

PART ONE

We All Have Problems

Chapter 1

The Problem of Impatience

Many years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his own people, the Hebrews, and he saw how hard they were forced to work. During his visit, he saw an Egyptian beating one of his fellow Hebrews. After looking in all directions to make sure no one was watching, Moses killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand.

—Exodus 2:11, 12

I am not patient. Traffic jams make me very impatient. I always ask myself why the lane I'm driving in is usually the slowest. I get frustrated when people tell stories without getting to the point. I don't like to wait on the phone, listening to music. My initial impulse, like Moses in the verses above, is to act first, think later.

This attitude has caused me problems. God is helping me to change, but I need more help. Perhaps you identify with me on this. Could there be a way to change?

This dilemma presents itself particularly when my wife and I go out to eat. First of all, when the waiter comes, I already know what I want, and I am ready to order. Why waste time? My wife, with

her analytical eye, asks for more time to analyze the menu. After finally ordering the food, I scarf it down right away. My wife looks at the food, evaluates it, enjoys it, savors it. I usually finish my food way before her, and then I do something that annoys her. I try her food.

The result? I have fork marks on my hands that remind me it is important to be patient. Here are principles of patience I want to share:

1. Impatience is a human problem.

Moses was leading his people from the slavery and servitude of Egypt to the Promised Land. But the way was long. Note the italicized words in the passage: “Then the people of Israel set out from Mount Hor, taking the road to the Red Sea to go around the land of Edom. *But the people grew impatient with the long journey.*” (Numbers 21:4; emphasis added).

Perhaps you feel like the Israelites. You never finish journeying to your destiny. One year ends, and the next begins, and you think, *This is my year.* However, you encounter more of the same. If you’re honest, you even question whether God really exists or is interested in what happens to you. Situations such as these arise:

- A marriage that never gets better
- Children who get into trouble and don’t learn
- Debts that never go away

- A diet that doesn't work

You live stuck in the middle—not where you were, but also not where you want to be. This produces impatience. *Until when, God? When will it be my turn? The journey is long, the desert inhospitable, and my patience is wearing thin.* What can you do? This brings us to the second principle.

2. The force behind your impatience is a desire for control.

The reason we become impatient is that human nature likes to be in control. It's a natural desire to want to know what will happen and how. Anxiety increases with uncertainty. We don't like verses such as, "Our God is in the heavens, and he does as he wishes" (Psalm 115:3).

I would like to tell you that, yes, you can predict what will happen and, if you work hard and you're honest, everything will go right for you. The reality is that there are no controlled results. No one—not even religious types who assure you that if you do A, B, and C, then D will happen—is always correct. A lot of the time, we are more comfortable with a God who simply endorses our decisions versus the God who orders our steps. One of the most difficult things to learn about life is how to let God control it.

I would like to be able to tell you that there are always predetermined results. I'd like to tell you that

life is like my Father's Day gift. What do I mean?

Trying to exercise regularly, I began to look for resources to aid me. I saw this watch called a Fitbit that counts your steps, your heart rate, and your calories. I wanted one for Father's Day. Understand that Father's Day is not like Mother's Day. Mothers get breakfast in bed, fancy presents, and poems on Facebook. Fathers get toast and another necktie. So my probability of getting a Fitbit for Father's Day was between zero and nothing. I hatched a plan—guaranteed results.

I sat my family down and told them, “This coming Father's Day, I would like for you to get me a Fitbit. Here's one hundred and fifty dollars so you can buy it.” What do you think happened? I got it! Unfortunately, there are few things in life that we can control to this degree.

When I feel the temptation to be impatient, I ask myself, “What part of this situation do I want to control?” I realize that behind my impatience is a real and intense desire for things to turn out the way I want them to. I invite you to have a chat with God the next time you feel impatient. Give your anxiety and worries to Him. It's going to be difficult, but it can be learned.

3. You can't speed up God's blessings, but you can certainly delay them.

Moses and his 1.6 million followers left slavery in Egypt and headed for the Promised Land. A trip

that should have taken days took decades. Why? The apostle Paul provides a clue: “And don’t grumble as some of them did, and then were destroyed by the angel of death. These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age” (1 Corinthians 10:10, 11).

The Israelites complained about everything. Going around the desert in circles was not God’s idea, but was the consequence of a negative spirit that demonstrated they were not ready to arrive where God wanted to take them. Every time they complained, God looked from heaven and said, “Another lap around the desert!”

“We don’t like the food You give us, Lord. Manna [a special bread God gave them daily] in the morning, afternoon, and night. We’re tired of manna!”

“Oh, you don’t like the food? Another lap!”

“We don’t like this leader you put over us, Lord. He sticks to his family and doesn’t do what we want.”

“You don’t like the leader? Okay. Another lap!”

“We don’t like the water; it’s bitter.”

“Don’t like the water? That’s cool. Another lap!”

Maybe the same thing is happening to you. You are in a desert in your life, going around in circles without getting anywhere. There’s movement, but no progress. There’s action, but no success. It feels like a carousel: a lot of moving about, but in the end you find yourself in the same place you started

out from—only now with the infernal carousel music stuck in your head.

Remember that you can't speed up your blessing. You can only delay it.

4. Do you want to be an oak or a mushroom?

The mushrooms that you can find in your garden sprout, grow, and die within a day. On the other hand, the oak in your yard grows much more slowly, but it can weather terrible storms. Success with Christianity—and, really, with all life in general—can be summarized in two words: Takes time.

Places worth going don't have shortcuts. When you are patient, God promises that He will work in your favor. Consider this verse: "For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him!" (Isaiah 64:4).

Remember that, with patience, even the snail was able to board Noah's ark.

5. The promise that is most difficult to wait for

You've probably heard that Jesus will return to this world to eliminate all evil and restore everything good. People have been waiting for His arrival for more than two thousand years. The Israelites waited 450 years for their promised liberation, which came through Moses. It is difficult to wait. At times, it's easy to become cynical and ask, as the Israelites did, "Until when, Lord?"

In the middle of this wait, allow me to share a bit of hope. Another biblical author, who was also a disciple of Jesus and saw Him ascend to heaven, tells us, “The Lord isn’t really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent” (2 Peter 3:9).

Allow me to introduce you to a concept commonly called “hope.” Hope is living with certainty and patience while what is promised is on its way. Imagine that two employees are asked to do the same job: install cabinet doors. The same work—doing the same thing day after day, week after week—can become tedious. Now imagine that one of these employees was told he would receive fifteen dollars as a bonus at the end of the year, and the other was told he would receive a fifteen-dollar bonus at the end of the job. Do you think there would be a difference in the way they did the same work? The former would probably begin to complain at some point, and the latter would be whistling while he worked. The difference between them is hope.

The reason you can hope for the coming of Jesus is that you can study the Bible and understand that what God promises, He fulfills. Paul reminds us of the connection between hope and patience: “Rejoice in our confident *hope*. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying” (Romans 12:12; emphasis added). With hope, the heart becomes glad, even

though the current circumstances are not the best. Hope gives us patience, and prayer reminds us that we have hope. Hope reminds us that our worst day is not our last day. Live with hope. Live with patience.

“So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up” (Galatians 6:9).