



The Outcome Is As Certain As God

The Blessings of Infinite Patience

by Greg Mackie

True confession: At times, I find it difficult to be patient. Now, I don't want to exaggerate—I'm actually a pretty calm, even-keeled guy much of the time. However, I have to admit that more often than I'd like, I get frustrated with how things are going. Oh, my impatience may not always be apparent, but it's there. When something is not coming together in the manner or the speed that I think it should, I feel that inner tension, that flash of irritation in my mind that says "Hurry up! What's wrong with you? Why is this taking so long?"

I'm clearly not the only one who wrestles with impatience. Many of my friends and colleagues have shared their own struggles. In the original typescript of the Course, even Jesus speaks of his "slips into impatience" during his earthly life. (Was it dealing with those slow-witted disciples? Losing it in the Temple?) If even Jesus in the last year before his total awakening was prone to this, it must be a tough nut to crack indeed.

Fortunately for us, this is an issue the Course addresses. The Course places a major emphasis on the virtue of patience, to the point of calling us to *infinite* patience. I've been (patiently) working on becoming more patient with the help of the Course, and while it's still a work in progress, I'd like to share a bit of what I've learned about the blessings of infinite patience.

The basis of patience: the loving certainty that someone will bring about a happy outcome

What does it mean to be patient? To get an idea, it might be helpful to first consider what it means to be *impatient*. We've all experienced this in our own lives, so it's really not too hard to understand.

Impatience (with another person) is essentially a state of *irritated doubt* that someone will bring about a happy outcome. Doesn't that really capture it? When we're impatient with someone, rather than loving the person, we're *irritated* at the fact that she doesn't seem to be bringing about whatever outcome we want in a timely manner. Moreover, we tend to *doubt* both the person's intentions—maybe she really doesn't have our best interests at heart—and her ability, her power to accomplish the goal. As a result of all this, we are convinced that the outcome won't happen, or at least won't happen soon enough to be of any use to us. Impatience is an attitude that says "Get it done, you lazy bum," combined with "This lazy bum will *never* get it done."

Patience is the opposite of all that: it is a state of *loving certainty* that someone will bring about a happy outcome. (Perhaps not the one we were expecting, but a happy outcome nonetheless.) When we're patient with someone, we're affirming our *love* for that person; indeed, the Course frequently links "infinite patience" with "infinite love." And that patience is rooted in *certainty*—or at least a high degree of confidence—that this person can be trusted to eventually bring about the happy outcome, because she has both the good intentions and the ability/power needed to succeed. It may take time, but our love for this person and our trust in her goodness and capability assure us that the happy outcome will come in due time. Patience, then, is an attitude that says "You *will* get it done, my love—I trust your intentions and abilities so completely that I'm not even going to worry about how long it might take."

This brings us to the ultimate foundation of patience in the Course: the loving certainty that the ultimate Someone, God, can be completely trusted to bring about a happy outcome, both in the short term of our lives and in the long term of our entire journey through time and space. Because He is the font of infinite love, the epitome of absolute goodness, and the only real power there is, "A happy outcome to all things is sure" (W-pI.292.Heading).

God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus are infinitely patient with us

Of course, we have quite a hard time scaring up this kind of patience, because our experience of ourselves and other people suggests that human beings are *not* all that trustworthy or competent, and so happy outcomes are doubtful, to say the least. But God and His agents (the Holy Spirit and Jesus) look at this situation from a very different perspective.

Their perspective begins with God: As I said, He is the font of infinite love, the epitome of absolute goodness, and the only real power there is. He created us, and everything He creates shares His attributes; as the Course tells us so often, “Ideas leave not their source” (T-26.VII.4:7). We are quite literally part of Him. The logic, then, is inescapable: If all this is so, then *we* are infinite love, *we* are the epitome of absolute goodness, and *we* share the only power there is. All that God is, we are.

