



St. John the Beloved

Everyone would like to add the virtue of patience to his/her personal attributes. Patience not only adds to our degree of spiritual fruitfulness but helps us to accomplish the most difficult of tasks with the least amount of effort. If you desire your life to be fruitful and productive your heart will be conducive to hearing and obeying God's Word often with a patient ear. If you are complacent about hearing and obeying the Word of God, attaining fruits of the spirit will be a constant problem in your life. You will not achieve a fulfilling life but be in constant search of it.

"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:23).

Many look toward support groups, toward self-help books and media outreach programs, and toward attachments to others and or groups for achieving a worldly optimal life style often overlooking the spiritual seeds of God's Word and applying Biblical truths to your life. While support groups are transient parts of a mobile society, self-help advise changes almost daily, and attachment to others can

sometimes be sources of frustration. God is stable, a source of security, ever present and unchanging encouraging us to bear fruits which will ultimately enrich our life.

Take caution when those around you tend to be impatient, have a on-going spirit of discontentment, a complaint of every sort, a negative attitude, and a detailed list of everything wrong happening in their life that they regularly converse about. Avoid these sorts of groups, meetings, and friends because it will encourage you to self-indulge in the negative behavior as well. In an age of "support systems" one must put God first in their time of need and as their ultimate source of support.

When things in life become difficult and hard to comprehend we tend to desire a packaged solution that is readily available and mass produced. When things remain difficult and beyond our understanding for longer than we believe necessary, we tend to want to do something, anything, to take care of the problem. We may even wonder why God does not intervene and do something to rid us of our problem.

Patience is one of life's most desirable and sought after fruits of the spirit. We often ask God for more patience in dealing with our problems. Sometimes in

our pursuit of patience we think God may be testing us and this could absolutely be true. Testing a person is actually taking an assessment to see the need for improvement in a person. Don't we all need improvement in our earthly lives? On the other hand, the reverse may be true and we often find ourselves testing God, such as asking ourselves, is He really there? Does He really care about me? Is He concerned about my life?

"Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" (Matthew 4:7).

God needs no testing. God is perfect; He is the measure of perfection against that which perfection is based upon. Therefore, God needs no improvement. So logically it does not make sense to even desire to test God by questioning His actions in our lives. We must believe that He knows what is best for each of us and therefore learn the usefulness of the fruit of patience.

When we think about what is upsetting our life circumstances with no apparent solution in sight, think about things in perspective, such as why did the woman healed on the Sabbath in the Holy Gospel of St. Luke 13:11-12, have to suffer eighteen years with a spirit that had crippled her before she was healed by the Lord Jesus Christ?

"And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise her self up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, 'Woman, you are loosened from your infirmity'" (Luke 13:11-12).

With increasing patience a person learns to think in a positive manner rather than a confused or angry manner. Impatience generally does not lead to a solution, but simply causes a person to lose their inner peace. The person who has patience, and thinks positively about what happens to him will think calmly and make his situation pass peacefully. The woman with the spirit for eighteen years when healed glorified God.

But the person who cannot think positively but chooses to dwell on the negative aspects of things loses his patience and his thoughts become agitated and anxiety will make one thought integrate into another thought. The anxiety will increasingly build within the person and soon an outburst will occur. Not only outbursts of frustration emerge, but an anxious disposition develops that can be exhausting, spiritually troubling, and instills fear.

Nervous exhaustion can lead to one to intolerance, preoccupation with their troubles in life and

increased anxiety levels. Again with the fruit of patient endurance in all things a release from the stresses and strains encompassing our daily lives is learned. Have you ever heard an eight year old say, "Boy am I stressed out!"

How can a child of eight be stressed out? Perhaps he has heard one of his parents or his Sunday School servant say this. Being stressed out is a rather sad characteristic to imitate at such a young age. Rather he should have heard his parents or servant say faith and patient endurance can find a way.

"Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you.'" (Mark 2:3-5).

With patient endurance, four people brought a paralyzed man to the Lord Jesus Christ to be healed. He had to be carried. The crowd to see the Lord Jesus had become so large it was overflowing out of the building. Most would have given up and said 'I can't'. Patiently and calmly the four firmly believed the Lord Jesus Christ could heal their friend and

they continued to think in a positive manner. Thinking positively they went up the outside stairs and opened a hole in the roof. Through the hole they lowered a paralyzed man directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point is that when the four men encountered an obstacle, a great obstacle, and blocked the paralyzed man's only chance to be healed, they did not see a challenge that could not be conquered but rather explored other approaches into the building where the Lord Jesus could be encountered. The overcrowded building and multitudes of on-lookers were not seen as a dead-end street but rather as the four men needed another way to approach their final destination.

Patience adheres to the one step at a time method. Take a step then another step. With each step have faith. Moving mountains were often a Biblical phrase that encouraged people that with the smallest of faith you can move mountains. Patient enduring faith to overcome the insurmountable mountain or the hardest tasks in life can be accomplished with a desire to grow in faith, patience, and trust that something can happen as all things are possible with God.

The Israelites did not have patience when upon leaving their four-hundred year bondage of servitude in Egypt; they followed Moses into the desert. They complained about lack of enough water, about the food, and about their lack of meat. God provided them with water, with manna from Heaven and with quail. Yet with all these provisions they continued to lack patience. Why? They did not starve, did not succumb to thirst, and the Holy Bible even tells us that after forty years of wandering the very shoes on their feet did not wear out.

There was a dire consequence to their moaning and groaning and lack of contentment and patience:

"Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp. Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched" (Numbers 11:1-2).

Perhaps we can all learn from the Israelites a valuable lesson in that patience is "...learned in whatever state I am in to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I

can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

As St. Paul teaches us and the church in Philippi, he gives us the key to patience. We must believe in the authority of God and that through His strength we can overcome whatever life may bring.

May we all strive to be increasingly patient, content in all things, and fruitful being anxious for nothing in handling the daily pressures of life.

Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern
United States