

Seeking God's Will (Part Three): Patience

Learning to Imitate God's Longsuffering

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According to a traditional Hebrew story, Abraham the patriarch was sitting outside his tent late one day when he spied an old man weary from age and his arduous journey walking toward him. Of course, Abraham rushed out and greeted him, and invited him into his tent. There he washed the old man's feet, and gave him food and drink. And, the old man began eating without saying a word, or asking any sort of blessing. So then, Abraham asked him, "Sir, don't you worship God?" And the old traveler replied, "I worship only fire, and reverence no god." When Abraham heard this, he was astonished, and became angry. He grabbed the old man by the shoulders, and threw him out of the tent into the cold night air. And the man tottered off.

Well, within seconds, God called out to His friend, Abraham, and asked him where the stranger was. "Abraham, where's the old man?" And Abraham replied, "I forced him out, because he didn't worship You." And God answered, "Abraham, I've suffered him these 80 years, although he dishonors Me every day. Couldn't you endure him one night?"

Now, I am sure that this is an apocryphal story based on the events of Genesis 18 where Abraham was sitting at the door of the tent, and he saw the three men coming, one of whom was Christ. I suppose that some rabbi centuries ago made this up to make a theological point and, I think that the story does its job well in contrasting God's patience with our own.

In these distressful days, especially today in our time, would we have even given this old man the time of day? If he had knocked on your door, would you have answered it? Would you have peeked through the window curtains and say to yourself, "I don't know, this man looks kind of scary," much less let him in, and served him? We complain that we have no time for such things, that life is moving far too fast, that we have too much to do, people expect too much from us, and that it would be just a waste of our time and energy, money and food and whatever, to endure such a person, to put up with them.

You know, ours is a very impatient society and age. We have no time to waste, we think. We want *instant breakfast*, *minute rice*, and Nestle's *Quik*. We might go to a nearby quickie mart to purchase some pain relief. We get our car's oil changed at "Jiffy Lube," or "Speedy Oil Change." We build or fix things with fast-drying cement, fast-drying caulk, fast-drying primer, and fast-drying paint. And, let us not forget those other things that we rely on every day like *instant messaging*, *instant coffee*, *instant credit*, *instant reply*, *instant stain removal*, and then we want everything else "on-the-double!" We do not want to wait for anything, these days. It has to be now, now, now, quick, quick, quick, on-my-desk-first-thing-in-the-morning!

While standing at the checkout line, if we have to wait an extra minute or two, most of us are already halfway to starting a riot. We shout to the manager, "Hey! Open up another line!" We tell the person in front of us, "Why didn't you get your checkbook out at the beginning of this process?" Or, we think (but do we actually say this?), "You dummy! Why did you get into so much debt that they had to refuse your credit card?" "This line is for twenty items or less! Not 21, or 53!" I am sure that most of us have had these thoughts.

We demand instant gratification, whatever the need happens to be. It does not matter if it is the least important thing, or the most important, we want it done *now*. We want to be satisfied. We do not want to waste any time.

Think about it. Has there ever been a time in human history when so many have been so impatient? In this culture that we are spreading all over this world—perhaps I should say, that we *have spread* all over the world—we are trained and conditioned to be impatient from our earliest days. We are probably barely out of diapers—no, even while still in diapers—that if we leave that diaper on just a moment longer than they like, and they start crying and squawking. But, the whole world is impatient—uber-impatient if you will—because we have all been trained that way.

And it certainly starts long before we ever start watching television. I am sure that it does begin sooner than that because we watch our impatient parents. That is where we learn it. But the media is constantly pressuring us to get this, or that, or something else, and do this other thing, and it has to be now, now, now. “Don’t wait. Don’t be the last of your friends and neighbors to take advantage of this incredible offer!” Are we not glad that God is not like us?

What if He demanded instant gratification in every area like we do?

What if He demanded instant obedience in every thing? We would all become dark oily stains! What if He, like some of our “enlightened” state’s penal codes, had a three-strike rule policy? “That’s it! That’s your third sin! I’m sorry, but you’ve just lost your salvation! You’re out! Hey, Three strikes! Gave you fair warning! Three—that’s pretty generous, don’t you think?” Just three sins, and you are out. We would all be doomed to the Lake of Fire!

