Why are the majority of people around me such stupid, inconsiderate jerks? Life would be so much more enjoyable if people thought of others.

(Gotta love that – “if all the stupid idiots around me were just nicer and more considerate of me and my needs, everything would be fine.”)

Then he adds: “This comment excludes my perfect wife.” Wimp.

That brother may have excluded his wife but this guy didn't:

“I have tuned my wife out in normal conversation. She rambles on and on and interrupts me when I'm talking.”

So, guys expressed it in many different ways,  
but the consensus was:

I want to be more patient.

But I'm not sure that's what we really want.

Our word patient comes from a Latin word meaning “to suffer.”

In Hebrew the root for the word “patient” means “long,”

as in “long-suffering” which is a synonym for patience.

Is that really what you want?

To be long-suffering?

Here's a definition.

Patience: the ability to tolerate delay, difficulty, annoyance or pain without becoming upset or complaining.

We say we want patience,

but what we really want is no delay, no difficulty, no annoyance, no pain –  
no reason to have to be patient.

We want all those stupid jerks around us to think first and foremost  
about us and our needs.

We want our wives to quit rambling on and on when they talk to us  
and we want them to stop interrupting us when we're talking to them.

We want things to do what they're supposed to do  
when they're supposed to do them.

We want life to be fair.

Really,

we want the universe to bend to our will and conform to our expectations.

Learning to be patient –  
 learning to be long-suffering,  
 learning to put up with pain and irritation and frustration  
 and not even being able to get ticked off about it.  
 Who wants that?

Patience isn't easy.  
 And it never has been.

Nearly a thousand years before Christ, Solomon wrote:

**Proverbs 16.32:** Better a patient man than a warrior, a man with self-control than one who takes a city.

Solomon says the man who has conquered his impatience and his anger  
 has done something more difficult than the warrior who has conquered a city.

Being patient was hard in Solomon's time.  
 And if anything, it's even more difficult today.

Our culture trains us to be impatient.

We eat fast food.  
 We expect overnight delivery.  
 We ask Google a question and get frustrated if the answer takes  
 more than a tenth of a second.  
 Guys now arrange dates by swiping right.  
 They don't even have to learn the art of chatting a gal up.  
 We don't need to wait by the phone for a call.  
 We certainly aren't waiting three days for a letter.

And we want to binge watch our favorite TV series.  
 No more of this waiting a whole week for the next episode.  
 We want our TV and our movies  
 the way we want our lives – on demand.

I want it,  
 I demand it, and  
 I get it now.

I wish I could show you a clip from a well-known comic,  
but he's been accused of and pretty much admitted to  
doing some despicable things.  
And putting him up on the screens might offend some of you  
and I can understand if it would.

So, I'm not going to put him up on the screen or mention his name.

He talks about how people complain that their flight was delayed.  
"We were 30 minutes late boarding,  
and then we waited – on the plane –  
before we took off for another 40 minutes.  
It was a nightmare."

He goes on,  
"O really.  
What happened next?  
Did you fly in the air like a bird?  
Did you sit in a chair in the sky  
and travel at 500 miles an hour  
and while you were doing that  
did someone offer you something to eat  
and alcohol to drink?"

"Delay?  
It took you 6 whole hours to get from New York to LA?  
It used to take 3 years by covered wagon to make that trip  
and half of you would die along the way."

Everything that frustrates us is faster today  
than it was in the past by orders of magnitude.  
We should have the fewest problems of anyone who has ever lived  
with being patient but instead we have the most.

Let's take a minute and look at when we're likely to have a problem  
with impatience.

## WE ARE LIKELY TO STRUGGLE WITH IMPATIENCE WHEN

1. We are facing a nuisance of some kind.

Not really a big deal.

But somebody, something irritates you and gets on your nerves.

It may be the guy at your job who

steps into your office,

sits down and

talks about absolutely nothing

when he should be able to see that you're up to your neck in work.

Or the neighbor who mows his lawn too early on Saturday morning.

Or your wife who rambles on when she talks

and interrupts you when it's your turn.

Or we get put on hold forever –

forever being defined as three minutes or longer.

