

Galatians 5:22-26

Gal 5:22 (NKJV) **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,** ²³ **gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.** ²⁴ **And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.** ²⁵ **If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.** ²⁶ **Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.**

We begin to look at the next word “**longsuffering**” which is the Greek word “*makrothumia*”. In many of the translations, they use the word “**patience**”. It comes from the word “*makrothymos*” which means to have a long and enduring temper, to be lenient and patient, to be forbearing with someone. “*Makros*” means long and “*thymos*” means temper, thus to be long tempered.¹ The Greek word “*thymos*” is associated with the Greek word “*thumoomai*” which means to be furious and burn with intense anger.² So, “**longsuffering**” carries the idea of exercising personal self-restraint before proceeding to some kind of action. It is similar to the person who is able to avenge themselves, but they refrain from doing so.³ This word represents a kind of calm, a kind of peaceful restraint that someone exercises when they are being provoked by someone else.

In the Old Testament, the equivalent phrase for “**longsuffering**” literally meant “long of nose” or “long of breathing”. It was the opposite of being “short of nose”, or that anger which was indicated by rapid, violent breathing through the nostrils. Have you ever been around someone who was really angry and how they begin to breathe heavily through their nose. When used of God in the Old Testament, it referred to His being “**slow to anger**” and is often translated in that manner. For instance, [Exodus 34:6](#) says,

Ex 34:6 (NKJV) **And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,**

The NASB, ESV, AMP, NIV, ASV, RSV, and YLT translate it as “**slow to anger**”. In fact, in most cases where the NKJV uses the word “**longsuffering**” in the Old Testament, most of the other translations use the words “**slow to anger**”. I am so grateful that God is not a man, for if He had been a man, He would have destroyed the world a long time ago similar to what happened in the flood. [1 Peter 3:20](#) says,

1Pe 3:20 (NKJV) **who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.**

[2 Peter 3:9](#) says,

2Pe 3:9 (NKJV) **The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.**

¹ Strong's, 1219.

² Precept, *Galatians 5:22, makrothumia*, ep.

³ Zodhaites, 939.

The word is used often in the Old Testament and the New Testament where God’s “**longsuffering**” has a specific design to it – that of leading men and women to salvation.⁴ For instance, [Romans 2:4](#) says,

Ro 2:4 (NKJV) Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

[1 Timothy 1:16](#) echoes this meaning when it says,

1Ti 1:16 (NKJV) However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

The clear idea of these two verses is that being longsuffering and forbearing with someone is critical if we are ever going to be able to help bring them to Christ for salvation. No one will even care or give any kind of personal attention to our gospel presentation to them if we are always angry and frustrated with them. We personally do not listen to or even give attention to people who are rude and lack self-control in what they say or how they treat us. Our tendency is to completely ignore anything they may have to say to us. I think this happens all the time with young people who have parents who never seem to exercise this quality with their children as they get older and start to go through that growing up stage of their life.

[Ephesians 4:2](#) seems to indicate that being longsuffering with someone is actually a quality of personal love for that individual, rather than disdain.

Eph 4:2 (NKJV) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

I.e., if we really love someone and care about that person, then we are going to exercise a high level of perseverance and longsuffering with them when something that they do to us or say to us frustrates and irritates us. We cannot be a reflection of God or a reflection of God’s longsuffering with people unless we exercise this quality towards them ourselves. I think it is correct to say that the measure of “**longsuffering**” that we exercise towards people is a reflection of the measure of God’s love that we actually have for them. Too often when someone offends us or does something that is not pleasing to us, we simply begin to treat them the way that they are treating us. We retaliate, we strike back with unpleasant and unbecoming words, we get even, we give as we get. What we should do is exercise “**longsuffering**”, forgive, and just move on. [Colossians 3:12](#) says,

Col 3:12 (NKJV) Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

Now, I am not in favor of using the word “**patience**” in the actual translation simply because the normal word for “**patience**” is the Greek word “*hupomone*”. The difference between “**longsuffering**” and “**patience**” is that “**longsuffering**” specifically refers to the restraint that we exercise towards people and “**patience**” refers to the restraint that we exercise towards things or circumstances.⁵ To me personally, both are important, but how we deal with annoying or trying people seems a little more important than how we deal with difficult circumstances. I have often heard someone say that so and so

⁴ Harris, *makrothumia*, #3087, ep.

⁵ Zodiates, 939

is “*testing my patience*”, but it may be better to say that they are “*testing my longsuffering*”. [2 Timothy 3:10](#) uses the two words together,

^{2Ti 3:10 (NKJV)} **But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering** (*makrothumia*), **love, perseverance** (*hupomone*).

Dr. Vine actually notes that “**longsuffering**” is that particular quality that exercises self-restraint in the face of being provoked by someone such that we are not inclined to retaliate. He says that it is the opposite of anger and is associated with showing mercy vs. showing anger. So, if “**longsuffering**” is the opposite of anger, then “**patience**” is the opposite of despondency and is associated with hope.⁶ I keep thinking about the very important verse in [1 Peter 2:23](#) where when Jesus was reviled He did not revile in return, and when He suffered, He did not threaten people in return, but just kept committing Himself to His Father’s will for His life.

