



5 - LONGSUFFERING



As I got to writing this chapter, let me tell you—it wasn't easy. It took me a while, and in fact, here I am, after a long day of writing, right back at the top of the chapter. I'm starting over.

The more that I worked on this chapter, and the deeper I dug into scripture, the more I understood what longsuffering is. You see, growing up we were simply taught it was patience. But patience is more of a general term, while longsuffering is a bit more specific. You can patiently wait for your pizza, you can patiently finish a long project, or you can exercise patience when your computer is down.

Longsuffering however, is different, it's not so much about biding our time as it is about being patient in spite of affliction.

Paul explained it well when he said,

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. (1 Timothy 1:16, KJV)

The Greek word for longsuffering is “makrothymia” (Strong's G3115) which is forbearance, longsuffering, and slowness in avenging wrongs.

When you see the word “makrothymia” used in scripture you'll see that Paul will often use it in reference to patience with others. Here's an example:

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love (Ephesians 4:2, KJV)

As God is slow to anger and patient with us, so we too must be slow to anger with others, forbearing in love.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

The definition of love in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 starts with longsuffering in verse 4 (makrothymeō) and ends with patience (hypomenō) in verse 7.

Longsuffering is choosing patience and kindness when we're provoked. We've all been provoked at one time or another haven't we? People have bad days, and sometimes they just want to take it out on the first person they see. I've worked in retail, and I've seen my share of difficult people. Customers were great for the most part, but there were always a few that were irritable and demanding. Those were the ones that made the days long.

The thing is, we should never take our cue from challenging people. Difficult people don't set the tone of our day. What they do is offer us an opportunity to respond with Christ-likeness. No one has or ever will exhibit longsuffering in the way that He did.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7, NIV)

How often do we see people losing their temper? If you're online, it's a daily occurrence. People are hurt, and they want to lash out. Instead of turning the cheek or responding in love, they're typing as fast as they can.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

Makrothymōs is a compound word consisting of makro (far from) and thymos (anger, boiling up).

Together they form the idea of being slow to anger, or putting our anger away.

May we always be like that lamb which is silent and still in the hands of our Master. Bearing well under pressure. Obedient when our sense of comfort is taken away. Following the map of our Savior Who was loving and kind to those that hurt Him the most. He could have done more, He could have said more, He could have fought more, but He chose the path of longsuffering that they too might be saved.

"Father, forgive them," He said, "for they do not know what they do."

Have you ever thought about that before? Maybe you have, but have you thought of it lately? Have you stopped to think that maybe they don't see? Maybe they're not enlightened by the Spirit in the same way that you've been. Maybe they haven't been raised with kindness and love. Maybe they had a horrible day. And, maybe they desperately need God's patience and grace. If we could only see into their heart, and if could only understand them the way God does, maybe we would love them better than we do.

We talked about Joseph in the first chapter, but if we go back to his

Forsbear One Another in Love

story again, we see that his life was a series of longsuffering. He was hurt by one person after another, and yet he didn't let it seep in. Yes, he had hardship and pain, but he didn't let it permeate him. That's the power of God at work from within.

Paul writes,

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Corinthians 4:7-9)

As I said before, you'll see that Paul will often use the word longsuffering in reference to "patience with others," but we can also be longsuffering in response to our trials.

Job was a man who feared God and shunned evil. He had everything a man could possibly want, but was he truly faithful to God?

In Job chapter 1, we see him plagued with one trial after another. In one horrific swoop, Job lost his servants, his livestock, and finally his children. And what response did he have to these trials? In verse 20 we read that he fell to the ground and worshipped the Lord.

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:20-21, KJV)

What does that tell us about Job's character? It tells us that he was a man of integrity who truly loved God, while it proves how blameless and pure his faith was.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

It [longsuffering] is also associated with "joy," indicating that it is not a mere submissiveness, but a joyful acceptance of the will of God, whatever it may be.

