



*the
Bridge of Patience*

The Patience Journey: Crossing the
Bridge of Patience
Study Guide

Introduction

We believe that the strongest marriages are those that have found a way to integrate seven foundational attributes of a healthy relationship. We like to call those attributes The Seven Bridges. Bridges help us get from where we are to where we want to go, and help us to avoid unnecessary obstacles. They connect two parts of a singular journey.

Relationships are also a journey. Along that journey there are many gaps, gorges, obstacles and other impediments. These obstacles make it more difficult to continue on that journey. Some of those obstacles are so challenging that many people give up before they reach their destination. Some couples just need a bridge in their relationship.

The Seven Bridges represent the relational characteristics of God found in a covenant relationship. God often describes his covenant relationship with his people as a marriage. A marriage that is thriving and exhilarating. By taking the time to understand the relational characteristics of God, we will begin to gain some insights into what a healthy relationship looks like. When we apply these attributes into our relationship with our spouse, and with God, we will start to experience the kind of relationship that only a perfect and almighty God can design. The Seven Bridges are:

The Bridge of Fellowship
The Bridge of Purpose
The Bridge of Celebration
The Bridge of Humility

The Bridge of Healing
The Bridge of Forgiveness
The Bridge of Patience

We cross a bridge one step at a time. Some bridges take longer than others. The goal is to have a clearly defined path where we can begin to move forward.

Journeys

We have developed a study guide for each of The Seven Bridges to help you more fully understand these relational characteristics of God. They are great for couples to explore together or for use in small groups. Each Journey has seven steps and will allow you to understand how these characteristics apply in a marriage. We hope that they will also help you develop a greater appreciation of the relationship God desires with you.

Step One: What is Patience?

Fruit of the Spirit

Read: Galatians 5:22

The fruit of the Spirit represents the qualities that are produced by the Holy Spirit. When we accept Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in and works through us and produces the fruit found in Galatians 5:22. Just like an apple tree, the Holy Spirit cannot help but produce its fruit. The fruit is always ready to bloom. How much fruit is produced depends on you. A good farmer does not leave his crops alone to see if they will produce fruit, but instead fertilizes, cultivates, and protects his crop to yield the greatest fruit.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think it is important to understand that patience is a fruit of the Spirit and not just a personality trait?

Couple Discussion: When is it the hardest for you to show patience?

Longsuffering

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:14

Sometimes it is difficult to be patient with anyone, yet we are called to be patient with everyone. The Greek word for patient in this verse is *makrothumeo*, which means longsuffering. *Makrothumeo* comes from two words meaning long and temper. It is the opposite of a short-temper in that it does not over-react in anger. It also has a connotation of showing bravery in handling difficult situations. It recognizes that showing this type of patience is not easy, but takes courage in restraining yourself as you go through difficulties.

Couple Discussion: What difficulties would you make it hard for you to show patience?

Couple Discussion: Why do you think it is important to demonstrate longsuffering in a marriage?

Reflection of Love

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4

The very first word to describe agape (unconditional) love is patient. It is the same Greek word, *makrothumeo*, found in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, which means longsuffering. If love is patient, then when we show patience, we are showing love. Also, if unconditional love is patient, then our patience should also be unconditional.

Couple Discussion: How do you feel when your spouse is patient with you?

Forbearing

Have you ever had a bad day and responded harshly to your spouse even though you didn't mean it? Have you said words that you wish you could have stopped before they left your mouth? We all have experienced those moments of regret. We have all also been on the receiving end of those moments of regret. How do you respond when you are the one receiving those harsh words?

Read: 2 Timothy 2:24

The Greek word for patience in this verse is *anexikakos*, which means forbearing. Forbearing is similar to longsuffering. It reveals a willingness to give others the benefit of the doubt and keep your temper under control in response to an evil act. In other words, you are not easily provoked and have self-control in responding to others.

Couple Discussion: How do you tend to respond when provoked?

Couple Discussion: How would forbearance help in the midst of a conflict?

Constancy

Read: 1 Timothy 1:15-16

Paul describes himself as the worst of sinners, based on how he used to persecute Christians. He says this not to demean himself, but instead to describe the extent of Christ's patience with us. Christ is willing to wait patiently for us to come to him, even while we are at our worst. The Greek word for patience in this verse is *makrothumia*, which means a constant endurance and steadfastness. It reflects a patience that does not change but perseveres through difficult times. It is a patience that can be counted upon.

Couple Discussion: How does it feel when you know that you can count on someone to be there for you?

Step Two: Why is Patience Important?

Handling Conflict

Read: Proverbs 25:15

There is a funny story about a child that is told to sit down at the dinner table. In a reluctant response, the child says, "I will sit down, but in my heart I am still standing." Forcing others into compliance without winning their heart does not end the conflict, it just changes the strategy. Patience is important in conflict as it can allow time for others to come into agreement with us, and also allow time for us to realize that we are wrong.

