

Christian Perspectives: Practicing Patience

By Reverend Barbara Moulton

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Rainer Maria Rilke

I first read this quote almost a decade ago. I was (and still am) captured by the thought that when I allow myself to be patient with the things I don't yet understand, and when I choose to love the questions, I am spiritually enriched. The process of finding answers, not just the answers themselves, is of great value.

The other day, my husband and I were watching a movie on television.

We knew that we knew one of the supporting actors. But we could not recall how we knew him.

No fear.

A quick check on the internet gave us the answer within seconds. No need for patience.

Obviously, we didn't miss anything. Journeying with that particular question for a period of time was not likely to lead to great insight. However, the speed with which we were able to find the answer, illustrated how much things have changed in my lifetime.

In the past, it would have been so difficult to find the answer that I might have forgotten that I even had the question.

Any baby boomers reading this will remember with me, what it took to research a topic when we were in school. Long evenings at libraries, card catalogues, books piled high and copious notes on white index cards were part of the process. We became well acquainted with the Dewey Decimal System.

And in the process of finding the answers to one question we often learned answers to those we didn't even know we had. Patience brought rewards.

Similarly, if you opened up a dictionary to look up how to spell a word, you would find other words as you ran your finger down the page. Online dictionaries are so much faster. But you lose those moments of unexpected discovery.

I am not lamenting the loss of the good old days. The reality is that, even before the Internet, it was far easier for me to find answers to questions, than it would have been for a woman in the fifteenth century. As a result, I have been able to learn more than she could have ever dreamed. I am sure that future generations will amass a wealth of knowledge that will lead to greater and greater accomplishments. I don't really want to go back.

But, the challenge will be to teach the value of patience in a world where it is not always needed. To teach that we are enriched when we take time to love the questions themselves. To understand that time spent with uncertainty is not necessarily time wasted.

Above all, to remember that the answer to the most important questions of our souls demand patience.

John Jacob Nile wrote:

I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

He thought about the birth and death of Jesus. He asked questions about God's love. In the asking alone he was blessed.

Google can do a great deal for us in our quest for knowledge. But, when it comes to spiritual questions, it can't take the place of a pondering along the path of patience. Take time to ponder. Take time to practice patience.

The journey to understanding is just as important as understanding itself.