

Patience Is a Great Power

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Thank you very much, President Oaks, for the gracious introduction. I'm sure you won't take exception if I tell you I appreciate your introduction almost as much as one I had a few weeks ago when visiting a Junior Sunday School in connection with a stake quarterly conference. When called upon to say a few words to these young students, I said to them, "Who can tell me who Harold B. Lee is?"

Hands went up rapidly. One six-year-old boy said, "He is our prophet."

Another young girl left her hand up. I asked her, "Do you have something else you would like to say?"

She responded with, "And I know who you are too."

"Who am I?"

"You're the prophet's helper."

This is one of my very favorite introductions. I hope I may always be.

I bear witness to you this morning I too know who President Harold B. Lee is. He is a prophet of God. I wish I knew all things as well.

My Brigham Young University friends, I want to share with you today some thoughts on the subject and principle of patience. Incidentally, while I am speaking today, you may all practice patience. I'd like Coach Potter,

the basketball team, and the student body to know Sister Ashton and I are coming down Thursday evening to watch the game with UTEP, and we're not coming down to learn patience—we're coming down to see an appropriate victory.

Referring back to the six-year-old girl's introduction, may I remind you we can learn much from young people, particularly children, if we will have the patience to listen and observe. One other experience I hope will emphasize this. I was speaking to another Junior Sunday School group en route to a general session of quarterly conference. After a few thoughts I was making my way down the aisle to join their parents in the general assembly. In the process of leaving I tapped a couple of young boys on the top of their heads and said, "Good-bye, boys," and made my way out of the room. As I left the room the door was opened in back of me. I turned and saw another six-year-old running after me. I stopped, bent down, and listened while he said, "Brother Ashton, you didn't touch me on

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my head." I tapped him on both shoulders and we both went away feeling happier. I hope when he went back to his Junior Sunday School class there was a teacher with enough patience to not say, "Son, you can't do that."

Let me share with you one more child story and then I'll be back to my outlined patience theme. This story has to do with patience, I believe, and whether it does or not in your minds, I like it and hope you'll enjoy it. A city family recently moved to the country. Shortly after arrival and settling down, the father borrowed a horse from one of the new neighbors and placed himself upon the horse with his young nine-year-old securely in back of him. After they were mounted upon the horse, a big truck came by and caused a loud noise. The horse shied and off went the father and the son. This father showed great patience in making a comment to his son. Incidentally, I've been around horses enough to know that when they misbehave people don't talk to their sons; they talk to the horses. But he had the patience to turn to his son and say, "If that horse were mine, I'd teach him a thing or two." The next night at dinner time, when it was quiet, young Billy had his moment and said, "Dad, I talked to Brother Brown and he told me for \$125 you can have the horse and teach him anything you want."

In the Doctrine and Covenants, section 6, verses 18 and 19, important instructions were given to Oliver Cowdery:

Therefore be diligent; stand by my servant Joseph, faithfully, in whatsoever difficult circumstances he may be for the word's sake.

Admonish him in his faults, and also receive admonition of him. Be patient; be sober; be temperate; have patience, faith, hope and charity.

Please note the double emphasis on patience. Oliver, as we, needed double reminding. Oliver Cowdery later fell because he lacked patience. He failed in the test of

patience. He handled the sacred plates. He saw John the Baptist. He received the higher priesthood from Peter, James, and John. He participated in many unusual blessings, but he knew not patience.

Someone has said, "Patience is the support of weakness; impatience is the ruin of strength."

Now let me share with you some thoughts about patience in four different areas.

Patience with God

First, patience with God. How often have we heard people say, "I cannot believe or put my trust in an unknown being who permits my mother, my father, my brother, my sister, my child to die or suffer when I know I am entitled to have my prayers answered, as are they. If there is a God, he surely would have answered my prayers and heard my pleas." Aren't we lacking in patience, to say the least, when we are inclined to tell God how to answer our prayers and desires? Our relationship to God will improve as we learn to ask rather than to tell. Surely it is wisdom that we seek not to counsel the Lord. Aren't we out of our realm when we judge or are inclined to second-guess God in our human frailties?

