

# How Patient Are You?

Recently, the Lord opened my eyes to an incredible truth about patience - something I'd never seen before. It appears in Jesus' explanation of the parable of the sower:

*"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*

*They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

*And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*

*But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."* LK 8:11-15

This parable is all about patience! I don't mean patience toward people - but patience toward God. Jesus is speaking here of patience in our walk with God, patience in doing His work, patience in His working in us.

I believe that once you see what God is saying here, you will understand more clearly why so many Christians are backsliding and falling away. And you'll also better understand the working of the Lord in your own heart!

The "good ground" Jesus mentions indicates those who heard the

Word and eventually brought forth fruit "with patience". The other hearers brought forth a measure of fruit too - but only for a time. Why? It is because they were impatient with the Lord and His working in their life - and they fell away!

I pray that as we explore this parable, you'll see each of these hearers in a whole new light. I believe there is a fresh word here for you from the Lord.

## 1. First, Consider the "Wayside Hearer"!

*"Those by the way side are they that hear..."* Verse 12

This hearer had the Word of God planted in his heart. And he heard it like any interested hearer: He sat, listened and didn't turn it off. He was not a mocker - he had respect for the Word.

Yet, Jesus says, *"...then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."* (Verse 12).

Now, I have always had a difficult time with this verse. Am I to believe I can preach to a congregation, drive out the powers of hell, command the devil to leave - and yet Satan can come in promiscuously and rob a person of the Word he or she has just heard? Can the enemy hover over a believer, wait for the Word to fall on that person's heart, then freely pluck it up?

That, to me, seems like throwing the Word of God straight into the devil's mouth! I just can't accept it. Instead, I believe we have to ask: Is this wayside hearer simply an innocent, childlike person, anxiously hearing the Word? Is it true that, through no fault of the hearer, the devil can swoop down, rob him of the preached Word and blind him spiritually, so that he won't turn to the Lord?

No - never! We don't serve a God who's like that! And that isn't the gospel we preach. We have to understand Jesus is saying something much deeper here.

You see, the wayside hearer has a heart that is "trodden down": *"A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it."* (Verse 5).

Here is our clue! Jesus is describing the kind of heart this wayside hearer has. And the phrase He uses here is trodden down. In other words, this person has "heard" often. In fact, he is a "professional hearer" - an expert at it. His heart has been trodden down, made hard like a well-walked road, by years of hearing without ever heeding!

This wayside hearer is described in Isaiah 5. The prophet tells Israel how God is going to turn them into a trodden-down vineyard - be-

cause they have heard so much reproof and rejected it all:

*"...I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste..."*

ISA 5:5-6

Jesus quotes from this same passage to introduce the parable of the sower: *"...Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."* (LK 8:10).

You see, God had instructed Isaiah: *"...Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."* (ISA 6:9-10).

What Isaiah describes is the condition of the wayside hearer!

### **The Wayside Hearer Is Hard and Trodden Down Because He Has Rejected The Word So Often!**

Luke uses a Greek word for trodden down that means, "rejection with disdain; an attitude of superiority". The wayside hearer has been reproved so often and for so long, he now smirks at the gospel. He laughs at it - mocks it! Nothing touches him anymore.

I think of a young Jewish man who came to Times Square Church during our first two years here. He was homeless, and the congregation adopted him. Almost everyone shared the gospel with him. Loving people gave him money and took him out for meals. Jesus Christ was made very plain to him.

That young man came to the altar at least twice. Both times I saw him standing there with his hands folded - and wearing a devilish grin on his face! I used to look up in the balcony and see him sleeping through the sermons. I prayed that at least one message would pierce the trodden-down soil of his heart.

It never happened! Eventually he became so vile, disruptive and explosive we had to ban him from

the church. He had become hard - a man with a trodden-down heart. No person in New York heard more of the gospel. No one received so much love. No one was more prayed for. But he had hardened his heart and shut his ears!

Beloved, that is when the enemy comes in - when the heart is hardened! Satan swoops down and steals the seed that has been distributed, before there is a chance of even a tiny crack opening in the ground. The devil doesn't promiscuously have access to any heart that hears the gospel. Not at all! Rather, he steals from those who have been reproved - yet who smirk in disdain at God's Word!

