

Love is patient

Love is patient. Patient in the Greek is *makrothyme* . This is a verb meaning to suffer long and to bravely endure misfortunes and trouble. It also means slow to anger and slow to punish. Jonathan Edwards, a North American preacher in the 1700s, explains that having a love that is long-suffering means that a person will receive injuries with a soul filled with meekness, quietness, and goodness.

We tend to think of patience as having to wait in line at Costco for 5 minutes. We congratulate ourselves when we don't use a sharp tone when one of our kids has to be asked twice to pick up their room. In other words, we have reduced this beautiful facet of love down to not exploding when something doesn't go our way immediately. But God says that we should endure harsh, bitter words from others with quietness and meekness in our hearts. We should demonstrate gentleness and kindness when others sin against us and repeatedly hurt us. Long-suffering means that we should suffer for a long time while displaying the attitude, words, and actions of Christ.

Wayne Mack says "This word means we will bear not only a small injury, but also a great deal of injurious treatment from others without retaliation. We are to meekly bear these injuries without retaliation though they go on for a long time. We should be willing to suffer a great while in reference to our own interests before we defend ourselves... Even then we do it in such a way that we do not do unnecessary injury to the person who injured us."

Consider how you typically respond in these situations:⁵

1. When others are unfair or dishonest in how they treat you.
2. When others make promises and then don't keep them.
3. When others exaggerate or misrepresent your faults.
4. When you are treated without respect and honor and cooperation from people in authority over you.
5. When people over whom you have authority do not show respect, honor and cooperation to you.
6. When others will not admit they have wronged you.
7. When others blame you for something you didn't do.
8. When others take longer to do something that shouldn't take that long.
9. When others don't listen and you have to repeat yourself.

⁵ Maximum Impact by Wayne Mack (I have taken the liberty to paraphrase his long list.)

10. When others are late for appointments with you.
11. When others use belittling or unkind words towards you.
12. When others spread unkind things about you and gossip about you.
13. When others borrow things and don't return them, or don't use the toothpaste tube the way you do, or don't turn off lights, or leave cupboards doors open.

Here are just thirteen examples of times when most of us are not long-suffering. These are times when we display whether or not we are truly patient in the way we love our fellow believers, neighbors, family, enemies, and everyone else or if we prefer ourselves and our own convenience and comfort. Scripture shows us some examples of living this out in a way that honors God.

Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians 4 how he and Apollos were long-suffering. "To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure, when slandered, we entreat" (verses 11-12). Rather than returning harsh words for harsh words or retaliating when they were mistreated, Paul and Apollos chose to endure patiently and display the love of Christ to those who were reviling and slandering them. Their ministry was marked by love (long suffering patience) and they saw people turn to Christ as they loved others well.

Again, in 2 Corinthians 6 Paul says they showed great endurance in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, and imprisonments, just to name a few. And they did this with purity, knowledge, patience, kindness and the weapons of righteousness so as to give no offense to anyone. Paul was so set on honoring Christ that he was compelled to love others no matter what they did to him. Long-suffering is displayed when you are able to be kind in the face of mistreatment and trials, even when they go on for years and years. Paul's entire ministry was one of persecution, imprisonment, and suffering, yet he longed to love others with the love he had received from Christ.

Of course, Paul was only imitating the greatest example of love. God displays His patience with His people throughout the entire bible. In Exodus as God was responding to Moses in the midst of "stiff-necked" people He says of Himself, I am "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (Exodus 34:6). "Slow to anger" is another way of saying long-suffering. When we don't get what we want, we tend to be quick to anger and display a lack of patience with any inconvenience. This is not like God who patiently endures us sinning against Him many times every single day.. Again, Psalm 86:15 says,

“But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.”

Looking back at the thirteen examples given of times when we fail to show patience or long-suffering love, it is because we are quick to anger and frustration. God, on the other hand, is slow to anger, and endures the many, many ways He is wronged and sinned against by men. When we ignore God, deny His existence, act as though He were unfair or unkind to us, God does not destroy us as He rightfully could. He bears with us. Consider how God has been patient with you over the course of your life. Really, stop. Take some time to think about how often you sin against God. About how often you repent and ask for forgiveness only to do the same sin again. God is patient! When we are upset about repeating ourselves for the third time or frustrated that our spouse is doing that annoying thing again, think about how God has patiently endured your besetting sins and continues to forgive you.

Christ’s life is an example of glorious patience and long-suffering. Consider how Jesus was mistreated by his friends, family, enemies, and crowds. “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return, when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” (1 Peter 2:22-24). Jesus endured the worst possible case of injustice. He was perfectly sinless and holy. He endured all temptation without sin. Yet He was the one who suffered and bore our sins while being forsaken by God so that we, His enemies, would have life and righteousness. Jesus is the ultimate example of patience.

Consider when Peter denied Jesus three times (Luke 22). Jesus had forewarned Peter that he would deny Jesus three times and Peter assured Jesus that he would never abandon Him. Jesus, of course, was right and Peter pretended not to know Jesus. Jesus’ “turns and looks at Peter” when the rooster crows. Then, after Jesus’ resurrection, he demonstrates that patience with restoring Peter by asking him three times, “Peter do you love me?” What a beautiful picture of Jesus patiently showing Peter that he was forgiven and still counted among Jesus’ friends. Peter possibly remembers this when he writes

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. . . . Count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him. (2

Peter 3:9, 15)

Jesus again showed tremendous patience with Saul who was persecuting believers. On the road to Damascus, as Saul was heading to the city to get permission to arrest and jail more Christians, Jesus appears as a bright light and says, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 7) If there was ever a person who deserved a quick, angry response, it was Saul. Instead, Jesus waited and then showed tremendous mercy and compassion by transforming Saul into Paul, a deeply devoted servant of Christ. How would you or I have responded to someone who was stoning, beating, and arresting our friends?

We are called to Christlikeness. God's desire for us is our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). So putting long-suffering in practice means that we will endure with kindness the injuries inflicted by others whether the mistreatments are intentional or mistakes. It means that we will respond with kindness and not harbor unforgiveness or bitterness. It means that we will gladly bear with the weaknesses and sins of others without expressing sinful attitudes or actions in return.

We cannot love like this on our own. It is only through the power of Christ's Spirit in us that we can love this way. In Christ, united to him by grace through faith, you can grow to love this way. It will require prayer and dependence on God. It will require trust that God's promises and design for how to live are best and rewarding. It will require pursuit, the intentional effort of choosing to love in the face of mistreatment. We can only love because God loved us first (1 John 4:19). We must spend time reflecting on God's patience and long-suffering and through his power seek to love others this way.

Application:

1. Write out the concepts that stood out most to you in this section. Why did they stand out?
2. Look up the following verses. What do you learn about patience?

Numbers 14:18

Nehemiah 9:16-17

Psalms 86:15

Psalms 145:8

Isaiah 48:9

Proverbs 14:29

Proverbs 16:32

Romans 12:12

3. Thinking about how this section has defined patience and long-suffering love, how do you rate yourself in this area on a scale of 1 - 10. (10 being as long-suffering as Jesus) Why?
4. In what areas of your life (specific types of circumstances) do you fail to display patience and long-suffering love? Choose 3 to write out.
5. Who in your life is it most difficult to express patient, long-suffering love?
6. Take some time to repent of your lack of patience and long-suffering love. Be specific about how you have been quick to anger and who you are quick to get angry with. Ask God to forgive you and help you to love as He has loved you.
7. In what specific ways have you demonstrated patient, long-suffering love?
8. In what ways do you need to change to be more long-suffering in your love for others? Write out at least 3 ways you can demonstrate patience.