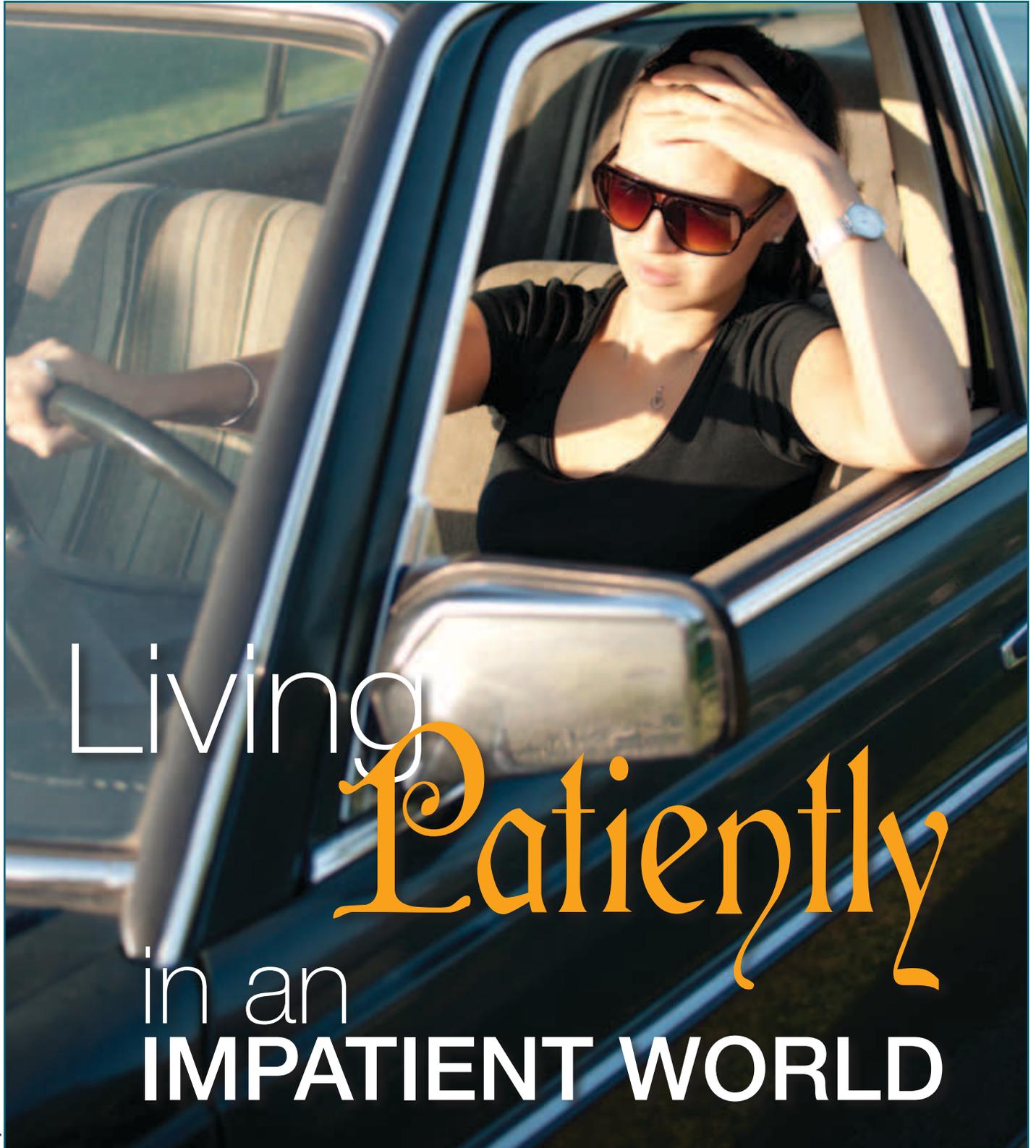


ISRAEL Teaching Letter

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Living
Patiently
in an
IMPATIENT WORLD

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Living Patiently in an Impatient World



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FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS, my husband and I were in full time Christian service in America. Our home became the center of our work and was a hub of activity 24 hours a day. From infants to the retired, single moms to hurting families, we ministered the love of the Lord to all who came to us for help. We often had 20 people or more around our dinner table, many of whom lived with us for varying periods of time. One young woman with her two-year-old son became an integral part of our ministry and they lived with us for 11 years. With children around my feet and a phone to my ear, I wrote training and teaching materials for our staff while I counseled pregnant teens and led Bible studies. And through it all, I was known for my patience. Even-tempered and filled with the joy of the Lord, it was very hard to “ruffle my feathers.”