What Paul is talking about here is simply having a long fuse vs. a short fuse. It is having a kind of supernatural empowerment to exercise a great deal of personal restraint when someone provokes us. The more we react with people when they frustrate us, the shorter our fuse becomes, and the less we react against people when they frustrate or irritate us, the longer our fuse becomes. I know personally that I am much more longsuffering and forbearing with people than I use to be. I think that the one place where I failed in this area more than any other was with my wife and children – short tempered, impatient, and short on forbearance.

This is such an important quality to allow the Holy Spirit to develop in our life simply because it creates within us the capacity to be wronged without taking any action against another person. The more that we allow this quality to be developed in our life, the greater will be people’s respect for us and for what we have to say – and that is critical to us as Christians simply because we should have something to say. There is always a time to be firm about something, but normally there are opportunities to work through difficult situations with difficult people. This is kind of an emotional word to some degree in that it represents the fact that a believer has this kind of personal reservoir of endurance and forbearance with people that has been developed in them. The deeper the well, the more water there is in the reservoir. Everyone is going to have to suffer through difficult and adverse circumstances with other people who are rude, unpleasant, and often very offensive and disrespectful. In reality, all of that is okay simply because they are the people the Holy Spirit is using to develop and cultivate this particular virtue and attribute into our lives. I have to be able to see that, to see how God is using difficult people in my life, and how allowing Him to do so is what really brings Him the greatest glory and honor from my life.

So, what this word is doing in the believer’s life is developing a high level of personal restraint, self-control, and discipline that will serve them well in the future. I think it would be correct to say that someone who does not have this quality of self-control being developed in their life is a person that will always be out of control when it comes to their relationships with other people. We have to understand that there will always be those moments in our life and those people in our life that will arouse our emotions. They are the moments that frustrate us, that irritate us, that aggravate and exasperate us. So,

⁶ Vine’s, 684.

if we are not willing to allow the Holy Spirit to continue to develop this virtue in our life, then our negative reactions to everything will simply become a way of life and a very unhealthy bad habit.

This is a word that helps us not to lose focus with people and how God is working in both them and in us. If we are not focused and paying attention to how God uses this attribute in our life, the result of that will be that we become irritable, short-tempered, angry, and cross with people. We have to learn how to remain gracious with people even when the people in question are not that way towards us personally. I have said it this way often, but we can win the battle, but still lose the war – and that is what not allowing this virtue to be developed in our life actually does to us. We have our way, we react how we wanted to react, we say what we wanted to say, but in the process, our relationship with the other person is literally destroyed – maybe forever. What “*makrothumia*” does is that it allows us to bear up under insult and wrong without bearing a grudge or without having to retaliate. It allows us to be incredibly patient with some incredibly unpleasant people.

I am sure that someone is going to ask the question “Well, what if the other person is actually wrong? – and that is a very good question. Why? It is because with “**longsuffering**” the issue is not a matter of whether someone else is right or wrong, but of me being rightly related to God and demonstrating His character to the person that is wrong. In fact, in all likelihood, the other person is wrong in what they did to provoke us, but when we are “**longsuffering**”, we are right in how we responded to it. There is a great difference in the two, and having God’s perspective on what we are supposed to do is our goal. I love the way that one author expressed this attitude of “**longsuffering**” when he said that it was “*the even temper that comes from a big heart. It is not the grit your teeth kind of angry endurance; it is the loving tolerance in spite of people’s weakness and failure... Perhaps the best way to lengthen the fuse on ours tempers is to remember how much God has to overlook and forgive in our own lives.*”⁷

So, how can someone know if they lack this quality? It should be fairly obvious and intuitive to anyone who is serious about their Christian life, but two obvious indications are when we find ourselves all the time complaining about others or being irritated with them. The individual who actually lacks this quality is always speaking and acting impulsively. “**Longsuffering**” allows us to graciously put up with people who often times have the uncanny ability to provoke us in different areas of our life. Some people are adept at just “flying off the handle”. Someone says something, does something, acts a certain way – and immediately the individual who lacks this quality in their life finds themselves just saying what they want to say. Self-restraint is a very godly quality that comes from the deeper quality of self-control. From our perspective relative to “**longsuffering**”, the goal is not to be quick tempered, hot tempered, or to become angry at people quickly – and especially for those things in our life that really are not that important.⁸ What someone thinks about me or what they may say about me or even what they may do to me are not all that important in the big picture. I just leave it be and go about my way without reacting. It really is that simple – just walk away from difficult people with a measure of godly grace. We have to understand that most of the time, it is God who has brought difficult people into our life to test us and to help us understand a particular area of our life that He wants us to develop. We cannot do that without being tested, and sometimes severely.

⁷ Precept, *Galatians 5:22, makrothumia*, ep.

⁸ Precept, *Galatians 5:22, makrothumia*, ep.

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