

How do you handle a flight delay when it might mean missing your next flight?
What do you do when traffic backs up and you can't get off the highway?
What happens to your blood pressure when something you expected has not yet arrived? What happens when you are "still single, still grieving, still between jobs, or when you just can't take it anymore?"

Waiting is so much a part of life, whether we like it or not. Patience is often so elusive and we have a lot of trouble when we just don't want to wait. In your experience, is patience a virtue, or an impossible dream?

"Cooling his heels in jail" John the Baptist sounds as if he had lost patience. He sent his followers to Jesus with a question: "Are you THE one? What is going on?" After all John's work, he sounded confused. He had gathered crowds, he had baptized Jesus in the Jordan, and yet he was arrested and placed in prison.

After all his hard work, Jesus had not claimed the throne and the daily lives of the community did not seem to be any different. Beyond that, John was starting to understand that he was facing probable death. Had his work been in vain? How much longer could he wait?

The Epistle of James had a section addressed to Christians who were much like John, they had done "everything right" but were confused that Jesus' second coming had not yet arrived. They wondered what was going on and if there was something they had missed. Like John, they sounded impatient. But that had been an issue from the beginning of time.

In fact, the first story in Genesis is about losing patience. Adam and Eve were in a perfect world until the voice of the serpent said “oh, by the way, there is more. God is holding back.” And their impatience in running after “what they couldn’t wait for” lost them the keys to the kingdom.

All around us the message is loud and clear: “get what you want now! Don’t wait!” Borrow what you don’t have and delay paying till later for what is important now. None of us like to wait! And Satan takes advantage of that genetic flaw. So, how can we learn to be patient in an impatient world?

Impatience is just another word for “ME not getting what I want. NOW!”

Impatience is selfishness-in-the-flesh. And because so many make it easy to be impatient, we need to look elsewhere to learn another way!

James understood and gave great examples. He encouraged those who read his letter to think about how a farmer knows to wait for the season of rain. Being impatient doesn’t change the weather, and one might as well learn to wait, as that is what farming is all about. He also said, “Look at the prophets, who had powerful messages about a Messiah who would one day come. They never got to see that happen in their lives but they were content with the message that was placed in their mouths.

John’s question to Jesus was an opportunity for Jesus to cure John’s impatience. (Or maybe for John to teach his disciples?) Delaying a direct answers he told John’s disciples to just look at what was all around them. The blind can see, the lame can walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and good news has been shared. Once John looks at that, he will know ... and he will have peace!” Impatience was healed and John knew all was well.

Jesus PATIENTLY loved an IMPATIENT world. He came to change the lives of all whose *impatient self-love* kept them from seeing God's love. And he did it in simple ways. He loved. He healed. He proclaimed that God was present.

This was not even the ultimate goal, but a warm up act to prepare everyone to wait and watch for the real miracle which would begin on a cross and climax in a tomb! That is where the Messiah would finally be revealed, so Jesus counseled patience so that everyone would be ready, at the right time.

Advent helps us to learn similar patience. Much as we wish to already sing Christmas carols, share gifts, and sit in the glow of strings of light, this season of preparation calls us to hold off on the celebration, slow down the hectic pace, and take time to reflect on WHO it is that we are waiting for.

Waiting for Christmas isn't the same for all as waiting for Christ. Too many think gifts and parties and decorations are enough to bring light to a darkened world. But such earthly props are never enough and never last. That is why waiting for the *right* thing, is so important and why such patience is rewarded with a joy and a light and a peace that will change every day, for all time!

Once upon a time there two cowboys herded cattle to their ranch. They rode through unfamiliar territory with a scout from the Sioux nation and were headed back to the Dakotas, trying to get home before a winter blizzard blocked their journey. On the last day they rode hard and didn't have time to stop and eat. All day long the cowboys talked about how hungry they were and the huge meal they would eat that night. The scout said nothing.

They asked why he was so quiet. Wasn't he hungry too? His answer was, "No! Not hungry." Late that night they reached their settlement and were able to

eat. The scout ate more than the other two together. One asked, "WHAT GIVES? You said you weren't hungry!" His reply was simply, "It wasn't wise to be hungry *before* there was food." He understood "patience."

Advent becomes our lesson in patience as we hear "Wait! Remember! Wait! Remember! And wait, just a little longer!"

God operates not with a timetable but with faithfulness! Being patient means trusting in GOD'S CONTROL. When you lose patience it means you are fighting God for control, basically saying "I can do better." When you live with patience it means you have turned it over to God. That was the message of the Garden of Eden, and in every other encounter with God throughout scripture!

As a child, I always got a stomach ache on Christmas Eve. I was always so nervous and just couldn't wait. As I got older, I finally realized whether I was impatient or not, Christmas came at the same time. My impatience simply got in the way of really enjoying the most special day in the life of a kid.

When you lose patience, find a quiet place! Take time to wait! Open your eyes and watch for God's coming. Open your ears and remember prayer is about listening! Open your hearts so God and not your impatience is what fills you.

Advent is certainly a countdown to Christmas, but it is more than that. It is on-the-job training that teaches the true peace that comes from learning faithful waiting, day after day after day. And when we know that the wait is over, and Christ has already come, why is there any excuse for impatience again? Amen