These are minor irritations

but they are frequent and frustrating.

2. When our life setting is unfair or difficult.

We are given great responsibility at work,

but not the authority to accomplish the task we've been assigned.

We perform well

but year after year our raises are less than we deserve.

You may find yourself in a difficult marriage.

You and your wife are mismatched.

You don't

communicate the same way,

have the same values,

enjoy the same activities,

agree on how to raise the kids, or

possess the same degree of sexual desire.

You work on it,  
but you continue to feel alone and unfulfilled.

Or maybe you're single and  
you ask God for a companion to share your life with  
and it never happens.

Possibly you do a lot for your parents or for your children  
and they're unappreciative.  
They take you for granted.

You're getting older  
and you can no longer do the things you once did that brought you joy.  
Your energy gets less  
and your world gets smaller.  
And you know it's not going to get any better.

Or it could be football season again  
and you went to Rice University.

There are all kinds of ways that life can be unfair and difficult.  
And sometimes it seems that things will never change.

It's hard to be patient when we're in that place.

3. We are suffering physically or emotionally.

You may be in pain because of a disease or some other physical affliction.  
You may struggle with depression or anxiety.  
You may love someone who is suffering  
and you may be caring for him or her.  
Your children may be making dangerous, disastrous decisions  
that not only affect their lives but yours, as well.

Some of us have more reasons to be impatient than others.  
But all of us have something or someone  
who is a real challenge.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT THAT WE LEARN PATIENCE?

One reason is because

1. We are commanded to be patient in Scripture.

**Ephesians 4.2:** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

**1 Thessalonians 5.14:** Encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

Our goal as Christians is to become more like Jesus who was remarkably patient with his disciples who so often failed to understand what he taught and who let him down time and time again.

So, growing in patience is essential to growing as a Christian.

I think Scripture commands us to be patient for another reason. God wants to make this world a better place one person at a time. And very often that means bearing with another person even when he or she is difficult, listening to their story, and trying to meet their needs.

And that's really hard to do when we're impatient and angry.

Another reason we need to learn patience is because

2. Impatience and anger are destructive forces in our lives.

Usually.

Sometimes anger is the right response, but that's when people are being mistreated and justice is being perverted, not when our pride is offended or the person eating across from us won't stop smacking his lips.

But impatience over little things or with things that are not in our control creates stress in our lives.

Here's a definition for impatience.

Impatience: Stress we inflict upon ourselves.

And it has negative physiological effects upon our bodies,  
it disrupts our sense of emotional well-being, and  
it makes us likely to lash out at others  
and do damage to our relationships.

Be impatient often  
and your wife and your children will withdraw from you,  
you'll be seen as difficult and unstable at work  
and you're likely to miss out on opportunities that might have come your  
way.

And the only friends you'll attract are guys  
who are as irritable and as irrational as you are.

So, why do we need to overcome impatience?

1. To honor God.
2. To have a life that is whole and healthy.

## HOW DO WE OVERCOME IMPATIENCE?

Lots of information here,  
probably too much.

Hopefully one or two of these will speak to you  
and be helpful.

1. Adopt realistic expectations.

We can save ourselves a lot of grief if we quit expecting life to be different  
than it is.



We can think life should be fair,  
 people should be thoughtful and  
 the world ought to revolve around us.

But life is not fair.  
 Ask Jesus or Peter or Paul.

People will continue to be people –  
 we can call them jerks if we want to –  
 but people are not going to change their natures.  
 Sometimes they will be thoughtful.  
 But often they will be as fixated on their own needs as we are on ours  
 and they'll be as oblivious to our concerns as we are to theirs.

Remember the passage we looked at last week from Romans 7.  
 Paul puts this in the first person.  
 But he's describing the human condition.

**From Romans 7:** I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right,  
 but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. I want to do what is good, but I don't.  
 I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. Oh, what a miserable man I am!

We all have a sinful nature.  
 We all act in ways we don't want to act  
 and treat people differently than we want to treat them.

And "we all" includes your wife, your children, your boss, your co-workers,  
 your friends and everyone else you will ever deal with.  
 They all possess a selfish, sinful nature.

