

Longsuffering

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The heroes of today's culture, portrayed in the media as angry, aggressive defenders of democracy, destroy without patience or forethought all opposing forces regardless of their personal qualities. In our impatient, self-centered world, one quality of character has all but perished: longsuffering. Similar to patience and forbearance, longsuffering is the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation. A person who is longsuffering is not quick to retaliate or promptly punish someone who has insulted, offended or harmed him. The opposite of anger, it is intimately associated with mercy. Longsuffering is an attribute of God and thus a fruit of His Holy Spirit. In this Bible Study on "the fruit of the Spirit," we will examine longsuffering.

1. What word most accurately describes this spiritual fruit? Galatians 5:22.

Comment: Various translations use "longsuffering," "patience" or "forbearance" to translate the Greek word *makrothumia*. This word combines the roots *makro*, meaning "long," and *thumos*, meaning "temper," so it literally means "to be long-tempered." It implies the opposite of "short temper," describing the mind holding back a long time before it expresses itself in action or passion.

Makrothumia is rarely rendered as "patience" and never as "forbearance" in the New Testament, although both words are considered synonyms of "longsuffering."

2. Is God longsuffering? Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18, 27; Psalm 86:15; Jeremiah 15:15. What does God's longsuffering prove? Luke 18:7; Romans 2:4; II Peter 3:9, 15.

Comment: God *bears long* and is *slow to anger*. Longsuffering is proof of God's goodness, faithfulness and His desire to grant us salvation. Romans 2:4 describes God as forbearing and longsuffering. Forbearance is refraining from the enforcement of

something that is due like a debt, right, or obligation. Longsuffering differs slightly in that its emphasis is on temperament.

3. Does God's longsuffering delay His wrath? Joel 2:13; Romans 9:22-24; I Peter 3:18-20.

Comment: God relents from doing harm. His longsuffering is seen in His gracious restraint of His wrath towards those who deserve it. Despite the rebellious condition of the world, He waited patiently for 120 years while Noah built the ark and gathered the animals. God's longsuffering does not overlook anything. Unlike man, God has the end in view. He has true insight, knows what is best and is not swayed by human emotions.

4. How is longsuffering exemplified in Christ? Matthew 17:17; I Timothy 1:16; II Peter 3:14-15.

Comment: Christ's patient and enduring handling of sinners demonstrates His longsuffering. God promises that He will be long-tempered with us as we repent and dedicate ourselves to the obedience and service of God. As in everything else, Jesus Christ sets the standard of longsuffering.

5. Are others used as an example of longsuffering? II Corinthians 6:4-6; Hebrews 6:12-15; James 5:8-10.

Comment: Many of God's servants develop the quality of longsuffering through their service and dedication to Him.

6. Should longsuffering be an integral quality of our character? Colossians 3:12-13; Ephesians 4:1-3; I Thessalonians 5:14; II Timothy 3:10-11; 4:2.

Comment: As the elect of God, we must put on or clothe ourselves with longsuffering. By doing this in unity as a church, we rid

ourselves of, or at least dramatically reduce, friction. To be loving and effective, a minister must correct, rebuke and encourage with longsuffering.

7. Does longsuffering strengthen spiritually? Colossians 1:9-11. Does it show evidence of Godly love? I Corinthians 13:4.

Comment: Paul tells the saints in Colosse that he prays they will possess the trait that is the opposite of wrath or revenge. He speaks of having an even temper, an attitude that in spite of injury or insult does not retaliate. We can develop longsuffering only as a fruit of the Spirit, not as an independent character trait. It grows from the common root of love and bears fruit only along with other spiritual fruit.

Love takes precedence in this list of gifts of the Spirit and carries the attribute that it suffers long. Longsuffering is extended and patient endurance of offense. Since patience is an aspect of longsuffering, they are very close in intent. Patience is cheerful or hopeful endurance, patient waiting. Therefore, longsuffering is the quality of patiently tolerating the actions of others against us, even when we are severely tried.