

“Patience—in the Process of Time”

COLEEN K. MENLOVE
Primary General President

This address was given, at the 2002 BYU Women’s Conference

© 2002 by Brigham Young University,
Women’s Conference
All rights reserved.

For further information write:

BYU Women’s Conference,
352 Harman Continuing Education Building,
Provo, Utah 84602.
(801) 422-7692

E-mail: womens_conference@byu.edu
Home page: <http://womensconference.byu.edu>

It is so wonderful to be with you, sisters. As I look into your faces and as I see the joy of your testimonies, I wonder why I felt so anxious about this appointment today at this hour. I know that it is your testimonies that teach and guide and direct the children—your children—for you are the mothers, the grandmothers, and the favorite aunts of those Primary children. On one occasion when Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke at a BYU devotional here in the Marriott Center, he said, “In choosing to speak today about a rather pedestrian principle, patience, I hope I do not empty the Marriott Center!”¹ I also hope I don’t empty the Marriott Center—physically or mentally—as I have been asked to speak on the scriptural phrase “according to the own due time of the Lord” (1 Nephi 10:3), which for me means patience. It is my prayer that the Spirit will fill this building and our hearts to teach each one of us what is needful to become patient.

When I shared with my husband that I had been asked to speak on patience, his spontaneous reply was, “Oh, the Lord really knows you and what you need.” That was a humbling but accurate statement. My first impression was that if the Lord had instructed the BYU Women’s Conference committee to help me focus on understanding and develop patience, it must be important and I had better be about it. It has become a research project for me. The

Lord has gently guided me with daily opportunities to learn more about my attitudes and my habits related to patience and impatience. And my family has been assisting me, or better said, checking up on me. A public declaration of your desire to work on a virtue can come back to haunt you. Let me share with you three things that I have learned as I have focused on patience, and perhaps this can be the take-home message. First, patience is part of Heavenly Father's plan; second, we can learn to be more patient; and third, we can start right now to become patient.

Patience Is Part of Heavenly Father's Plan

We might assume we know what patience is, and we could even hastily assume we are patient. Let's look more closely and see if there is need to improve. The dictionary defines patience as the bearing of pain or sorrow calmly or without complaint; not being hasty or impetuous; being steadfast despite opposition, difficulty, or adversity. This really sounds like the ideal hospital patient—or, perhaps, a daughter of God.

Children say that patience is waiting, waiting nicely, waiting nicely for a long time. At our house we have a saying about patience that has been passed down from generations before. It is, "Every dog has his day, and you're still a pup." Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said that patience is "accepting a divine rhythm to life"—allowing Heavenly Father's plan to unfold. "Patience is . . . being willing . . . to submit . . . to what the scriptures call the 'process of time.'"²

However you describe patience, it is important in the scriptures, as the word patient or patience appears more than eighty times. Patience is a virtue attributed to God the Father and Jesus Christ. In Mosiah we are asked if we have "come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men" (Mosiah 4:6).

The apostle Paul said, "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1–2). As in all things, we look to Jesus Christ and His life for understanding and for an example of how to run the race with patience. As we take the yoke of Christ upon us, we learn of Him and how to be like Him (see Matt. 11:29). Elder Maxwell reassures us that "even though our experiences are micro compared to [the Savior's,] the process is the same."³ The Prophet Joseph

Smith learned that patience has a refining role in preparing us for “a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (D&C 63:66). After Joseph Smith’s experience in the Sacred Grove, he was required to wait. He waited patiently for more than three years before the angel Moroni appeared to him. And then more waiting and more patience were required in order to learn necessary lessons.

Knowledge of the eternal plan of happiness gives us hope and reassurance for today and for eternity. Elder Maxwell teaches that patience is being willing “to watch the unfolding [process] of God with a sense of wonder and awe—rather than pacing up and down within the cell of our circumstance.”⁴ We have been given the amazing gift of the Holy Ghost to teach, guide, calm, and comfort us. As we seek, listen, and respond to the Spirit, it will testify to the truth of the plan of happiness. Feelings of panic can be replaced with peace and joy because we know our potential for eternal life with Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ. This knowledge makes enduring to the end—and all through the middle—a much more meaningful and enjoyable experience.