You and I – we need to change our expectations.  
 People are not suddenly and miraculously going to be totally sanctified  
 so that they are totally Christlike, sinless and without any vestiges of selfishness

People have bad days.  
 People get overwhelmed.  
 People struggle with self-centeredness the same way we do.  
 Expect them to be different  
 and you're setting yourself up for disappointment, frustration and anger.

As far as the cosmos bending to our will  
and doing what we think it should do –

the author Stephen Crane whom most of us know from his American classic,  
“The Red Badge of Courage,” wrote a poem bearing the name of its first line.

Stephen Crane:

A man said to the universe:

“Sir, I exist!”

“However,” replied the universe,

“The fact has not created in me

A sense of obligation.”

The universe feels no compulsion to treat you the way you desire  
or the way you think it should.

And, frankly, neither does God.

Everyone else on the planet has already determined  
that you are not the center of the universe  
and they do not need to revolve around you and your needs.

Today might be a good time  
for you to come to the same conclusion and  
adjust your expectations accordingly.

You want to become more patient.

Accept the fact that:

life is not fair,

people are often self-obsessed sinners, and

the universe is not impressed that you exist.

Being human is a tough gig.

Of course, there are moments of wonder and beauty and grace.

I don't want you to miss those.

I don't want you to become a pessimistic and cynical.

But it's important that we're realistic with our expectation.

## 2. Accept responsibility for your emotions.

Who is responsible for the way you feel?

Not the driver in the other car that doesn't move when the light changes.

Not the person who puts you on hold and leaves you there.

Not the clerk at the store who doesn't understand  
what you're asking for.

Not your wife who when you park at the mall,  
is evidently surprised that you're there already  
and needs ten minutes  
to look for her shoes,  
open her purse, and  
go on a scavenger hunt to  
find her lipstick and apply it,  
take a last swig of her drink and  
straighten her blouse  
while you're waiting for her to get out of the car so you can lock it.

Who's responsible for the way you feel?

You are.

I don't say that to blame and shame you.

I say this to empower you.

As long as you think you're impatient because of  
another person,  
an unpleasant situation,  
bad service or  
something you spent good money on that's not working right –  
as long as you think your emotions are controlled by something out there  
you'll give away the power you have in here  
to change how you feel and to react differently.

If impatience was caused by what's going on out there,  
we'd all become impatient at the same things to the same degree.

But we react differently.

Why?

Because impatience is caused by what's going on inside of us.  
And we must accept responsibility for that.

That leads to:

3. Decide that you can control your emotions.

If while you're fuming outside your car waiting  
on your wife to powder her face,  
and a buddy pulls up next to you,  
what happens?

Your disposition changes immediately.  
You smile and  
you have a pleasant conversation.

Why?  
Because you can control your emotions.

You are not a microwave oven,  
people can't just press your buttons  
and you have to heat up and go off.

You have a mind,  
you have a will, and  
you have the ability to control your emotions.

You know who taught us this?  
Our old friend Terry Tate,  
Office Linebacker.  
This is from years ago,  
so I'll just show you a brief clip.

**Terry Tate Office Linebacker clip**

Sure, we all get triggered.  
 Something happens and we get upset.  
 That's not the issue.  
 It's how long we hold onto our anger  
 and what we do with it.

And you have the ability to recognize when you get triggered  
 and you have the power to let go of your anger  
 and change how you feel and how you react.

#### 4. Change how you think.

We tend to believe how we feel determines how we think.  
 But it's the opposite.  
 How we think determines what we feel.  
 How you see a situation or another person  
 will determine how you react

There are people who can't tell a story to save their lives.  
 They don't seem to comprehend the concept  
 that stories have a beginning and an ending,  
 and in between there's supposed to be something  
 that connects the beginning and the ending  
 that is coherent and intelligible.

Do you become impatient with the person who doesn't seem to get that?

Depends how you see them,  
 what you think about them.

If you see him as that insufferable bore  
 who is always stopping you and talking about nothing  
 when you're late for a meeting,  
 yeah, you'll get ticked.

