

Lesson Four

Patience

Introduction

Patience is like kitty litter. Kitty litter absorbs kitty leavings, lots of kitty leavings, without any indication that kitty has deposited a thing. Patience absorbs life's leavings—the slights, hurts, losses, messes—without an indication that anything has happened.

The Greek word for patience, which is the fruit of the Spirit we are considering in this lesson, is *makrothumia*. Break that word into its components, and you'll find *makro*, meaning “long,” and *thumia*, meaning “temper.” To be long-tempered is the opposite of being short-tempered. It is similar to the Old Testament word we translate as “slow to anger.” To be long-tempered is to control our anger in the face of the wrongs others inflict on us. In fact, it is the opposite of anger. In place of anger's desire for revenge, patience substitutes endurance, self-restraint, and forbearance.

When the Spirit moved into our lives by bringing us to faith in Jesus, he brought this characteristic along and now makes it available to us.

Studying God's Word

God's Patience

First Peter 3:20 informs us, *God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built*. A good place to learn about God's patience, then, is in the events leading up to the flood. Read the following passages from Genesis.

Genesis 5:32

³² *After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.*

Genesis 6:1-13

¹ *When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them,* ² *the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.* ³ *Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with^[a] humans forever, for they are mortal^[b]; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”*

⁴ *The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.*

⁵ *The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.* ⁶ *The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.* ⁷ *So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.”* ⁸ *But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.*

⁹ *This is the account of Noah and his family.*

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. ¹⁰ *Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.*

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³ So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

Genesis 7:6

⁶ Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth.

1. List the amoral conditions on earth that demanded God's judgment.
2. What do you notice about God's patience when you calculate how long God waited between his intention to destroy the world in a flood and his sending the flood waters? (See Genesis 6:3.)
3. In Hebrews 11:7 we learn that through his act of building the ark, Noah "condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." In 2 Peter 2:5 we're told that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness." What does that tell us about God's patience during the building of the ark?
4. Notice that in Genesis chapter 7 God's patience came to an end, the flood destroyed all life except for aquatic life and the people and animals in the ark. How does God describe his patience and justice in Exodus 34:6,7? He says that he is "*the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. . . . Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.*"
5. Examine these passages to learn why God is patient with us.
 - Romans 2:4 *Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*
 - 2 Peter 3:15 *Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.*
 - Psalm 103:8-18 *The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.*

His Word in My Life

1. Consider Jesus during the final 24 hours of his life. How do we see the patience of God lived out?
2. If you were to draw a picture of patience (“slow to anger,” “long-tempered”), what would you draw?
3. Evaluate: If God were less patient and punished people a little more quickly for their sins, this world would be a better place to live in.

Studying God’s Word

Responding to God’s Patience

1. Read the following passages. Point out how they emphasize that it’s God’s grace that prompts our patience. Note how the Spirit’s gift of patience will show itself in our lives.
 - Colossians 3:12,13 *Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:14 *We urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*
 - James 5:7-11 *Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. Don’t grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*
 - Ephesians 4:1-3 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*
 - Hebrews 6:9-12 *Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

His Word in My Life

We might summarize the previous section like this:

- We are motivated to patience because we are God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved.
 - We are patient with others and forgive them as the Lord forgave us.
 - In our lives we mimic God’s love for us by showing brotherly love to fellow believers.
 - The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, and he wants us to clothe ourselves in the same.
 - God is not unjust; he will not forget your work.
 - If we patiently endure, we will inherit what has been promised.
1. Explain how patience and admonition balance when a congregation deals with members who are not concerned about their spiritual well-being.

 2. Evaluate: Because God is as patient as he is, he won’t mind if we sow some wild oats when we are young, or old, for that matter.

 3. Hebrews 6:12 urges us to “*imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*” How is patience an outgrowth of faith?

 4. Agree/disagree: In our world today, patience is sometimes regarded as a weakness.

 5. Which is the better definition for patience:
 - A. Patience is a passive acceptance of delays or difficulties.
 - B. Patience is an active choice to respond to life with grace, perseverance, and hope.

 6. When is it hardest for you to be patient? What have you learned that fills up your reservoir of patience when you see yourself becoming angry?

Summary

God so loves humans and is so patient with them that even Christians sometimes find fault with him. His patience flows from his desire that everyone be saved through faith in the truth. He goes to extraordinary lengths so that will happen. Sacrificing his Son to forgive our sins is the boldest example. Now, motivating them by his patience, he empowers Christians to exhibit the Spirit’s patience.