What if He imposed a time limit? Let us be generous—a day! What if He imposed a time limit of a day upon us to repent of our sins? You commit a sin, and the clock starts ticking. You have 24 hours to repent of that sin. But, you are not aware of the sin you did. It did not even strike you that it was a sin. But, God has this hard and fast time limit—24 hours to repent of that sin (in this stupid little illustration I am giving).

You know, we would have absolutely no hope of forgiveness, and we would all die in our sins, because there are probably hundreds of sins that we commit all the time, that we are not aware of. And we would die unforgiven.

Are we not glad that God is not like us to impose such things on us?

Think about this: What horrible impatient God beings we would be if God were to change us to spirit with our present character within just this one area of impatience.

What if you were given God’s job as a spirit being, and you had to watch all these sinful people down here, and they had been given God’s law, and it was your job to judge; you were given all the power to judge. And so many of those people down there are just so bad! They do not listen! “I tell them this, and I give them that little trial, and I do this and that for them, but they never change!” We would blow something up. It would probably be the whole earth, and we would tell God, “Let’s start all over!”

But, God is not like that, is He? Are you not glad! We can thank God that He is patient with us as we grow into the image of Jesus Christ. He is not like a man full of impatience!

As most of you know, this series of sermons is based on what is said in Ephesians 5:17

Ephesians 5:17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

In these sermons we are exploring just a handful of God's character traits so that we can understand them better, and therefore use them as a springboard to figure out what His will is in just about any situation, because if we have the mind of God, then we should be reacting like God. That is the whole idea behind this series. So, if we seek out the will of the Lord by going through His character traits with a fine-toothed comb, then maybe we can learn how to react in a godly fashion, and particularly I am interested in those situations where we are placed in conflict with one another.

If we know the way that God would react, and if we have enough character to conform ourselves to it, then we can react properly, diffusing the situation, and grow thereby.

What we are trying to do here is to learn God's character traits, understanding that they are the things that form His will, and then we can try to convert these ideas into godly speech and conduct for ourselves.

Clearly, today's character trait is patience. I am not going to be dwelling specifically with patience, but rather with the related and associated virtues such as longsuffering, endurance, perseverance, and forbearing. They are all related. And the way that they are related is by the concept of the passage of time. You cannot be patient in an instant! Patience takes time, not just to develop, but to be used properly too.

It is the same thing with longsuffering. The word long is in there, and you suffer a long time. In endurance, you get the idea that we are going to put up with whatever it takes in order to reach the goal, or finish line—so we endure. Perseverance is the same sort of thing, where we are trying to get to the end of something, and we wait it out, and we do what it takes to get there. Forbearance, of course, is bearing long with another. It is being tolerant of the person in his weakness, allowing him time to change.

So, all of these ideas—patience, longsuffering, endurance, perseverance, and forbearance—have this idea of a length or period of time that is stretched out.

But, this is the exact opposite of our training and conditioning, because we are trained and conditioned to want things right away, and want them done right away, not having to wait. It seems to be totally against our human nature to wait. Yet, God wants us to learn and grow in patience in order to be like Him. This is one of our jobs in this life.

Turn to Isaiah 57 where I want to pick out a phrase for you, but we will read it all for the sake of getting the context:

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

This context, here, is about leading people to repentance. As my New King James says here, "Healing the Backslider." This is part of God's response, where He says that He inhabits eternity.

This phrase is rather curious, that God inhabits eternity. What does that mean? In my view it has two possible meanings, and both of these are astounding. One is a bit more understandable than the other. One actually seems a bit farfetched or harder to grasp as a human being. But, the first is the fact that God saying that He inhabits eternity is a similar way of saying that He is the great I Am—that He always has been, that He is, and that He will always be. There has never been a time, nor will there ever be a time in which God is not in existence! So this can be re-phrased to say, "God is the only constant in eternity." If you have eternity, there is God. This is probably the easiest one to understand. It is basically His name—I Am.

Now, the second one is a bit more "out there." But, it is something I think we should consider, and that is that God inhabits eternity means that God has a perspective on time, and an access to time that we do not understand. We could say that He lives in all time, as inhabit suggests. He can see all time, and He can manipulate all time on a level that is far beyond our feeble intelligence and imagination.

This one is a bit more "Star Trek," if you know what I mean. He sees the whole continuum of time. He can look in on any part of time, and He can manipulate time as He wants to.