But someone could tell the same story in the same lame way  
 and you wouldn't be bothered at all if you were thinking:

“My three-year old granddaughter is so adorable  
 when she gets excited and wants to tell me a story.”  
 If you’re thinking that,  
 you’ll laugh and give her a hug when she’s done.

Or if you’re thinking,  
 I remember when my mother was the brightest, funniest person in our whole  
 family.  
 Now, she’s 91 and has dementia  
 and I never thought I’d see this day.  
 You’d probably tear up as she struggles to get her story out,  
 hold her hand,  
 pull in close,  
 help her with a few details, and  
 kiss her on the forehead when she’s done.

Or if you’re thinking,  
 “My friend has never been the same since that stinking car accident.  
 God, how I hate this for him  
 and for his family.”  
 You’d listen  
 and you’d laugh or smile or wince,  
 whatever the response is you think he wants  
 no matter how many times he tried to tell you that story.  
 And you’d say a prayer for him and his wife and his kids.

You might get a little frustrated in each of those scenarios,  
 but impatient – probably not.  
 Or if you did,  
 you wouldn’t let it change how you reacted.

Why?  
 Because you’re thinking,  
 “She or he is doing the best they can.”  
 You’re thinking,  
 “Here’s someone who needs love.”  
 You’re thinking,  
 “Here’s a chance for me to be a little more like Jesus.”

How about this?

Just about everyone who irritates you –  
not the guy who's stabbing you in the back  
or trying to make you look bad at work –  
but the person who irritates you,  
even a teenage or young adult child who's making your life pretty darn tough,  
just about everyone who irritates you  
is doing the best they can,  
needs love, and  
is giving you a chance to be a little more like Jesus.

Brent Parker, our pastor at our Woodforest Campus –  
shout out to you guys at Woodforest who are watching this on video –  
Brent has the church there repeat a benediction,  
I believe each week.

**Woodforest Benediction:** Wherever we go, whomever we meet, remember to be  
kind and gentle, thoughtful and gracious. For we do not know the burdens others  
may bear in their hearts, in their minds, or in their bodies. We are the Body of Christ.

Most people are doing the best they can.  
And everybody is carrying something in their hearts, in their minds or in their  
bodies.

So be patient.  
Most people even the ones who are irritating,  
are doing the best they can,  
need love and  
are giving you a chance to be like Jesus.

## 5. Redefine winning.

What's a win for you?

Is it getting your way?

Is it

proving that you're right,  
 putting someone in his place,  
 making someone who irritates you feel small,  
 demonstrating your dominance?

If that's a win for you,

you probably don't need to worry about being patient.

Being impatient will probably help you get that win.

You can watch this in action in a scene from Planes, Trains and Automobiles.

Steve Martin has had all he can take,

and he decides he's going to win.

**Clip: Planes Trains and Automobiles.**

If that's a win for you –

giving into anger and impatience is a great way to go.

But if a win for you is being more like Jesus.

Then you're playing a different game and

Your win is self-control.

Your win is being kind to a difficult person.

Your win is being gracious to someone who is a thoughtless boor.

Your win is loving someone with the love of Jesus

who is as difficult to love as you are.

Play that game.

Make that your goal.

Not conquering a city,

but controlling your spirit.



6. Do something about the things that irritate you repeatedly.

It's ok to have boundaries.

It's ok to tell someone,

I'd really appreciate it if you wouldn't do that.

Being patient doesn't mean you're a doormat  
or that you can't speak up for yourself.

This is especially true if it's not some minor irritation  
but you're being taken advantage of.

Do it when you're not triggered or angry.

Think through what you want to say.

Don't accuse or attack.

You'll either love this story or think I'm a complete jerk.

Or both.

When I returned to this church 18 years ago,  
one of the first people to schedule an appointment with me  
was a woman I'll call Judy.

She said she wanted to learn how to pray for me and my family.

I told my admin to schedule a 45 minute appointment.

When I told people I was meeting with her,  
pastors and admins on staff rolled their eyes and said,  
"OK, I guess it's your turn."

