

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Keep the Faith

Sunday, October 13

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I began this series by reminding us that faith is not a feeling; it is a choice to trust God's character rather than your condition. Last week I talked about how to keep the faith when you've failed. I said that failure is never final – that God can redeem our failures.

Today I want to talk about how to keep the faith when you're impatient. Anyone struggle with patience? I do! I need to develop patience – right now! The truth is I wish I was as thin as my patience! I think that's one of the reasons God gave me Paul. Children have a special way of teaching you patience.

Anyone who knows me knows that I am not a very patient person. It's a weakness of mine, I'll admit. I can't stand long meetings. I don't like waiting in lines. I don't like waiting for answers. I don't like waiting for patience.

I like the story about the monk who was very impatient. The more he tried, the more impatient he became, so he decided that he must get away by himself and learn to be patient. So he built himself a little home deep in the woods, far away from civilization.

Years later, a man was traveling in those woods and met him. The man was amazed to find anyone living so far away from the rest of the world so he asked the monk why he was there all by himself.

The monk said that he was there to learn to be patient. The traveler asked how long he had been there, and the monk replied: seven years.

Stunned, the traveler asked, "If there is no one around to bother you, how will you know when you are patient?"

Annoyed, the monk replied, "Would you get out of here! I don't have time for this!"

Now, I am not as bad as that monk, but I still struggle with patience. This is especially true when it comes to my faith. So much of faith is about waiting on God – waiting for answers to prayer – waiting for guidance – waiting to know the next step – waiting for the next

opportunity. Waiting. Sometimes it is hard to keep the faith when you're waiting.

Ever been there? Are you there today? Maybe you've been waiting for God to give you an answer to something or guidance with a decision. Perhaps you have been waiting on God to provide the right man or woman or the perfect job opportunity. You have been waiting a long time and your patience is running thin.

But maybe for you it's not just about waiting for an answer. It's about dealing with sorrow or pain and wanting it to stop. Perhaps you are waiting for your soul to heal and it feels like it is going to take forever.

This morning I want to change the way you think about waiting on God. I want you to see faith as the bridge between where you are and where God wants you to be. So I am going to give you some biblical wisdom that I have learned about patience and keeping the faith. I believe if you apply this wisdom you will have a stronger hold on your faith, more confidence in God, and a peace in your soul.

Delay Does Not Mean Denial

Sometimes it is hard to keep the faith when it seems God has not kept his promises. Maybe you were sure God promised you something a long time ago, but it has never happened. And you think, "Did I misunderstand God? Was this all in my head?"

Or maybe you think God doesn't love you anymore or that God changed his mind. Maybe you think God's delay means his denial.

Let me tell you a story about a guy in the Old Testament named Joseph. His story appears in Genesis. When Joseph was young, God promised him he would do something big, something important. He would be a ruler and influence many people.

Then for the next thirteen years everything in his life went south. His brothers hated him and sold him to the

Egyptians. He was falsely accused, thrown into prison and forgotten.

But Joseph refused to believe that God had denied him. He didn't feel sorry for himself or get bitter or impatient. Instead, he chose to be faithful and serve God wherever he was. He let go of his expectations of how and when God would carry out the promise. In the meantime, God was up to something huge for Joseph. Ultimately God fulfilled his promise to Joseph.

Joseph became Pharaoh's right-hand man, the second in command over all of Egypt. As a result, Joseph ended up saving the lives of his whole family and became reunited with them. He also saved most of Egypt from starvation (<https://thelife.com/delay-is-not-denial>).

Listen to what God has to say through the prophet Jeremiah: **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” - Jeremiah 29:11**

If life doesn't make sense to you right now and you are impatient take that verse into your heart and trust God. God has not denied you. Perhaps God is trying to teach you something or time his promise to affect the greatest amount of people. Maybe your experience will help someone else down the road. You don't know. But God's silence does not mean he has given up on you.

A few years ago I was driving around a mall that had fences and signs all around it notifying the public it was being remodeled. There were others signs on the outside gate advertising new stores. I tried to look at the construction but the gate was blocking my view. I couldn't see it but that does not mean nothing was happening. I am quite certain construction was going on.

In the same way, we can't always see God's construction but that doesn't mean God is doing nothing. God always carefully constructs his plans. Whatever you are frustrated or impatient about right now just might be critical to God's plan. God's delay is not God's denial; it's the planning of his promise.

Faith in God Includes Faith in His Timing

Faith means believing that God is making us wait for very good reasons. Faith means understanding that God views things from eternity.

Take a look at what 2nd Peter has to say about this: **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. -2 Peter 3:8-9

God has a different perspective. An economist read this passage and was quite amazed by it and talked to God about it. “Lord, is it true that a thousand years for us is just like one minute to you?” The Lord said, “Yes.” The economist said, “Well then, a million dollars to us must be like one penny to you.” The Lord said, “Well, yes.” The economist said, “Well, Lord, will you give me one of those pennies?” The Lord said, “All right, I will. Wait here a minute.”

Commenting on this story a preacher said, “Often we want God's resources, but we don't want his timing. We want the penny but not the minute. We want his hand, but we don't want his calendar. We forget his work in us while we wait is as important as what it is you're waiting for. Waiting means I must trust that God knows what he's doing” (<http://www.northwaychurch.net/waiting-million-dollars/>).

