



PATIENCE

EXHIBITING PATIENCE WHEN YOU ARE SUFFERING

“Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

PSALM 27:14 (NIV)

SUFFERING

If you have ever been in a situation of suffering, especially indiscriminate suffering with an unforeseen end, it's very likely that you know all too well what it is like to lose patience with your circumstances and even to lose heart. The very definition of patience is “the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties, or to suffer without complaining or becoming annoyed.”[1] In other words, patience is developed over time when we find ourselves in the midst of hard circumstances.

This is not a light and easy topic to discuss. Special needs families are all too familiar with experiencing some type of suffering, and often on a daily basis. This suffering can show up in many different scenarios: it can be experienced by a child and a parent when a child is left out of a birthday party due to their perceived “differences”; it can be experienced by all the members of a family when a child has yet another life-threatening medical crisis; it can be experienced when a parent has feelings of overwhelm and emotional anguish at the thought of an adult child's future without them. There are so many ways that suffering can present itself to our families. The suffering is real and it is often chronic or ongoing. So how can we exhibit patience during times like these, when the pain from suffering is so real?

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One of the hardest questions to face is how can we have patience with our circumstances when the suffering that we or our loved one experiences, is ongoing or potentially might never end?

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”[2]

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything.”[3]

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.”[4]

[1] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/patience>

[2] Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

[3] James 1:2-4 (NIV)

[4] Psalm 18:2 (NIV)

“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.”[5]

These verses speak to a way forward. They lift the heavy burden of suffering, giving it meaning and giving the bearer of the suffering hope while in the midst of circumstances. Our hope is in the Lord. He is our way forward toward developing patience when experiencing suffering. He, a “man of suffering and familiar with pain”, is the one who will renew our strength in the midst of our suffering. He is our rock and firm foundation on which we stand, and he is the author and perfecter of our faith bringing us to a place of maturity and patience through this journey with suffering. A place where we can walk and not be faint, run and not grow weary, and ultimately soar like eagles - thriving and not merely surviving this life.

THE STORY OF THE SUFFERING WOMAN

The book of Mark tells of a woman who once experienced years of suffering. She was sick for a very long time. In fact for twelve years this woman suffered from some sort of issue with bleeding. The bible doesn't tell us what her diagnosis was, we don't know if it was endometriosis or a blood clotting disorder or something else, only that she had a discharge of blood for twelve years and that no doctor had been able to help her. Like many families who have found themselves using much of their life savings to pay out of pocket for specialized physicians, therapists, and medical treatments, this woman had been so desperate to find a solution it says that, “she had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.”[6]

She appeared to be on her last hope, and had lost all patience with her circumstances, when we meet her in Mark 5:24-34. As Jesus is being pressed on all sides by a crowd of followers wanting to see, listen, touch and speak to him, the woman makes her move. The story says that “When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, ‘If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.’ Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.”[7]. Jesus having miraculously felt power go out of him in that moment turned to find who had touched him. With many people having touched him in that same moment there had to be more to the story of course and it says that, “Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it”. It's clear that Jesus knew who it was, but this appears to prompt the next thing that occurs. The woman came trembling and fell at Jesus feet and shared her story with all who was around. And Jesus says, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”[8] He calls her daughter! Yes he heals her, but this part of the story often gets overlooked. This is a woman, who due to the Old Testament laws about bleeding, had been considered unclean for twelve years. As such, for those twelve years she was not allowed into the temple or allowed to socialize with her friends and even her family.

[5] Isaiah 53.3a (NIV)

[6] Mark 5:26 (NIV)

[7] Mark 5:27-29 (NIV)

[8] Mark 5:34 (NIV)



Jesus's compassion toward her suffering was about more than just her physical suffering. It was also about her mental, emotional, financial, and spiritual suffering as well. Jesus saw her suffering and drew near to her, calling her daughter, a term of endearment. What a beautiful example, for all of us, of how we can reach out to God in the midst of our suffering and how God draws close with his love and compassion for us.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Mark 5:24-34. What parts of the story stand out to you?
2. Have you ever struggled to be patient when experiencing hard circumstances and feeling like either you or a loved one is suffering?
3. What did you do to move forward toward patience in the midst of these hard circumstances or are you still experiencing suffering in your life or the life of a loved one?
4. Memorizing scripture is a powerful way to meditate on the truth of God's love and compassion toward us and to build the capacity for patience in the midst of our suffering. Choose 1 or 2 of the verses listed above that you would like to commit to memory in the coming weeks.

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