But recently, the Lord showed me how far I had fallen from that ideal. Living in Israel, one is constantly faced with opportunities to display patience, and being in traffic is certainly one of them. As my husband drove us through the crowded Jerusalem streets the other day, I found myself becoming more and more agitated with the drivers around us. And, as one particularly assertive fellow cut in front of us, I erupted with “road rage,” shouting, even though he couldn’t hear me, and shaking my finger at him angrily. Embarrassed and ashamed of myself, I repented immediately, and as I did, the Lord began to bring other incidents to my mind.



Impatience
is the antithesis
of our love
for one another.



Time and time again, I had reacted with impatience—in traffic, at the market, in the queue—as though my existence, my goals, my time, my desires, and plans were more important than those around me. Somehow, I had come to think that I was at the center of everything, and I realized how often we let our circumstances govern our reactions. We can so easily decide, for some strange reason, that we have a right to demand from those around us, to react with anger, to speak without thinking. And how rarely we call those actions what they really are: rank selfishness. Strangely, confessing that “I was a little impatient” just doesn’t sound nearly as bad as the truth of the matter: “I was terribly selfish.”

The Newer Testament echoes the admonition found in the Older: to love those around us, even to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Yeshua tells His followers that they will be known as His disciples, not necessarily by their sound doctrine so much as by their love for one another. Impatience is the antithesis of that love, and unfortunately, like the flu or a bad cold, it is highly contagious.

Acquiring Patience

I decided the only way to secure an “impatience inoculation” was to take a serious refresher course in what the Bible has to say about it. And, of course, that includes a foray into the Hebraic foundations of our Christian understanding. As I began to pray and ask the Lord for His direction in this study, two thoughts immediately came to mind.

When I first became a believer, our pastor used to say, “Never pray for patience!” The concern was that the Lord would not answer that prayer by allowing a mantle of serenity to gently and miraculously settle upon us. On the contrary, such a request would require the Lord to teach us by placing us in situations that actually *required* patience. It could be, our pastor warned us, a very uncomfortable training ground.

Interestingly, the rabbis have said the same thing for generations, teaching that many of the gifts God bestows on His children are reactive. Healing can only come in the face of illness or injury. Deliverance is only possible when one is in bondage. Such is the case, Judaism says, with patience. It can only be cultivated in the face of trying circumstances.

But the *Mussar* (an ancient, traditional Jewish discipline that offers guidance to help live a godly life) offers hope for a slightly less painful path to the goal. It teaches that impatience stems from the erroneous belief that we are masters of our own fate. Such a viewpoint denies the fact that God is sovereign and in control of every aspect of our lives. The truth is, the rabbis say, that although we are not powerless and not to live passively, our lives are integrated within His grand schemes of time, space, spirit, and matter. Our circumstances are guided by Hands that are not our own. And the best way to cultivate patience, they say, is to contemplate who we actually are in relation to the rest of the universe. A realization of our “smallness” and His enormity should put things into perspective.

My second thought was of Galatians 5:22–23 in the Newer Testament: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*” (ESV)

Often, when Christians talk about these very important concepts, they refer to the “fruits” of the Spirit, when in fact, the writer uses the singular form of the noun. They are not a bunch of individual fruits. Somewhat like the pomegranate that is filled with hundreds of seeds or an orange segment that is made up of dozens of tiny juice-filled sacs, they are collectively one fruit. And like those seeds and sacs, each may be unique in its own right, but has a lot in common with its fellow seeds. A closer look at the original language reveals that truth in even greater depth:

love
joy
peace
patience



kindness
goodness
faithfulness
gentleness
self-control





All nine
attributes are
together the
manifestation
of the life
God
desires
us to live.



1. **LOVE:** Unique among this list of attributes, it is the only one commanded by the writers of the Bible. From the days of the ancient Israelites to the days of Yeshua, God's people are instructed to love; to love the Lord, love each other, love ourselves, even love our enemies. So it is not surprising it is at the top of the list. Love is sort of like the peel that holds the rest of the fruit together.
2. **JOY:** One commentator defined joy as "grace recognized." It refers to a sense of happiness that actually flourishes in hard times.
3. **PEACE:** In both the Hebrew and the Greek, this word has a plethora of meanings, but in this instance it has the connotation of bringing order in chaos.
4. **PATIENCE:** Although we will look at this word in more depth later, here it can be defined as endurance.
5. **KINDNESS:** Unlike our modern understanding, this word doesn't necessarily mean "being nice." Rather, it indicates acting for the good of the situation no matter how difficult it might be.
6. **GOODNESS:** This word refers to highest moral character, displaying excellence and virtue that is not diminished by circumstances.
7. **FAITHFULNESS:** The connotation here is absolute, total commitment, 100% reliability regardless of the consequences.
8. **GENTLENESS:** Often defined as even-tempered or tranquil, the meaning here is balanced, bringing a sense of calm, even long-suffering.
9. **SELF-CONTROL:** Meaning to have mastery over, this word appropriately ends the list as love began it.

