

What comes to mind when I say the word “patience”? If you’re like me, your blood pressure might rise at the mere mention of the word—because patience only comes to bear when there is delay or difficulty.

By definition, we’d rather *not* have a reason to need to be patient.

Patience is about continuing, waiting, or persevering when you’re not getting the result you want.

But today we’re not talking about the kind of patience you need to wait calmly in traffic or experience serenity in line at the grocery store.

We’re not even talking about waiting for a dream to come true, whether that be for a promotion, a relationship, or to see this building full of new followers of Jesus. To be clear: actively waiting, trusting, and hoping for all these dreams to come to pass requires profound patience.

And I want to honor the tension and even pain all of us who are in that place of waiting, yearning, and longing might be feeling.

But the kind of patience we're reflecting on today is an *even* deeper and more profound kind of patience—even deeper than our most heartfelt longings. The kind of patience we're considering today is the patience God displays with us, as seen in Colossians 3.

God's patience actually refers to an ability to bear up under provocation, to refrain from exacting revenge, to have willingness to endure wrongs, and to withhold anger or wrath.

Today we're focusing on God's longsuffering to endure wrong, His patient heart toward us. We will discover that patience is at the center of God's heart, the very core of who He is.

This will shift our understanding of what God thinks about us,  
and how He *feels* about us. In turn, this can change how we experience  
and live out the gospel. For the more we live under the influence of the  
gospel, the more we can live it out.

The converse is true as well:

the LESS we live under the influence of the gospel,

the less able we will be to experience God's grace for ourselves.

And if we aren't aware of the grace we have received in God,

when we attempt to extend God's grace to others,

the flowing river of grace will be to us but a dry and barren riverbed.

I know this church is passionate to see the gospel proclaimed and embraced because of the sacrifices you have made and continue to make. To not lose heart, to not lose hope, we need to remind ourselves God's grace. The patience of God will give us the strength and the courage to continue to follow Him.

Because **to truly extend the gospel of grace to others,**

**we must first clothe ourselves in God's patience for us.**

To understand God's patience for us, let's turn to Colossians 3 verses 12 and 13, which Paul wrote while under house arrest.

The first half of Colossians could be considered one of the one of the most vivid theological portraits of Jesus, while the second half responds with the implications for the Christian life. In other words, based on what we have seen to be true of Jesus, how are Jesus followers called to live?

Hear now the Word of the LORD.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

This is the Word of the LORD.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,

Open our hearts and minds this morning to truly set them on You.

By Your Holy Spirit, help us see that You are far more patient, more

loving, more generous, more kind, than we ever imagined. That even

while You are holy beyond compare, at the very same time You offer us

a way to be near to You, to experience Your grace, Your compassion,

Your patience. Show us Your heart this morning, we pray.

Amen.

The patience of God is greater than you ever imagined, and far more gracious than you've ever dared believe. What does patience mean here?

Patience in Colossians 3:12 is described as “longsuffering that endures wrong and puts up with the exasperating conduct of others—rather than flying into a rage or wanting revenge.” From the context in our passage, we can sense that this patience is more profound than being able to wait with a smile on your face while you're in line. Maybe it's something more akin to patience with a very difficult family member.

We look to the next verse to see the context to “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” This is a much deeper kind of patience, perhaps precisely because it is more costly to extend.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, we see God's patience reflects His love and His compassion. Peter, perhaps one of the most impetuous and hasty of disciples prior to receiving the Holy Spirit, had his entire concept of timing overturned by the grandness and goodness of God's plans.

Writing to encourage people who believed Jesus would come again, yet who were being mocked and scorned simply because Jesus had yet to return in their own lifetimes,

Peter reminded them in 2 Peter 3, verses 8 and 9:

**8** But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: *With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.*



**9** The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. **Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

You see, the LORD is willing to withhold final judgment until everyone who will one day turn to Him, finally turns to Him.

**God's mercy and IMMENSE patience are powerfully linked.**

And that is one of the most basic and yet profound differences between God's anger and ours, and therefore, God's patience and ours. God's patience is a withholding of anger *where it is rightfully deserved.*

Rabbi Abraham Heschel reminds us: “The prophets never [portray] God’s anger as something that cannot be accounted for, unpredictable, irrational. It [God’s anger] is never a spontaneous outburst, but a reaction occasioned by the conduct of humans...and motivated by concern for right and wrong.”

