

## ***Being Patient with Ourselves***

Dear Ross,

I am sitting in my study early on a Wednesday morning rejoicing in the fact that God in His sovereignty has brought you into my life. As a mid-life pastor, I can say unequivocally that in the busyness of my call, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that God's work in me is far from finished. Recently, I have been going through a rather difficult mid-life reevaluation. As I look back over the past twenty-five years of ministry, I have had to ask myself some hard questions as to why, as a younger person, I was so hard on myself when I failed to meet my own expectations or the expectations of others.

As I think of you this morning, and how in just a few short days you will be graduating from seminary, I rejoice in all that God has done in you over the past three years. However, I pray that you realize that God is not finished with you yet, and thus you will need to be patient with yourself even as He is patient with you.

It is so easy, Ross, to fall into the trap of thinking that as *God's minister* your life should somehow magically fall into place. This is especially true for those of us high energy, hard driving perfectionists. But reality has taught me that life is full of *ebb and flow* events. At times, it seems that no matter what we do, everything comes out smelling like roses, while at other times no matter what we try nothing goes right. It's during these latter times that the Enemy, who Scripture

calls the *accuser of the brethren*, swoops down into our soul and seeks to discourage us with our obvious failures.

Furthermore, these times of failure not only occur in our ministries, but likewise surface in our families. For example, I recently had this type of episode with my wife. I was not connecting with her. To be honest, I was downright insensitive to her. And even after apologizing for my behavior, I still felt disgusted with myself for causing her pain.

As someone who has had the privilege of representing Christ in full-time vocational ministry for over two decades, I want to encourage you to realize that no one is perfect. In fact, in those relationships that are dearest to you, you are most likely to fail. And it's especially in those relationships that you and I both need the assurance that, in spite of the blunders we make at times, God is still present, and He still cares for us and believes in us.

A few things have helped me in dealing with my predisposition to impatience with myself. Let me share these with you in an attempt to save you some anguish down the road.

The first is to reach out to friends around you. These encouragers can offer a perspective beyond the inward condemnation of our feelings. As we sense their unconditional acceptance, we can more easily feel God's acceptance. When we are going through a time of inward condemnation, the Accuser wants us to not only believe his lies, but isolate ourselves away from those who can give us a godly, balanced perspective.

This is why I strongly urge you to make sure that you are in some *rope-holding* relationships. Connect with mature friends who can hold you up even when you cannot uphold yourself. A time will also come when you are on the anchoring end for them. Remember, friend, *two are better than one for they have a good return for their labor. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up* (Ecclesiastes 4:11-12).

Who are your rope-holders, Ross? If you do not have rope-holders, you desperately need to ask God to provide such persons.

Another thing that has helped me develop perspective and patience has been reading about the lives of other believers, and seeing how God has brought them through difficult periods. Being able to observe their lives, and their patience (and in some cases impatience) chronicles how God instills hope even in hopeless situations.

A final practical suggestion, and the most important, is to make sure that you set aside concentrated time with Jesus. I especially enjoy reflecting in such books as the Psalms. I ask our Lord not only speak to my soul, but to help me discern the source of the attacks in my mind. I seek His guidance on how I can build safeguards against the onslaught of the Enemy.

Nothing—and I mean nothing—can substitute for personal times with the Lord. Gaining His perspective on our lives is so essential to our well being. Yet, in the busyness and constant crises of ministry, we can bypass drawing close to the One who is our Rock. May we never forget to listen to the One who knows us best!

I love you deeply my brother! My prayer for you is that, as you launch your ministry, you'll remember that God is indeed in control of all things, and that He will never forsake you no matter how bleak the situation and no matter how badly you feel you have failed Him. Be patient with yourself as God works out His perfect plan for your life.

God Bless!

Dwight Perry

Great Lakes Baptist Conference, Rothchild, Wisconsin

*Being confident in this, that he who began a good work in you  
will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 1:6*