We need to trust that the Lord will fulfill His promises in His own due time. “When we are . . . impatient, we are suggesting that we know what is best” and that all should march to our timetable and not rely upon Heavenly Father and His divine plan.⁵ In the stage production *Savior of the World*, Zacharias and Elisabeth proclaim, “[I will] give God forever to make me what I am—give my plans, and give my dreams, [and] give up all my fretful schemes.”⁶

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland helps us understand the significance of submitting our will to the Father’s. He described the appearance of the Savior to those on this continent: “In an initial and profound moment of spellbinding wonder, when surely [Christ had] the attention of every man, woman, and child, . . . his submission to his Father is the first and most important thing he wishes us to know about himself.

“Frankly, I am a bit haunted by the thought that this is the first and most important thing he may want to know about us when we meet him one day in similar fashion. Did we obey, even if it was painful? Did we submit, even if the cup was bitter indeed? Did we yield to a vision higher and holier than our own, . . . ?”⁷ As we follow the example of the Savior, we will learn to submit our will to the Father’s will and do His will in His way.

You know, it's not fashionable in today's world to submit to anyone or anything. Submission will appear to many as wimpish and feeble. A popular fast-food chain motto promotes, "Have it your way." Our way may not be consistent with the Lord's way. It takes conviction to submit patiently. It takes trust that the Lord knows best the purpose of our life. Oh, there will be many who will say, "You can't do it," or "Give it up," or "It's too hard," and even "It isn't worth it." But our best guidance doesn't come from the voices of the world. It comes from the sweet Spirit of the Holy Ghost confirming the purpose of our patience.

We must take care, though, that our abilities do not interfere with our humility and our desire to submit to the Lord. A mission president told me about a missionary who came to his mission. A well-accomplished young man, he was physically attractive, an athlete, and an excellent scholar. He was determined to be the best missionary ever, according to his definition of "best missionary." When things didn't go well, his solution was to put in more time, to work harder. In the past, it had seemed that his abilities and natural talents had been sufficient for success. But missionary work had a lesson for this elder to learn. He began to understand what it means to patiently submit to the will of the Lord.

We Can Learn to Be More Patient

The second part of the take-home message is that we can learn to be more patient. A few years ago, I opened a fortune cookie and found this message inside: "What you are doing now is insufficient for the future." It is not good enough to claim that patience is not in our genes or that we are a type "A" personality and we can't help our nature. Let's look at what is needed to develop the godly virtue of patience. But I want to warn you that the more I have tried to develop greater patience, the more aware I am of how impatient I am and how patient others are.

Here are two suggestions to consider: first, we need to adjust our expectations to our knowledge of Heavenly Father's plan; and second, we need to learn to wait upon the Lord.

Adjust Your Expectations to Your Knowledge of Heavenly Father's Plan

There seems to be an unending supply of challenges for all of us. There are so many opportunities for us to learn the kind of patience that requires us to "be still and know" (D&C 101:16). Even patience with a deadline will give

opportunities to learn. I spent considerable time studying and pondering what would be important to say today. I patiently waited for what a friend calls “the talk angels” to deliver the pages, at least hint at the words, and finally just to give comfort. And I was really fine until this deadline came uncomfortably close. The Lord has so much to teach me about patience with a deadline. It is humbling to realize that the best thoughts for this talk may come to me as I’m driving home today.

We often expect instantaneous solutions. We want immediate rescue, which is the very thing that will remove our opportunities to develop that which we have been sent to become—like the Savior.

Elder Richard G. Scott reminds us: “You are here on earth for a divine purpose. It is not to be endlessly entertained or to be constantly in full pursuit of pleasure. You are here to be tried, to prove yourself so that you can receive the additional blessings God has for you. The tempering effect of patience is required. Some blessings will be delivered here in this life; others will come beyond the veil. The Lord is intent on your personal growth and development. . . . If you question everything you are asked to do, or dig in your heels at every unpleasant challenge, you make it harder for the Lord to bless you.”⁸

God’s commitment to agency requires commitment to patience. As God has patience with us, we need patience with ourselves and with others. We can’t override the agency of others and take from them that which God has given. Angela, a fifth-grade student, learned about the agency of others when she took the counsel of her mother and she fasted and prayed that another fifth-grade girl would stop being mean to her. But the next day at school did not go as Angela had planned. The girl she had prayed for was instrumental in framing Angela as the culprit who vandalized the girl’s restroom. Angela was stunned when the principal called her into his office and accused her of the crime. When she arrived home, she was very upset. She had fasted and prayed. She had used all her faith that Heavenly Father would make this girl be nice. Mother’s response was, “Angela, we can’t pray away another person’s agency, no matter how much faith we have. When we pray for our enemies, it changes how we feel about them and brings us peace. We change for the better, and sometimes our goodness helps our enemies to change. Sadly, some never change. But we should never let our enemies choose how we will act.”⁹ We, too, can learn patience with others as we honor their use of agency.