Hmmm. *But if God’s patience is a withholding of **justified** anger, we run into a real danger:*

*we might think of ANGER as the undercurrent that defines God’s temperament, His heart toward us. As if he’s constantly battling to hold back a tsunami of anger that might someday get beyond His power to control. That is NOT the case.*

If we think that IS the case, we will never feel truly free to come to God in all our weaknesses, disappointments, hurts, shortcomings, and sins. If He's just one wrong step from flying off the handle, He is far from safe—and we would be far from accepted.

The key to unlocking this is understanding that God does not get angry the same way we get angry. If we took our experience of anger and mapped it back onto God, we would have a distorted view of divine anger. Some of us bury our anger—or at least try to—until we can't take it anymore and we erupt. But God doesn't do that.

God isn't a volcano waiting to erupt, or a pot about to boil over.

Hear this:

The **patience of God** means God is **SLOW to anger**, as we declared together in our call to worship.

In Exodus 34, when Moses asks to be shown God's glory, this is how God chooses to respond, the third phrase God chooses to describe himself.

Presbyterian pastor and author Dane Ortlund points out how remarkable God's self-description is. Ortlund calls our attention to this:

“‘Merciful and gracious.’ These are the **first words** out of God's own mouth after proclaiming His name (“the LORD,” or “I AM”).

*“The first words...The first two words God uses to describe who he is are **merciful** and **gracious**.*

“God does **not** reveal his glory as

‘The LORD, the LORD, exacting and precise’

or ‘The LORD, the LORD, tolerant and overlooking’

or, ‘THE LORD, the LORD, disappointed and frustrated.’

His highest priority and deepest delight and first reaction—

His heart—is **merciful** and **gracious.**”

Flowing out of God's mercy and grace is the *third* phrase God uses to describe Himself here: **slow to anger**.

This is important: Ortlund notes that while God needs to be provoked by sin in order to become angry,

God **doesn't** need to be provoked to LOVE—

because God's loving mercy is His natural heart posture.

Ortlund points out: "We tend to think: divine anger is pent up, spring-loaded; [whereas] divine mercy is slow to build.

[But] it's just the opposite.

Divine mercy is ready to burst forth at the slightest prick!"

This is profound. Have we been thinking of God's anger like a mighty wave, bridled and held back by a dam that's about to break?

How many of us walk around burdened by how disappointing we are to God, as if His holiness means He will never be pleased with us, because we are not holy enough for Him?

But to paraphrase Ortlund, if we were to prick God,

He would bleed divine mercy.

Our righteous God, who set the standards for holiness—is our compassionate God, who met His own standards in His Son, Jesus.

His Son, who literally bled divine mercy for us.

God's standards are completely satisfied in Jesus,  
and when we believe this, that satisfaction completely covers us,  
cleanses us, and makes us right with God—just as we are.

By accepting the gift of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection,  
we receive access into the grace in which we now stand.

We step under a torrent, a waterfall of God's grace—

not His anger, not His displeasure, not His disappointment—

but His patience, His delight, and His desire to be close to us.

**Indeed, to extend grace to others,**

**we must first clothe ourselves in God's patience for us.**



When we choose to live APART from God and His patience for us, we are living AGAINST our God-given design, to bear His image to the watching and waiting world. We see that in verse 12, that we as God's **chosen** people, **holy** and **dearly loved**, are called to live differently, to live with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. These traits that we see Jesus living out, that we are to imitate.

We are to imitate these traits *so that* we might show others the love of God, the freedom and joy that is found when we live according to our identity as people chosen by God, holy and dearly loved.

**And in order to imitate God, we have to depend on Him. We must yield ourselves to Him.**

*And wouldn't you know: patience, withholding anger to extend grace, is one of the best training grounds for us to practice surrender.*

*To yield ourselves to God and to depend on Him.*

*Because any of us who have ever had to forgive know that we cannot do this in our own strength.*

[pause]

One of the most incredible stories of forgiveness I have ever heard is a story about God answering a desperate prayer for help to forgive someone.

