



A teacher had just finished putting the last pair of galoshes on her first-graders – 32 pairs in all. The last little girl said, **“You know what, teacher? These aren’t my galoshes!”**

The teacher smiled, leaned down and removed them from the girl’s feet. Then the little girl continued, **“They are my sister’s, but she let me wear them today.”**

Without missing a beat, the teacher mildly leaned down again and quietly put them back on the child’s feet.

Now that’s patience!

Every morning I eat instant oatmeal. And I want it pretty quick once I get up. I want it...instantly.

I am not much more patient at the Burger King drive thru. I want my two junior whoppers...in less than five minutes from order to pick-up.

You know, their slogan used to be...Your Way, Right Away. Let’s get back to that “right away” part.

Being patient is not a strength of mine.

I even had a friend sing to me Herb the Snail song...“Have Patience.” **“Have patience, have patience/ Don’t be in such a hurry/ When you get impatient, you only start to worry/ Remember, remember that God is patient, too/ And think of all the times when others have to wait for you.”**

She took too long to sing it.

So, I am not a patient person.

Which doesn’t really bother me until I am reminded how central patience is in the spiritual life. Growing takes a long time. Growing into Christlikeness...even longer.

It’s a marathon not a sprint, I’ve heard it said. But what if you are a sprinter!?

My lack of patience is not the best part of my story, but because of God it isn’t the end of my story either.

Paul’s story reminds us of this and gives us some really good news about patience.

That good news we need to hear? That represents the WHOLE story...? The good news, what completes and makes whole our story...**is that God is patient.** God is patient.

The good news is always who and what God does. In verse 13, Paul describes Christ as immensely patient. That’s really good news us!

It is through God’s patience that God helps even the greatest of sinners to become their best selves, Christ-like in living for the sake of others. The good news is that God is enormously patient with us, that’s our hope.

Again, to get a sense of God's patient commitment to us, this promise from Philippians chapter 1 verse 6,

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." God is patiently committed to us and in working in and through us.

There is no doubt in my mind that there are many people here today who are more patient than I am. Mostly because it wouldn't take much.

But I am guessing we probably all struggle a little in the patience department. Waiting at red lights, long lines at the grocery store, waiting on hold for customer service, or traffic jams.

And taking that a little bit deeper, that maybe even, at times, we know our impatience has been hurtful to others, harming our relationships.

Good friendships, deep relationships need slow moments and patient give and take. We may even have some regrets, a desire to have a do-over with more than one rushed conversation.

Therefore, maybe we would all benefit in looking at God's patient involvement in Paul's life. That we might be encouraged.

Being assured of this...that if God could patiently work out all those wonderful things in Paul's life, God's patient involvement can and is doing wonderful things in MY life too.

In 1 Timothy 1:12-17, we have only part of Paul's story. It is a story of stark contrasts, and gratitude all made possible by Christ's immense patience with Paul.

A little on the contrasts in 1st Timothy. Paul is writing as an ...ahem/cough...old Christian leader to a younger Christian leader, Timothy. A mentor to a mentee. One is soon to be exiting life and ministry and the other is just entering his life of ministry.

Paul's conversion experience is also a huge contrast. He had a very public conversion.

On that road to Damascus, Paul was full of murderous rage and rushing to do evil. But the Lord lovingly stopped him in his tracks. And then the Lord called him into service.

Paul describes his radical conversion from number one persecutor of the church to its chief supporter. Complete about face, a 180 degree turnaround! From 100% oppressor to 100% advocate, in an instant. Thankfully you can't get whiplash from someone's story.

But then Paul gives us another clear and glaring contrast. The contrast of Paul's sinful undeserving life with the goodness of God.

At one time Paul had been focused on killing. But God determined his patience and grace would prevail in Paul's life.

And here, as Paul reflects on his life, he is very aware of God's goodness to him.

