

Lesson 8

Patience, Kindness, Goodness

Galatians 5:22 says “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness...” At first it might seem impossible to live a life characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. But God has called us to this high standard, and He has given us the power through His Holy Spirit to actually live this kind of life. As we continue to grow in our relationship with God and obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we will see these qualities develop and blossom. It’s part of Christian maturity — and it only comes with constant obedience: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

Patience

Sometimes what we describe as patience really isn’t patience at all. A mother struggling with six highly active, boisterous young children is not necessarily patient. At that moment she might be self-controlled or easygoing — or even just tolerant. But patience requires an anticipated or desired end, a goal. [It could be argued, however, that the harried mother is patiently waiting for her children to grow up and leave home!] Patience is not an uncaring, apathetic, “come-what-may” attitude toward life. Patience is what sustains us in the process of moving to an anticipated end. Patience constantly looks to the goal, however far off it might seem.

First, *patience requires a reliance on God*. As Christians, all our goals should be centered on God and His promises. What are some of the promises we confidently rely on God to bring about?

Psalm 27:13-14

Habakkuk 3:16

Romans 8:23-25

Philippians 1:6

James 5:7-8

2 Peter 3:9

To truly have patience we must have confidence in three things: God's wisdom, God's control and God's timing. When we're undergoing difficult circumstances, it's easy to blame God for them. Instead, we must realize that in God's wisdom, there is a goal, a desired outcome that God is trying to achieve. He knows what is best for us and for the advancement of His Kingdom. What do you learn from these verses about God's wisdom and His purpose for trials in our lives?

Proverbs 3:5-6

Isaiah 55:8-9

1 Corinthians 1:20, 25

2 Corinthians 1:3-6

2 Corinthians 1:9-10

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

James 1:2-4

God's wisdom often conflicts with our own. What we think is best is usually the easy road, but God often leads us down the path that forces us to trust Him more and to grow in our Christian character. Knowing that God is wiser than we are helps us to be patient. Likewise, it also helps to know that God is in control. Not every event in life is carefully orchestrated by God to bring about some desired end. Some events are the consequences of human decision or disobedience, or they are the direct result of evil in the world. Though we don't always understand why God allows some difficulties to occur, we do know that He is ultimately in control. Write out Romans 8:28 to remind yourself that God can take even bad circumstances and cause good to come out of them:

Sometimes we understand what God is trying to do and we realize He is in control, but we grow frustrated because it seems to take God so long. Patience requires us to trust God's timing. How do these verses help you understand God's timing?

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 11a

2 Peter 3:8

The NIV Study Bible offers this insight on 2 Peter 3:8 (p. 1903):

"God does not view time as humans do. He stands above time, with the result that when time is seen in the light of eternity, an age appears no longer than one short day, and a day seems no shorter than a long age. Since time is purely relative with God, he waits patiently while human beings stew with impatience."

The book of proverbs offers some interesting insights into patience and the lack of it. What do you learn from these verses?

Proverbs 14:29

Proverbs 15:18

Proverbs 16:32

Did you notice the correlation between a lack of patience and anger? Think for a moment about what causes you to lose your temper or to become angry. For most of us, anger arises when we don't understand why something happens, when we can't control someone or something, or when things don't happen according to our timetable. The patient person is not easily angered because he or she has learned to trust God in all three of these areas.

Patience involves a reliance on God, but *patience also involves constant activity*. There are times when God commands us to stop striving and to wait on Him, but "patience" rarely connotes idle waiting. Read James 5:7-8. James illustrates patience by describing the farmer who must wait for the autumn and spring rains. The farmer is patient, but he's certainly not idle. He fertilizes, waters and cares for his crops, trusting God to bring about the goal — a bountiful harvest. There is constant work involved. And so it is with patience. In the New Testament the words patience and endurance are often found together, which indicates a struggle, hard work or toil. In some senses, patience is trusting that our steadfast work will bring about the desired response, but realizing the ultimate harvest depends on God. Just because the farmer follows all the time-tested rules of farming does not guarantee that God will bless his efforts, but not doing those things would almost guarantee failure. For example, suppose a man has a son with whom he consistently shares the Gospel. He sets a godly example, takes him to church often and spends much time trying to establish a loving relationship with him. The father waits patiently (albeit actively) for God to move in his son's heart and for his son to accept Christ. His actions don't insure success — His son still might grow up to reject Christ and to lead a life of sin. But neglecting all these activities would certainly make the prospect of his son reaching the desired end a lot slimmer. The father is not displaying a lack of faith or reliance on God or patience to work so hard on his son. His patience is just being expressed by what he does.