I didn't know that when Stew Grant came on staff a couple of years earlier,  
another pastor brought this same woman by his office,  
smiled and pointed at her and said,  
"Stew, black hole of need.  
Be careful, black hole of need."

We sat down in my office,  
and after 90 seconds of telling her about my family,  
she launched into all the things she was doing  
and all the ways she wanted me to help her,  
none of which I had any interest in doing.

I realized what was going on immediately.  
I remember looking at the clock over her shoulder  
and thinking, “Dear Jesus, I’ve got to smile and count to 60  
43 times before this is over.”

This woman always had a project for you.  
And she would do her best,  
in the nicest way possible,  
to let you know how disappointed she was that you hadn’t done  
what she asked as quickly or as thoroughly as she had hoped you would.

Finally, I had a little conversation with her.  
Judy,  
I know y’all are having some problems with your son.  
If I can help y’all, I want to.  
But other than that I’d like our conversation to be  
Hello, how are you doing?  
Fine, how are you doing.  
I never want you to give me another task  
and I never want to hear again how disappointed you are that I haven’t  
done what you want me to do.  
Got it?

I wasn’t mean,  
but I was firm.  
She wasn’t likely to change  
and God had not called me into a co-dependent relationship with her.  
So I felt fine setting a boundary with her.

Jerk or hero?  
You decide.

But I will tell you that when I told another pastor on staff what I did,  
he said, “Can you write that down for me?  
I’m going to use that the next time I see her.”

You can tell your wife, your children, your parents  
 that there's something they do  
 that isn't working for you.

You can tell your co-worker,  
 "Tom, I enjoy talking with you,  
 but there are going to be times when you come into my office  
 that I'm going to need to focus on work and  
 I'll need to tell you that now's not the best time.  
 I hope you understand."

If it's a wife or a child,  
 you can't tell them  
 "I find you irritating  
 and don't want anything more to do with you."

But relationships do not get better  
 because we don't talk about the problems.  
 They get worse,  
 we get frustrated  
 and we grow impatient.

Talk about your problems.  
 Ask people to change.  
 Set boundaries.

7. When you're triggered, gather yourself.

**George Jean Nathan:** No man can think clearly with his fists clenched.

When you find yourself getting upset,  
 unclench your fists physically, mentally and spiritually.

Physically, take some deep breaths,  
 release the tension in your body –  
 shake it out –  
 and if need be, remove yourself from the situation.

Mentally, ask yourself,  
“Is this really important?  
Is this about a principle or is this about my ego?  
Is it imperative that I get this, say this, do this right now?”  
If not,  
let it go.

Spiritually,  
say a prayer for yourself and for the person who is irritating you.

Last week, I’m coming out of Kroger.  
It’s late at night.  
Another guy is walking towards the door.  
Never seen him before in my life.

I smile and nod.  
He calls me a 7-letter word that starts with an a.  
I’ll give you a second to do the math.  
Yep, that’s it, you got it.

I got a little bothered.  
“What did I do?  
The nerve of that guy.  
What a jerk.”

I got in my car,  
took a breath,  
thought: maybe he’s had a bad day  
or he misunderstood what my little nod and smile meant.

And, ok this makes me look good –  
but I usually tell you about the times  
that I look like an idiot or a jerk –  
I said a prayer for the guy.

It's hard to stay irritated with someone  
when you have prayed,  
"Father,  
Help that guy with whatever is bothering him.  
Pour out your love on him and  
give him every good thing."

Let me end with this.

Most things in life that are truly important  
cannot be rushed.  
Things that really matter usually don't happen in a moment –  
they happen over a lifetime.

Character can't be rushed.  
Integrity can't be rushed.  
Being a good father can't be rushed.  
Being a real friend can't be rushed.  
Being a great husband cannot be rushed.

Falling in love can happen in a second  
but creating a truly loving relationship with another person  
that takes a lifetime  
of patiently putting another person first,  
overlooking their irritating habits,  
forgiving their mistakes, and  
asking them to forgive you when you're the one that failed.

Becoming more like Jesus  
that cannot be rushed.

Patience makes all the things we really want possible.  
And patience cannot be rushed.