Nine Attributes — One Fruit

The writer of Galatians has given us nine visible attributes of the holy life. One might be tempted to view them individually, praying perhaps for gentleness or peace to the exclusion of the other eight. Or they might be viewed as stepping stones, to be sought after in order of appearance, each one building on the other. That would be very typical of our Western worldview, compartmentalizing and viewing individual aspects of life as independent of all others. But it is important to remember that the authors of the Newer Testament were Jewish men who viewed the world Hebraically. Their worldview was one of integration, looking at life and all its parts as an interconnected unit. The individual, his family, his community, his nation, and his God formed one synergistic whole and whatever impacted any part of that whole, impacted all of it.

I believe the Lord intends for us to view these verses through Hebraic eyes: nine individual but not independent characteristics, inextricably linked and overlapping, each one forming part of all the others. Together they are the manifestation of the life God desires us to live.

Viewed through the lens of Judaism, to pray for any one of these nine attributes is to pray for all of them. Here we see faithfulness made possible by gentleness; patience allowing goodness to persevere; goodness displayed as joy flourishes; peace bringing order to chaos; and self-control revealed as love brings mastery in every situation. And my impatient outburst, carefully examined, reveals not just a lack of patience, but of peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, joy, and, above all, love.



Patience:

- bearing pain or trial without complaint;
- manifesting forbearance under provocation or stress;
- not hasty or impetuous;
- steadfast despite adversity;
- able or willing to bear.

Patience Defined

The dictionary definitions of "patience" provide even further evidence of the importance of this Hebraic understanding. As you read them, look for components of the eight other attributes.

Patience: (1) bearing pain or trial without complaint; (2) manifesting forbearance under provocation or stress; (3) not hasty or impetuous; (4) steadfast despite adversity; (5) able or willing to bear.

The Hebrew word for patience focuses on a single aspect of several of the characteristics found in Galatians. The word is *savlanoot* (סבלינות) and it means to tolerate, suffer, bear, or carry a heavy load. As the word is used in the Scriptures and in the writings of the sages, it often refers to carrying a burden. Sometimes that burden might be time, waiting, persecution, opposition, mistreatment, lack of response from others, even unmet expectations. Whether in English or in Hebrew, there is no doubt that being patient means cultivating the ability to suffer.

Is Patience Possible Today?

When I was a child, I loved walking to the post office with my mother. Every couple of days, we would stroll down to see what awaited us in our post office box, and I would be thrilled from time to time to find a letter from my cousin who lived many miles away. That letter would take several days, sometimes even a week, to reach me. When I got a little older and discovered overnight postal service, I was amazed that the mail could move so quickly.

But times have certainly changed. From the teletype to the fax machine, to the computer and the iPhone, we have moved into the day of real-time communication and instant information. We are living what researchers are calling a virtual lifestyle, and recent studies show that we are paying a high price for it. Our cell phone, email, internet, chat rooms, etc., are creating a plethora of health issues similar to addictions and eating disorders, but at the top of the list of technology-related problems is impatience.

We want everything now. Success now, wealth now, response now, whatever it is—we want it now. And we have deluded ourselves as a society into thinking we have the right and the power to live a NOW life. However, NOW is rarely, if ever, a reality in human existence.

King Solomon taught us that the end of the matter is worth waiting for because it is always more beneficial than what the beginning indicates. And the Lord Himself is described in the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) as having the virtue of patience. The rabbis have taught that He preserved Lot and his daughters from the destruction of Sodom because generations later, Ruth and her grandson David would be his descendants and bring great holiness to Israel. The Lord's infinite patience, waiting generations for positive results to develop from a seemingly negative situation, provides an example for us ordinary mortals that flies in the face of our demand for instant gratification.

The *Mussar* reminds us that God's incredible patience is seen most clearly when we are disobedient or fail to do what we know is right. Even then, His forbearance is extended to us. Otherwise, punishment would be instantaneous. There would be no margin for error, no second chances, no opportunity to learn and grow. God's long-suffering allows us to experience His forgiveness and restoration over and over again.