This "trodden down" hearer is the most impatient of all people. He does not want to deal with his problems. He'd rather drown them in pleasure - alcohol, drugs, sex, anything - to calm down his terrible feelings of guilt!

You speak to him of having heaven some day - but he wants it all now! He longs only for good times - no problems, so self-denial, no hardships. "Taking up a cross? Enduring suffering? No will of my own? Waiting forever for God to work character in me? You've got to be crazy!"

Indeed, multitudes of Americans are in a big hurry to prosper - to "get theirs" while the getting is good. That's what motivated Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken and so many other greedy Wall Streeters. They all thought the economy was headed for collapse, so they tried to make a quick fortune they could hide in a Swiss bank account.

How sad it is, though, that this spirit is creeping into the church! Many Christians have no patience for being tested or tried. They have no time for waiting on God, for bearing fruit with patience, as Jesus described. Instead, they want a full, blessing, painless, prosperous lifestyle with no waiting, no preparation, no reproof. And sadly, they have teachers and a gospel to back them up!

These believers hate any preaching of obedience, separation, holiness, repentance. They call it all "doomsday preaching". Why such resistance, such spite? It is because they are trodden down

with the urge to "get it all now"! They want to be entertained, blessed - to go to church, feel happy and leave in the same condition as when they entered. They don't want the Holy Spirit to prod them, to dig deeply to do the slow work of faith. They'd rather go to a charismatic circus!

### **2. Next, Consider the "Rootless Hearer".**

*"...which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away"*

LK 8:13

These hearers make the best-looking converts you've ever seen. They're happy, full of joy, vibrant. They testify to Christ's work in their lives. And theirs is a true conversion. They want to go on with the Lord - convicted by the Word, repentant, living in His joy.

Yet I ask every new convert reading this message right now to pay careful attention: If you ever fall away from the Lord, it will be because you are in this category - a "rootless hearer"!

You've been saved, filled with God's peace, and you're praising the Lord. You sing, you worship, you have joy. But one problem remains: You still battle a powerful temptation! It is like a snake, coiled and hissing, ready to strike at you with its poison.

You hate this besetting sin that once controlled your life. And now you're on your knees, crying "Oh Jesus, deliver me! I don't want this old lust haranguing me. I want to be free, clean. Help me - it has hold of my heart!"

Jesus says rootless hearers, *"...in time of temptation fall away."* (Verse 13).

This does not mean the temptation is so overwhelming it sweeps them away. It doesn't mean they fall because of an overwhelming desire for drugs, a sexual urge, a thirst for alcohol. No - it all has to do with being impatient with the work of God!

If you look back at a time when you fell or failed God, what would you say happened? You got mad at God for not answering your

prayer! You didn't believe He would honor His Word to keep and deliver you. And in time of temptation, you fell away because you were impatient with His work in you!

A woman in our church has a sister who fell from grace back to drugs. This backslidden woman is tormented by her addiction. Yet she is like an evangelist, telling converts who struggle with impatience: "Stay in church - stay with the Lord! Look at what's happened to me. It's so hard to get back!"

I'm sure if you sat down with her, she'd probably tell you, "I prayed - but I was overwhelmed. My preacher told me Jesus was my deliverer - that He would keep me from the power of sin. I cried, I prayed, I wept. But nothing happened!" Beloved, her sin was impatience!

Oh, what agonizing cries the rootless hearer sends up in time of temptation: "Lord, set me free! Take away my desires, the old sins. When will You ever deliver me, so I will never have to be afraid anymore?" Yet when the rootless hearer comes into a time of temptation, he falls - because he is not patient enough to put down roots!

You see, it is not enough to repent - to simply say "yes" to God. You have to put down roots in the Lord - and that takes patience. You can't simply drop a seed into the ground, stand over it and command, "Grow roots!" No - it's a natural process that takes time. It is a sovereign work of God.

Yet, as a young believer, you were surprised whenever you fell! You immediately condemned yourself. And after repeated failures, you told yourself it was no use trying. Then the devil whispered to you, "You're no good - you're too wicked. You can't make it. You might as well quit!"

But you had forgotten that God always judges you with great compassion! He knew you had not had time to put down roots. And that is the very reason you fell: You hadn't had time to grow roots!

