

***Love's Flagship, Patience***  
***A Love Worth Giving – Week 2***

If you asked me if I was a patient person, I would say, *kind of*...but having a new puppy has shown me that I really am not very patient.

Olive is 6 months old. She is very, very busy. She likes to chew things. She likes to take all the paper off the toilet paper roll and run all over the house with it. She likes to take things out of the trash and bring them into the living room. She likes to steal dirty clothes from the laundry and socks you have tucked into your shoes and hide them behind the sofa.

Now it is easy to say, *No Olive, bad dog*. It is easy to get frustrated and put her outside. It is easy to wonder, why did I want a puppy? But the truth is, Olive is just being Olive.

Olive is a good gauge for me as I think about the relationship between love and patience. There is a strong relationship. Patience, it seems, may be love's flagship.

A flagship? What is a flagship? According to our good friends at Wikipedia, a flagship is "the lead ship in a fleet of vessels, a designation given on account of being either the largest, fastest, newest, most heavily armed or, for publicity purposes, the most well known. In military terms, it is a ship used by the commanding officer of a group of naval ships. The term originates from the custom of the commanding officer (usually, but not always, a flag officer) to fly a distinguishing flag.

"Used in this way, 'flagship' is fundamentally a temporary designation; the flagship is wherever the admiral is flying his flag..

"In the age of sailing ships, the flagship was typically a first-rate; the aft of one of the three decks would become the admiral's quarters and staff offices. This can be seen today on HMS Victory, the flagship of Admiral Nelson ..."

The word flagship has come into common usage "where it means the most important or leading member of a group. It has also come to be an adjective describing the most prominent or highly touted product, brand, location, or service among those offered by a company. It now has common derivations such as the 'flagship brand' or 'flagship product' of a manufacturing company or 'flagship store' of a retail chain. Auto companies usually have a flagship in the form of their most important car. The Mercedes-Benz S-Class is one example, and the Jaguar XJ is another."

A "flagship store, or simply a flagship, is a main store from a retailer designed to serve a mainstream of customers. Most noticeably, flagships are found in prominent shopping districts...

"For example, the brand Abercrombie & Fitch holds 359 mall stores in the U.S. and operates two flagships in the country. One in Fifth Avenue and the other at The Grove at Farmers Market... Many other upscale retailers operate flagships worldwide. This includes but is not limited to: Prada, Loui Vuitton, Polo Ralph Lauren, Dior, and The Apple Store among numerous others."

So, if patience is "Love's flagship," love's foundation, love's leader, love's jumping-off point, then we need patience if we are to grow in love. So let's take a quiz to measure our patience.

(Quiz)

How did you do? I guess the answer closest to “correct” was “c”. I always do better on quizzes than I do in real life. Probably most of us do—that is, we score better in the abstract than as we deal with the everyday things that test our patience.

We are in the second week of a message series called *A Love Worth Giving*. We are discovering how to be more loving people. We began last week with the topic I went over during the kid’s message—the 24:7 principle. This is the idea that before we give love, we must first receive. If we want to give love, we must open our lives up first to receive love from God. If we don’t, we get to the end of our resources rather quickly. Throughout these weeks you will hear this repeated, that we must receive and then give, no matter how capable we feel to do otherwise.

**9AM ONLY:** Our foundational text is 1 Corinthians 13, so let’s read it responsively:

M: If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love,

**P: I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.**

M: And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

**P: If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.**

M: Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

**P: It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.**

M: It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

**P: Love never ends.**

M: And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three;

**P: And the greatest of these is love.**

**10:40 ONLY:** Our foundation text is 1 Cor 13, which we read as our call to worship.

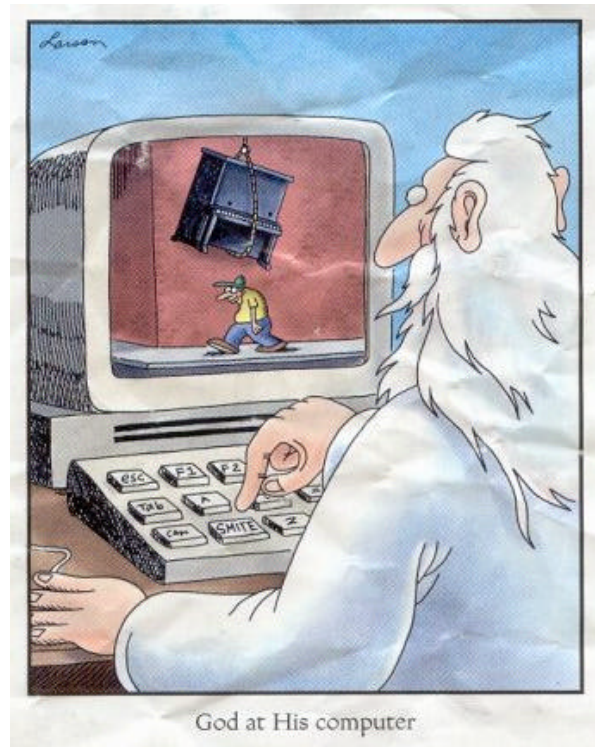
Today’s focus is on the portion of the text that reads, “Love is patient…” Why is patience important in loving relationships? Certainly it has to do with the truth that we are each on a journey, and because no two of us are in the same place, patience is essential. But knowing this doesn’t help too much.

