

Stepping Into God's Will When You Feel Out of Control

People have told me not to ask for patience. If you do, they say, God will teach it to you. The assumption, then, is that God will put you in situations where you are forced to go slowly, especially when you're in a hurry. And somehow, by forcing slowness onto our busy lives, we will learn patience.

But I'm not so sure learning patience is that simple. It is far deeper and more important than simply being OK not getting somewhere fast or getting something done quickly.

When God teaches patience, the lessons are usually done when we are forced to slow down our lives. Those lessons can be challenging, because when we must be patient, we realize that we are not in control. We're not in control of our life; we're not the one leading; we're not the one calling all the shots.

So, we wait.

But how we wait is important. This is where we either learn we don't.

So, God puts us in situations in life to teach us patience.

These are not the trite situations of:

- being stuck behind a driver who takes off slowly when a red light turns to green;
- getting stuck in rush hour on the highway;
- being in the slow lane at the grocery store checkout;
- waiting for your kids to get into the SUV when you're already five minutes late, even though you told them 15 minutes ago you would be leaving and they needed to get their things together.

These are the challenging places in life where:

- we are waiting far longer than we'd hoped for God's leading for a new job;
- waiting for God to lead us to that person we want to spend our life with;
- struggling to find an answer for our child's health issue and feeling helpless because a parent can do nothing to speed up the process;
- sitting in a hospital bed, longing for our body to heal quickly so we can get back to normal;
- there is a holding pattern of job, security, family and so on, and we see no way out.

And somehow, we're supposed to learn patience.

Yet, maybe in these situations, patience is not the goal?

The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 5:22 that one of the fruits of the Spirit is patience.

A fruit of the Spirit is produced when our lives more closely follow the way and will of God.

It is a visible attribute of someone who is becoming more and more like Christ.

Godly patience is not the fruit of the situation. It's not the fruit of the challenge. It's not the fruit of the waiting. Godly patience doesn't just come from enduring a situation.

Godly patience is the fruit of the Spirit, walking more and more closely with the Spirit.

Our having patience reflects who God is and how He relates to us. We can be thankful that our God is a patient God. He allows us, His creatures, who are slow learners, to take things at our pace, to have lessons repeated over and over, and sometimes allows us years to learn the lesson that He is trying to teach.

For in the situation where patience is needed, the Spirit

teaches us who God is:

- A sovereign God who leads in His perfect timing.
- A God who has the long perspective on things. (From Adam and Eve to Jesus—the Father decided 6,000 years would do just fine.)
- A God who has a deeper perspective.
- A God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- A God who is patient.

God puts us into situations where patience is needed, not to learn patience for patience's sake, but to draw us to Himself, to seek His face, and to have us learn to depend upon Him in the waiting.

The end goal is not patience. The goal of the situation is far deeper and more important than that. It is for us to put our trust in God, allow the Holy Spirit to teach us lessons of who God is, and work those lessons into our lives so that we might become more and more like our Father in heaven.

And in taking on the attribute of the patience of God, which must be learned in situations where we are forced to trust Him, forced to depend on Him, and forced to rely on Him.

That is when the fruit of the Spirit, patience, is grown and reflected in our lives. {eo}

Reprinted with permission from Strategic Renewal. Copyright ©2017 Jon Hoekema. All rights reserved. Jon has been pastor at Horizon Community Church in Downers Grove, Illinois, since December 2003. After spending five years in sunny southern California, the winters of Chicago were just too hard to resist! Jon and Cindy were married in August 1995 and they have four children—Katelyn, Kyle, Alyssa, and Jayson—who keep both of them busy. Pastor Jon is bivocational, co-owner of Friendly Stitches Sew & Vac.