Now, if there is anyone who could go backward or forward into time it would be God. We do not know if He actually does this, but it is an interesting idea. He has a way of looking at, and dealing with time that is so far beyond us that we just cannot understand it. And so, the Hebrews just put it into this phrase, that He inhabits eternity. God made time, He is in time, and He is out of (above) time. He is not subject to time. He can work with time.

Like I said, it stretches the mind a bit to think that God has this view of time—this perspective of time—in a way that we just do not comprehend.

Regardless how we see it, we can at least pull out these two things: God possesses all of time as its Creator, and He is the undisputed Master of it all. Those are the two foundational truths about time that we need to know and understand.

We are talking about patience here. We could say, then, that in terms of patience, God has it easy; far easier than we do, because He is the Master of time. He can work time however way He works time. He has all the time in the universe. He is everlasting, and ever-living. He can afford to be patient. No one is pressuring Him. It is His game. He has all the levers up there that He needs to pull to make things happen.

So He, then, waits.

We, on the other hand, are limited to a few score years and ten. That is tough. That is all we get. We have to make things happen. We have to do things now. Time's a-wasting. Daylight is burning. Let us go! What are we waiting for?

And of course, we have no way to control time; no way to manipulate time. We are, unlike God, absolutely subject to time. It is like a river that flows inexorably forward, and we have been thrown into this river. We are floundering around, going along the banks, swept up in the flow, and most of us are barely keeping our noses above the water as it were. Time is moving on.

And for us, the river is only so long, so we are rushing to get things done. We want things now. We cannot wait.

Think about this difference and contrast between God and ourselves in terms of time and patience. We have a hard time being patient for only a few seconds. Maybe we can be patient for a few minutes. We probably think, "I want dinner. If I do it the normal way, where I put it on the stove, turn on the burner, get everything fixed up and ready to go, well, that's about an hour. I have to wait an hour to eat? Can you believe that?" But hey! There is this nifty little thing called a "microwave dinner." You hardly have to do anything. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to use the microwave oven, so you just follow the very simple directions on the package, put that thing inside, and in about 15 minutes or so, you have your dinner. But hey! You saved 45 minutes. And yet, most of us are standing there, rapping our fingers on the counter, impatiently waiting for it, counting down the time.

Sometimes we can be patient for hours, or even days. Some of us are really good—we can put away our money waiting for a car or some other large purchase for many months. But, there are not very many of us that will do that any more. But some people do. They quietly stash their money in the bank, and when they have enough, they go with all their cash, and go to the car dealer, and ride home in a nice new car. Good for them!

Now, let us consider God. God is patient. He starts in years being patient. But, usually it is time spans of decades, centuries, or even millennia. How would you consider half of all eternity? Who knows? How can you even measure time like that? God has been patient.

Even though He has it so much easier than we do in terms of time and being patient, He still is so much more patient than we are. Think about it. We want Christ to return in glory tomorrow! Yet, God and Christ have been waiting for nearly 2000 years! And this is a drop in the bucket for them!

Consider how long God had waited on certain things. How long has He been waiting to convert Israel, and bring her back to the land of promise? 2500 years or so, maybe? That is more than He has been waiting to send Christ back to the earth! But, He has been waiting. How long has He been waiting to fulfill His promise to David to make him king over all Israel in the Millennium? Let us go further back than that—how long has He been waiting to fulfill His promises to Abraham? That is even longer than David's wait—3500 years or so! Okay, those are good things.

But there is more. There are negative, or bad things too. How long has He suffered the pride and disobedience of humanity? Just about 6000 years, right? But, every day, and every minute of those days He has had to observe the sins of humanity. And you know, it must tick Him off because cannot abide sin.

And of course, He has come up with a beautiful plan for overcoming them. But even so, He has had to endure it. It is not His way. He does not like it. But, He has suffered it.

How long (we are going back further now), has He endured the constant accusations and rebellions of Satan the Devil. We do not know how far back that goes. But, how would you like to have that in your ear? You could say, "No, not today Satan. You're out of here." But, He does allow it. He does allow Satan to accuse us.

How long has He had this plan of His in mind? We do not know how far back into eternity it goes. We cannot conceive of time that far back. But, He had an idea with the One who became Christ, that they would reproduce Themselves. And, the One, the Word, would come down here after men were created, and after they sinned (They obviously knew that men would sin—how could they not? We are fleshly, very weak beings.) He would die paying the price for all the sins of the world for all time. How far back in time did They have this thought? How far back have They been thinking and planning and designing to make sure that it all worked out wonderfully in the end? How patient has He been once They started the ball rolling in bringing it to pass?