Doctrine and Covenants, section 54, verse 10: "And again, be patient in tribulation." Proper prayer teaches us patience. I declare to you, my friends, this morning, very often our prayers are best answered in silence. Sometimes the answers to our prayers are delayed so we may learn patience. I bear witness to you today our Heavenly Father is an almighty God because he has eternal patience with us. God lives; he loves us; he hears our prayers; he answers our prayers; he answers the prayers of the faithful; he hears the prayers of the repentant. God can be found if we have the patience to seek, knock, ask, and listen.

Patience with Family

Second, a thought or two about patience with parents and family members. "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). Oh, to God that we had the patience to withstand such family statements as these:

"I am ashamed of you."

"I never want to see you again."

"You're a disgrace to the family."

Yes, even "Get out and never come back."

"You've ruined our lives."

"What have we done to deserve such a son, or such a daughter?"

"This is a fine way to treat us after all we have done for you."

And "You watch. You'll never amount to anything."

May I pause long enough to say I, along with you, wish that such statements were never made. But if they are, students, do you have the patience to withstand, forgive, and bear without malice?

I'm thinking of a young lady who had decided upon marriage. When she consulted her father, he said, "Marriage will be a tremendous adjustment. Don't have any children until you have become adjusted to each other and know each other well." Her marriage was in difficulty after six months. As we visited with her, I thought to myself, speaking of patience with parents, maybe it would have been well for her at the time to have said to her father, who undoubtedly in all sincerity had given this advice, "Father, if you don't mind, these are things my husband and I will work out, decide, and plan." Patience with family members is most important.

I'm thinking of a young man I met over at the Utah State Prison. Let me just tell you some circumstances, with the thought in mind of patience on the part of this young man. We went there for a religious service. Members of the gathering were inmates of the prison along with friends and family members. The inmates

sat on one side of the hall and their relatives, families, and friends sat on the other side of the small chapel. As we came into this setting through the rear door each individual was in place ready for the service. I noticed a young man near the front nudge his buddy. As they looked back at us, he said to his buddy, "Which one of those guys is Ashton?" I took a look at the size of the fellow who had asked the question and hoped his buddy didn't know which one I was.

"Ashton's the one in the middle," his buddy said.

We walked up toward the front. As we reached the place where these young men were seated, this young questioning prisoner came over to me and said, "Could I talk to you for a moment?"

As he made that advance, one of the deputy wardens walked over and said, "Sit down." (He said that to the prisoner, not to me. I'd have been happy if he had said it to me at that moment.)

"I want to talk to Ashton."

I saw he was determined. The deputy said to me, "Do you want to speak to him?"

I replied, "Yes, I do." (I may be a coward, but I'm not stupid.) I'll never forget what this prisoner told me privately just before the service started. He took hold of my arm as we stood alone and pointed over to the other side of the room.

"Do you see the guy on the end of the third row?" I looked over. He said, as I recognized the spot, "He's my dad. You know what?"

I asked, "What?"

He then continued, "Next week my dad's going to be ordained an elder, and I'm the guy what's done it. Ever since I've been in this prison, my dad's been coming down once a week to see me. I've been teaching him out of the Book of Mormon and the Bible. Now he's shaped up and is ready to be ordained an elder." If you English teachers will plug your

ears again, I'll repeat what he said: "And I am the guy what's done it."

I found out later that that young man had every right to say, "You see that man over on the end of the third row? He's my dad. I'd like to break his back. He's no good. He's the reason I am here. The only time he ever spent any time with me in my life was after I came here." But he didn't say those things. In the true spirit of patience, he accepted his father when he visited him. Now his father was qualified to be ordained an elder because this son had patiently worked with him.