Couple Discussion: How do you typically respond to others that disagree with you?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways you could show patience with your spouse during conflict?

Hope

Read: Romans 5:3-5

Hope is a powerful force. The existence of hope allows us to focus on what something could be and not just what it is. In these verses, the Greek word for perseverance is *humpomone*, which also means patience. Hope begins with patience in the midst of difficult times. When you are going through difficult times and want to have hope, remember to focus first on patience. But don't forget that before hope comes, you may need to work on your character.

Couple Discussion: What are some things you hope for in your marriage?

Couple Discussion: What are some of the positive character traits in your spouse?

Turns God to Us

Read: Psalm 40:1

What is waiting patiently? First, it is an attitude. We can wait for something and demonstrate many different attitudes. We can wait with anger, annoyance, contempt, impatience, joy, or peace to name a few. But what is it about patience that allows God to turn to us? The Hebrew word for patience in this verse is *qavah*, which describes an attitude of eagerness and expectation as you wait. It demonstrates that you have faith in God and trust his timing. Think of it as a child waiting for Christmas morning.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that waiting patiently for your spouse might turn them to you?

Creates Thankfulness

Read: 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

When we are patient with others, it creates thankfulness in the relationship. Thankfulness is a critical component in building intimacy and drawing close to your spouse. When we are thankful for our spouse, it makes us want to become better a

better spouse and show them our appreciation. This alone can do wonders for a marriage.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways you could show your thankfulness for each other?

Step Three: What Hinders Patience?

Pride

Read: Ecclesiastes 7:8

Pride has a way of hindering many fruitful things in our lives. When we focus on our own desires, we begin the process of neglecting the needs of others. We begin to think that our desires are the most important. This leaves little room for patience when we want our own needs satisfied. This also often leads to actions of instant gratification.

Couple Discussion: What desires do you have that make you impatient?

Couple Discussion: What impact do these desires have on how you approach your decisions?

Weariness

Read: Matthew 11:28

When we become burned out, it is difficult to be patient and endure hardship. In Matthew 11:28, Christ makes the offer to those that are tired and burdened with the trials of life. He says that he will give rest (enduring patience).

Couple Discussion: What are some areas where we are weary and can ask Christ for enduring patience?

Sin

Read: Hebrews 12:1

Before we run the race set before us with enduring patience (*Greek, hupomone*), we must get rid of the sin that entangles us. When we are entangled, it preoccupies our mind with the sin and does not allow us to focus on where God is leading us. When we lose our focus, we allow doubt and other distractions to slow us down and frustrate our endurance.

Couple Discussion: When do you feel like you have the least amount of patience?

Couple Discussion: What do you think makes it difficult for you to keep your focus with enduring patience?

Lack of Self-Control

Read: 2 Peter 1:5-7

Our degree of patience is contingent on our degree of self-control. In other words, if you need more patience, then you need to focus on self-control. Patience is also need in order to grow in our spiritual maturity and ability to demonstrate love to others.

Couple Discussion: Where do we struggle most with self-control?

Step Four: What Promotes Patience?

Wisdom

Read: Proverbs 19:11

Some versions of the Bible, translate "patience" in this verse as being slow to anger, as well other similar translations. The concept is similar to being forbearing or longsuffering. Wisdom allows us to interpret situations beyond the moment, which gives us the patience to handle immediately stressful circumstances.

Wisdom is something that is provided by God (Psalm 51:6, Proverbs 2:6). The fear of God is the first step to receiving wisdom (Proverbs 15:33).

Couple Discussion: Why do you think wisdom is helpful in showing patience?

Couple Discussion: What are some current situations where we would like more wisdom?

Power of God

Read: Colossians 1:11

This is great news! When we don't feel like we have the patience to handle a situation, we do not have to become discouraged. God provides us with the patience we need through his strength. Make patience a regular request in your times of prayer. It is best to obtain patience before we need to demonstrate it.

Couple Discussion: What are some ways that you would like to see the power of God work in your life?

Suffering

Read: Romans 5:3

When we go through difficult situations, we begin to recognize our inner-strength. We know our personal limitations and the points that we need the strength provided by the encouragement of others and by the power of God. By working through these situations, we gain an insight into ourselves that we never had before. It gives us the ability to view future situations from a different perspective. A perspective that says, "I can overcome this!"

Couple Discussion: What painful experiences have you overcome in the past?

Couple Discussion: What circumstances scare you the most? How would you handle it?