I mean, when you or I have a project and we are getting toward the end of it, we just want to get it done! We get so nervous about it, we begin to speed things up a little bit. But, God is working, in His time, to bring it all about. It does say there in the books of Peter that we can hasten things along a bit, but I do not know how good a job of that we are doing, but I get the idea from that, that God is encouraging us. Yes, He wants to get this all done. "Come on guys, work harder! Overcome! Let's

go! Don't you want the Millennium? Don't you want all eternity? Don't you want to sit on God's throne with Christ? Come on, let's move!"

But, there is still time to go in this plan. Even if Christ would return tomorrow (like we all want) well, there is still the 1000 years of the Millennium, then the 100 years of the Great White Throne Judgment, and then finally we have the New Heavens and the New Earth. So, what is 1100 years to God?

He is patient. That is the plan, and He is going to stick to it. He is going to work this plan very methodically. That is what He does.

Obviously, we will never be more patient, more enduring, more longsuffering, or more forbearing than God. He will outlast us no matter how difficult the circumstances, or no matter what grief we give Him, no matter who else is involved, whether other people, or demons, or Satan himself, God is going to do what He thinks best, and it will take as long as He thinks it needs to take.

He is willing to wait as long as it takes to produce the result He is looking for. So, if that means that He has to let some demon cause some sort of problem in your life, and it is going to take X-amount of months to work yourself through all this, to produce the little bit of growth in character that we are supposed to get at the end of that trial, then that is exactly what you are going to get.

God is patient, because He wants to produce the things that He wants to produce. Of course, ultimately, He wants to produce men and women in the image of Jesus Christ. And, He specifically wants *you* in the image of His Son, and He is going to work toward that end as hard as He can for as long as it takes to produce that fruit. And, He will keep you alive long enough to get done.

So, putting all this together, we can see that for us, the key to being patient like God is patient, however well we can do that in these fleshly weak bodies, is to have His perspective of time and His priorities about what is truly important. If we get on His wavelength understanding that He is in control of time, and we put the priorities into place that He has—His ultimate priorities are to bring His plan to fruition; to bring us into His glorious Kingdom by producing the character in us of Jesus Christ—if we get those two things right, then we are a good step along the road to learning patience.

But we tend to forget these things. We tend to be so focused on ourselves, and the here-and-now, we become impatient because things are not working out the way that we think they should be.

Now, the words for patience in both the Hebrew and Greek are interesting, particularly the ones having to do with longsuffering.

I thought it was interesting when I started out looking at this subject, that the King James Version uses the words “patient,” “patience,” or “patiently,” only three times in the entire Old Testament. I was kind of shocked. I thought patience would be there more often. But, the King James uses these related terms only three times. What I also found out was when I did *An Englishman's Search* on this, is that they are three different words! So they used three different words, one time each in the whole Old Testament.

The first term is “arek.” It simply means “long,” or “lengthy.” The second term is, “chuwl.” It means “to bear as to carry something.” And, the third term is, “qavah.” It means “to wait.”

Then I went and looked into the New King James and their use of patience in the Old Testament, and what I found is that they used two other words or phrases they translated into patience. The first is, “mashak,” which means, “to prolong, or to bear with,” and the second is a phrase, “apeka le'erek.” As you can see, there is the “arek,” in a portion of that phrase. This combination includes “long” from the arek, and “apeka” is from the word aph, which is “nose.” So the literal translation of this phrase is “long nose,” but it is actually the Old Testament term for “longsuffering.”

We say in our time, maybe a hand-me-down from our Hebrew heritage, that when a person is discouraged, or depressed, we say that he has a long face. (The old story—a horse walks into a bar, and the bartender asks, “Why the long face?”) But we have a similar way of doing that. When you are discouraged you have been bearing with a problem for a long time and you have a long face. Well, the Hebrews did not go for face, they went for nose. “You have a long nose.” This sounds strange to us, but it means that somebody is bearing long with something, so it became their word for longsuffering. And it describes a person who is patient, who is bearing under a heavy load for a long time. Or, he is putting up with a trying person or situation for an extended period.