After the meeting I asked him, "What are you going to do now that you have your father ordained an elder?"

With genuine seriousness in his eyes, he answered, "Now I'm going to start on my mom."

I was interviewing a missionary not long ago in the privacy of a small church room. He asked me, "Brother Ashton, do you think I can make it as a missionary? I've been out fourteen months. My father is an alcoholic. My mother's been divorced twice. Can I make it as a missionary?"

I asked him, "How do you feel about your dad? How do you feel about your mother?"

His chin quivered as he replied, "I love them."

I felt impressed to say, "You'll make it. With patience and love like that you can't fail."

Patience with Friends, Associates, and Neighbors

Third, patience with friends, associates, and neighbors is the next classification I'd like to speak about. Have the patience not to resist reminders. Be patient in counsel. Be patient in the repentance processes of your friends. Be patient in living within policy. I bear witness to you, if you'll be patient you'll know the policies and procedures on this campus are for your benefit, your development, and your joy. May I share this quotation from John 21:14–17.

Though it is very seldom used in the framework of patience, will you look upon it this way as I quote it.

This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?

And the scriptures say that Peter was *grieved*, but I would like to say for this occasion Peter was *impatient*.

. . . because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

Oh that we could take counsel and direction repeatedly without resentment and without impatience.

Let us forgo giving people last chances: "Either . . . or else you've had it. I've put up with this as long as I can." Let's forgo giving last chances to family members or friends. This is not the spirit of Christ.

Patience with Self

Fourth, may I ask you to think with me for a few moments about patience with self. Have more patience with yourself—more self-understanding. I would plead that we understand it is not our role to be self-condemning. I like to think when we are taught "Judge not, that ye be not judged," that it has direct

reference to us and our relationship with ourselves. We should not judge ourselves. We should teach ourselves patience—patience to believe in ourselves, patience to motivate ourselves, patience to believe that God and I can do it. When necessary, lean on the truth “I am a child of God.” God and I, with patience on my part, can do it. I remind you we do not have to worry about the patience of God, because he is the personification of patience, no matter where we have been, what we have done, or what we, to this moment, have allowed ourselves to think of ourselves. Two of Satan’s greatest tools today are spreading impatience and discouragement. Drugs, moral misconduct, violent protest are merely evidences of internal impatience on our part.

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. [James 1:12–14]

I share with you this morning, my young friends, this fact. When you have hours and days of a feeling of inadequacy, when you are inclined to say, “I don’t have much going for me; no one cares about me,” I bear witness to you that an eternal truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the value of the individual. God will not forsake you.

Be Patient in all Things

Patience is personal. Patience is a great teacher. Patience is a great achievement.

Patience is a great power. I hope and pray our Heavenly Father will help us to be patient with God, to be patient with our families, to be patient with our friends and neighbors, and most of all, today, to be patient with ourselves. You are someone special. Our Heavenly Father is aware of you. All he asks in return is for you to be patient with him. I bear witness he knows the beginning. He knows the end. He knows you. Joseph Smith, in contrast to what I said in the beginning about Oliver Cowdery, remained true and faithful and was a vital instrument in the hands of the Lord because his patience was unceasing and undying. Some of you may wonder, “What can I do to make my testimony stronger?” One of the greatest ingredients for a strong, enduring, vigorous testimony is patience.

I humbly pray we will realize the great opportunity we have to practice patience with God, with neighbors, with family, and with friends, and with self. Never forget, man is that he might have joy. I bear witness to you, we can have joy only as we practice patience. One of the primary reasons we have been placed here upon the earth is to know God through diligence and patience.

I thought to myself last night as I watched television and saw our first prisoners of war making initial contact with their families, “How great, how wonderful, are the fruits of patience.”

I humbly leave you my testimony to the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you for this opportunity of being with you and briefly turning your thoughts, in this day when it is so important, to patience. May God help us to be patient in all things, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.