

“What Do You Want to Be Like When You Grow Up?—Patience and Kindness”

Today we're continuing the series where we're asking the question, "What do you want to be like when you grow up?" No matter what age you are right now, you are still in the process of becoming. And who you end up becoming down the road is being shaped today by what you do.

The foundation of what we're doing in this series comes from the writing of the Apostle Paul. He lists a series of characteristics that he calls the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Paul writes, "**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**" (Galatians 5:22-23). Paul is saying, "This is what you were made for."

We're made to live out the characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit. But if we don't cultivate them, we slide into other characteristics. If we don't nurture the fruits of the Spirit the natural drift is toward what Paul calls the works of the flesh. And he lists them: "**Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these**" (Galatians 5:19-21).

No matter where you are in life, no matter what age you are, no matter where you are in your spiritual journey, you're not done becoming. And a good thing to do a few times a year is to look back and ask yourself the question, "Am I in a better place today than I was a year ago? Have I grown in my spiritual maturity? In my knowledge? In my understanding? Do I see more evidence of these nine things called the fruits of the Spirit?" If the answer is yes, that's awesome, keep doing what you're doing. If the answer is no, then it's time to do more to cultivate these things or the drift to the works of the flesh will start.

Last week Pastor Mark took a look at three of the fruits of the spirit (love, joy and peace) and today we're going to take a look at 2 more, patience and kindness. So let's start with patience. Think about this for a second. If I were to talk to your spouse, or your best friend, or your kids, and I asked them, "Is he or she a patient person?" What would they say about you? For the most part, I think I am a pretty patient person. I'm very patient, except when I'm not. And there are several things that trigger my impatience.

For me, and lots of you, our patience breaks down, because we are swimming in a culture of instant gratification. We feel like it's a violation of our human rights to have to wait for anything. The internet just feed this. If you want music, you don't have to go anywhere, or wait at all. You can download it immediately, and you don't even need to sit at your computer, you can download it straight to your phone. You want to buy a book? You don't have to go to the bookstore, just download it instantly to your Kindle. Software? Download it right now.

This culture of immediate gratification puts us in a constant state of wanting everything in this moment. Some restaurants have to hit this head on. I've seen a few menus that have a little note at the bottom. Have you seen this? It says something like, "This is not fast food, it is good food. We are going to make your meal from scratch after you order it and it may take 25 minutes. If you can't wait that long there's a McDonalds down the road that would love your business." Because of this culture of instant gratification, we are set up to react harshly when things take more time.

By the way, the word patience in the New Testament comes from the Greek word that means long-tempered, or long-fused. And when we are impatient we are short-tempered or short-fused. That's when it doesn't take very much to agitate us, irritate us, or frustrate us.

One of the things I see in myself since the tornado is that my fuse has gotten shorter. It takes much less now to frustrate me or irritate. A good example was Zoe's 5th grade graduation. Her school, Irving, was destroyed and the graduation program was held at the South Middle School. We got there really early to get a seat but the program got started 45 minutes late. By that time my patience was a smidge thin. Someone apologized for starting late by saying, "Well we're all more understanding because of the tornado, so it's OK." It is? Because I didn't get that memo! I was coming unglued, because of the tornado I had 1,000 more things to do and less time than ever to do them!

Then there was no one there to run the sound, or lights, or video presentations. I finally got up and ran a spot light at the back because the entire stage was dark. And I was so mad. The video tape I took that night has me mumbling in the back ground, griping about everything. My impatience impaired that night for me.

Stress can shorten our fuses. Knowing that ahead of time can prevent us from doing something really stupid. Preparing ourselves for stressful situations can keep us from slipping into impatience.

Another trigger of impatience for me, and lots of you, is lack of margin. We try to cram too much stuff into our schedules and it results in a lifestyle that has no breathing room. There's no margin for error. About 90 percent of the time I'm a very patient driver. There is an exception to that. What is that exception? When I'm late. When I've overloaded my life and I've got three minutes in my schedule to get someplace that takes 15. That's when I lose it. That is when I lose my patience. When the guy in front of me doesn't move the nanosecond the light turns green and I think, "What are you doing! Come on!" That type of thing. When you live life with no margin, any little mismanagement will trigger impatience. This glass is a visual example. When you fill a glass with water what do you normally do? You leave some space at the top, right? Why do you leave that space at the top? Because you know that it could get bumped and if you fill it to the very top, and then you mismanage that cup a little bit, you've got spillage. When you schedule your life filled to the top, you have created situations that force spillage. And that spillage isn't harmless like water or a soda. The spillage that comes out is words of frustration. Regrettable action. Tense confrontation. All because you've overloaded; all because there is no margin in your life. That's an enemy of patience. To cultivate patience we have to ruthlessly build margin into our lives. We can no longer fill them to the top. God plants the seed of patience, we have to cultivate it.

