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Spirit Life: Patience

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We are in the opening weeks of our worship series, Spirit Life, where we are exploring how our financial generosity is shaped by living the fruits of the Spirit. “Live by the Spirit,” the Apostle Paul instructs his church in Galatia. And Paul continues... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. (Gal 5:22-23 NRS) And the amazing thing is that all these fruits of the spirit that come from living Spirit Life, both help us to live Spirit Life and they grow the other fruits of the Spirit as well. If you have more love, you are bound to have more faithfulness. If you have more gentleness, you are bound to have more love. And on and on and on. The same is true for generosity. As we move through this year’s stewardship appeal, we will dive deeper into several of these fruits of the spirit to guide us into living Spirit Life with more generosity.

And it’s important to understand why the apostle Paul calls all of these “fruits” of the spirit... because they are to be grown. The fruit of the spirit don’t just magically appear. Living Spirit Life is a journey. Just like fruit on a tree takes time to grow, so does Spirit Life. And just maybe one of the most obvious examples of this is the spiritual fruit of patience.

Here is what I mean. One of my deepest goals/desires is to be the best dad I can. Before I even had kids, I sought counseling to help me walk through and process any barriers to being the best dad I could be. My wife and I have spent lots of time working on our relationship so that when our kids entered our relationship we’d be as healthy as we could be. And as my group of friends all became dads at around the same time, we talked, shared our journeys, and supported one another, and still do support one another in our parenting.

So, there I was, a relatively new dad on a Saturday with the task of replacing a vanity faucet. Why did I need to replace the faucet... well we will leave that up to a conversation about marriage counseling. However, as I’m lying on my back, squished into this narrow vanity opening, reaching as far as my

fingertips will go, to get this very necessary and important faucet installed, my 3-year-old son shows up with a screwdriver or wrench and tries to squeeze in with me to help. One of the cutest things in the world. Unless... you are the one on your back squeezed into a small vanity opening, reaching as far as your fingertips will go.

What do you think happened? I’ll give you one guess... I wasn’t the most patient dad at that moment. Spirit Life? Eh... not so much. Why? Because wasn’t the most important thing the faucet install? Wasn’t finishing the task at hand the most important? He started to walk out of the bathroom and then I remembered what kind of dad I wanted to be, and I had a new word to describe it. I wanted to be a generous dad. I kept using the phrase “best dad I could be” but what did that mean? In that moment it came to me. It meant being a generous dad. Generous with my affection, generous with my attention, generous with my presence, generous with my time. And all of that pointed to the spiritual fruit of patience. To be generous with my affection, attention, presence, and my time all pointed to patience. Generosity came from a place of patience.

So, I called him back in and we spent the whole afternoon replacing the faucet. Why? Well... why not? Because that’s where the good stuff is. That’s where Spirit Life is. And over the years we did lots of that stuff together. And that generosity, born out of patience, has been paid forward because now when I ask him to help me put something together, we start together, he patiently waits until the right time, and then he just takes over and I watch. Super fun!

Generosity born out of patience is not new, but it can often be overlooked. It’s often overlooked in the story known as Ruth. And I can see why. In the story of Ruth, a husband and wife, named Naomi, have two sons but are living in Judah where they are overcome by famine. This famine is so bad they leave and become immigrants in a neighboring country called Moab. The husband dies and the two sons marry two Moabite women, one whose name is Ruth. Then those two sons die leaving all three women as widows. Naomi tells her daughters-in-law that they should go back to their families because she is going to go back to her

extended family in Judah and hopes to make it. One daughter – in – law goes back to her family but the other, named Ruth refused to leave and makes this promise. One of the most famous promises in all of scripture:

But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die-- there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" (Rut 1:16-17 NRS)

What a promise, and we might stop there and call it a day. But this story is not only of promise made but a promise fulfilled and is linked to generosity born out lots of things, but one is patience. The next thing that happens in the story reads...

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. (Rut 1:19 NRS)

The two of them "went"... makes it sound like an afternoon walk to Judah. This was a strenuous 7-10 day hike over difficult terrain, exposed to the weather, wild animals and who knows what else was lurking around. Ruth made a promise – but her patience kept her committed to that promise. I'm not sure how long my patience would last. Around day 3 or 4, going home to a familiar landscape, familiar people, going home to a sure thing would have sounded really, really, good. But she didn't throw in the towel. She remained patient.

But they get back to Naomi's family and one day Ruth asks Naomi if Ruth can help improve their food situation. Ruth asks if she could go glean food from a field that has been harvested for any leftovers. Naomi says yes and Ruth goes out and the story reads...

... So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment." (Rut 2:7 NRS)

Ruth is patiently waiting all day for permission from the landowner... a guy named Boaz. Boaz does notice her and her patience is rewarded with generosity from Boaz. He gives her a job. Gives her protection. And ultimately gives her and Naomi a future by bringing them into his family. Boaz and Ruth marry, and they become the proud great-grandparents of King David.

Now there are many, many other things going on in Ruth. Too many for us in our time today but let us not miss the spiritual fruit of patience that brings forth the generosity of all these characters. A generosity that changes the course of history for an entire people, as King David becomes a great champion and king.

The spiritual fruit of patience is that great giver. Patience gives the other time. Time to reflect... time to get things sorted out... time to be themselves. Patience gives us the time to do the same.

Patience gives the other respect. Respects their wishes and desires... their unique backgrounds... their own hopes and dreams. Patience gives us the respect to do the same.

And as we live into this season of our stewardship appeal, I ask that all of us live the spiritual fruit of patience. Financial generosity is not a topic we love to linger on. This a hike for us all. It can leave us out in the open, exposed even. And after a few week you may want to throw in the towel and go home. You may also feel like Ruth, standing in a field all day long wondering when all this stewardship stuff will end. I get it.

But as we move together and you consider your generosity, be patient with yourself and one another. Take time to reflect, to get things sorted out. Be yourself. You are unique and all our gifts are all needed for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Living the Spirit Life of patience will lead you to be generous with your affection to this community and the Gospel mission that Prince of Peace has committed itself to. Living the Spirit Life of patience will lead you to be generous with your attention, your presence, and your time. And the amazing thing, is that if you've been around here for a while you know how living the Spirit Life patience has led to unbelievable generosity. Won't you join in?