

11th July 2025

Patience

“Patience is the art of hoping.”

Marquis De Vauvenargues, *Reflections and Maxims* (1746)

My friend was waiting for results of medical tests. “It’s hard,” he told me. “I don’t like ‘not knowing’. At least when I get the results, I’ll know what needs to be done. The waiting is the hardest bit.”

It’s about patience, and I suppose it would have been easy enough for me to throw platitudes about patience to someone who is struggling with waiting. The American 19th century writer Cyrus Augustus Bartol wrote in *Radical Problems*, “Patience is a nobler notion than any deed.” But if I’d responded to my friend’s frustrations with *that* kind of epithet, I suspect I would have been given short shrift! Perhaps offering Ambrose Bierce’s definition of patience from *The Devil’s Dictionary* –

Patience, n. A minor form of despair, disguised as a virtue.

might have been more helpful, and more real. In the end, I offered sympathy, and little else. Nothing clever seemed appropriate.

It’s easy to find reasons why *other* folk should be patient, or to keep encouraging them to work at their patience to help get them through a tough time. But, as we all know, patience is hard to find when we need it for ourselves. James Parker is a staff writer at *The Atlantic*, an outlet that covers news, politics, culture, technology, health and more, in articles, podcasts, videos, and a flagship magazine. (<https://www.theatlantic.com>). He’s the author of *Get Me Through the Next Five Minutes: Odes to Being Alive*, and since 2011 he’s been running the *Black Seed Writers Group* – a weekly writing workshop for homeless, transitional, and recently housed writers in downtown Boston. Reflecting on patience, he’s offered this:

Patience, one discovers, is not a virtue but a quantity. Like oil in the car or milk in the fridge. Not limitless and oceanic, but quite finite. I ran out years ago. All I have now is stamina. I can endure. Radiant with suppressed exasperation, I can hang in there.

I liked that! And I suspect my friend might like it too. Perhaps he and I can hang-in-there together, applying “the art of hoping” to our own needs.

A prayer for today

Living God, in my exasperation, help me to endure.

Give me the stamina I need when my patience runs out. Amen