

Longsuffering (Patience)

The Fruits of the Spirit · Fruits of the Spirit

Longsuffering, the fourth fruit of the Spirit, represents a divine attribute that enables believers to endure provocation, injury, and opposition without yielding to anger, retaliation, or despair. The Greek μακροθυμία (makrothumia) literally means 'long-tempered'—the polar opposite of the short-tempered, quick-to-anger disposition that characterizes fallen humanity. This supernatural patience restrains vengeance, bears wrongs without immediate recompense, and perseveres steadfastly in well-doing despite repeated disappointment or opposition. It mirrors God's own patience toward sinners and distinguishes those who truly await Christ's return with faith and hope.

Note: The Greek μακροθυμία (makrothumia) combines μακρός (makros, long) and θυμός (thumos, temper/passion), describing the capacity to endure injuries, provocations, or delays for an extended period without yielding to anger or abandoning hope. This patience differs from ὑπομονή (hupomone, endurance under trial); longsuffering specifically addresses patience with people and circumstances, while hupomone emphasizes perseverance under suffering. God exemplifies perfect longsuffering, being 'slow to anger, and of great mercy' (Numbers 14:18).

Scripture reveals God's longsuffering as the supreme pattern for believers. Peter declared that 'the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation' (2 Peter 3:15), emphasizing that God's patient delay of judgment provides opportunity for repentance. The Lord is 'longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (2 Peter 3:9). Throughout history, God has endured humanity's rebellion, idolatry, and ingratitude without immediate retribution. He bore with Israel's repeated apostasies, warned persistently through prophets, and ultimately sent His Son to

rebellious sinners. Paul marveled that Christ showed 'all longsuffering' toward him, 'the chief of sinners,' as a pattern for future believers (1 Timothy 1:16). This divine patience toward the undeserving provides both the model and motivation for Christian longsuffering toward others.

The cultivation of longsuffering requires deliberate submission to the Spirit's work. Paul exhorted believers to 'put on' longsuffering as part of the Christian character (Colossians 3:12), and to walk 'with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love' (Ephesians 4:2). This fruit does not develop through passive waiting but through active trust in God's sovereignty and goodness. When wronged, believers must resist the natural impulse toward immediate retaliation, remembering that 'vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord' (Romans 12:19). When facing delays in answered prayer or fulfillment of promises, Christians exercise longsuffering by continuing to trust God's perfect timing rather than demanding immediate resolution.

Longsuffering proves particularly vital in relationships—both with fellow believers and with the lost. Paul commanded ministers to preach the word 'with all longsuffering and doctrine' (2 Timothy 4:2), recognizing that spiritual transformation requires patient instruction over time. Believers must forbear one another's weaknesses, offenses, and immaturity, 'forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye' (Colossians 3:13). This patience in relationships testifies to the gospel's reality, for the world operates on the principle of immediate retaliation—'an eye for an eye.' When Christians respond to provocation with longsuffering rather than vengeance, they manifest the Spirit's transforming power and reflect their Father's character.

Moreover, longsuffering characterizes those who await Christ's return. James exhorted, 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord' (James

5:7-8), using the farmer's patient waiting for harvest as illustration. Just as the husbandman exercises long patience until he receives both early and latter rain, so believers must patiently endure, knowing that 'the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' This eschatological patience prevents discouragement when Christ's return tarries longer than anticipated, guards against abandoning the faith during persecution, and maintains hope despite the apparent triumph of evil. Those possessing this fruit neither grow weary in well-doing nor faint under opposition, but endure unto the end, knowing their labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Key Verses

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Colossians 3:12-13

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.

Ephesians 4:2

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.

James 5:7-8

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

Proverbs 15:18

A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.

1 Timothy 1:16

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.

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