That is an interesting one. Words are great, and this one—“You're very long-nosed, aren't you?” Kind of like calling them a horse.

Now, the Greek equivalent of longsuffering is “macrothumia,” which is similar to the Hebrew word. Instead of being long nosed, macrothumia means, “macro” “long,” and “thumia,” meaning, “temper.” So, if you are described as macrothumia, then you have a long temper. In other words, it means that your temper, your temperament does not change for a long time; it remains tranquil under adversity. So, you can have all sorts of things happening to you, but you remain tranquil and calm throughout. You have a long temper.

The Greek word for patience (many of you probably already know this), is “hupomone,” which literally means, “abiding under or continuing under.” And thus, it means “patient endurance.” If you were under a load for a long time, you continued under this load, you were said to have “hupomone.” You have patient endurance. You are willing to bear it for a long time.

Turn back to Exodus 34. This is the occasion when God, after Israel's rebellion with the Golden Calf, has to soothe Moses, because Moses was in a dither, and he asked to see the Lord. And God says, "Okay. You just come here, I'll let you see My backsides, and I'm going to preach to you a sermon." And, this is what He says:

Exodus 34:5-7 Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

So this is how God describes Himself. In this one term, He is "long nosed." This is that phrase for longsuffering, *apeka le'erek*. He is longsuffering. This is one of His names, He says. It is a part of His character.

Notice in the flow of this passage that He prefaces this after He gives His name, "The Lord, the Lord God," He says, "merciful and gracious," and then He goes to "longsuffering."

What God does in all this in setting this up like this, is that He is showing that this trait of His is not a negative emotion. Most of us think of suffering long as something hard to bear. It is something that we would wish that we did not have to do, and I am sure that God does not want to have to do this either, but the way He sets this up, is that it is in league with merciful and gracious; that these temper His longsuffering; as if to say that He is happy to do it.

He is not reluctantly patient because He must—that would be negative, He had to. He wants us to know that His longsuffering is an essential part of His loving nature. He is longsuffering because He is merciful. He is longsuffering because He is gracious. He loves us, and so He is more than willing to be longsuffering with us. He understands us; He knows our frame. He knows how weak we are; He knows we are made of flesh.

And so, in order for Him to truly love us, and to be merciful and gracious, He is longsuffering. He will bear with us for as long as need be.

Why? Because it is good and necessary to produce the result in us that He is looking for.

As our Creator, as the One who is creating His character in us, He is more than willing, and happy to be longsuffering with us, because in the end, He is going to get what He wants—a child of God in His image!

This reminds me of something I recall hearing from Margaret Thatcher, not that I was there personally. She said, "I am extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end." And in a good way, that is how God is too. God is willing to be far more patient than we would be in order to get what He wants in the end. For Him, it is a positive loving character trait. He is not trying to get something selfishly. He is actually on the other side of the fence. He is using His longsuffering as a way of loving us; a way of showing us outgoing concern. And so, we both win in the end. Margaret Thatcher would only win on her side, but for us, and God, His longsuffering is designed to make us both win; for both to have what we want in the end.

Turn to Numbers 14. Let me explain where we are here. This passage is getting toward the end of the whole episode where they had come upon the Promised Land. They were at the southern end of it, and had sent the spies up into the land, and they had returned after checking things out, with the evil report, except for Joshua and Caleb. And it got to the point after the bad spies made their evil report that the whole of Israel was up in arms. They wanted to actually get new leaders. They were through with Moses and Aaron! They were going to choose somebody to lead them right back to Egypt because they had it good there. They were not facing the Anakim there. It was not a land that was going to swallow them up. They had even taken up rocks to kill Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 14:11-23 Then the LORD said to Moses: "How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they." [Here God is tempted to just start it all over again with Moses. Then Moses intercedes.] And Moses said to the LORD: "Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.' And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 'The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation [Moses was listening, was he not? That is exactly what God had told him in Exodus 34].' Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." [So he is asking Him to continue His longsuffering, remain patient as You have been.] Then the LORD said: "I have pardoned, [How positive that is!] according to your word; but truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD—because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it."

God goes on here to say that Joshua and Caleb would see it because they had given a faithful report.

Now it is clear from reading this passage that God's longsuffering—patience—is not without bounds. He will reach a breaking point at some time. We can wear His patience *very* thin. We can wear it out completely, if we take it that far.

