

Patience has been a familiar theme for us during the Coronavirus pandemic. A young family, a small house, nowhere to go, nothing to do... During lockdown we were typically very close to each other for long periods of time. Such proximity takes its toll. If only social distancing measures applied *within* households! (I had this thought only occasionally).

I'm sure this is familiar to lots of you. It's been a gruelling time whatever our personal circumstances. Despite the real and lovely joys of more time together or slower life patterns, patience has often worn thin. I am in a Zoom prayer group. We share our victories and our struggles. As to the latter, I find myself returning again and again to patience as my main intercessory need.

It's good to reflect on patience in the context of prayer because doing so reveals two things. First, in my case at least, it reveals how glibly we can treat patience: 'Please, Lord, give me patience' often amounts to no more than 'Please let me get through the next hour without shouting at my 3 year-old'. This is a fair prayer, but doesn't do justice to Christian patience. At best it mistakes patience for gentleness (the virtue that mitigates anger and frustration), and at worst it is simply a coded allusion to our desire that time pass more quickly - like willing the final whistle to blow when your football team is up with two minutes to go. This is essentially a form of defeatism.

Second, thinking about patience in the context of prayer reminds us that all we need comes from God - patience included. In praying, we ask for things; and in asking for patience we recall its origin in God and not us.

Thus, if we want to grow in patience, we have to understand what it means that God is patient.

God's patience is most manifest in the way he deals with us after the fall. In essence, God is patient with our sin. Sin itself is impatient: it wants everything now. By contrast, God endures our sin that we might return to him at the appointed time and in the appointed way. His patience with sin means we are granted patience for a future, better, hope than the world has to offer. We do not hope for earthly pleasures but for what is unseen (Romans 8:25); our future is in the hands of God.

The means by which God secures our future hope is Christ. In Christ we see the long-suffering and endurance - the patience - of God. It is a patience which lays itself down for the joy that is to come (Hebrews 12:2) and therefore knows its proper end: the cross is only possible in light of the resurrection. Because Jesus endured suffering and guilt on our behalf, the way is made for our return to God.

Life can be hard. And patience doesn't come easily, whatever our circumstances. So pray for patience! But pray that you would be patient like God is patient, not treating it as a crutch to get you through the next few difficult moments, or as an excuse for resignation and defeatism, but for what it is: a property of God's great love revealed to us in Christ.