Given this, the Course is full of beautiful descriptions of God’s lofty view of us and the infinite patience with us that His view naturally engenders. For instance, speaking of the Holy Spirit’s patience with us, Jesus says:

He always teaches you the inestimable worth of every Son of God, teaching it with infinite patience born of the infinite Love for which He speaks. (T-7.VII.7:3)

Whatever journey you choose to take, He will go with you, waiting. You can safely trust His patience, for He cannot leave a part of God. (T-11.II.5:7-8)

This may sound like a lot of empty rhetoric, but I think the power of it can grow in us as we let it sink in: *We are born of infinite Love. We have inestimable worth. We are part of God. All that God is, we are.* Imagine for a moment that this is really true. I don’t know about you, but I find it truly amazing. It completely overturns my unfortunately persistent view of other people and myself as dubious characters haplessly and hopelessly stumbling through life. God sees so much more in us—such holiness, such sublimity, such beauty, such radiance, such power. He sees nothing less than *Himself* in us. The more I think about that, the more I stand in awe of it.

And this, as I’ve said, is the basis of God’s, the Holy Spirit’s, and Jesus’ infinite patience with us. Oh yes, we’ve made lots of mistakes—to paraphrase the Queen in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*, I’ve made as many as six mistakes before breakfast. We’ve identified with false selves that are unloving, attacking, and utterly incompetent. When minds as powerful as ours make a mistake, it’s a doozy. But God and His agents know us better than we do. We can’t really change ourselves, and so we are still the loving, good, powerful beings God created us to be. However long it may take, our true nature will come to the fore, and we *will* bring about the happy outcome God knows is sure. How, then, could our Helpers in Heaven be anything but infinitely patient with us?

Like God, we are to be infinitely patient with our brothers

Precisely because we share God’s nature, again and again the Course calls us to imitate God in the way we treat our brothers. So it is with patience: Just as God is infinitely patient with us, so we should be infinitely patient with each other. Indeed, God’s patience with us, the Holy Spirit’s patience with us, Jesus’ patience with us, our patience with our brothers, and our patience with ourselves are all rolled into one:

Your patience with your brother is your patience with yourself. Is not a child of God worth patience? I have shown you infinite patience because my will is that of our Father, from Whom I learned of infinite patience. His Voice was in me as It is in you, speaking for patience towards the Sonship in the Name of its Creator. (T-5.VI.11:4-7)

This patience is, in fact, one of the attributes of the teachers of God. Instead of angrily rapping their pupils’ knuckles when they seem to be progressing slowly, “Teachers must be patient and repeat their lessons until they are learned” (T-4.I.7:4). As we step into that role, we’re meant to be like the Holy Spirit and Jesus, teaching with infinite patience born of God’s infinite Love. (As we try to be patient with others, we might do well to consider just how much patience Jesus has had with us!)

This patience with our brothers must be rooted in a vision of them as the infinitely loving, good, and powerful beings that God created. Acquiring this vision, of course, is a gradual journey, the very journey the Course is taking us on. But we need to develop this vision as well as we can, with the Holy Spirit’s help. As long as we’re seeing our brothers as petty little egos with petty little agendas, we won’t have any rationale to be patient with them. It is only as we start to

see them as they are, only as we start to see “the inestimable worth of every Son of God,” that our patience will grow.

Imagine what it would be like to be infinitely patient with everyone you meet! Think of the peace and joy you would experience if all that irritation, anxiety, and mistrust were replaced with calm, loving certainty! I’ve been trying to do this when I interact with other people, and it really does make a difference. Oh, I can’t say I’m anywhere close to infinitely patient, but I’m cutting people a lot more slack than I used to. As I’m loosening my tight grip on how things go, as I’m letting go of my investment in getting the outcome I want when I want it, I’m finding myself more at peace with people and situations, no matter how things unfold.