However, this story is actually an example of just how *extensive* His patience and longsuffering is. I mean, think about what Israel was doing here. Like He said, they had tested Him 10 times, even though they had seen all those things that He had done for them—starting way back with the first plague all the way through until this point, over two years of God's constant work on their behalf. Plague after plague in Egypt, and then He brings them out after destroying that land. He saves them in the Red Sea. They see their enemy dead on the coast. Then they go trudging through the wilderness, hardly any food or water in the whole place, and He provides it for them—water for millions of people—gallons and gallons and gallons, a lake full of water for them every day. And then, He also rained manna from heaven for them, and they were given quail.

God went out of His way to give them the things that they needed. He defeated their enemies. All Moses had to do was hold his arms up, and their enemies fell. He showed them the way across the wilderness, not only by day in a Pillar of Cloud, but He also lit it up in the evening and so they had a fiery presence of God at night. They *knew* He was there. They did not think that He was way off in heaven. He was right there with them all the time—two years so far in this story, but it eventually ended up being 40 years. And if we go into Deuteronomy, He tells us that their shoes did not wear out, their clothes did not wear out, that everything just remained constantly good and usable for all that time.

And yet, they were rejecting Him, because these silly people across the border were taller than they were! It is incredible.

They were rejecting His plan, and His promises that He made to them, as well as to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then to all of them back on Mount Sinai. They were rejecting His law, they were rejecting His servants, they were rejecting His providence, and they were rejecting everything about God. Though He was tempted to start over, and voiced that to Moses, yet He pardons them, and puts up with them for another 38 years until they died. That is just incredible patience—incredible longsuffering. His nose is very long, as it were.

Just think—put yourself in God's place—of all the complaining that He heard in those 40 years. All the reluctance to do anything that He, through Moses, told them to do. And of course, there was all the disobedience starting with idolatry, and fornication, and who knows all the things they did there in the wilderness. They gave Him grief, after grief, after grief for all that time. It must, to Him, seemed like an interminable journey across the wilderness. Yet, He patiently endured them and all their unbelief. It sounds a lot like that story I gave you as I began, that God endured this man for 80 years, “can't you endure him for one night?” He endured the children of Israel for 40 years. And that is enough to turn anyone's hair absolutely white. It would us.

I am surprised that Moses ended up like he was. It says his natural vigor had not abated, even when he was 120 years old, and his eye was not dim. He took it. He was in many ways similarly patient with the people of Israel, because he understood God's patience. And, that is what we are supposed to be doing—learning God's will in all this—to be patient and start doing this thing ourselves, showing this same patience toward one another.

Did you know that it says in Deuteronomy 7 that God did all this to Israel those 40 years because He loved them! All of His longsuffering He did because He loved them, His people Israel. And then, despite all that they had done, He would keep His oath, He would bless them, and multiply them in the land.

That is just amazing patience and longsuffering, because then, once they got into the land, He put up with their children several hundred more years doing the same things. The only thing different was that the children were not going anywhere. They were just in the land, being disobedient in the same ways.

So, His over-arching purpose—His love, His desire to produce children like Himself—compels Him to be patient with His people. Now, that same longsuffering, that same patience is extended to us—to His elect. And He will continue to be patient with us.

Turn to the New Testament, and the book of James. Let us bring this up to the present. This passage (actually down through verse 11 or so) is a conclusion to what He said earlier in verses 1-6, which discusses the rich and powerful, and James recognizes how the rich and powerful were oppressing the weak of the world, the worker, and doing a lot of damage, and causing a lot of grief to the people. His conclusion is here: Okay, these bad people are powerful and wealthy, they have all the advantages, and we have very little, but . . .

James 5:7-9 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

This is an interesting way of concluding this. "Look! You're being beaten about the head and shoulders with all this oppression. There is tyranny right and left. Your freedoms are being taken away. You're being made to work for wages that are peanuts. You can't buy what you used to with the money you have. Times are bad. And they're gonna get worse." But his advice: "Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." That is his advice. It is hard to take, because we want to do something, we want somebody to do something. But James says to be patient. Just wait. God will deal with them in His time. You are too weak to do anything. And if you try to do anything, you are probably going to get squashed. So be patient. God is in control. God will take the feet out from under these bad people. Just wait and see.

So, our job is to be patient, and if need be, all the way until the very end—until Christ returns. It will probably only be then that tyrants and oppressors will get their due.