(www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/longsuffering)

Again, in chapter two he was further tried. This time Satan attacked his body, plaguing Job with boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. It's one thing to endure emotional pain, yet another to experience physical pain in the way that Job did. Even so, he stayed true to his faith saying,

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this did not Job sin with his lips. (Job 2:10, KJV)

Job didn't just act like a believer, he was a believer. When push came to shove, the fruit of longsuffering was evident in his life. He was patient in spite of affliction. We saw that his

faithfulness had nothing to do with the world around him and everything to do with his relationship with God.

Job knew that life was filled with ups and downs. Some days we have mountains and other days we have valleys. What doesn't change however is our relationship with Christ. Whether we're up or we're down, life is easy or tough, things are good or they're bad, our God is unchanging.

Longsuffering doesn't come easy, and I doubt that it did for Job. But it's a virtue that can and should be exercised daily. In fact, there's a constant call to patience in every one of our lives.

It's holding back anger when someone is getting on our nerves.

It's being kind when we disagree with our spouse.

It's trusting God when we've lost everything.

It's praising God through a trial.

It's responding kindly to harsh words.

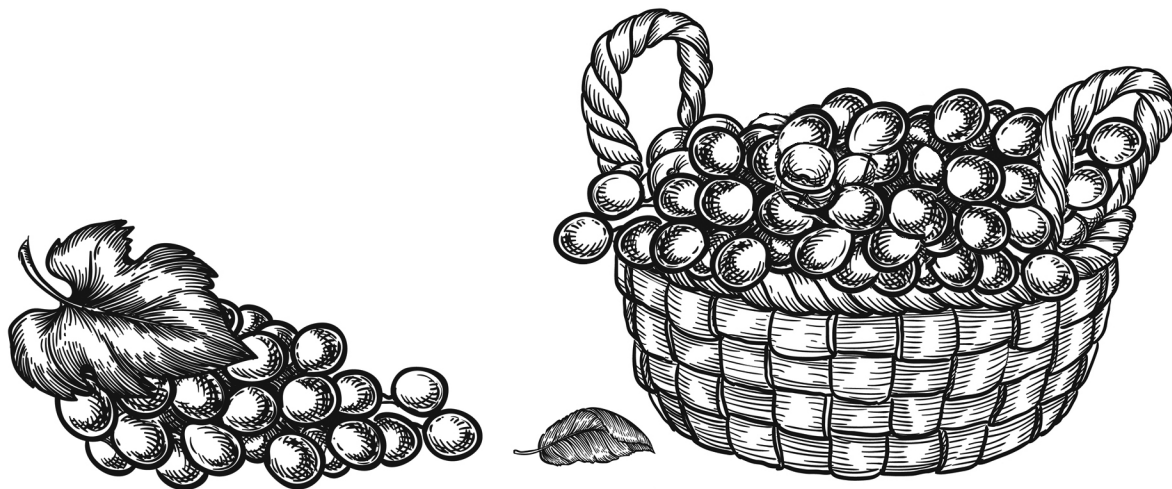
And sometimes it's not responding at all.

In Nehemiah chapter nine we read about the patience of God:

But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them. (Nehemiah 9:16-17, NI V)

If God could be longsuffering with the Israelites who complained and lacked faith for 40 years in the desert, certainly you and I can be patient with a person we interact with for two minutes in line at the grocery store.

Patience takes practice and sometimes it takes everything that we have just to hold ourselves back and keep ourselves cool, but if we want to love as God loves, we must also live as He lives.



How does longsuffering differ from patience in general?

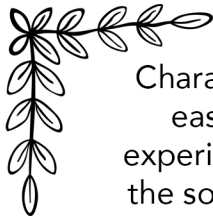


What is the Greek word for longsuffering and how is it defined?

What does Isaiah 53:7 say? Write the verse out here.

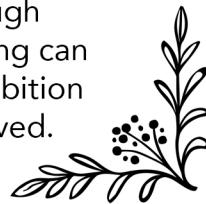
What was Joseph's response to his brothers in Genesis 50:15-21?

