This morning, I am in the fifth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "The Spirit-Formed Life." During this series, I will be looking at what is known as the fruit of the Spirit, a phrase Paul uses in Galatians 5:22 to describe the kind of character that is formed in the person who lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit, walking not according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit of God. In case you're unfamiliar with the concept of the fruit of the Spirit, it comes from Paul's words in Galatians 5:

Galatians 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control.

This, Paul says, is what the Spirit produces in the life of the person who walks in step with God's Holy Spirit. People marked by love, not hatred, hostility or indifference. Joy, not despair or cheap thrill-seeking. Peace, not anxiety or conflict. Forbearance or patience, not anger, irritability, or impatience. Kindness instead of meanness, callousness or cruelty. Goodness instead of selfishness, corruption, or perpetrating evil. Faithfulness instead of faithlessness, unreliability, or a lack of integrity. Gentleness instead of harshness, abusiveness, or aggression. And self-control instead of living a chaotic, out of control life enslaved to desires. And Paul tells us that these qualities will be ours in increasing measure as we learn to walk with the Holy Spirit of God and to yield ourselves in obedience to His fruit-producing work in our lives. That is the Spirit-formed life.

This morning, we will be looking at the fourth characteristic on the list: forbearance or patience.

There are two main aspects to the patience produced in us by the Holy Spirit. The main sense has to do with our relationships with other people, what is translated in our English translations as either patience, forbearance or long-suffering. In fact, the Greek word in Galatians 5:22 is "makrothumia," which is made up of two parts – Macro, meaning long or large, and thumos, meaning temper, passion, or wrath. The literal sense is having a long fuse, taking a long time to become angry. This type of patience is the capacity to endure difficult circumstances, provocations, or mistreatment from others without retaliating or losing one's temper. It includes choosing to hold back anger, patiently enduring difficult people, and refusing to retaliate when wronged. Take a moment to ponder that definition in light of your relationships.

The other kind of patience produced in us by the Holy Spirit has more to do with our relationship with life and God; this is the Greek word "hupomone," which is

often translated as perseverance. Hupomone is made up of two parts – hupo meaning under, beneath or below, and mone, meaning to remain, stay, or abide. It carries the connotation of actively bearing up under a heavy load or standing one's ground under pressure without bending, breaking or running away. It refers to persevering, enduring, or remaining steadfast under difficult circumstances or trials.

I would imagine that you are already seeing how critical patience is, how much of a challenge it is to truly have and display it, and how desperately we need God's Holy Spirit to produce this fruit in us. For many of us, we struggle to suffer long with people, to have a long fuse, to be slow to anger, to endure difficult relationships without losing our temper or growing bitter and resentful. And for all of us, we truly need God's strength to stand firm in the midst of painful circumstances, to persevere and remain steadfast. So let's pray, and then let's talk about how we can partner with the Holy Spirit to grow in patience.

With others

1) Be transformed by God's patient love and mercy towards you

It is hard to have patience with difficult people, and just telling you to be more patient is not going to prevent the instinctive surge of anger or disgust that comes upon you when someone offends, mistreats, or annoys you. But for a moment, let's consider how God deals with you. Consider your sin. How many times have we gone back on our word, fallen back into the same sin, and offended him over and over? And yet, how patient and forgiving is our God with us, day after day? Honestly consider the depth of your sin, and then listen to these descriptions of God's patience and mercy:

Exodus 34:6-7 - And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, [7] maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

God is a just God, but he emphasizes first his compassion, grace, and how he is slow to anger and abounding in love.

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Once again, yes, God is a just judge, but he holds off, or forbears, his judgment to give us the opportunity to recognize the error of our ways and repent, or turn from our sin back to Him.

Romans 2:4 - Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

Paul shares the same message as Peter and as God in Exodus. God is full of grace and patient love for you, but do not mistake that as an inability or unwillingness to judge. Rather, see it as a loving invitation to turn to Him.

Lamentations 3:22–23 - Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. [23] They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

His mercy, his compassion, his love, is new every morning. See how healing, how transformative, this kind of love can be! To be shown such great patience and daily mercy by our holy God.

2) Repent of our lack of patient love and mercy towards others

Unfortunately for us, we too often do not reflect the patience and mercy of our God. I am asking you to recognize your anger, frustration and bitterness for what it is. A sinful response to the sin of others. Do not blame others, do not justify yourself, do not compare yourself to others. Look at God's love and mercy towards you and repent of where you fall short. Whether it is on the road, in your home, at work, with your spouse or children or parents, call it sin and repent of it.

