

Another Spiritual Gift of Waiting: Patience

Isaiah 40:28-31

Rev. Ann LaMar

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While we wait for Pastor Todd to return, we are dipping our collective toes into a book Holly Whitcomb wrote about 10 years ago, entitled Seven Spiritual Gifts of Waiting. To refresh your memory a bit in case you've forgotten, or clue you in in case you weren't here last Sunday, the first spiritual gift of waiting is "Loss of Control." Loss of control teaches us to:

- Become interdependent – learn from each other so we can build bridges into new worlds;
- Grieve our losses in the moment, so they don't come back later to haunt us;
- And the third lesson losing control teaches us is to tap into our inner resilience.

Another spiritual gift of waiting is Patience. Giggle! Who's patient anymore? We learned that last week when we lost control. So let's play a little game; let's test our patience. We're going to wait, patiently, for one minute. You ready? GO!

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Finally! I don't know about you, but I have a hard time being patient while I wait . . . for anything. Sometimes I become so impatient that I charge off to do some multi-tasking, SOMETHING "productive" while I wait.

Once there was a little boy who grew impatient while he waited. Joey had found a caterpillar inching its way along a parsley stem in his family's garden: inch, munch, stretch, chew. Fascinated, he carefully picked it up and took it in the house to show his mother. He asked if he could keep it, and she said he could if he would take good care of it.

So Joey got a huge jar from the cabinet and put parsley sprigs in the jar for the caterpillar to eat, and for good measure added a stick for it to get some exercise. First thing every morning and right after school each afternoon, Joey brought it new parsley sprigs. Then one day the caterpillar climbed up the stick, attached itself to the underside, and started shaking. Joey called to his mother who figured it out (mothers are good at figuring things out!): The caterpillar was creating a cocoon, beginning the process of metamorphosis to change into a butterfly.

Joey knew the changes his caterpillar would go through. So he watched every day, waiting for the butterfly to emerge. One day a small hole appeared at the bottom of the cocoon and the butterfly started to struggle its way out. At first he was excited, but soon became alarmed. What he thought would be the butterfly was struggling so hard, but couldn't get out! This caterpillar-turning- butterfly seemed to be in big trouble!

Joey was so concerned he decided to help. He ran to get the scissors, and then walked slowly back (because he had learned not to run with scissor). He took the lid off the jar, pulled out the stick and carefully snipped the bottom of the cocoon to make the hole bigger. The butterfly fell right out, but it didn't look quite like he had expected. It had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. Joey continued to watch expecting that any moment, the wings would dry out and it would look like the butterfly he expected.

But it didn't happen!

The butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings.

Poor butterfly never did fly...

Well, Joey wanted to know what went wrong. So his mother introduced him to a scientist from a local college where he learned that the butterfly was **SUPPOSED** to struggle. In fact, the butterfly's struggle to push its way through the tiny opening of the cocoon pushes the fluid out of its body and into its wings. Without the struggle, the butterfly would never, ever fly. Joey's good intentions hampered the butterfly's development; stunted its growth.

Being patient while we wait, struggling all the while, is part of life. The *struggle* provides for us 'the next right answer' about what we are to do, and we provide the *patience* to endure the struggle.

So what's involved in patience? Four components: Teaching; Opening; Giving; and Inviting

- **Patience teaches us** there is no quick fix
 - we'd like to think there are – these days we have super glue; instant messaging; instant pudding; express lanes at the store . . . the list has no end
 - however, in spite of the fast pace of life today, some things take time
- **Patience opens us** to *active waiting*
 - Helps to define what something IS by first saying what it is NOT
 - so the opposite of active is passive
 - when we're passive, we let others take over; make decisions for us
 - too often "patience" means long suffering
 - *active waiting* asks questions and seeks answers
 - it is assertive and relational
 - it is willing to give up control and enter unknown territory
 - active waiting calls for discipline > staying with – living through
 - listening carefully; overcoming fear of . . . whatever frightens us
- **Patience gives us** time to be available
 - we can either fret all by ourselves,
 - or use that time to spend with others.
- **Patience invites us** to trust the "fullness of God's time" > "God's time" is not our time
 - many scriptures have phrase "in fullness of time" or "when time was right"
 - think of a time when you had to wait for "the fullness of time"
 - a loan to be approved, a loaf of bread to rise
 - maybe pacing floor for baby's birth; someone to die > "walking them home"
 - did you later discover it was a good thing you waited?
 - might it have been a disaster if you had fought the waiting; pushed ahead?
 - almost every new class of "students" at the jail contains at least one person who says, "Coming to jail is the best thing that could have happened. It gave me time to think, to reconsider my priorities, to decide what I want to do with my life."
 - Words from Isaiah 40:28-31 remind us > waiting for "God's time" energizes us

Teaching us no quick fixes; opening us to active waiting; giving us time; inviting us to trust God's time

Words from Lao-tzu in his Tao Te Ching speak to patience.

Do you have the patience to wait
till your mud settles and the water is clear?
Can you remain unmoving
Till the right action arises by itself?

Patience. It's a spiritual gift God gives to us to restore our lives as we wait.