Wait upon the Lord and Allow for the Process of Time

But “patience is not indifference. Actually, [it’s] caring very much, but being willing, nevertheless, to submit both to the Lord and to what the scriptures call the ‘process of time.’”¹⁰ “While the scriptural phrase ‘in process of time’ means ‘eventually,’ it also denotes an entire spiritual process: ‘The Lord showed unto Enoch all the inhabitants of the earth; and he beheld, and lo, Zion, in process of time, was taken up into heaven (Moses 7:21).’

“By itself, . . . the passage of time does not bring an automatic advance . . . we often need the ‘process of time’ in order to come to our spiritual senses. . . . Many spiritual outcomes require saving truths to be mixed with time.”¹¹

As mentioned earlier, Joseph Smith learned to wait upon the Lord. He waited for the plates, he waited in prison—he waited for the Lord’s purpose. And what did he do while he was waiting upon the Lord? He prayed, he sang, he wrote, he obeyed, and the “Lord was with him.” Waiting time can be productive time. It is a time to pray, to fast, study the scriptures, renew covenants, obey, ponder, and learn from others.

During my years as a young mother of seven children, I was a Relief Society visiting teacher to an older sister who was suffering with a terminal illness. She sat in her chair most of the day with a table piled high with medications by her side. She had been very generous with her means and her home. She had children and grandchildren living with her, and she often tended one or two of her grandchildren while their parents worked. But her response to this pain was, “I love being alive and I love being with these children.” They called her “Grandmother Dear.” She was an inspiration to me as I was struggling in good health to meet the needs of my young children. I have since adopted the title of Grandmother Dear—to remind me of this dear sister’s good works even while she was patiently suffering.

Another lesson in patience came from a neighborhood child, Rebecca. I have shared this with some of you before, but it is one of those defining experiences. Rebecca is now eight years old, but when she was a toddler, she occasionally wandered into my yard and became a regular visitor by the time she was three. One fall I invested money and time in purchasing and planting numerous flower bulbs. The next spring, I woke up early each

morning and walked around the yard to inventory and enjoy the progress of the daffodils, the tulips, and the hyacinths.

And then the morning came when the flowers were in full, glorious bloom, and I felt I had truly achieved the status of a master gardener. But that afternoon as I turned into my driveway, there was not a blossom to be seen. When my car reached the end of the driveway, I saw where my flowers had gone. My Alberta spruce was covered with an extensive floral arrangement. The name Rebecca came to my mind. This was a serious test for me. I had to decide who I loved most, the “neighbor’s child” or my precious flowers that I had so lovingly planted and whose beauty I had so hopefully imagined during those long, cold winter months.

The decision was made—I could love both. I knew from that moment that I could continue my love for flowers and also develop a loving relationship with Rebecca. In fact, the flowers would be the way to develop that relationship. We obviously had something in common—we both loved flowers! The only difference was that I liked flowers in the ground connected to their bulbs, and she liked them without stems stuck on a tree! I might be able to share my love of flowers with her, and I knew she had much to teach me—starting with patience and mercy. Magic began to happen between us. That same spring Rebecca helped me take the marigolds out of the pony packs so I could plant them in the ground. And the following spring, when Rebecca was five, she helped me clear the ground and prepare it for planting. The next year she helped me very carefully plant the flowers. She stayed and worked until bedtime while my own children were off with their friends. Even I was ready to quit long before Rebecca lost interest. Again, Rebecca taught me patience.

Rebecca has often left things on my doorstep. One afternoon, as I rushed home with much on my mind, I was surprised by more Rebecca magic on my porch. This time it was a picture Rebecca had made of flowers and a rainbow. On the back of the picture she had written the words, “I love you” and “I love being me.” Thank you, Rebecca. You have taught me much about patience. And we, like Rebecca, can love being who we are as we feel the joy of learning lessons we have been sent here to learn.

I realize that this experience is not as challenging as many of the events some of you have faced. But I have shared it because it may be a “while we are at it” moment—one of the seemingly insignificant opportunities that go

unnoticed and underestimated and even undervalued for development of patience.

We Can Start Right Now to Become Patient

The third part of the take-home message is that we can start right now to become patient. It's not enough to know what patience is and how to be more patient; we need to become more patient, to become Christlike. What is it that challenges your patience? Is it loneliness due to the death of a loved one? Is it physical or spiritual pain? Or is it as simple as the monotony of daily problems such as the lack of sleep because of an infant's crying or a youth out late at night? Is it a child with a disability who requires more focused attention, or perhaps a son of missionary age who is not ready to go on a mission? Does the neighbor's dog bark night and day? Has your long-range planning experienced a shortfall? Do you have parents who are aging and need your patient assistance?