Comforting Words

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:5-7

Our lack of patience is often a result of fear in our lives. It is the unknown that often scares us and causes us to react in haste. The comforting words and actions by those closest to us, can give us the peace needed to patiently endure the unknown. When your spouse is not patient with you, ask yourself whether they may

be fearful of something. If so, responding with comforting words instead of words of frustration may bring about the patience you desire.

Couple Discussion: How do you typically respond to each other in stressful situations?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways you could comfort your spouse?

Step Five: How is Patience Demonstrated by God?

Mercy

Read: 1 Timothy 1:16

God demonstrated his patience with Paul during a period that he was doing everything possible to destroy the Christian faith. It was God's mercy that allowed him to wait patiently for the right time to approach Paul and transform his life. Mercy is often described as not giving us what we do deserve. Not only did God not give Paul what he deserved, but instead gave him the opportunity to come along side him as he transformed history.

Couple Discussion: How have you been shown mercy in the past?

Couple Discussion: What are some ways you can show mercy to your spouse?

Salvation

Read: 2 Peter 3:15

Peter calls us to regard God's patience with us as salvation. In other words, his patience with us is such an integral part of our salvation that we cannot separate the two. This stresses the importance of patience in a relationship. It is a cornerstone in any reconciliation process.

Couple Discussion: Why do you think God's patience is an important part of being reconciled to him through our salvation?

Individually

Read: 2 Peter 3:9

God is not just patient. He is specifically patient with each individual person. He sees the value in each person and the important of being patient with each one. Just as God choose to be patient with you, you need to choose to be patient with your spouse.

Couple Discussion: In what ways has God been patient with you?

Step Six: How is Patience Demonstrated in Marriage?

Slow to Anger

Read: Psalm 86:15

It is very easy to let our natural instincts take over in the heat of a disagreement. Many people have experienced those times that your anger seemed to appear out of nowhere. In our patience, we need to learn to demonstrate forbearance in those times of disagreement and wait before we speak.

Couple Discussion: What circumstances or things said tend to cause us to become angry the easiest?

Couple Discussion: What helps you to keep from getting angry?

Understanding

Read: Proverbs 14:29

Taking time to understand each other is a principle that many couples fail to focus on in their marriage. They are too preoccupied with getting their point across or meeting their needs that they don't take time to truly understand their spouse. This is a matter of patience. It starts with us deciding that it is more important to focus first on understanding regardless of the outcome. Understanding is less about what you think you know and more about what your spouse thinks you know. In other words, your focus should be to make sure your spouse believes that you understand them.

Couple Discussion: How do you communicate that you understand your spouse?

Stop the Fight

Read: Proverbs 15:18

One of the primary reasons that couples find it difficult to resolve conflict is escalation. Escalation is the process of increasing the intensity (verbally and physically) during a disagreement. Once couples escalate an argument, it is often difficult to find any immediate resolution. It often results in seeds of bitterness being sowed in the relationship. Healthy relationships learn how to control their emotions through patience, and not allow an argument to escalate.

Couple Discussion: Do we tend to escalate arguments? If so, what usually triggers the escalation?

Couple Discussion: What helps you "cool down" during periods of intense disagreements?

Listening

Read: Acts 26:3

What is patient listening? It is the process of letting your spouse speak their mind without interrupting them and not thinking about how you are going to respond before they are done talking. Once you hear what your spouse says, let them know what you heard them say just to be sure there are no miscommunications.



The Patience Journey

Couple Discussion: Do you find it difficult to listen patiently? Why?

Step Seven: Steps to Patience

Decide

Read: Colossians 3:12

Being patient is a decision. It is not a natural response. Just like any fruit of the Spirit, we can embrace it or reject it.

Couple Discussion: What do you think makes people choose to not demonstrate patience?

Role Models

Read: Hebrews 6:12 and 2 Timothy 3:10

Every couple should seek to have a couple to mentor them. Having a mentor is not a sign of problems or weakness in a marriage, but is a sign of how important a couple views their marriage. No couple has crossed every challenge they will someday face, nor know the outcome of all their decisions. However, other couples have crossed those bridges and can help you view those situations with patience as they guide you in wisdom.

Couple Discussion: What qualities do you think are important for a mentor couple to have?

Ask God

Read: Romans 15:5

God is our source to receive all the fruits of the Spirit. He will provide you with the patience and endurance to overcome any circumstance. Seek patience and he will also provide greater unity in your relationship.

Couple Discussion: What are some specific areas where you can ask God for patience?

Summary

One of the strongest verses in scripture about patience is Peter's call that we should regard patience as salvation (2 Peter 3:15). It is such an integral part of the Christian faith. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and part of the definition of love (1 Cor. 13). If you demonstrate patience with your spouse, you will build an atmosphere of thankfulness and unity that will allow you to experience a love that is only possible through Christ.



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SEVEN BRIDGES