This may sound like an excuse, but it isn't. It is a valid explanation for what happens in our walk with

the Lord. And the answer to it all is: Go back! Pray, dig in. Ask the Lord for roots. And ask Him for patience until they come!

But, you ask, what about mature Christians who once had roots - people who were grounded in Christ, yet still fell into sin? You know Christians who have been saved for years, who seemed to have deep roots - but who took a terrible fall!

The Bible says, *"...their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit..."* (HOS 9:16).

Such believers didn't stay close to Jesus! They had roots at one time - but they drifted away, and those roots dried up. The winds of false doctrine blew them away, because they allowed their roots to dry!

### **God Tests Us to See If We Will Patiently Wait for Him to Deliver Us!**

God knows that our impatience is totally destructive. Consider Israel's impatience:

Moses went up to the mountain, and God delayed him there. So what happened below: The people lost patience! After forty days, they rose up to play, dance and carouse in a drunken orgy. Finally, they melted all their jewelry and made a golden calf to worship!

I picture the Israelites saying, "Where is Moses? Where is our God, our help? What kind of deliverance is this? God has let us down! He saved us only to turn us over to this awful desert. Now we're going to do our own thing!"

Yet at that moment, Moses was on his way down the mountain, with God's Word in his hands! God is always on His way - He's always right at the door!

Consider what happened to Saul. Samuel told Saul to wait for him at Gilgal before fighting the Philistines. He warned him not to go into battle until Samuel had returned and could offer sacrifices to the Lord. Samuel said, "It may take me six, seven, eight days. But I'll be there!"

So Saul gathered with Israel at Gilgal. But after five days, the Israelites grew impatient. The Philistine army had been gathering

and building strength - and Saul's people began fleeing left and right! Soon the king had only a handful of soldiers left. Finally, on the seventh day, he grew very impatient: "Where is that prophet? Where is the burnt offering? We need it now!"

What Saul didn't know was that God had delayed Samuel - because He wanted to see what was in Saul's heart! God wanted to know if he would hold onto his faith while everything looked bad - if he would say, "I'll die trusting God if I have to. I'm going to stand on His Word to me!"

Instead, Saul took matters into his own hands. He said, "Bring me the lamb!" And he laid it out and offered the sacrifice himself (which was against Israel's law!). Then suddenly, Scripture says, *"And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came..."* (1.SAM 13:10).

Here came Saul's answer, his deliverance. But he had already acted in impatience! He hadn't been willing to stake his future on God's Word. The answer had been at the door all along - but he lost it all!

Perhaps this is true of you as well: Your deliverance was close at hand. But you fell because you could not hold on just a little while longer. You lost heart - you fainted too soon!

David is another man who grew tired of waiting. He complained, *"For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Thine eyes: nevertheless thou hearest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee."* (PSA 31:22).

David was looking back and saying, "In my impatience I accused the Lord of not answering my cry. I accused Him of abandoning me in my temptation and trial. But all the while, He heard me and preserved me. I stand here today preserved by Him!"

### **3. There Is Also the "Thorny Hearer".**

*"And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of*

*this life, and bring no fruit to perfection."*

LK 8:14

Jesus tells us this hearer didn't fall. He didn't go back to the world. No, he kept going on. But he didn't bear any fruit!

The "thorny hearer" goes to church, listens to the preaching, reads his Bible, hangs around God's people. He goes through all the motions - but he bears no fruit to fullness! He makes a lot of promises to God but never fulfills them. He's simply there - spiritually empty, just a body filling a pew!

Jesus says the thorny hearer "goes forth". In other words, once he hears the Word, he goes on with his life. Oh, he prays a little every day, talks the Christian talk, witnesses to others on occasion. But he's preoccupied, busy - with cares, pleasures, business!

How did he become so bogged down with the cares of the world? Through riches! The Bible says this type of hearer is drawn into lustful pleasures by his desire for wealth: *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."* (1.TIM 6:9).

I believe the thorny hearer is more impatient than anyone else in this parable. I picture him as high-powered, active, entrepreneurial, a person of action - kind, charitable, not selfish. But a terrible kind of impatience has gripped him: It is an impatience with the high-cost demand of the cross of Christ!