You might be familiar with the World War II story of Corrie ten Boom and her family, who hid Jewish people in their home and joined a broader resistance effort during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

It's estimated that the ten Boom family saved nearly 800 lives during the Holocaust, though at great price. The ten Booms were eventually reported and arrested. Corrie's father died in prison.

Corrie and her sister, Betsie, were then transferred into a concentration camp, where Betsie would end up dying.

Corrie survived.

After the war ended, still motivated by her Christian faith, Corrie traveled around Germany sharing the importance and power of God's forgiveness. After one of these talks, she recognizes a man walking toward her—a guard from the concentration camp where she and her sister, Betsie, had been imprisoned. Where Betsie had died.

Flashbacks of the camp seize her as he approaches.

He thrusts out his hand to shake hers, telling her how good it was to know that having become a Christian after his days as a concentration camp guard, that all his sins were at the bottom of the sea, just as she had said in her talk.

Listen to what Corrie writes about their encounter:

He said, “I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well”—again the hand came out—“will you forgive me?”

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—**and could not.** *Betsie had DIED in that place*—could he erase her slow, terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed HOURS as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that.

....[pause]

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart.

But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too.

Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function *regardless* of the temperature of the heart.

**“Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently. “I can lift my hand.**

**I can do that much. YOU supply the feeling.”**

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place.

The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands.

And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being,

bringing tears to my eyes.

**“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”**

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands,

the former guard and the former prisoner.

I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.

[pause]

In withholding wrath, Corrie was living out the heart of God,  
the love of God.

We are never closer to God than when we depend on Him

to extend His great mercy and compassion to another person.

Colossians 3:13 compels us to forgive as the LORD has forgiven us.

I tell this story about the supernatural empowerment to forgive because forgiveness is a supernatural act that needs the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. There is likely at least one person that comes to mind for each person here, a name or a face that has popped up as I have spoken about forgiveness, that we need God's power to forgive.

There is no other way to truly forgive someone than to be reminded of how much we need God's forgiveness ourselves.

When I am struggling to be patient—

in the profound way that God is patient—

in that withholding of wrath that pours out grace in its place,

I need to remind myself of God's grace for ME,



and then ask God to extend that grace THROUGH me.

To be patient, we ask God to forgive *through* us, as His chosen, holy, and dearly loved people, who are marked by having received His patience and grace instead of anger. **To truly extend grace to others, we must first clothe ourselves in God's patience for us.**

*As I bring this to a close, you might still be wondering: what does it mean to clothe ourselves in patience? How do we do that? How can we clothe ourselves in something intangible? Typically in the Bible, “clothing yourself” is used metaphorically to mean the taking on of characteristics, virtues, or intentions.*

There seems to be a tension of “putting on” the new self and “taking off” the old self and “clothing ourselves”. This might seem like it’s all external, and something **we** have to do, versus flowing out of something God has done for us.

When I was younger, I loved wearing my dad’s sweatshirts. There was something so cozy about sinking into that huge oversized shirt that belonged to him. It made me think of him.

His sweatshirt was laughably big on me—sleeves dangling down inches past my hands, billowing at the middle, long enough to be a dress instead of a shirt.

But the reason I felt so cozy when I wore it was because being reminded of how small I was, was actually reassuring; it reminded me of how much bigger my dad was. It made me feel safe. What if clothing ourselves with the character traits of God was somehow like this, making us feel close to God, cozy, safe, secure in Him.

Now, I've never asked my dad how he felt seeing me in his clothes.

I can imagine though, with our Heavenly Father, He's excited to see us put on and grow into this spiritual clothing, the taking on of His characteristics, so that we resemble Him more and more as we grow, *in partnership with the Holy Spirit*, yielding ourselves to Him and His power.

For there is an inner work that God is doing in us,

AND a work that we can participate in by actively taking part.

To see the gospel released in power in our midst,

let's **live** the gospel of forgiveness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**To truly extend the gospel of grace to others, we must first clothe**

**ourselves in God's patience for us. When we do, like Corrie, we will**

**experience the love of God and believe the gospel more deeply than**

**ever before.**