

"How to Grow a Long Fuse"

By Allan Pole



Theme: God's patience can be yours as you cooperate with Him.

Text: James 1:19

Here's a thought: Patience is the ability to "count down" before "blasting off."

A train was filled with tired people. Most of them had spent the day travelling through the hot dusty plains. At last, evening had come and they all tried to settle down to a sound sleep. However, at one end of the car a man was holding a tiny baby and as night came on the baby became restless and cried more and more. Unable to take it any longer, a big brawny man spoke for the rest of the group. "Why don't you take that baby to its mother?"

There was a moment's pause and then came the reply. "I'm sorry. I'm doin' my best. The baby's mother is in her casket in the baggage car ahead."

Again, there was an awful silence for a moment. Then the big man who asked the cruel question left his seat and moved toward the man with the motherless child. He apologized for his impatience and unkind remark. He took the tiny baby in his own arms and told the tired father to get some sleep. Then in loving patience he cared for the little child all through the night.

Patience is the ability to "count down" before "blasting off." As I read the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call The Old Testament) I am amazed at how long God's fuse was with His rebellious and disobedient people. The Lord certainly became angry eventually but He repeatedly demonstrated that His temper has a long fuse.

James 1:19 tells us how to grow a long fuse:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. NIV

Patience is developed as you learn how to use your:

Ears



A mother asked her young daughter on Christmas Day, "Well, did you see Santa Claus last night?"

Her daughter replied, "No. It was too dark to see him, but I heard what he said when he stubbed his toe against the chair in the living room."

Proverbs 20:5 promises that you will learn a lot about people as you learn to be a listener:

The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out. NIV

Many people hear but do not truly listen. Active listening has the following characteristics:

- 1) It is intentional - the listener tries to receive as accurately as possible what the other person is communicating.
- 2) It is focused - the attention is fully placed on the person talking.
- 3) It is interpretive - the listener tries to recognize the meaning of a speaker's thoughts, feelings and attitudes about his subject.
- 4) It is conveyed - the listener reports back to the speaker. The best way to convey that you are actively listening is to rephrase in your own words what you understand the other person to be saying.

When you are upset with someone, make it your goal to gain a better understanding, to more fully comprehend the situation and the perspective of the other person.

Abraham Lincoln explained:

When I'm getting ready to reason with a man, I spend one-third of my time thinking about myself and what I am going to say - and two-thirds thinking about him and what he is going to say.

King Solomon observed in Proverbs 12:15 that your growth in wisdom is directly proportionate to your growth as a listener, "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice." NIV

Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes and see the situation the way they do. This is done in three easy steps:

1. Close your mouth
2. Open your ears

3. Step into their shoes

Are you quick to listen? Would those you live, work or play with describe you as a good listener? If yes, well done! If no, it is time to start cleaning the wax out of your ears!

Patience is developed as you learn how to use your:

Ears

Mouth



Your mouth can be a powerful vehicle for conveying positive messages that build up and encourage people or tear down and discourage people.

Let's live according to Ephesians 4:29:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. NIV

As you seek to affirm people, study their:

- Gifts - what do they do well?
- Accomplishments - what have they completed recently?
- Temperament or personality - how are they unlike you and how does that make the world a better place?
- Joys - what do they enjoy doing?

Proverbs 18:2 claims that continually flapping lips belong to a fool, "A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions." NIV

My preaching professor in seminary taught me three basic rules that can apply to speaking in general:

- 1) Stand up. Be bold. Lift your chin up and push your shoulders back.
- 2) Speak up. Be clear and articulate. Express your feelings and requests in a straightforward and loving manner.
- 3) Shut up. Long talking begets short hearing.

For two solid hours, the lady sitting next to a man on an airplane had told him about her grandchildren. She had even produced a plastic foldout photograph album of all eight of her grandchildren.

After talking for two hours about the grandchildren, she finally realized that she had dominated the whole conversation. "Oh, I've done all the talking, and I'm so sorry. I know you certainly have something to say. Please, tell me - what do you think of my grandchildren?"

Are you slow to speak? Would people who know you say that you use your mouth well?