Strangely enough, I’ve been dealing with an impatience-inducing situation while writing this article. As I type these words, the article is due very soon, but my writing process is being heavily disrupted by a couple of electricians who are here rewiring our house. The electricians are actually very nice, and they’re here to do a job we contracted them to do. However, the situation has been pushing my impatience buttons on multiple fronts: Patricia’s out of town, they’ll be here all day for four days and I can’t leave the house while they’re here, I had to cancel an appointment and a movie with Patricia’s daughter, they need to turn the power off frequently so my Internet is unpredictable, their work is noisy, I’ll have to leave my writing room when they work on it, I had to go with them to a store to buy parts today, I have to problem-solve with them in Spanish and I don’t know many electricians’ terms in Spanish (or in English!), etc.

I thought, “Well, if I can’t work on my patience article, I really ought to practice what I’m preaching in it!” So, I’ve been doing a lot of patience practices, with these guys and this situation in mind. As we went to the store today, I repeated things like *“Infinite patience born of infinite love. My patience with my brothers is my patience with myself. Are not these children of God worth patience?”* I’m letting these and other patience practices flow through my mind right now as the guys are clattering around downstairs. And you know what? It’s working! I feel a lot more peace right now than I would have without the Course to help me. Perhaps this present peace is an example of what the Course means when it says that “only infinite patience produces immediate effects” (T-5.VI.12:1).

Like God, we are to be infinitely patient with ourselves and our progress on the path

There’s a popular idea out there which says that before we can be patient with anyone else, we have to learn to be patient with ourselves. I don’t hold to that idea—I think we can start developing patience anywhere with anyone—but patience with ourselves *is* important. Certainly it’s something I personally feel the need to cultivate, because I can be awfully hard on myself when I make mistakes. How about you?

As long as we wallow in self-loathing, as long as we see ourselves as small-minded, weak little animals muddling through a cruel and overpowering world, it will be hard to be patient with ourselves. Impatience and self-doubt are simply logical outcomes of this self-perception; as Lesson 47 tells us, “If you are trusting in your own strength, you have every reason to be apprehensive, anxious and fearful” (W-pI.47.1:1). No, if we want to develop patience with ourselves, we need to start letting in a vision of ourselves that should be very familiar by now: the vision of ourselves as the infinitely loving, good, and powerful beings that God created. We need to learn to see ourselves as God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus know us. They see so much more in us than we do.

To capture that vision, let me share a passage from Lesson 252 that has really captivated me lately. It is one of those lofty descriptions of us I mentioned earlier:

My Self is holy beyond all the thoughts of holiness of which I now conceive. Its shimmering and perfect purity is far more brilliant than is any light that I have ever looked upon. Its love is limitless, with an intensity that holds all things within it, in the calm of quiet certainty. Its strength comes not from burning impulses which move the world, but from the boundless Love of God Himself. How far beyond this world my Self must be, and yet how near to me and close to God! (W-pII.252.1:1-5)

What a sublime vision of who I am! Oh, how I would like to set aside my impatience with myself, my self-abasement and self-doubt, and really let the truth of me all the way in! I need to resist Bill’s old temptation of believing that universal laws apply to everyone except him—no, if everyone is of inestimable worth, then I must be too.

I’m trying to let that in by repeating passages like the one above, and while I’m certainly not there yet, I do feel like I’m progressing. I’m laying the whip down more and more often, opting out of the formerly obligatory internal tongue-lashing. (I will not berate myself for being impatient while writing my patience article!) I’m reminding myself that God is a lot happier with me than I tend to be with myself. If descriptions like the passage above are really the truth of what I am, I can rest assured that I will make it to the happy outcome God wants for me, no matter how long it might take.

Of course, letting in a vision like this does take time, so we have to be...well, *patient* with ourselves as we wait for

it to come. The Course's Workbook has a lot of meditation instructions that counsel us to wait patiently for the light to dawn in our minds (see, for example, W-pI.75.6). I think these meditation instructions could be more broadly applied to our journey with the Course in general: We need to wait patiently for the light of love, peace, joy, and understanding to dawn on our so-often distressed and doubtful minds. We need to be at peace with our progress, however slow it may seem to be. After all, God Himself loves us completely just the way we are: "God takes you where you are and welcomes you. What more could you desire, when this is all you need?" (M-26.4:10-11).