I know this is very difficult. Long-suffering is well, long suffering. It requires a lot of forgiveness and mercy and bearing with people and their sins and struggles Forgiveness is not easy. As Sigmund Freud once said, "One must forgive one's enemies, preferably after they've been hanged."

The disciples realized that forgiving others over and over is not an easy thing. But listen to how Jesus told them to find the perspective and motivation to forgive:

Matthew 18:21–35 - Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”
22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven
times. 23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. 28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. 29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ 30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.
35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

When we sit in judgment on others, we are like a servant thinking we are the king. But when we recognize the depth of our sin, the magnitude of the debt we owe, and how gracious and merciful God has been towards us and continues to be towards us daily, not treating us as our sins deserve, our hearts can be transformed by His Holy Spirit so that we can show the same kind of patience, grace, and mercy towards others. Listen to how some of the other writers of the New Testament put it:

James 1:19–20 - My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Romans 12:9–21 - Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.
13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be

proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
[17] Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. [18] If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. [19] Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. [20] On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

As far as it depends upon you, live at peace. Do not repay evil for evil. Be willing to forgive, to pray for, and to do good.

3) Choose to forgive, love, pray for others and to leave the judgment to God

There has been such an increase in people going no contact with others. Children blocking their parents. Refusing to forgive and allowing bitterness to grow. Sometimes it is necessary. But only when it is done out of love, out of doing what is best for the parties involved. Do you see how holding on to anger affects not only you but your relationships with others? As Anne Lamott put it, "Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die." There is a better way:

1 Corinthians 13:4–5 - Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. [5] It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Colossians 3:12–13 - Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
[13] Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Ephesians 4:1–3 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2] Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Even when you don't feel like it, you can make a choice to love, to bless, and even to pray for those who are hard to love and put up with. Look at Jesus on the cross:

Luke 23:33–34 - When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. [34] Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Respond in love, even when confronting. It's not about me; this is the most loving thing to do for you. Don't stop loving, praying for, hoping for people, believing in what God can do through them. Be gracious and patient with them when they disappoint and frustrate you.

In life

We don't like to wait. We want everything faster, getting frustrated with slow loading speeds, delayed airplanes, and people who drive slowly in front of us. We can be impulsive, rushing into things without prayer or considering whether God wants us to move in that direction. Two simple but hard to follow instructions:

1) **Lay down your plans**

We have our plans, our timetable, our expectations of life and God. And when they do not happen, we grow impatient. The more you trust in your own view and plan, the more cynical and self-absorbed you become.

Proverbs 19:21 - Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

James 4:13–15 - Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." [14] Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. [15] Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

2) **Choose to trust**

Lay down your plans and choose to trust that God loves you, that He alone has the proper perspective on the world and your life, that He knows you better than you know yourself, and that His plan can be trusted.

Proverbs 3:5–6 - Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; [6] in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

James 5:7–11 - Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. [8] You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. [9] Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! [10] Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. [11] As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Like a farmer, be patient for the Lord's coming. Like the prophets or Job, persevere, stand up under trial, trusting in God, who is full of compassion and mercy. God can be trusted!

As Donald Miller put it in his book, A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: "Somehow we realize that great stories are told in conflict, but we are unwilling to embrace the potential greatness of the story we are actually in. We think God is unjust, rather than a master storyteller."

What would it look like for you to courageously trust that God is at work in your story and in this world, despite the suffering you have seen and experienced?

Elisabeth Elliot, who lost two husbands amidst many other inexplicable troubles, learned to trust God no matter what, and put it this way: "God is God. If He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere but in His will, and that will is infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to."

If you have a hard time being patient and trusting God with your life, is it possible that he has reasons for what He is doing that you can not understand? Can you humble yourself enough to accept this? Can you believe that if God is big enough to create everything, then he is big enough to have a reason for not giving you everything you have asked for, or for allowing your suffering that you can not understand? Can that help you to trust, knowing that God is perfect in His love, justice, and sovereignty, sees the end from the beginning, and knows what He is doing, even when we can't comprehend it?

Isaiah 55:8–9 - “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. 9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Remember Jesus and the disciples at the cross. God is at work for good. And see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, asking for what He wants, but choosing to trust His Father.

Luke 22:42 - “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

May you gain a vision of His love and sovereign care for you, that you might grow in your trust in Him and wait patiently for Him.