

Hey, when it comes to getting things done, what's your temperament or your style...are you more of a patient person or someone who tends to think everything is urgent?

Well, truth be told, an effective, well-balanced person in this area is, well, actually well-balanced between patience and urgency! That's because both of these characteristics are highly valuable necessities to the fruitful believer. So, let me build a case for what I think is one of the most valuable approaches to the road ahead of us in life, the Kingdom, and our workplaces: what I like to call out as *patient urgency*.

That means that, first, we should foundationally approach our appointed tasks with a sense of urgency. Let's start with some of the ways God handles this. At the start of Mark's gospel (1:15), Mark summarizes Jesus's overarching message as this: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Jesus had now come and His Kingdom was at hand, so a hearer of the Gospel is to change direction and believe! Now that was urgent for the hearer then...and, likewise, it still is now!

To be sure, many like to treat the Christian life quite passively, simply doing what others do in church and then somehow, by a sort of assumed, slow-motion osmosis, they become Christians, all kind of by default. But the reality is, the Bible is clear that the Gospel must be preached, and the hearer must respond—*truly believe in the Gospel*. And when Nicodemus approached Jesus secretly in the middle of the night, Jesus instructed him that a person must be born again to enter the Kingdom. Yes, a believer simply *must believe*.

As to urgency, Jesus "said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'" (Matthew 9:37-38 ESV) Now, if you've never been at a farm at harvest-time, it's almost always an *urgent* time. Potentially destructive weather or pests or just plain spoilage make harvest an urgent endeavor. The worst case scenario is to not have enough people for the harvest. But, sadly, Jesus says just that is the case for His Kingdom. Wow.

And, then, to bring it all to where the harvest ends up, Paul wrote to the Colossians (1:13) that the Father "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of his beloved Son." So, for each person, for each generation, the process is clear: the gospel is preached, and each hearer must respond in order to become a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a citizen both now and forever in heaven. Each person's response to the gospel is urgent, because only God knows the day or hour of the natural demise of a person. Since messengers like us don't either, our proclaiming the Gospel to all is urgent. We can't control the response by hearers, but we can deliver the message that God has given us!

Tell me, now, have you ever played that parlor game with friends where you are asked what you would do if you only had 48 or maybe 72 hours to live, God forbid? Where would *you* go? Disneyland? The beach? Who would you go talk to? Your mother? Your siblings? Your spouse? As a believer, would you talk to unbelievers about the good news of Jesus and His Kingdom? Indeed, what would clear and imminent deadlines for your time remaining on this earth do to your list of urgent tasks to undertake?

Oh, you might say, I know that the Bible says Jesus is coming soon, but "they" have been saying that for a couple thousand years. Yes, but there *have* been numerous generations who have come and gone during those two millennia. And for those departed who were Christians, they joined Jesus immediately, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5, "away from the body and at home with the Lord." Alive one minute, with the Lord the next. But all the others had a different destiny. That's why urgency of the message is so important.

But not everyone we come across responds immediately to the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the person is a mere child, not yet at what we call the "age of accountability," the age when the kiddo can understand the gospel. Or perhaps the person's on a personal path of destruction that must take a toll on the person's life before the Gospel becomes "real" to the hearer. Preposterous, you say? Well, the whole creation was groaning (Romans 8:22) and God sent His Son "in the fullness of time" (Galatians 4:4). God's

timing in these things is somewhat inscrutable, that's for sure—we do not see through the glass clearly or fully, and His thinking is above our thinking. But He does reveal enough...in fact, way more than enough!

You see, God's patience and kindness is meant to lead to repentance (Romans 2:4). The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus revealed His "perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." (1 Timothy 1:16) And Peter said to "count the patience of our Lord as salvation..." (2 Peter 3:15) So we must be patient—abiding in Christ, the Bible instructs us—even when our loved ones and friends and co-workers seem to choose every path except the Way the Lord has made for every person.

But the equipping for our patience is deep. You *do* know that patience is actually a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22 promises that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience*, kindness, goodness, faithfulness." Think of it! The necessary patience is actually the fruit of God's Spirit working in our lives! So, how are we to reconcile these two Biblical principles: urgency and patience? Well, that's pretty clear: we are to have *patient urgency*! That's right, patient urgency! God intends us to exhibit an astute blend of urgency and patience in every one of our projects and tasks! And He intends us to join in with Him to both His urgency and in His patience in leading people to respond well to God's offer of salvation.

Here's how all that works, in a sort of multiple cycles of fruitfulness. We do our seeding with urgency, making sure the soil has previously been prepared just right for the task at hand. Perhaps that yields fruit quickly, maybe with a person's response to Christ's finished work on the Cross. But more likely, effective seed-planting must be followed by effective watering and perhaps even fertilization. In due time, harvest-time is different for asparagus and wheat, for apples and carrots, for one person contrasted with another. Regardless, when the time is right, harvest time is here and field hands are urgently needed for harvest.

A sturdy slang phrase for all of this is "hurry up and wait." Urgency when seeding the project, then trusting patience, then maybe another urgency precipitated by a crisis, then more patience—and perhaps that needed for a very long time. Then, finally, harvest. You see, patience is necessarily embedded in virtually every all-encompassing project that is designed or destined to bear great fruit.

But others have often sown before us, sometimes waiting in vain for a harvest. Perhaps we then had nothing to do but help with the urgent harvest, helping to reap what was done by others. I think of a great evangelist like the late Billy Graham. Were the results all from *his* efforts? Of course not! In many cases, those who were long-time friends or family of the listener had prayed, witnessed, lived for Christ unceasingly...yes, seeding, watering and fertilizing the life of the listener who was just now sitting down to listen to Graham in a stadium or living room. But then the evangelistic team precipitated the desired response...this, a patience-laden story culminating in jubilation. This, *this* is the reality of patient urgency.

But wait, what about the discipling that necessarily comes after that? Well, now, that's *more* seeding, watering, fertilizing in the life of the new believer. Urgently, of course. And patiently. Yes. Patient urgency.

That is also the story of every entrepreneur in a business or nonprofit. Daily urgencies, but each urgency part of different cycles of organizational life. Like marketing. Like operations. Like finance. Yes, *overlapping* urgencies, with maddening patience also required. But then fresh, new, urgent crises arise. Then *more* patience is required. Did you know that Amazon started in the mid-1990s? So it took decades of patient urgency by Jeff Bezos and his team, the patient urgency that has fostered Amazon's amazing growth story!

These are the complex seasons of every successful organization—from a retail chain...to your family...to the Kingdom of God. Listen. God waited thousands of years for the Cross. He has patiently waited since for thousands more, appointing us to obedient urgency. And to obedient patience.

You want to be a real success in your organizations—from your family to your workplace to God's glorious Kingdom? Then focus on a mature, Spirit-led life of patient urgency! Now *that* is clearly the will of God!

A&A: Application & Action

1. If *patient urgency* is indeed the goal of a well-balanced life in Christ, which of the two—patience or urgency—is more your weakness that an objective observer might say has hampered your overall effectiveness? What are your best next steps to remove that hampering? Be specific.
2. Do you have different approaches to patient urgency for your key organizational commitments, like your family versus your workplace versus the Kingdom? In other words, are you more patient for Kingdom activities than career impact? Why or why not? Be specific.
3. Does your church demonstrate an urgency to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers such that many “are added”—even thousands—as exemplified in the early church (Acts 2:41, 4:4)? If so, explain how your church does this effectively. If not, explain your church’s alternative focus and its rationale from a New Testament perspective.