We are to meet God's patience with our eager "impatience"

All of this talk about being patient might give the impression that we're supposed to sit around twiddling our thumbs, patiently waiting for the sky to open up and for God to snatch us back home. But needless to say (I hope), that's not really what the Course is calling for. What the Course is actually calling for is suggested by this initially perplexing line about the Holy Spirit patiently waiting to give us the real world: "*Meet His patience with your impatience at delay in meeting Him*" (T-17.II.8:4, Urtext version).

What? *Impatience*? What the heck does this mean? I think the key lies in the passage's earlier statement that the Holy Spirit is *eager* to give the real world to us. We are told that "the eagerness of the Holy Spirit to give you this is so intense He would not wait [i.e., He does not want to wait], although He waits in patience" (T-17.II.8:3). This statement, then, is inviting us to take the same attitude as that of the Holy Spirit: Even as we cultivate patience regarding the happy outcome God promises us, we should also cultivate *impatience* in the sense of *eager desire* to reach that outcome. We should be willing to wait, but at the same time have an attitude that says, "I don't want to wait any longer than I have to!" We want to be a more mature version of the kid waiting for Santa Claus; we'll do what the Course asks us to do, so we can open God's presents to us without delay.

This strikes me as the perfect attitude, because it offers a way of overcoming two negative attitudes that can derail our progress. One is the kind of frantic impatience I've been talking about in this article. The other is a lazy, complacent "patience" that is not real patience but rather lethargy dressed up as patience. Both attitudes keep us from making progress. Instead, we are told here, we need to combine the infinite patience I've talked about in this article with the eager desire to reach the happy outcome God promises us. This kind of eagerness is not fearful doubt but instead loving anticipation. After all, God really is available to us right now. Why wait when we don't have to? As the Course tells us, "Delay of joy is needless" (T-9.VII.1:7).

So, I ask myself: Why am *I* waiting? Is that football game really more important than awakening to God? What can I do to become more aware of that eager desire, that "irresistible attraction" to God that the Urtext of the Course talks about? Perhaps I should stop watching the game and do that practice period instead.

Application

As I mentioned, the Course tells us that patience is one of the attributes of God's teachers. As a person who is trying to fulfill that role myself, I have found the "Patience" section of the Manual (M-4.VIII) to be a powerful antidote to the impatience I wrestle with. So here, I want to turn that one-paragraph section into a little application that you can use when you are dealing with your own impatience.

So, bring to mind a situation in your life that is bringing up impatience in you. Get in touch with your lack of love, that irritated doubt that the people involved can really bring about a happy outcome. With this situation in mind, slowly repeat these words with as much sincerity as you can muster, letting their full import sink deeply into your mind:

Because the ultimate outcome of this situation is certain, I can afford to wait, and wait without anxiety. However impatient I may feel at times, patience is natural to me. Let me remember that all God sees in this situation is certain outcome, at a time perhaps unknown to me as yet, but not in doubt. The time will be as right as is the answer. And this is true for this situation and for any situation I face in the future. Past situations as well held no mistakes in the ultimate sense; nothing that did not serve to benefit the world, as well as everyone involved. Perhaps those situations were not understood at the time. But even though those past situations benefitted everyone in some way, I am still willing to reconsider all my past decisions if they are causing pain to anyone. Patience is natural to those who trust. Because I can be sure of the ultimate interpretation of all things in time, no outcome in this situation or any other situation need cause me fear.
(based on M-4.VIII.1)

After you do this little application, I suggest praying about what you should do as you go forward in the situation you're contemplating. You'll want to pray especially about the decisions that confront you, so that you can make God-inspired decisions that will not cause "pain to anyone." I wish you all the best!

Conclusion

I think the Course's emphasis on patience can be self-transforming and, if applied more broadly, even world transforming. To illustrate, let me share a bit from my partner Patricia's experience as a migrants' human rights defender. The situation with migrants here in Mexico is grave, and it understandably stirs strong emotions among the people working to help them. Everyone wants to fix the situation overnight. Unfortunately, this impatience all too often leads to rash, poorly thought-out decisions that at times literally cost lives. Ironically, this impatience pushes the happy outcomes these workers are hoping for even further away.