Do you ever find yourself amazed by what people think or how they act? Have you ever had a conversation with people only to scratch your head because they are at such a different place? I think we all have.

Knowing people are different and that everyone—including us—requires patience doesn’t make us patient people. In my journey, my ability to be patient grew not when I recognized that we were all on different journeys, but when I encountered a truth in my faith. This is what I recognized; I recognized that **my patience with others grew when I recognized God’s patience with me.**

Think about it. Those times you only used God’s name when you swore. Those weeks you didn’t make any time for God, not even the hour on Sunday. The times when you said, “God, if you get me out of this, I promise I will never do anything wrong again,” and then you went back on your word.

God has had more than enough reasons to grow impatient with every one of us. Our laziness, our immaturity, our bickering, our complaining—surely these have given God cause enough to zap us all. One of my favorite Far Side's illustrates this....



But God doesn't hit the smite key, because God is patient with us. What about the thousands of sunsets for which we didn't thank God? The health we have enjoyed that we took for granted? The family and friends we have taken seen as ours, instead of as a gift from God's hand? Doesn't God have more than enough evidence to walk out on us?

None of this is said to make us feel guilty. Guilt doesn't often change hearts. But this short list should give us pause, for God has, if nothing else, been excruciatingly patient with us.

Max Lucado says that the "Greek word used here for patience is a descriptive one. It figuratively means 'taking a long time to boil.' Think about a pot of boiling water. What factors determine the speed at which it boils? The size of the stove? No. The pot? The pot may have an influence, but the primary factor is the intensity of the flame. Water boils quickly when the flame is high. It boils slowly when the flame is low. Patience 'keeps the burners down.'"

We need to see that patience isn't naïve or ignorant of actions; patience isn't a patsy, an easy mark. No, instead, patience keeps the flame low—and waits and listens, hopes and prays. In 2 Peter 3:8-9, it is put this way:

"But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as

some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.”

*The Message* version puts the same text this way:

“Don't overlook the obvious here, friends. With God, one day is as good as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day. God isn't late with his promise as some measure of lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the End because he doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change.”

Think about your own life: the way you have lived. The things you have done or left undone. The words you have spoken in anger or hate. The judgments you have made. The way you have not responded to God's call for you to live in accordance with God's way. And through it all, God has been working in you, being patient with you, wooing you forward, into the light. Take a deep breath and let yourself experience how patient God's love has been with you.

Jesus spoke of patience in Matthew 18:21-35.

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” <sup>22</sup>Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. <sup>23</sup>“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup>When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; <sup>25</sup>and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup>So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ <sup>27</sup>And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup>But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ <sup>29</sup>Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ <sup>30</sup>But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. <sup>31</sup>When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup>Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup>Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ <sup>34</sup>And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. <sup>35</sup>So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Did you notice that the slave doesn't plead that the debt would be erased? Instead, he asks the king for patience. And patience opens the door for forgiveness of the debt.

But the problem is that the slave then turns around and demands money from someone who owed him. Once again patience is requested, but this time, the forgiven slave demands payment in full. He even goes so far as to throw the man in jail.

The king, upon hearing of this, is, of course, stunned. How dare his slave not have patience? The ink is barely dry on his own canceled debt. The king is mad, calls the servant, and throws him in jail. His lack of patience with another canceled the King's patience with him.

The problem here is that the king's forgiveness made no difference to the slave. So, we might ask ourselves, "Does knowing that God has been patient with me cause me to be patient with others? Or am I like the slave who holds others up to a higher standard than that to which God has held me up?"

We need to experience God's patience with us in such a way that it stuns us, overwhelms us, startles us. When we have experienced this, then we will give patience to the others in our lives. But first we need the experience. And let me say this just in case.

Get over the belief that God hasn't had to be patient with you. God has. If you question it, ask your Mom, or your spouse, or your best friend how they have had to be patient with you—that will give you a slight hint at how patient with you God has had to be! Romans 2:1-4 reads, (*The Message* version)

"Those people are on a dark spiral downward. But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again.

"Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one. Judgmental criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors. But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done.

"You didn't think, did you, that just by pointing your finger at others you would distract God from seeing all your misdoings and from coming down on you hard? Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change."

The proof that we have received God's patience is not in your words, or your understanding. No, the proof that you have opened your life up to God's great patience with you is your own patience—or lack thereof—with others. "Patience deeply received results in patience freely offered."

Our story of the forgiving king and the impatient servant ends with jail. Our impatience ends with a kind of jail as well. It is the jail of self-absorption and ingratitude that makes up our jail. Do you want to start breaking free? This week, take time every day to ask God to show you how patient God is with you. For when you receive this from God, you will begin to live a life of patient love with others.

Another way of making this real is to use the sheet in your worship folder marked "Patience." We will have some background music as you have a chance to spend some time on this, thinking and filling it out.

9 AM: This will be the start of our prayer time—after filling out the sheet, you are invited to light candles, continue praying or join the band in singing.

10:40AM: After the special music, we will continue in our time of prayer