In verse 15, Paul encourages Timothy to embrace this next line fully, when Paul wrote in contrast, **"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst."**

Some say that Paul is being a bit dramatic, claiming he is the worst. But he was a murderer and recruited others to murder men, women and children.

Maybe he is exaggerating a bit, but for us. Granted I don't know everyone yet, but I feel pretty safe to say Paul's sins as a mass murderer would top our list.

But we begin to see Paul's gratitude. Paul understands he is unworthy of God's salvation, unworthy of receiving God's mercy or the abundant grace he knows the Lord has poured out into his life.

He knows he is undeserving of being called and strengthened to speak for God and serve others in Christ's name.

But Paul is grateful too.

We probably resonate with these sentiments of Paul's. We can relate. We are not worthy and yet we are grateful too.

But he also realizes, and this is main point of our text, Christ worked in his life this way SO THAT others looking to Christ would be encouraged.

Anyone else looking to Christ, anyone else aware of their sinfulness, willing to receive Christ...would be encouraged by Paul's experience with God.

They would be encouraged that if Christ showed immense patience in Paul's life; maybe the Lord would do it again for me? We could trust we would receive that same abundant grace, that same powerful mercy and that same immense patience.

Has Paul's experience become our own? Have we received from God?

Have we experienced God's goodness, grace, and love? Identifying with Christ's immense patience in our own lives?

I hope so.

Because you can.

Nothing is stopping us, but us.

It should not be surprising to any of us that immediately after Paul shared of Christ's mercy, grace, and immense patience that Paul breaks out in spontaneous praise.

He praises God with. **"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever."** Yes! Paul's immense gratitude moves him to exuberant praise.

Maybe something is stirring in us, in the same way.

God's plan for redemption includes you! There is nothing too sinful, too shameful or too painful in your past or your present that God's love and grace can't reach.

We might need to be patient with God as he works this out.

And just as a quick aside, for those who are thinking about sharing a story verbally or writing down a paragraph or two for next Sunday, November 19th. To share a story where God broke into your life or saved you from your own junk or brought you through a storm.

Paul gives us a good example to follow in retelling a story from our life. In keeping it short...here Paul uses two paragraphs and six full sentences. You can use more words, but it doesn't have to be more than half a page.

And then naming our shortcomings and sins briefly and in general and keeping it focused on Christ's goodness and grace.

And like Paul did, share a sentence of how God called you into a life of serving, to live for the sake of others, which Paul included as evidence of Christ's work in him.

How has your life shifted off yourself and shifted toward more of pouring out our lives for Christ, living for the sake of others.

Just a few pointers for your sharing your stories. It's a worthy exercise whether you hand it in or not.

God desires to use your life and stories, to inspire and encourage all those who hear it and assure them of the inexhaustible grace and immense patience that reside in our Lord.

We are called to tell the painful, as well as triumphant stories that are interspersed in our faith. Christ calls us to tell this story not that it may be used as a place of shame or self-deprecation.

We do this in the hope it may draw other imperfect souls into communion with a perfectly patient God.

One final encouragement to be patient and to place our full trust in Christ's immense patience towards us. Another contrast in Paul's life.

A light-hearted and delightful reminder we can trust in God who through immense patience is working out all things for our good.

Came across this quote...

Scarcely a greater contrast can be drawn than that between Paul and Nero. Nero was the Roman Emperor, seated on a throne while Paul was alive.

Nero was known throughout the empire. Paul was an obscure Jew, totally unimpressive in his physical appearance – he says so himself in his letters.

In a distant corner of the Roman Empire, Paul was a leader in a small, heretical sect that was known only as a group of troublemakers. Virtually no one had heard of Paul, while everybody had heard of Nero.

Isn't it interesting that now, over two thousand years later, we name our sons Paul and our dogs Nero?

Time of Reflection

As we move into some time to reflect...

What gratitude and worship is welling up in you...as you think of God's grace, mercy and immense patience at work in your life?