We can learn to find purpose and joy in whatever season of life or circumstances we find ourselves. Elder Scott tells us that "after their noble husbands were called home, Sister Camilla Kimball, Amelia McConkie, and Helen Richards learned to paint. They not only left legacies of art, but they never saw a sunset, a face, or a tree the same again."¹² We, too, can develop talents that sharpen our capacity to reason, to act, and to find purpose in life. They give a renewal, a spark of enthusiasm, and a zest for life. Make a list of things you can do to bring happiness to yourself and to others while you are waiting upon the Lord's own due time. Experiences such as writing a thank-you note, adding an extra few minutes of ponder time to scripture study, and maybe just even smiling more will be part of your process of time.

The Lord has said, "Be patient in afflictions, for thou shalt have many; but endure them, for, lo, I am with thee, even unto the end of thy days" (D&C 24:8). "As you are patient, you will come to understand what the statement 'I am with [you]' means. God's love brings peace and joy."¹³

Yesterday has past, and tomorrow is not yet here, but today is our day to live. Harold B. Lee counseled, "Don't try to live too many days ahead. Seek for strength to attend to the problems of today. . . .

"Do all that you can do and leave the rest to God, the Father of us all. [It's] not enough to say I will do my best, but rather, I will do everything which is [in] my power; I will do all that is necessary."¹⁴

Elder Maxwell's talk on patience that I referred to earlier was given a few years before his being diagnosed with leukemia and spending forty-six days and nights in the hospital with debilitating chemotherapy. He found comfort in a scripture that he'd often quoted to others who were suffering. "I know that [God] loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (1 Nephi 11:17).¹⁵

What do we do when things are not as we wished when we wish them? We seek strength from the Spirit to keep trying. "Sometimes that which we are doing is correct enough but simply needs to be persisted in—patiently—not for [just] a minute or a moment but sometimes for years."¹⁶ When we go to bed at night, we can say prayers of thanks as we think about the opportunities we have been given to practice patience, and we can smile at our step-by-step growth to "run with patience the race that is set before us." Success will come by daily hanging onto the desire to look "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Conclusion

The take-home message for this time together is this: Patience is part of Heavenly Father's plan, we can learn to be more patient, and we can start right now to become patient. We have received a mighty promise in the Book of Mormon: "Because of your diligence and your faith and your patience . . . ye shall pluck the fruit . . . which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet. . . . Ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, your diligence, and patience" (Alma 32:37, 42–43).

We are on a journey to exaltation. Earthly experiences have a purpose and will bring opportunities to fulfill our divine potential. "God's court is filled with those who have patiently overcome—whose company we do not yet deserve."¹⁷ The godly virtue of patience will bring the power to overcome challenges, the surety of the Savior's love as we seek His help, and genuine joy in His eternal plan. I testify that Heavenly Father will always be there to guide, to lift, and to love us. And this I say in His holy name, Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, "Patience," *Ensign*, October 1980, 28.

2. Maxwell, "Patience," 28.
3. Neal A. Maxwell, "Endure It Well," Ensign, May 1990, 33.
4. Maxwell, "Patience," 28-29.
5. Maxwell, "Patience," 28.
6. "I'll Give God Forever," Savior of the World, musical drama, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
7. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Will of the Father in All Things," Brigham Young University 1989–99 Devotional and Fireside Speeches (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999); see also Jeffrey R. Holland and Patricia T. Holland, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 126; emphasis added.
8. Richard G. Scott, "Finding Joy in Life," Ensign, May 1996, 24.
9. Lisa H. Fernelius, "Fiction: Prayers and Faith," Friend, November 1999, 44; emphasis in original.
10. Maxwell, "Patience," 28.
11. Maxwell, "Endure It Well," 34.
12. Scott, "Finding Joy," 24.
13. Scott, "Finding Joy," 24.
14. Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, October 1970, 117–18; or "Time to Prepare to Meet God," Improvement Era, December 1970, 28–30; see also Harold B. Lee, vol. 2 of *Teachings of Presidents of the Church* series (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000), 8.
15. Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple's Life: The Biography of Neal A. Maxwell* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 11–12.
16. Maxwell, "Patience," 28.
17. Maxwell, "Patience," 29.