So far we've looked at patience primarily as it applies to circumstances or to waiting for God. When it comes to people, *patience is closely associated with caring*. It is difficult to have patience with a person (the kind of patience that results in action, that is) if we don't value that person. In fact, our level of patience is usually directly proportionate to how much we care about someone. It is easy to become impatient with the careless driver who cuts us off in traffic — unless, of course, that driver happens to be our own son or daughter driving alone for the first time.

What insights do these verses give on having patience with people?

Ephesians 4:2

Proverbs 19:11

1 Thessalonians 5:14

Sometimes our patience with those we love the most — family members and other Christians — is lacking. It could be because we take these people for granted or don't really care enough. But more often than not it's because we misunderstand the meaning of patience. It involves rebuking and correcting and training. It is *not* sitting by idly, hoping God will fix everything in His time. If we truly care about others, we will display an active patience toward them, not a passive apathy.

Patience is the direct result of the Holy Spirit working in your life. You can't manufacture it on your own. Patience is an inner calm in the midst of turmoil that comes only as we rely on God and trust Him to perform His will. But patience also makes us active, and it comes from a sincere love for others. It is the product of the Holy Spirit working in you: the fruit of the Spirit. If you're a Christian walking in step with the spirit, this kind of patience should be evidenced in your life.

Kindness

In the New Testament there are four words translated “kind.” The first primarily means “good” — a basic goodness displayed to other people. This word is used in 1 Thessalonians 5:15 and Titus 2:5. The second word is often translated “gentle” and means “affable or mild.” Instead of quarreling, it says in 2 Timothy 2:24, we should be kind to everyone — we should display a certain gentleness. The third word, for which the city of Philadelphia is named, means “brotherly love” and is used in 2 Peter 1:7. Kindness could be described as “love in the little things.”

But “kindness” in Galatians 5:22 (translated “gentleness” in the King James Version) has a much deeper meaning. The word means “usefulness” or “moral excellence in character or demeanor.” This form of kindness is a quality of the regenerated life — it is a fruit of the spirit. It is only attainable through the Spirit at work in us.

Kindness is usefulness. What do these verses say about how God reveals His message to the world?

Acts 1:8

Romans 10:14

2 Corinthians 2:14-15

2 Corinthians 3:2-3

2 Corinthians 5:19b-20

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8

2 Timothy 4:17

God, in His infinite wisdom has chosen to use people as the primary vehicle through which His message is made known to the world. In order for us to be useful in God's work, we must be actively doing something. "Kindness" is love in action; it is love made useful. First Corinthians 13:4 tells us that love is kind. It's not enough just to "feel" loving or to love from a distance. Kindness is where the rubber hits the road, where love comes into action in all the little things of life. According to these verses, how does God want us to be kind (useful)?

Proverbs 12:25

Proverbs 14:21

Proverbs 14:31

Proverbs 19:17

Mark 9:41

Acts 28:2

Ephesians 4:32

1 Thessalonians 5:15

God wants to use us to show compassion to others, to meet the needs of the poor and to minister to needs. Our acts of kindness make us useful. We become the arm of God to a needy world.

Kindness is moral excellence. In Galatians 5:22, the word “kindness” means usefulness. It also means moral excellence in both our demeanor (in what we do) and in our character (in what we are). Write out your insights from the following verses.

2 Corinthians 6:3-4a, 6

Ephesians 4:1

Philippians 1:27

Colossians 1:10

Colossians 3:12

2 Peter 1:5-8

As Christians, God has called us to a very high standard. We are called to live lives that are worthy, to act as servants and to be kind because we are “God’s chosen people.” We have been called to moral excellence. When we treat someone unkindly by speaking harshly, treating them unfairly, or by being rude or unfriendly, we can actually create a stumbling block for them (thereby diminishing our usefulness) and discredit our ministry (2 Corinthians 6:3-6). Everything we do should be kind. Kindness puts the other person first; it seeks to build up rather than cut down; it always searches for ways to help others. Kindness must be expressed in our every action.

But kindness is deeper than just social courtesy. It is also moral excellence in our character — in what we are and in what we think. This is what distinguishes the Christian from the philanthropist. You see, when we become Christians we’re not just changed on the outside. Becoming a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) involves a renewing of everything on the inside, including our minds (Romans 12:2). Our character is completely changed. True kindness is moral excellence, and it is only possible when the Holy Spirit is working within us. Though the philanthropist may be morally upright, only a Christian can be morally excellent.

Read Ephesians 4:29-32. Paul says that we are to watch what comes out of our mouths and to get rid of bitterness, rage, slander, and the like. Instead, we are to be kind and compassionate. What Paul is really saying is, “Be morally excellent.” A kind person doesn’t involve himself in speech that tears others down (including coarse jokes, racial slurs or profanity), because the mouth speaks out of the overflow of the heart (Luke 6:45). He doesn’t harbor poor attitudes that result in hatred and malice. Moral excellence must reach down into what we are and what we think. How important are our thoughts and about what should we be thinking?

Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28

2 Corinthians 10:5

Philippians 4:8

Hebrews 3:1

Romans 2:4 tells us that it is the kindness of God (love expressed) that will draw men to repentance. When we display the kindness of God to others — not just in our actions, but also in our attitudes and thoughts — people will be drawn to our God. And then we are truly useful to the Master. Whenever the fruit of the Spirit is evidenced in our lives, it makes us fruitful, and the result is that others are saved.

Goodness

A mistake that is commonly made is to interpret Galatians 5:22-23 as a recipe of distinct and separate ingredients (e.g., a cake consists of flour, sugar, salt, baking soda, eggs, etc.). These verses don't tell us what goes *in* to make something, but what comes *out* (a cake is good, tasty, satisfying, sweet, etc.). Paul's nouns are actually acting as adjectives, describing the Christian life lived through the Holy Spirit. And they're not easily separated, they're not distinctly different. They overlap in meaning, yet each brings another aspect of the Christian life to light. And so it is with goodness; it cannot be easily separated from kindness. Instead, it is goodness that energizes kindness; it is goodness that makes kindness possible. The concept of moral excellence (kindness) and truth ("love cannot be

divorced from truth") are inherent in the term "goodness." What do these verses teach about goodness?

Romans 12:9

Romans 12:21

Romans 15:14

Ephesians 5:9-11

Goodness implies a zeal for truth. To be "good" automatically means we should hate what is evil or wrong, that we should rebuke, correct and discipline, and that we should seek truth. Sin should be repugnant to the very nature of a Christian, because it is contrary to everything that God created us to be in Christ. But this "goodness" is not passive. When Jesus threw the moneychangers out of the temple (Luke 11:15-17), He gave us a strong example of goodness. He could have passed them by and proceeded to worship God, but He was "good" in the truest sense, so He had to show His (and God's) contempt for their disregard of God's law. John 2:17 says that after Jesus cleared the temple, "His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'" Goodness always takes a stand for what is right, because it is zealous for the truth.

Christians are often accused of trying to impose their standards on others. But the motivation behind condemning sin doesn't come from wanting to deny people their rights or to prove we are somehow superior. We know that the penalty of sin is death, and because we have "goodness" we don't want others to suffer the consequences of sin. The fruit of the Spirit is a "goodness" that makes us morally excellent, and that excellence is energized into a zeal for truth and righteousness.

The Old Testament word that corresponds to “goodness” in Galatians 5:22 adds a new dimension to our understanding of the word. In the Hebrew, this *goodness describes a quality of life*. It means to be good in the widest sense and is translated as goodness, beauty, gladness, welfare, bountiful, cheerful, at ease, joyful, kindness, loving, merry, pleasant, abundant and prosperity. Look up these Old Testament verses. What do they reveal about the quality of life that comes from serving God?

Psalm 23:6

Psalm 31:19

Jeremiah 31:12, 14

Jeremiah 33:9

God bestows His goodness on His people. No verse in the New Testament captures this concept better than John 10:10. Write out the entire verse:

Christ came to give us an abundant life: a life that is fulfilling and satisfying; a life that is rich; a life that is a bountiful treasure; a life that is like a well springing up within our souls. When the Holy Spirit has control over our lives, there is a goodness that He brings to it. The fruit of the Spirit is goodness — a richness of life.

If the purpose of the fruit of the Spirit is to make us fruitful so that others will be drawn to Christ, then it is easy to see why this kind of goodness is so vital to our witness. As others see our lives of goodness (lives filled with peace, love, joy and abundance), and see that we are fulfilled and satisfied, they will want to know our Savior. Each aspect of the fruit of the Spirit we've studied so far has had an "active" aspect to it. So it is with goodness. Since it is God's goodness that is bestowed on us, our goodness should be bestowed on others. Because of our goodness, other people should be made glad, at ease, joyful, kind, loving and pleasant. Their lives should be more abundant because of us. As the Holy Spirit works through us others will be affected. Think for a moment how we tend to behave when we're in the presence of someone "good." Our behavior is usually somewhat modified, as is our attitude and perhaps our speech. Our quality of life for that moment seems to change. That's what should happen to others when they come in contact with us.

We can't give goodness to others unless we first have it ourselves. Take a few minutes to examine your own life. Are you morally excellent? Are you zealous for truth? Do you hate what God hates? What is the quality of your life? Is it rich and satisfying? Are you cheerful, loving, kind, at ease and pleasant? Is your life spiritually prosperous and abundant? What is your impact on the lives of others? Do you enrich their lives? When people leave you, are they more cheerful, loving and kind? Jesus said that we would be recognized by our fruit. How are you doing? "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).