

Fruit That Is Always In Season: Patience 1 Timothy 1:15-16

Ah patience. Now that's a fruit of the Spirit that seems to be as rare and as valuable as real wasabi! Are there any Sushi eaters here today? I like certain kinds of Sushie and I like Wasabi, but real Wasabi is not cheap. Why? Because a **kilogram just over 2 pounds of raw wasabi goes for \$425**. In comparison, a kilogram or **2 pounds of apples is about \$3.50**.

Why is wasabi so expensive? It grows naturally in Japan but in rocky riverbeds—an environment that's hard to duplicate in a greenhouse or a farmer's field. **Plan on spending \$700,000 an acre to get your wasabi plantation up and running**. And then you'll have to wait over a year for the wasabi to mature, so you'll need patience if you want to see profits.

The Apostle Paul says that patience is something we Christians possess because the Holy Spirit is active in our lives producing it. **You and I have patience, we just don't use it very often (like that trombone I have hidden away in a closet)**. Those who practice patience are a joy to be around. They're also less stressed so wouldn't you like to become more patient? Let's find out how this is not only possible, but is also God's will for us. Listen to our text from 1 Timothy 1:15-16. **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”**

If I have to wait more than 30 seconds at a stoplight, I'll impatiently tap the steering wheel, as if this will make the light turn more quickly. When I am asked to repeat my email address over the phone to the customer service agent, I sigh as if I have just been asked to wash a week's load of laundry by hand. But that's just the way we are. Poor drivers make us nuts, and we get mad when the kids leave their craft material scattered across the floor.

Oh, but we can help this impatience. Have you ever been yelling at the kids when the phone rings and you answer it as nice as can be? That proves that you can control your anger. **You can be patient. We just usually choose not to. “But Pastor, you don't know what I have to put up with!” I'm sure I don't, but does it compare to what God puts up with?** Isn't that the point of our sermon text?

The Apostle Paul confessed that he was the worst of sinners. He was thinking about how he had once persecuted Christians—travelling far and wide to track them down and haul them off to prison. **But God was patient with him, and God is patient with us. I mean would there be anyone in heaven if God didn't give second, third, fourth and many more chances?** Right up to the very end Jesus was very patient with His disciples and with those He encountered lead to and including His crucifixion.

Jesus' example teaches us something important about patience. Patience, as God lives it, is a joyful mercy. Patience sees the other side of things.

Patience at the grocery store sees the clerk as she is, a mother who is trying to fit in a few hours of work in between caring for her children and aging parents.

Patience will cut her slack then when she has to call the manager because she doesn't know the correct code for that exotic fruit you're buying.

Patience sees that sassy kid at school as someone who is probably dealing with stress at home. And so what he needs is kindness, not dirty looks and people talking about him behind his back.

Patience looks at the bigger picture so that when you're delayed on the highway you realize that at most, you're going to get home 10 minutes later than planned. Why not use that time to look around and pray for the people in the vehicles behind and in front of you? We can afford to be patient like this because we are not the masters of our lives, God is.

We become impatient so easily because we think that if something doesn't get done NOW, it's going to mess everything up. But really, has being patient ever gotten you in trouble? It's when we refuse to be patient that we get ourselves into trouble. **Perhaps it's no coincidence that the word anger is just one letter away from the word danger.** When we're angry we're not in the frame of mind to make good decisions. A verse from Proverbs states: **“A stupid man gives free reign to his anger; a wise man waits and lets it grow cool”** (Proverbs 29:11). So should someone cut you off on the road, in your anger you might want to speed up and tailgate that person. But that's not safe for you or the other motorist. Or when someone says something to get your blood boiling, you want to rip right back into them. But those words will only damage the relationship

further. Instead say to yourself, “Ah, here is that situation that makes me mad. I’m going to let it go this time.” Acknowledge the inconvenience and then let it float away like a leaf down a river.

There were many impatient people in scripture. Samson, Abraham, Peter and others. Patience is essential for parenting. We want our kids to shape up but often just yell at them because that’s the easiest thing to do, rather than doing the hard work of figuring out and enforcing appropriate consequences for poor behavior and attitudes. It takes patience there too to see God work through the Word as he has promised to do.

Patience is important for ministry work too. And I say this perhaps more for myself than for your sake!

I cannot live up to all of your expectations. There are some 150 of you in this congregation and I am one person. I cannot do what I did 10-15-20-38 years ago when I arrived and most of you can’t do what you once did.

Just because more people aren’t coming through these doors doesn’t mean that our efforts of ministry are pointless. When was the last time YOU invited someone to church who actually came and stayed. Will it take years before that friend of yours takes you up on your offer to bring them to church and study the Bible with them? Anyway if ministry success is merely defined in terms of numbers, then we would have to dismiss the ministry “effectiveness” of nearly every biblical prophet. Not many of them were successful in converting large numbers. **And yet their message is still bearing fruit hundreds of years later in the lives of millions who continue to read the Bible today.**

Will it also take patience as you wait to receive your new pastor when that time comes? Sure. It might take months maybe longer before one arrives. I am an anomaly in the sense that I came and stayed. Some of you think I stayed too long. For better or worse I have seen many individuals come and go through those doors over the years. Some have tried to test my patience, and I have demonstrated fortitude.

So you may be sitting there saying why would God put this congregation through vacancy? ? Well, think of the wasabi plant. Where does it thrive? In rocky soil next to running water. It doesn’t seem like a place where anything can grow, but wasabi does and it’s valuable. Can anything grow here if there is no pastor on site? Of course, because you’ll continue to have the life-giving water of the Word flowing through this church. And even though the road ahead might be rocky and difficult, God is giving you the opportunity to bond closer together as you link arm and arm to keep the ministry going. What grows from that experience will be a stronger and more unified congregation.

You can do this. **You can exercise patience no matter what the circumstances because patience isn’t rare like real wasabi. God’s patience is all around us. He forbears and forgives our sins every day.** He treats us gently, as works in progress. Thank him for being slow to anger, for not giving up on us. And then when your own patience is tested, be confident that the Holy Spirit will help you bear with others in love, for patience is his fruit. Amen.