The thorny hearer cannot fully embrace self-denial. He cannot tolerate the idea of forsaking all to follow Jesus. He "*chokes*" (LK 8:14) on the demand to come out of the world and be separate and clean. And he chokes on the call to make his career secondary - to give his life to God's interests.

I know very few rich people who embrace self-denial. They're used to providing everything for themselves, catering to their flesh. They are like the thorny hearer, who has never been weaned from the things of the world. This hearer knows nothing of the spirit that was in Moses, who "(Chose) *rather to suffer affliction with the*

*people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season..."* (HEB 11:25).

Thank God, there are some wealthy Christians who are able to do this. But, as the Bible makes clear, most rich people spend their time, their energy and all their waking thoughts on investments, cares, pleasures. And they "go forth" content with a fruitless walk!

A Pentecostal minister once made a pitiful confession to me. He said he went to visit his parents in their tiny trailer home. His elderly father was a retired minister and was very poor, with no insurance. As the son looked at his parents' meager surroundings, satan whispered to him, "See this? If you give your whole life to the gospel, you'll end up in poverty! Think of all the missionaries who spend their lives for God. They all come home with nothing!"

Something came over that son. At that moment, he decided he would never be poor! He determined to make all the money he could, so he could retire in style.

This man was an official in his denomination and was very well-known and respected. But he started "wheeling and dealing" with his finances. All his tithes went toward investments. He "went forth" with his life, involved in ministry - but his preoccupation with wealth began to choke out his love for Jesus.

Eventually, all of his investments went sour. But, sadly, there has not been any repentance or change in him. He still ministers, often preaching at conventions. But he is still wheeling and dealing on the side, trying to build himself a nest egg.

Unlike his father, he may someday retire with a lot of money. But his father is going to go out in glory! I believe the Lord will always provide for that elderly minister and his wife. They may not be rich, but they'll always have food on the table. And when that father dies, he'll go to the Lord in peace and rest - home to receive his new body, a mansion and all that goes with it!

But the son will be bogged down with the cares of this life. If he ever does secure his future, he'll never

be able to enjoy it. Why? It is because he will live and die with no fruit to perfection!

#### 4. Finally, There Is the "Good Ground Hearer"!

*"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."*

LK 8:15

These hearers have a "good, honest heart"! Yet, what does this phrase mean? The answer is found in 2. Thessalonians: *"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."* (2.THESS 3:5).

This verse contains the two distinguishing marks of a "good-ground" hearer: (1) A heart that is set on loving God, and (2) One that is convinced Jesus will always deliver on time. These two characteristics are necessary for a heart that produces lasting fruit!

Now, the good-ground hearer is just like everybody else. He endures great afflictions, fiery trials and tests that seem strange to him. His body grows weary. Sometimes he gets depressed. Sometimes he's seduced by the flesh, and his passions are unruly. Sometimes his thoughts are disorderly and have to be brought into obedience to the Lord. Sometimes his love for Christ is tested, and he has long dry spells. Sometimes he is troubled by a distressed conscience.

But his heart has a definite direction! In every circumstance, he directs himself first into the love of God, and then into the patient waiting for Jesus Christ.

Now, waiting patiently on Christ has a dual meaning: It means, first of all, anticipating Jesus' Second Coming. But it also means waiting for Jesus to come suddenly in answer to your prayers, to deliver or bless you.

The good and honest heart says, "Jesus, I know I'm not perfect. I know my heart is black without Your cleansing blood. But I also know I love You with all my heart, and I am set on obeying You. I want to walk pleasing before You. Yet I don't have the power to do

anything of myself. You have promised to keep me. And I am going to wait for You to come with my deliverance!"

Jesus used a special word in referring to bearing fruit with patience: "cheerful". This means, literally, "a hopeful endurance through all tests and trials." Indeed, God's Word is most productive in us when it produces a quiet, trustful rest in the Lord.

*Hebrews tells us: "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."* (HEB 10:36). Have you set your hope - your whole life - on this Word? Do you believe it will keep you throughout all the years of your walk with Him?

Take God's Word and settle it in your heart right now. Let it produce an honest, pure, good heart in you. You'll find that in every trial and

temptation, it will always direct you immediately into His love and into patience - until Jesus comes with healing and victory.

**Hallelujah!**

by David Wilkerson  
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