So if you have prayed and prayed and waited and waited on God and feel impatient, I want you to consider something: Could it be that God is trying to teach you something? Could it be that God is trying to prepare you for something? It is in the present that God prepares us for our future.

Don't get impatient and try to circumvent God. You will miss God's best for you. You may be very close to something amazing God has in store for you. Don't screw it up. Trust God's wisdom and timing and pray, “Lord, this situation I am in is difficult, but there might be something you are trying to teach me that will prepare me for my future. I will be patient and rely on you. I will resist the immediate to receive your best for me.”

The late Corrie ten Boom told the story of when she went to her father as a child and said: “Papa, I don't think I have the faith to handle real trouble. I don't know what I'd do if you should die. I don't think I have the faith that some people have to face trouble.”

Corrie's father looked at her tenderly and said, “Corrie, dear, when your father says he will send you to the store tomorrow, does he give the money to you today? No, he gives it to you when you are ready to go to the store. And if you are going on a train trip and need money for a ticket, does your father give you the money when we

decide you may take the trip? No. He gives it to you when you are at the depot, all ready to buy your ticket. Corrie, God treats us the same way. He doesn't give you the faith until you need it. When you do need it, he will certainly give it to you."

Faith in God includes faith in his timing.

Sometimes When Things are Falling a Part They Just Might Be Falling into Place.

Sometimes we lose all patience with God when life seems to be spinning out of control. "Seriously God? You must be completely checked out."

But we must remember God sees things from a much larger perspective. And what looks like a hot mess to us could be part of God's perfect plan. Now understand I am not saying that "everything happens for a reason." I don't believe that, but some things do happen for a reason.

Over the last year we have taken Paul to get his regular check-ups. He is nice and healthy but a few of these trips have been extremely difficult for us because of the shots he needs. If you are a parent you know how tough it is to watch your children cry when they get their shots. They look at you like, "Why are you doing this to me? Why would you allow these needles to be stuck in me?" To them their world is falling apart. In their little minds they don't know it is for their own protection and health.

If you don't have children think about when you take your pet to the vet. When they get shots or painful procedures they must be wondering why you are allowing them to be tortured like that. They must wonder why you abandon them to live in the doctor's cage while they heal. They must think you are crazy to make them wear that horrible lamp shade around their head.

The same scenario must be going on with God as he works in our lives. "I know they are wondering why I am allowing such things in their lives, but they don't see the big picture like I do."

This is why I always go back to one of my favorite two verses in scripture: **Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.** –Proverbs 3:5-6

As I studied these two verses this week, I began to see them in a way I had never seen it before. It was a game changer for me.

You see, most folks think this verse means, "Pray to God, ask God for help and he will show you the way. It will be clear which way you should go." That's not what it means. You see, God's path is not the path we would typically take. God's idea of a straight path is not necessarily our idea of a straight path. Paul would not have chosen to get those shots!

Submitting to God in all our ways means being prepared to go wherever he may be leading us. Where God may be leading you may be the last place you want to go. The way God wants you to go may be filled with obstacles. In your mind, it seems impossible. You may want to run away from it and God wants you to run through it!

Trusting God means even if you don't see a way, you know in your heart God will make a way. He will remove the obstacles. That's what it means when it says God will make your paths straight.

Moses taught us this lesson in a powerful way. When Moses got to the edge of the Red Sea he thought things were falling apart. The children of Israel were finally set free from Egypt after 400 years of slavery, but the first thing they came to was the Red Sea. There were impassable mountain ranges on both sides of them, the sea in front of them and the Egyptian behind them. It looked like things were falling apart.

But to God things were falling right into place. God could see what they could not see. He opened the Red Sea and they walked through it. Years later the Israelites looked back and sang, " **Your road led by a pathway through the sea—a pathway no one knew was there!**" –Psalm 77:19 (LB)

Stay patient with God and keep the faith. God can see a path that you don't see. If you will trust God and keep on moving in faith, even when you don't see a way, he will make a way (<http://rickwarren.org/devotional/english/trusting-god-when-i-don't-understand>).

The only survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on a small, uninhabited island. He prayed feverishly for God to rescue him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a little hut out of driftwood to protect him from the elements, and to store his few possessions. But then one day, after scavenging for food, he arrived home to find his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky. The worst had happened;

everything was lost. He was stunned with grief and anger. “God, how could you do this to me!” he cried.

Early the next day, however, he was awakened by the sound of a ship that was approaching the island. It had come to rescue him. “How did you know I was here?” asked the weary man of his rescuers. “We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.

Reflecting on this story Amy Anderson writes, “It is so easy to get caught up in the moment when things are going wrong – to get into the mindset of believing that all is lost – when in reality it is just God sending up a

smoke signal for something better to come into your life.”

If things seem to be falling apart and you are getting impatient and frustrated, get out your binoculars and start watching for God’s ship that’s about to come into your life.

Remember God’s delays do not mean denials, faith in God includes faith in his timing, and when things seem to be falling apart they just might be falling into place.

