

PATIENCE UNWRAPPED

So here we go with the fourth fruit of the Spirit, patience, my speciality. Not really. My husband burst out laughing when I said I was writing about patience.

What is patience? Putting up with pain or some unpleasant thing calmly; persevering with something difficult because we know that the outcome will be worth it; waiting for something to happen when we have no idea when that might be.

I suppose that includes not moaning.

The Navy motto springs to mind. "Keep calm and carry on."

Here is a quote from the Greek philosopher Aristotle.

"Patience is bitter but its fruit is sweet."

Perhaps with the help of the Spirit it might be less bitter.

One of the hardest things is being patient when we are irritating each other. That might be happening a lot at the moment. What might normally be a small thing can be greatly magnified when we are together all the time. This is what the Bible says about that.

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

Ephesians 4 v 2

Even when we are really irritated by someone, we can always find things about him or her to love.

One good example of patience in the Bible is the story of Jacob and Rachel. Jacob waited and worked for seven years so that Laban would give him his younger daughter Rachel to be his wife. But Laban gave him his elder daughter Leah instead. Jacob then persuaded Laban to give him Rachel in return for another seven years work. Jacob was patient because he knew that the thing, or in this case the woman he was waiting for, was worth it.

Genesis 29 v 15-30

It is hard to imagine a similar situation nowadays. If a man and a woman want to be together, often they don't wait at all. Certainly not fourteen years. Is that a good thing?

There are two particular things that Christians need to learn to wait for patiently.

One is for our prayers to be answered in whatever way God chooses. It will be the right answer and will be worth waiting for.

This is from a psalm which was written by David.

"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

Psalms 27 v 14

David had many difficult issues in his life, not least the fact that King Saul spent much of his time trying to kill David because he was jealous of him. David had very strong faith and always believed that God would answer his prayers, even when things were not going so well.

In this world where we think that instant gratification, getting exactly what we want immediately, is our right, waiting patiently does not come naturally. Until recent global developments, the western world, at least, was moving breathtakingly fast. Waiting one minute for the phone to be answered felt like hours.

We need to have a different mind-set. God's timing is different from ours. He can see the whole world and all the past and all the future at the same time. He will answer our prayers in the best possible way. We can be totally relaxed and patient about that.

The other thing we have to wait patiently for, is the second coming of Jesus. Some people try to predict when he is going to come. The Jehovah's Witnesses keep making predictions about when this will be and keep getting it wrong.

It is definitely not our job to make predictions. All we should be doing is living our lives patiently, and in readiness, loving God and loving each other.

Here is a passage from the Letter of James. James is generally thought to be the brother of Jesus and was writing to Jewish believers in Jesus.

"Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged."

James 5 v 7-9

We have no excuse not to be patient. God is extremely patient with us. When we sin, he forgives us again and again. In the book of Exodus God tells Moses that he (God) is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness".

Exodus 34 v 6

And of course, we need patience and perseverance in our lockdown or semi lockdown, or whatever it is at the moment. We don't know what our lives will be like in a month, or a year, or indeed ten years. We need to be patient in what is a difficult time for most of us in different ways.

Shall we say a prayer?

Dear Lord

Please fill us with the Holy Spirit. Please give us patience in this strange situation. May we use our time wisely and productively and remember that you are in charge and you will bring something good out of this.

Amen