How did Job respond to his trials in Job chapter 1?

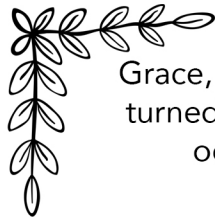


Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

- Helen Keller -



Is there someone in your life that you are struggling to get along with? What came between you? And how do you think Jesus would respond to this person?

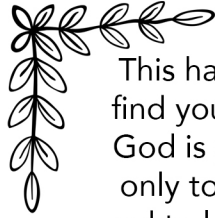


Grace, by its matchless art, has often turned the heaviest of our trials into occasions for heavenly joy.

- Charles Spurgeon -

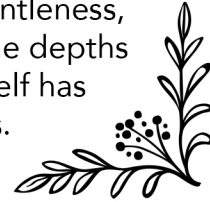


What are the four ways that Jesus instructs us to respond to our enemies in Luke 6:27-28?



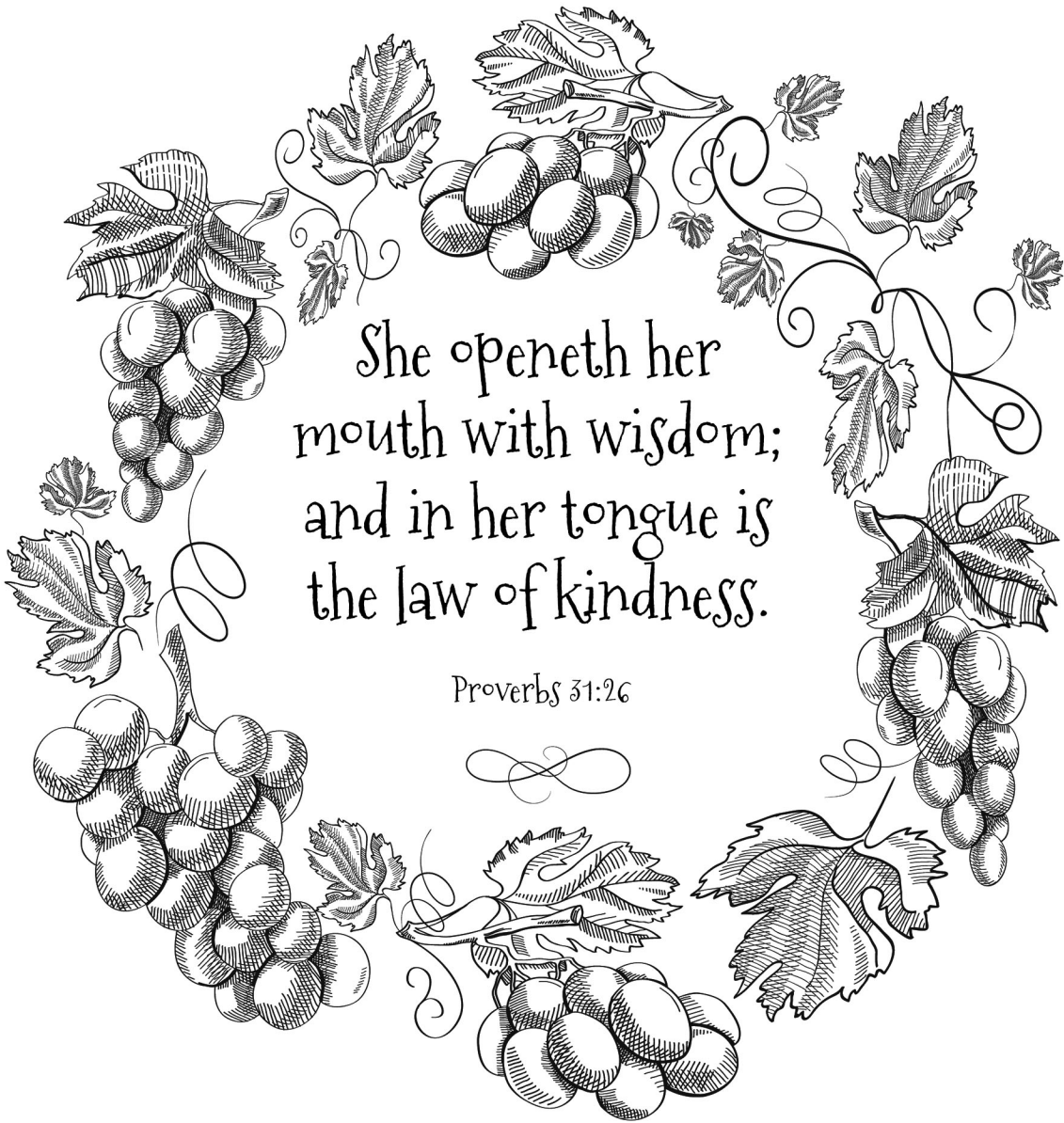
This hard place in which you perhaps find yourself is the very place in which God is giving you opportunity to look only to Him, to spend time in prayer, and to learn long-suffering, gentleness, meekness - in short, to learn the depths of the love that Christ Himself has poured out on all of us.

