

Developing patience can be a tricky project because in turning patience into a project we tend to want to finish it as quickly as possible, making our efforts counter-productive. Instead of making patience formation our project for the week, think of this week as an opportunity to experience our lives paying special attention to the opportunities that God gives us for patient trust in Him. Let's open our eyes and ears and be as present as possible in everything that occurs this week, not spending our time looking back in regret or forward in anticipation but trying to see what God is communicating to us in each moment. Here are some things to pay attention to this week:

## Day 1

### Acceptance and Mindfulness

The first thing we want to focus on this week is the ability to focus. To pay attention to our lives and what is going on around us and in us is difficult because we tend to focus solely on what we wish was going on. Our plans, our desires, our expectations often get in the way of what is really going on. As I was writing the last three sentences my computer interrupted me several times to suggest ways to make my writing better. By the fourth interruption, I was growing impatient even though all the suggestions made my writing better. They were, however, not what I had planned. I wanted to continue writing and get to the next topic. All this, to say, that we are almost never free from our inner desire to be gods and to dictate how reality will unfold, instead of allowing God to do his job, and to accept with joyful gratitude the gift of life as it is revealed moment by moment. To be free from our inner tyrant who wishes to control and manipulate everything, to see the detail in the things around us, to experience them as a gift and not an obstacle, is freedom indeed. This does not mean we embrace becoming passive hippies. God still calls us to take dominion, and it is good to make plans and to work to achieve them, but we must understand that we are participants in what God is already doing, and not dictators. Try to pay attention today to what is going on around you and quiet your inner tyrant.

Verses: Philippians 4:6-7; Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:2; Matthew 6:34

Prayer Topics: Attention, Mindfulness, Trust, Faith, Confidence, Patience

## Day 2

### Discomfort

When I was a child, I would often find myself so caught up in drawing pictures or other little projects, that I would completely forget about eating until I completed whatever I was working on. Upon completing the task I would realize I was very uncomfortably hungry, a state I was oblivious to until my mind turned from the task at hand to consider the needs of my body. As I got older, I found myself much more connected with my state of discomfort, and much more captivated by a need to avoid discomfort. In our lives we can often find ourselves drifting toward the goals of comfort, giving our physical existence a greater and greater priority until, if left unchecked, it becomes our master. This master can make us very impatient, as any form of discomfort will require immediate remedy from anyone around us, making us view everything and every moment in life as a tool to our comfort or an obstacle. It is important that we free ourselves from the tyranny of our own discomfort. This is a project that began for us in childhood, as we learned to be hungry without complaining, or tired without becoming unpleasant. If we continue this course throughout our lives our bodies become our servants instead of our masters. If we fail to continue this course our bodies exert a terrible control over us that makes us impatient and unable to receive the meeting of our needs as gifts. Be aware this week of when your body tries to make discomfort your master. Is it really true that if you don't eat soon catastrophe awaits? Or will your mind just eventually ignore your stomach's attempt to be master knowing that you will not

die of starvation in the next couple of hours? Do not let your body rule over you and greater patience will be a welcome companion.

Verses: Hebrews 12:7-11; 1 Peter 5:10; Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:28; John 16:33

Prayer Topics: Comfort, Suffering, Idolatry, Hope, Joy, Faith

Day 3

Be Slow

There is a saying among self-defense trainers that slow is smooth, and smooth is fast. The reason for this saying is that there is a tendency in self defense situations to try to move as quickly as possible as fear motivates you. The result is not speed, but useless fumbling that can get you killed. In less important matters the same concept seems to be true. I have many times faced an unexpected problem as the car won't start, or water is found in the house in a place it shouldn't be found. In many of these situations I found the unexpected problem to be a frustrating obstacle to the day I had planned, and proceeded to try to resolve it as quickly as possible. The usual result was a great deal of wasted time. What I have found works much better is to just be slow. Slow down, or even stop and spend time just looking at and thinking about the problem. Sometimes when dealing with a problem under the dash of my car, the immediate sensation will be that there is no way I can make sense out of all the complexity I am faced with. But I have found that if I slow down and look long enough, things will start to make sense. I will begin to see the patterns that allow me to understand the problem, and a solution will often present itself. I find that being slow makes me faster, while trying to solve something quickly, so I can get on with my plans, bogs me down for much longer. So many parts of our lives are just like this; where trying the quick fix embroils us in more problems, when the patient approach brings wisdom and success. Try the slow approach this week and see how it goes.

Verses: 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 12:12; Romans 8:25; Psalm 37:7-9

Prayer Topics: Patience, Slowing down, Attention to detail, Confidence, Peace

Day 4

Play

There is a difference between entertainment and play. I found that when my grand-kids are visiting, play is difficult while entertainment is easy. Most parents know this, and the Television is often pressed into baby-sitting duty because of it. Play requires our participation in an event that we do not control, while entertainment only requires us to passively watch. Play is something that requires us to accept as enjoyable having to respond to the unexpected, while entertainment only requires us to find enjoyable someone else's response to the unexpected. Play is ostensibly useless, while work is useful. While doing work we must often engage with the unexpected but we are not required to find it enjoyable. We do it, however, because there is a tangible reward, while play gives us no such tangible benefit. Play does, however, train us to see the enjoyable in the unexpected, so perhaps it is not as useless as its reputation suggests. Entertainment, because it does not require our participation outside of our attention, becomes the default state that we endure work and play to return to. Because of these factors, play is the odd man out. It does not provide the tangible reward of work or the low participation level of entertainment so we find ourselves engaging in less and less of it as we age. But because play does reward our participation in the unexpected, it is great at building patience. Spend some time playing this week, see what happens.

Verses: Zechariah 8:5; Psalm 150:1-6; Philippians 4:4; Psalm 118:24

Prayer Topics: Joy, Prayer, Play, Trust, Patience, Diligence, Laziness, Sloth

Day 5

Listen

One of the most difficult things to do is to listen. It requires great patience, especially if you are not really interested in the topic being pontificated upon, and if the speaker has no real talent for making his words interesting. Even if the speaker has skill and the topic is of interest to us, many of us still find it hard to listen, rather than planning our own entries in the conversation. The art of truly listening, of not just hearing the words but of trying to understand the speaker, of approaching them as something other and not a creation of our imagination, is a skill that is almost unequaled in reward. If we are being honest, most of the time we fill in other people's speech with our ideas of their motivations, their conclusions, and their "real" emotions rather than actually listening and asking questions, allowing them to become real people, and their words to us unexpected gifts. This can, and often does, become a habit that then gets transferred to God. His words to us in scripture are then projections of our own thoughts, views, and feelings, rather than the revelation of the Creator of the Universe, and we cease to stand in awe of who He is and what He has said. Spend some time this week really trying to listen. Don't see other people's words as obstacles to be overcome. Allow yourself to be surprised.

Verses: Proverbs 25:12; Proverbs 1:8-9; 1 John 4:5-6; Isaiah 55:1-3

Prayer Topics: Listening, Wisdom, Patience, Joy, Discernment, Love, Joy