Another enemy of my patience is rudeness. A while back I went into a local home supply store to return something that was defective—which in and of itself tries my patience. There's one person in front of me and four workers behind the counter. One is helping the other customer. None of the four acknowledge my existence. Now, I wasn't in a hurry. But I could feel the vein in my head popping out. When the worker finally got done with the customer in front of me, she never looked up, never acknowledged me as a being there. She just grabbed my item and the receipt and gave me my money. The only words the woman spoke were, "What's wrong with it?" I said, "It won't look me in the eye and acknowledge me!" NO, I didn't say that, but I thought it really loudly. But she never looked me in the eye. Rudeness tries my patience. And I know that I've been rude in the past and tried other people's patience and I regret that.

One last enemy of patience for me, is me. When I don't get what I want. When things don't happen when I want them to. When people don't get what I'm trying to say. I get impatient when people don't do something the way I want it done. I, I, I, I.

One researcher at the University of North Carolina found that a significant cause of our impatience is narcissism—focusing on ourselves. I don't want to be a narcissist—I hate that word! But when I look more closely at my impatience with other people, or in all kinds of situations, I recognize the narcissist in me. It's helpful to look at the root causes of some of these things, because I don't want to be a narcissist. And I don't want to be a fool. Ecclesiastes puts it this way, "**Patience is better than pride. Don't be quick tempered for anger is the friend of fools**" (Ecclesiastes 7:8-9, NLT). I hate both of those labels—narcissist and fool. I don't want to be impatient. So the question becomes, how?

In Colossians chapter 3 Paul asks the Colossians to be patient with one another, then he describes what it takes to be patient with other people. This is very important. Paul says if you want to be patient with each other then, "**Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love**" (Colossians 3:13-14).

This is important. Bear with each other—put up with each other. Recognize that nobody is perfect! C.S. Lewis said that if you spend three or four years with the same person after a while you will learn every tone of voice that grates on your nerves, every facial expression that irritates you. The longer you're around people the more things you find that irritate you and the only way to deal with that in any relationship is if you come to a place where you can forgive others and see beyond their shortcomings. And in order to do that you have to say, "I'm not perfect. I've got my issues too, and all those people around me, they have to

put up with me. So surely I can offer them grace and forgiveness. As many times as God has forgiven me, I can forgive others.”

A big part of patience is learning to reframe the situation. John Ortberg says that to cultivate patience in himself, when he's in the grocery store, there are times when he will pick out the longest checkout line. He intentionally goes to the line that's going to take 5 minutes longer. He says to himself, "What can I do with 5 minutes? I've got 5 minutes where I don't really have to do anything. I'm just here." So maybe you pray during that time, for the people on the cover of National Enquirer. They sure seem to need it! Or maybe you get out your Bible app on your smart phone and read a minute. Or maybe you just look around and say, "God, what do you want me to see right now?" Maybe you just breathe. That's a blessing, not a curse, that you have 5 extra minutes in the line. Reframe the situation.

Sometimes reframing takes the form of a prayer where, as your patience begins to wear thin, you ask, "God, please help me to see this person, this situation, the way you see it. Help me to respond how you would have me. If I look at this person, this situation, through my own eyes only, all I see is the problem. Help me to see with your eyes, with love, with forgiveness, with humility. Then I'll know what to do here." Peter wrote, "**The Lord is patient for your sake**" (2 Peter 3:9). God is patient with us, so we cultivate patience in ourselves toward others.

That thought allows us to move right into the next fruit of the spirit which is kindness. Kindness means being concerned about the people around me, concerned about their feelings, looking for ways to bless them.

The Greek word for kindness here isn't about some gigantic thing that you're going to do that's one grand act of kindness. It could be that, but it really points to small things. Sometimes we think that our lives are like a \$1,000 bill that's been given to us, to give away. And some of us think that we have to look for that one opportunity to lay down that \$1,000 dollar bill in one gigantic act of kindness. But the truth is that we're called to cash in that \$1,000 dollar bill for quarters that we give away every day, throughout each day, in simple and intentional acts of kindness.