Patience is developed as you learn how to use your:

Ears

Mouth

Temper



The Apostle Paul writes a lot about anger in a few short words in Ephesians 4:26-27:

26 In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. NIV

A truck driver stopped to eat at an all-night restaurant. The waitress had just served him when three swaggering, leather-jacketed motorcyclists - of the Hell's Angels type - entered and rushed up to him, apparently looking for a fight. One grabbed the hamburger off his plate; another took a handful of his French fries; and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it.

The trucker did not respond as one might expect. Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his bill, walked to the front of the room, placed the bill and his money on the cash register, and went out the door. The waitress followed him to put the money in the till and stood watching out the door as the big truck drove away into the night.

When she returned, one of the cyclists said to her, "Well, he's not much of a man, is he?"

She replied, "I can't answer that, but he's not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles in the parking lot."

Anger can make you bitter, withdrawn and negative. It can cripple and destroy

relationships. Uncontrolled anger is destructive, and unless you learn to control it, it will control you. Consider these principles for controlling your anger:

- (1) Anger is not sinful. It is a God-given emotional response to life's threats and hurts. The closer the relationship, the more likely that anger will occur. Anger itself doesn't hold the moral implications - it's how you handle it.
- (2) Be angry and sin not. Anger is not morally wrong, but it can be vented destructively. Learn to discharge anger in non-destructive ways. Express your feelings rather than launch a character assassination. Do something to "let off steam" without hurting someone, such as doing some kind of physical exercise or simply taking a deep breath and counting to ten.
- (3) Try to laugh at little irritations instead of letting them frustrate you.
- (4) Find out what really made you mad. Look beneath the surface for the root problem. Frustration results from a blocked goal, so what goal is being blocked?
- (5) Write an angry letter to the person or situation that got you upset. Be totally honest about your feelings, then tear the letter up.
- (6) Yell at God if you feel angry at Him, but then allow Him to speak to you.
- (7) Confront the person you're mad at - but only after you've calmed down, and do it gently without blaming or getting emotional.
- (8) Learn to forgive others and yourself.
- (9) Channel your anger into constructive action. For example, if it makes you mad that so many people in our world are hungry, find people that are less fortunate than you and help them.
- (10) If you find that you consistently can't handle your anger in appropriate ways, get help from a godly counselor.

Are you slow to become angry? How long is your fuse before you blow up?
When you *are* angry, how do you express it?

Patience is a quality you admire in the driver behind you, and scorn in the one ahead.

Patience is listed in the Bible as a fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). The Bible defines it as forbearance or having a long-temper - a long fuse. As is the case with other fruit or virtues that a follower of Jesus grows in, God's patience can be yours as you cooperate with Him.

James and John – two of the twelve apostles – were nicknamed “The Sons of Thunder” because of their fiery tempers. Although it was probably a different James that wrote the Book of James that we read from today, keep this nickname in mind the next time you read 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. By the time John writes these letters after years of walking with Jesus his words are filled with love and patience. If Jesus can change John He can change you and me!

Known as the "Bishop of the South Pacific," John Selwyn had at one time been recognized for his boxing skill. Touched by the Holy Spirit's convicting power, however, he later became an outstanding missionary. One day this godly leader reluctantly gave a stern but loving rebuke to a man who regularly attended the local church. The disorderly one resented the advice and angrily struck Brother Selwyn a violent blow in the face with his clenched fist. In return the missionary merely folded his arms and humbly looked into the man's blazing eyes. With his boxing skill and powerful rippling muscles, he could easily have knocked out his antagonist. Instead, he turned the other cheek and waited calmly to be hit a second time. This was too much for the assailant, who became greatly ashamed and fled into the jungle.

Years later, the man accepted the Lord as his Saviour and gave his testimony before the church. It was customary at that time for a believer to choose a Christian name for himself after he was converted. When asked if he wished to follow this practice, he replied without hesitation, "Yes, call me John Selwyn! He's the one who taught me what Jesus Christ is really like!"

All around you are people who need to see what Jesus Christ is really like. Will you acknowledge your shortcomings today and ask Him to live through you?

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