

Is patience dangerous?

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We can't work on everything at once so we prioritize. Do you have any particular spiritual priorities right now? Are you focused on anything specific?

Is patience high on your list of priorities? Is it in the top two or three?

If so—you are in danger. Yes, danger.

“Love is patient, love is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4). I believe that. Patience covers a good bit of love's terrain. But consider how it might be dangerous when it becomes our *primary* agenda.

Patience can be self-righteous

Patience, at least the way we apply it, can mean this: “You are messed up. I’m not. But, being the generous type, I will wait until you finally get it and reach my level.” Too often, patience is actually no agenda at all. The real agenda is for the dolts around us who need to change.

Patience without humility is self-righteousness. It leaves underlying resentment and anger unattended.

Patience can be passive

If we know anything about ourselves, we know that we are not perfect. We expect to have a long agenda for growth and change. Patience, however, tends to just sit around and wait. It has a keener vision for other people’s sins than it does for one’s own sin and weaknesses. This makes it a hopeless goal because it lacks fervor for daily growth. Instead, it waits to be “tried” by people or events.

Patience can be silent

Along with the smug self-righteousness that can seep into patience, another problem is that patience offers no compelling reason to speak with the other person. Patience tends to be silent, and, especially in close relationships, the last thing you want to do is be silent when the other person is being sinful or even irritating. If we are bothered by something that has happened in a relationship, our kingdom instincts should be to speak about the matter in a way that is humble and edifying. From this perspective, I would be so sad if my wife or friends were “patient” with me.

Patience without a willingness to speak openly and in the best interests of the relationship is cowardice, even hatred.

Patience is best when paired with kindness

Yes, patience is a fruit of the Spirit, in which case it works best when it rests on a godly explanation:

The Lord is so patient with me—so patient. And other people have to be patient with me *every* day. Therefore, it is my honor to be able to extend that patience to others. Usually patience will speak to the other person, sometimes it won't.

This version is less dangerous. But it could still use an addition. To be safe, we should remember Paul's words (above) and add kindness. While patience is willing to cover minor offenses, kindness is busy strategizing ways to do good. Patience-kindness is less prone to sitting around and waiting for change in others, and it avoids the arrogance and cowardice that can lie hidden under motives that can be more deceptive than we realize.