Enter Patricia: Informed by the Course's call to patience, she is helping her fellow helpers to see the blessings of patience. She is gently showing them that calm, well-informed, and prayerful decisions with an eye on the big picture lead to far better results not only in the long run, but often in the here and now. Even in the situations they're dealing with, it really does appear that infinite patience brings immediate results.

So, if you're like me and you've wrestled with impatience toward God, others, or yourself, why not let the Course offer you the blessings of infinite patience? Yes, it seems like our progress—both individual and collective—is slow at times, but we need not despair. By letting in the Course's exalted view of everyone and everything as ultimately loving, good, and powerful, we can rest in blessed patience even as we "impatiently" rush to the joy that awaits us the instant we are ready to fully embrace it. Whenever we doubt that we will reach that joy, let us remind ourselves that all we need do is "be patient a while and remember that the outcome is as certain as God" (T-4.II.5:8).



E-mail your comments to the author at: greg@circleofa.org

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CIRCLE MAILBOX

The following are reader responses to Robert's article in A Better Way #132, "Course Lore: Common Misconceptions and Their Correction."

Great article about Course lore! Please help me with #28:

28. There is no one out there. There's only one of us here. "Others" are just my own projections.

There is perhaps no more important theme in the Course than the true nature of our brother as a perfectly pure Son of God, who is God's masterpiece, who has inestimable worth, who is our equal, and who deserves all of the care and concern we typically lavish on our specialness: "All of the love and care, the strong protection, the thought by day and night, the deep concern, the powerful conviction this is you, belong to him" (T-24.VII.2:7). True, bodies and personalities are illusions, but it is hard to imagine an idea that cuts more against the grain of the Course than to turn this brother into an illusion, no more than a mirror, a mere projection screen.

Years ago Tara Singh once remarked at a retreat that “there is no somebody else.” That always stuck with me. For me it means we are the One Son of God, there is no somebody else...which to me is very inclusive, not exclusive. When I think that there is no somebody else, it is not that they are an illusion, but that they are not separate from me. Another way to say it is that otherness is myself.

Any thoughts on the above will be greatly appreciated.

— Judy Junghans

Reply to Judy: Good to hear from you! I would agree that “there is no somebody else” in the sense you describe—that they are not separate from me. That still affirms their reality. That’s very different, of course, than the idea that they are somehow illusory.

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Thank you, Robert, for your scholarly opus. The fifty principles “pressed the reset button” as needed on so many issues.

My appreciation to all of you for providing *A Better Way* rather than self-study.

— Diane Judge

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I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed “Course Lore” in Issue #132 of *A Better Way*.

I have had a difficult time responding to many of those examples of Course lore because I didn’t know what to say—I knew they were off base, but they sounded so reasonable and often seemed rooted in the Course.

I think your article should be required reading for all people who “think” they understand the Course and what it says.

— James Gregory

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Here are a few comments on your article “Course Lore.”

I am not sure that all of these ideas have reached the status of “Course lore.” You make some good points along the way although I would take issue with some of your opinions. Two examples below.

No. 6: The idea that we should “screw up” on learning the Course and forgive ourselves. This distortion supposedly originates from Ken Wapnick although Ken didn’t put it quite that way. In any case, Ken has clarified his position, which is that we should conscientiously study and practice the Course. He spent his life in helping students to do just that. I might mention that I have never heard this point raised by anyone other than yourself (except the student who raised the subject with Ken originally).

No. 34: The Course tells us point blank that our special function is forgiveness (T-25.VI). I have written about this subject elsewhere and will not repeat myself here, except to suggest that all students read this section carefully as well as the surrounding context. My articles and our dialogue on the subject are on the Circle’s Website.

— Mary Benton

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The fact that you wrote the article on misconceptions, and that it was so lucid, precise, economical, yet absolutely comprehensive, is a great joy to me. I wish I had the power to get the article into every Course student’s hands the world over.

— Thomas Dunn