Mother Teresa said, "**We can do no great things; only small things with great love.**" It's those small things done with great love that change the world; that make a difference in the life of someone. Small, intentional acts of kindness.

About 10 years ago I heard a man named John Maxwell speak at a conference. He's a renown business leader, Christian leader and author. Since then I've heard him speak several times at conferences and read some of his books. I really respect him. At one of his conference talks he described a habit he had taken on. It was the habit of building people up at every opportunity he had. At every encounter he had with somebody, people he knew or total strangers, he tried to do something or say something that would build that person up. Even if it was just a simple statement of affirmation. Since I heard John Maxwell talk about that, I've tried to do it as much as I can. There is so much in this world that brings people down and erodes their lives, I want to use my life to build others up, to strengthen them.

Well, two weeks ago as Janet and I were sitting down to watch a movie one night, and my cell phone rang. It was John Maxwell calling me from China! He had heard through a chain of friends about what we had been through here and he wanted to just encourage me and all of you. We talked for about 10 minutes and then he prayed for us. It was an act of kindness on his part to encourage us and build us up. How cool is that! He didn't have to do it. He doesn't know me at all. But he knew some folks down here needed some building up and he took time to express that kindness.

Whenever I'm in a restaurant, or business, or store, especially in any setting where someone is serving me, I try my best to build them up, because in those settings, where they're a waiter in a restaurant, or working in retail, they get beat down a lot. As Christians, when we're the ones being served, we look for ways to build others up. This is what the Apostle Paul is getting at when he teaches this: "**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others**" (Philippians 2:3-4).

He wrote, **Therefore encourage one another and build each other up...** (1Thessalonians 5:11).

These are everyday acts of kindness.

Proverbs 12:25 puts it this way, **“Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up” (Proverbs 12:25).**

Kindness is one of those traits that the Spirit of God brings into us, but we have to do our part and cultivate it. And here’s what happens when we put it into practice towards other people: It not only blesses them and changes their day, but it has a way of changing you.

A Stanford study in 2005 was done on students. They looked at the levels of happiness in these students before and after the study. Some of the students just went about their normal activities for the 6 weeks of the study. Some of the students were asked to do 5 intentional acts of kindness each week during the 6 weeks of the study. When they measured happiness at the end of the 6 weeks, you can guess who was more happy. The ones who practiced intentional acts of kindness.

Could this be one reason, when Jesus called his disciples to follow him, that he told them, “Do to others as you would have them do to you”? Because when we treat others with kindness the world changes dramatically and it blesses us. As we grow up, we’re meant to show more kindness, not less. Because we are growing more Christ-like.

I’ve got a long ways to grow when it comes to intentional acts of kindness, because, I get in the way. I get selfish, I worry about my time, I get very protective of me. But when I fail to practice intentional acts of kindness, I miss out. But as I grow up, I know what I want to be like.

On Wednesday I led the funeral for Bill Cook. A long time member here at Saint Paul’s. Part of our Spirit Force band since it started 13 or 14 years ago. A friend for almost 17 years. I’ve got to tell you that I am so thankful for the blessing he was because he modeled as good as anyone could, patience and kindness. One thing he was known for was helping his neighbors.

After his funeral a woman came up to me and said, “I was one of Bill and Pat’s neighbors. I have two little boys and their grandparents live a long ways away and their dad has to travel a lot with his job.” She said, “Bill was their stand-in grandpa. When he was mowing the yard my boys would run out to Bill and he would immediately stop mowing and say, ‘Boys get the soccer ball, let’s play!’” Then this woman got out her phone and started showing me pictures of the fort that Bill built for those boys. It was raised up off the ground, had windows, a slide, a rock climbing wall, everything a boy could want. Bill just did it—an intentional act of kindness. The woman said, “Whenever my husband would leave for a business trip, Pat and Bill would take me and the boys out to dinner at least once to keep us company.”

If you want to know what kindness looks like, that’s it. It looks like being a stand-in dad or grandpa, sometimes it looks like dropping everything and playing soccer, sometimes it looks like a fort for two little boys, sometimes it looks like taking somebody out to dinner when they need some company.

Paul wrote this to Titus as he was encouraging the Christians in Crete, **“I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone” (Titus 3:8).**

What do you want to be like when you grow up? I want have that kind of patience and kindness. Let’s let God do his part, let’s you and I do ours. Let’s change the world. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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