- Elisabeth Elliot -



God allows both problems and people to develop our patience. Can you think of any situations in the past that you've grown from?





She openeth her
mouth with wisdom;
and in her tongue is
the law of kindness.

Proverbs 31:26



6 - KINDNESS



I thought I was kind for the most part. I don't yell at people, I tip waiters, I hold my tongue in public, I smile at others, and I always respect those who serve me.

But then my son asked me a question one day that got me wondering if perhaps there was more to this kindness thing. "Are you really kind?" He asked. "Or are you just fearful? If you had the courage to do and say what you're thinking would you still be so kind?"

That got me thinking about all of the times I've thought to myself, "I should have said this..." or "I should have said that..." All of those times when I wished I would have stood my ground and snapped back... And with that I see what a foolish hypocrite I've been.

When Paul instructs the church to be kind, he starts by reminding us that kindness is an inside job. In other words, we've got some weeding to do in this garden we call love:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32, NIV)

It's easy to be kind when it suits us, when it makes us look good, or when we think it might get us something, but true kindness stems from within. It's rooted in Christ, and grounded in faith. That's what Jesus is talking about when He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart."

Kindness doesn't appear when it suits us or when it's simply convenient. It gives on difficult days and extends to difficult people. If it doesn't stem from the heart, you've got to wonder what's fueling your kindness. Is it pride? Is it the approval of others? Is it a feeling of importance? Is it for personal gain?

If we're answering yes to those questions, we're no different than the Pharisees who lived by the letter of the law yet neglected the more important things of God like mercy, kindness, and love. They were careful to clean the outside of their cups, but inside they were full of greed and self-indulgence. Jesus said,

Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (Matthew 23:26, NIV)

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

The washing of cups that Jesus was referring to in Matthew 23:26 was a ritual held by the Pharisees. According to Mark 7:4, they would ceremonially wash their cups and other dishes upon returning from the market. They held to the belief that ceremonial cleansing washed away sin, while failing to see their need for salvation.

If we're only kind when it's easy, we're not modeling the kindness of Christ. Remember the feeding of the 5,000? Most of us have heard this story, but how many of us have stopped to consider the events that led to this story? Opening our Bibles to Matthew 14, we read the story of John the Baptist, a good friend and relative of Jesus who was beheaded. His death was so horrific that his head was served on a platter and delivered to Herod's mistress Herodias at a party. I can only imagine the laughing and scoffing that went on that day at the expense of this precious and innocent life.

Upon hearing about what happened to John, Jesus slipped away privately to a solitary place. We all need a little space when we're grieving, don't we? But that wasn't the case with Christ. The Bible tells us that the crowds followed him. Whether He craved solitude at that moment or not, Jesus had compassion on them. And even after spending the day healing and ministering to them, He insisted on feeding them all before sending them off.