NOW!
Now is rarely,
if ever,
a reality
in human
existence.



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God's incredible patience
is seen most clearly when we are
disobedient or fail to do what we know is right.



The Sages Say

The *Talmud* (rabbinic commentary on Jewish tradition and the Hebrew Scriptures) also dedicates significant time to the subject of patience, describing it as the key ingredient for successful parenting and for classroom teaching. As a matter of fact, the *Talmud* states that a “hasty-tempered” (or impatient) man *cannot* be a teacher! Learning, it says, is based on trust. A teacher who has no patience with his students will not be trusted by them and, therefore, real learning will not occur.

Unfortunately, however, human beings are by nature likely to be short-tempered. Snap judgments, built-in biases, and prejudices cause impatience with others and combine to precipitate behavior and reactions that are not righteous. How incredibly blessed we are that our Savior and Redeemer is a long-suffering God who has infinite patience with His impatient children!

In the Scripture

Patience appears dozens of times in both the Older and Newer Testaments. We are told that God will render to each one according to His patience; His chosen ones will display patience; we should walk with patience and endurance; that He will strengthen us with patience; and we are above all to be patient with one another. It is in many of these verses that we are encouraged to recognize the incredible patience of the God who loves us.

“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (2 Pet. 3:9 ESV)

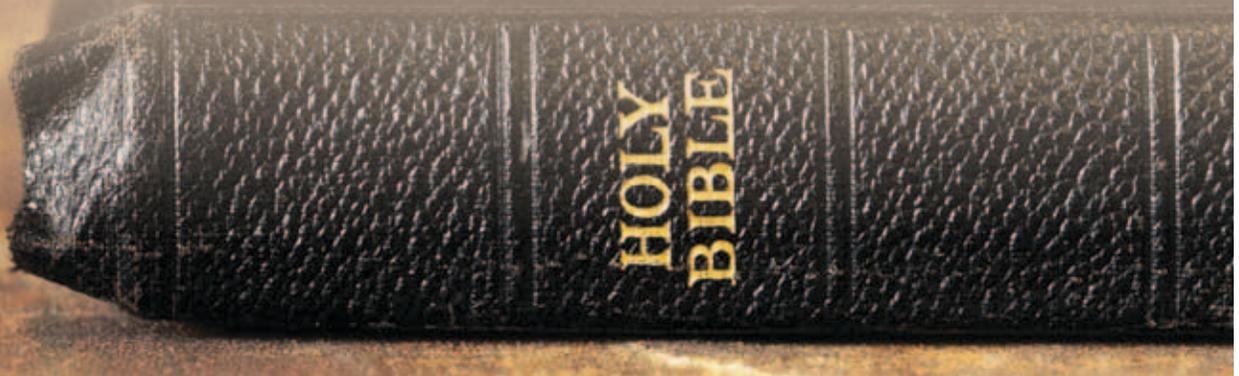
“The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression.” (Num. 14:18 ESV)

“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’” (Exod. 34:6 ESV)

“But you, O Lord, are a God full of compassion and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in mercy and truth.” (Ps. 86:15)

These are but a small sample of the many times Scripture tells of God’s mercy and patience, peace and kindness, gentleness, joy and goodness. In other words, the nine attributes in Galatians, including patience, are hallmarks of the godly life because they are the characteristics of God Himself. They sum up for us in a couple of short sentences who He actually is. He *is* love. He *is* peace. He *is* joy. He *is* patience.

And in that patience, He waits for us. And He’s not just twiddling His thumbs, biding His time, playing solitaire, and waiting for the right moment. He is *bearing* us. As He forebears judgment, we are what He suffers, we are what causes Him pain, we are the burden that He carries. And His incredible, extravagant, faithful, covenant love, called *chesed* (חֶסֶד) in Hebrew, compels Him to continue in that patience.



Patience with Israel

God is not just patient with us as individuals and mankind as a whole. Throughout the Bible, we encounter another ongoing example of God's incredible willingness to wait patiently for those He loves. This is His relationship with the nation of Israel. From the book of Genesis onward, He speaks through His prophets, letting His people know what will happen as they walk out their covenant relationship with Him. He promises His love and faithfulness, His care and deliverance, regardless of where they might find themselves on the globe. And He promises divine intervention that will result in the ingathering of His nation to their homeland from the four corners of the earth. Today, He is fulfilling those covenant promises, after three millennia of a loving, long-suffering relationship with His people. Three thousand years is a long time to wait, but the sages tell a wonderful story that reveals God's patient heart.