“Why do the wicked prosper, oh Lord?” Well, they prosper because God is letting them go, right now. But He is the Judge, and their rap sheet is getting longer, and longer. So, He will judge them. They will get what is coming to them.

And so, in our position now, as the weak of the world, as the foolish, as people with no influence at all, we should look at what is happening from God’s perspective, and wait for Him to act.

James mentions the farmer. God is the farmer. He is patiently tending His crops until the harvest. That is really what God is doing. He is allowing things to happen in this world, while working toward the end of His plan. But do you know where His focus is? His focus is on bringing His crop to harvest. Who is the crop? We are! He is focused on us. He is interested in us producing the fruit that He wants to see.

Is it not wonderful to be the apple of God’s eye?

These things out here, they do not mean a great deal in the great scheme of things. We just need to bear up under them, because He is in control. He is more interested in bring His sons to glory. And if He chooses to use these circumstances to do that, He will. Be patient. Get in sync with Him. See things from His point of view, and it will be much easier to bear up under.

So, he advises us to establish our hearts, which means to firm up our belief, our faith, and our character. While we are patiently waiting for God to work out His plan, we are supposed to be strengthening our loyalty to God, growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and putting on His image. These are jobs enough for any time. It can take up all of our time, so we do not need to worry about what is going on out there. If our hearts are established and firmly founded in the truth, then we will not be moved no matter what happens externally.

So, then, we can be patiently enduring, suffering long, bearing up under what is going on in this world, because we are looking at it like God does from a patient perspective, seeing things in God’s time.

But notice the next thing out of his mouth in verse 9, “Do not grumble against each other.” When we tend to focus on growing in character, we tend to start pointing fingers at other people who may not be keeping pace, or we might start nitpicking at other people because of things that they do that get us upset. Or, they cross us somehow. We react wrongly because we are focused in the wrong places. His warning is very severe. Notice this: He says, “Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned.” Who is doing the condemning? “Behold the Judge is standing at the door.” That

is a fearsome warning. He is saying that though you might be patient with the things that are happening around you, if you start grumbling against your brethren, you stand on a razor's edge. And if you step or lean the wrong way, you could lose your salvation.

What does Jesus say in John 15? "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples if you love one another." That is the tipping point. As I mentioned in a sermon a while back, if you love one another, you are showing that you love God. That is the gist of the parable in Matthew 25 with the sheep and the goats.

So James is very hard on them: "Look! You can be patient with the outside, but be sure that in your patience you're not biting and devouring one another." So in code, James is saying to be patient with one another, too, not just with the situation, but be patient with one another. God is watching us, and He is specifically watching how we treat each other. We must be patient with one another.

Romans 15:1-6 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was concerned about this, too. We need to bear with one another, because some are further along in understanding, and some are further behind. We have new converts, and we have old hands. We have members of very strong faith, while others are quite weak in faith.

He says that it is up to the strong—he puts the onus on the strong—to have patience, forbearance, longsuffering, and endurance with the lack of understanding and the associated problems of the weaker members. "Show your mettle," he says, "and bear with them. Be patient with them. They have scruples that may not be good. They have infirmities, and ways of thinking that may not be absolutely godly. Bear with them, because hopefully they are growing." It is up to the strong to make sure that those weaknesses do not cause problems.

The apostle says here, that if we handle them with love, and try to please them, it will lead to their edification. That if we show the right example, they will grow and be built up in understanding and faith. Paul says that this is what Christ did.

Do you think it was pleasant for Christ to always be submitting and giving in when He was right and they were wrong? But He did it anyway. He took the reproach upon Himself rather than respond impatiently, harshly, or in kind. Paul is saying, "You strong people in the faith, if you have a problem with somebody who's weaker, and you know that you're right, give in, and bear with them. You don't

t have to win. Please that other person, show the right example, show the love of God, and they will grow. And, you will too.” This is very hard to do. But, that is how we should do it. If we follow Christ’s example in this, we will be rewarded with growth, comfort, and hope. And, it will also produce unity, which the church of God *really* needs these days.

In conclusion turn to II Thessalonians 3, to a single verse in a prayer of Paul’s:

II Thessalonians 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

If we show love, and have patience with one another, that same love and patience that God and Christ have for and with us, our hearts will be established with the coming of Christ.