The Bible tells us that the kindness of God leads men to repentance. (Romans 2:4) And so we see the power of kindness and the potential it has to win souls. With 1440 minutes in a day and 365 days in a year we're given plenty of opportunities to be kind. The thing is, we tend to forget that small acts of kindness are every bit as powerful in drawing others to Christ as those we plan and prepare for. A smile, a word of encouragement, a glass of water, a prayer, a text, or a compassionate ear, are just some of the ways to show love and to glorify God.

Imagine the difference that one person can make—that YOU can make—by shining your light in this world.

In Luke Chapter 10, we find "The Parable of The Good Samaritan," who went out of his way to help someone in need while others passed by on the other side of the road.

One little word in this chapter stood out to me. It speaks volumes. It teaches us what real kindness entails. And as I dig a bit deeper, I see that Jesus made a point of using it often: mercy.

Kindness is an Inside Job

It's easy to love those who love us, but the challenge lies in our ability to love the unlovable. That calls for mercy and grace.

There's a popular mindset out there that says kindness is only for those who are kind. And why shouldn't it be? Why should we love our enemies, or go an extra mile without getting it back? Because we're called to be Christ-like and to reflect His compassion and grace in this world.

The moment we think that it must go both ways, we're forgetting the fact that we're sinners. If we're only kind to those who are kind in return, we're ignoring the gift of God's merciful grace and the price that He paid for our sin.

≡ DID YOU KNOW ≡

The character of The Good Samaritan reflects Christ, and the man by the side of the road is each one of us. It's a reminder of the One Who saves us by grace. A reminder that we have been broken and bruised. We've been left for dead by a thief who comes to kill and to steal and destroy.

If I ever hope to get along with others, I have to accept the fact that we're all growing in grace. I have to acknowledge that some days I have to give more than I get. And sometimes I have to put my frustration aside to bite my lip and be kind.

I remember one afternoon when my husband and I had a bit of a tiff. After a stressful day and my poor attempt to make things right, he went downstairs. I knew he was angry, but it was one of those days when I felt like it was more important to be right than it was to make peace.

"Mom," Madison looked over at me, "aren't you going to go say something to him?"

In other words, my daughter was pointing out the fact that it was time for me to put on a cloak of kindness. Wise girl.

Kindness is a virtue. It doesn't come easy to us unless we exercise that area of our life. It's more than simply a desire to do good to others, it's the behavior itself. Sometimes it calls us to sacrifice our pride, sometimes it calls us to walk in courage, and other times it requires both.

Kindness doesn't sit around analyzing a situation to determine whether *this* person is right or *that* person is wrong. Kindness is a charitable gift—it reaches out to those in need.

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (Colossians 3:12-13, KJV)

See that? "If any man have a quarrel against any..." Whether it's easy or not, we are commanded in scripture to put on kindness. We're commanded to be compassionate people because that's Who our Savior is.

We must exercise courage when it comes to love. And we have to destroy pride before it destroys us.

In Ephesians 4:32 Paul tells believers to be compassionate and forgiving. Is there anyone with whom you are not compassionate and forgiving? If so, why not?

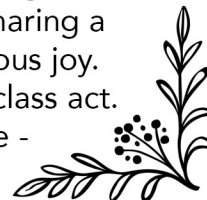
Look up the word “hypocrite” at Dictionary.com what does it mean?

In Ephesians 4:31 what 6 things does Paul tell believers to get rid of?



Say goodbye to bad hair days and bad heart days alike by remembering that you are God's masterpiece, sharing a smile, and spreading contagious joy. That's the real secret of every class act.

- Candace Cameron Bure -



What does the kindness of God do according to Romans 2:4?



What are some negative intentions that can fuel acts of kindness?

Why should we love our enemies, or go an extra mile without getting anything back?

In Matthew chapter 14 we read about the feeding of the 5,000.
What does verse 14 reveal about the heart of Jesus and His motives that day?



What are 7 things we are commanded to put on according to Colossians 3:12-13?