"I will bless you,
I will give you
an amazing land,
I will make you strong,

A powerful king married a beautiful noblewoman in an extravagant marriage ceremony with all the surrounding kingdoms witnessing his incredible display of love for her. Even the *ketubah* (marriage contract) was unusual in its lavish abundance. It was very long and in its many pages, he made promise after promise to his new bride. "I will give you many lands as your own..." he promised, and "I will give you your own stable of the finest horses." He promised many homes, servants, fields and crops, vineyards, etc., and with each, he spoke at length of what they would be like, how fine they would be, how the nations around her would envy what her loving husband had given her.

Shortly after the wedding, the king was called to one of his very distant lands to handle a deteriorating situation among its people. Unfortunately, it took many years to resolve the conflict and stabilize the situation, during which his bride waited for his return.

Representatives of the surrounding nations began to challenge the noblewoman regarding her husband. "He has left you! He is never coming back. When will you face the fact that he must not love you any more or he would find a way to be here." Repeatedly, they hurled insults about her husband and tried to convince her that he would never return. But each time, she would read the *ketubah*, and the words would comfort her. Even though he had not yet given her all he had promised, the words were so filled with passionate love that reading them filled her with confidence in his return.

And one day, he did in fact come home. He rushed to his wife and embraced her. "My darling," he cried, "I marvel that you were able to wait all of these years for my return, with such patience and faithfulness."

"My Lord," she replied, "it was not easy. The years have been filled with pain and much suffering. My neighbors insulted you and called me a fool for waiting. They said you would never come back to me. But each day, I read the *ketubah* that you gave me and it filled me with hope. I knew that somewhere, you were waiting patiently as well, that someday you would return."

So it is with Israel, the sages say. The nations mock saying, "How long are you going to wait? Are you doing to die for a God who has deserted you? He will never come back to you!" But God's chosen ones go to synagogue, to their *Shabbat* tables, to their halls of study and read the *Torah*. In it, God promises them many things and His words are filled with passionate love. "I will bless you, I will give you an amazing land, I will make you strong, you will be fruitful and multiply, I will redeem you, I will walk among you..." As they read His words, they are comforted and filled with hope.

When redemption comes, the sages say, and Israel stands before their God, the Holy One will say, "My dear ones, I marvel that you were able to wait for me all of these years!" And they will respond, "Master, but for your *Torah*, we would have failed. It has not been easy, the years have been filled with pain and suffering. The nations of the earth have long since become convinced that You were lost to us. They mocked us and told us we were foolish to expect You to return. But the *Torah* You gave us was so filled with Your love, it gave us the patience to wait."



Ketubah

you will be fruitful
and multiply,
I will redeem you,
I will walk among you..."

Godly Patience Is Like Dancing

Even in the Greek, the word for patience is linked to suffering. It requires that His people surrender to Him and wait, regardless of the circumstances that surround them, for His hand to move on their behalf. It goes beyond a begrudging, hand-wringing kind of self-control. It means giving up, trusting, waiting for God as He has waited for us. In the Newer Testament, Yeshua tells His followers that His yoke is easy and the burden we must carry is light. It only gets heavy when we fail to be patient and forget that we have His promise that He will carry that burden with us.

American pastor and teacher T. D. Jakes has said that godly patience is like dancing. You must be able to respond to rhythm, moving in step with God's timing, staying in sync with His directions, always following His lead. But when I try to force a NOW life, when I give in to selfishness, become short-tempered and demanding, fail to wait for Him as He has waited for me, I get out of step. And what should have been a beautiful ballet becomes a clumsy disaster.

I want my life to become a rich, ripe fruit overflowing with all of those wonderful little juice-filled sacs bursting with the character of God Himself. And I do pray for patience, knowing that praying for one of those amazing characteristics in Galatians means praying for all of them. I want to surrender, believing that the NOW-ness of my life is in His hands, always bearing my burdens with love and joy, filled with peace and patience, reacting with kindness and gentleness, known for my faithfulness, integrity and self-control.

A 17th-century Jewish reformer named the Ba'al Shem Tov who believed that Judaism should be a religion of joy, filled with singing and dancing, said this: "I stand up, I fall down; I stand up, I fall down; I stand up, I fall down...and all the while, I keep on dancing." Perhaps he and T. D. Jakes had the same idea!

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All Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

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