

You've no doubt heard the phrase, *patience is a virtue*.

The statement comes from a poem written in the 5<sup>th</sup> century in which the author sought to contrast the Seven Deadly Sins with Seven Heavenly Virtues.

Since we are talking about games I thought we would do a quick matching game. So up on the screen are two columns the 7 Heavenly virtues (left) and the 7 Deadly sins (right). Now take a moment and see if you can match the sin and the virtue.

Answer:

1. Chastity – Lust
2. Temperance – Gluttony
3. Charity – Greed
4. Diligence – Sloth
5. Patience – Wrath
6. Kindness – Envy
7. Humility – Pride

I don't know about you, but patience is not one of my finer qualities.

That might be why I had trouble with the game of Operation. I could blame my unsteady hand (I was slow to develop fine motor skills) for the accompanying buzzing and red light that occurs when you touch the tweezers to the metal while pulling out the Adam's apple; but the truth is I just don't have patience.

And patience is certainly a skill that we need when it comes to the game of life. During the month of July we are going to look at 4 games; Operation, Survivor, Scrabble and Battleship in an effort to learn four skills that all of us need in the game of life.

But today I want to unpack the wisdom of two Proverbs which deal with patience.

Proverbs 14:29; 15:18

As I began studying these two verses I came across this line in one of my commentaries: **Patience is the evidence of understanding**. If you wanted to look at it from the opposite perspective you could say that *impatience is the evidence of failing to understand*.

Think about this; when you get stuck in traffic, if you are anything like me you grow impatient. When you think about it the impatience is really from your lack of understanding why **you** have to be inconvenienced. And therein is the other culprit in impatience - selfishness.

Our lack of patience really comes down to two things: a lack of understanding and an overabundance of selfishness. Just think back a day or two to the last time you grew impatient. My guess is that one or both of those factors came into play.

So let's tackle the lack of understanding first. Help me out here; what is required for understanding another person/situation? Understanding requires time, effort, commitment... (Answers from audience)

I read a great article this past week from the Chicago Tribune about patience; and it mentioned all of that and more. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/health/ct-x-0703-zimmerman-autism-20130703.0.5102612.story>

In the article by Steve Zimmerman, a reporter from the Tribune, he details how he has learned patience by working with his 4 year old son who is autistic. Zimmerman says that in the 18 months since the diagnosis, Johnny has *'taught me to be more patient.'*

Steve goes on to write, 'But from all the training we've received and therapy sessions I've attended, the most important tool to help him has been an *endless supply of patience*. We need it to cope with the challenges it creates for everyone around him. We need it when he doesn't understand what we're trying to teach him and he recoils and resists and loses interest. We need it when too many people are talking to him and he goes into sensory overload and melts down. We need it when his appointments make us late for work.'

'In many ways, his diagnosis with high-functioning autism has shaped my daily routine as much as his. I have to remember to slow down and ensure eye contact when talking to Johnny or asking him questions. I have to encourage him to "use your words" tirelessly, as he tends to respond by repeating your words or give yes or no answers. I have to keep to the schedule that's Velcro'd to his door, and plan for more time than I think is needed to do anything with him. That might be the toughest of all.'

Near the end of the article Steve Zimmerman states: **I've learned to become the most patient version of myself that I can imagine.** Maybe we could rephrase it this way: *I've come to understand* so that I can be the most patient version of myself that I can imagine.

For the Zimmerman's, as well as any family dealing with mental or physical health issues with their children, patience comes from understanding. Understanding a diagnosis, understanding how to deal with issues raised by that diagnosis all go a long way in helping parents to, in Steve's words, 'become the most patient version of myself that I can imagine.'

### **Patience is the evidence of understanding.**

Whatever the relationship you find yourself in; with a family member or a total stranger, when we seek to understand the person or the situation we will display patience. Otherwise, we will find ourselves as the Proverbs says: falling into the folly of reacting with a 'quick-temper.'

### **Patience is the evidence of understanding.**

Probably the most famous scripture passage that speaks of patience comes in 1 Corinthians 13:4, Love is patient...

I think patience comes first in the list of words used to define love because love, true love- the kind of love that is self-giving and not selfish, requires patience.

For true love to be evidenced in our lives we need to abandon our selfish attitudes. And patience is displayed most prominently in our lives when we are others-centered and not self-centered.

Too often our patience fails because we refuse to see or hear the needs of others. Patience begins with understanding others and their needs over and above our own.

When Tim Keller moved his family to New York City to start Redeemer Presbyterian Church, he asked his wife Kathy to grant him three years of long hours, and after that, he promised, things would change.

Kathy agreed to Tim's request, but when the three year mark came and went, Tim said, "Just a couple more months." Still, the months flew by with no change. Although Kathy was incredibly patient and restrained, she did have to get Tim's attention. Tim writes what happened next:

One day I came home from work. It was a nice day outside, and I noticed that the door to our apartment's balcony was open. Just as I was taking off my jacket, I heard a smashing noise coming from the balcony. In another couple of seconds I heard another one. I walked out on to the balcony and to my surprise saw Kathy sitting on the floor. She had a hammer, and next to her was a stack of our wedding china. On the ground were the shards of two smashed saucers.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She looked up and said, "You aren't listening to me. You don't realize that if you keep working these hours you are going to destroy this family. I don't know how to get through to you. You aren't seeing how serious this is. This is what you are doing." And she brought the hammer down on the third saucer.

I sat down trembling. I thought she had snapped. "I'm listening. I'm listening," I said. As we talked, it became clear that she was intense and laser focused, but she was not in a rage or out of control emotionally. She spoke calmly but forcefully. Her arguments were the same as they had been months before, but I realized how deluded I had been. There would never be a convenient time to cut back. I was addicted to the level of productivity I had achieved. She saw me listening for the first time, and we hugged.

Finally I inquired, "When I first came out here, I thought you were having an emotional meltdown. How did you get control of yourself so fast?"

With a grin she answered, "It was no meltdown. Do you see these three saucers I smashed? I nodded. 'I have no cups for them. The cups have been broken for years. I had three saucers to spare. I'm glad you sat down before I had to break any more.'" Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage* (Dutton, 2011), pp. 145-146

<http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/december/1120511.html>

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For Tim & Kathy Keller love meant not only understanding one another by listening; but also Tim being able to get beyond a selfish attitude that could have crippled their marriage.

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When it comes to the game of life; all of us can learn more about the skill of patience. So when it comes to patience; we need to learn everything we can about the people and situation so that we can avoid responding in folly; and we need to think beyond our own needs and place the needs of others above our own.

When we learn and apply these things, not only will we display the love of God in our lives; but we will display patience with others that evidences our desire to understand them and put their needs first.

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