A few weeks ago, I was on my way to the school to pick the kids up at the end of the day. I usually try to leave a little early to beat the traffic and the busses from the High School and Middle schools, but that day I was a little later. I turned on 18th Street and came up right behind a bus. I followed it along until I was going to make my turn on Boyd Blvd, and it was turning too. I’ve been behind that bus before, and it makes several stops all the way to my kid’s school.

In my impatience I decided not to turn on Boyd, but to go down to 300 instead and try to get to the school faster. I turned on 300 and, of course, promptly got stuck behind another bus. Except this time the bus was dropping kids off at their houses so we were stopping every few houses all along the road.

It was about that time that God gently reminded me that I would be preaching on patience in a few weeks. I’m pretty sure if I would have been able to hear an audible voice from God at that moment he would have been laughing as he told me that.

Patience is one of those things that we think we have until it is tested. When our patience is tested, then we find out just how far we have yet to go. If you haven’t had your patience tested in a while and you would like to, I have four kids you can watch for the afternoon. Trust me, you’ll get plenty of testing.

Patience is the fourth piece of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul mentions in **Galatians 5:22–23 ESV — 22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Patience is not a bad translation of what the Bible talks about with the Greek word μακροθυμία (makrothymia) which means the state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome, or being able to bear up under provocation. It literally means to be long of mind or of soul, the seat of emotions. But there are other words that get at what Paul was talking about here a little better.

The new NIV translates this word forbearance instead of patience. Forbearance means to refrain from enforcing something that is due such as a debt or to be lenient. When you’re talking about a debt of some kind it means that the day you have to pay what you owe is postponed for a while. You are shown some leniency, some grace. When it comes to a punishment that you deserve or some kind of wrath you have earned, it means that punishment or wrath is put off.

Other words that would fit here are endurance, or steadfastness. The Bible often talks about endurance or suffering being connected to a person’s suffering or persecution. We tend to greatly admire those who endure, those who persevere. We admire those who make it despite the odds that are stacked against them. We love stories like Remember the Titans or The Blindside where the underdog that you would never expect ends up on top.

The KJV and NKJV both translate this word ‘longsuffering’, and I think that gets at the meaning behind this word maybe more than any other. The Greek word μακροθυμία (makrothymia) and the Hebrew word used for this concept in the Old Testament both get at this idea of longsuffering or forbearance.

The Hebrew words that are used in the Old Testament literally mean ‘long of nose’, ‘long of nostrils’, or ‘long of breath’. The idea was that a person’s anger is indicated by rapid, violent breathing through their nostrils. Did you ever have a parent or maybe a teacher that you knew was really angry when their nostrils started to flare. That’s when you knew you were in trouble. They didn’t even have to say anything. You knew it was bad simply because of their face. It’s like they were trying to contain an eruption, trying to keep it in.

The idea here of being ‘long of nose’ or ‘long of breath’ means that one who is longsuffering doesn’t immediately get angry about things. They are slow to get angry, slow to wrath. We often talk about having a short temper or a short fuse. If we had a good English word for the opposite of that it would be pretty close to what Paul is talking about. That idea is applied to God throughout the Bible.

The fruit of the Spirit is rooted in the very character of God. We see over and over again throughout the Bible that God exemplifies this characteristic of patience or longsuffering.

There are many places in Scripture where we see God get angry, but he never has a short temper. He never has a short fuse. What we see consistently from God, and what Paul talks about here in Galatians 5, is a slowness to anger. Longsuffering.

**Exodus 34:6 ESV — 6** The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

**Psalm 86:15 ESV — 15** But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

We see almost the exact same words repeated over and over again in the writings of Nehemiah, Joel, Nahum, Jeremiah, and Ecclesiastes. The God we serve is slow to anger.

Sometimes we like that characteristic of God, and sometimes we don’t. We always like it when God is patient with us. We want God to be longsuffering when it comes to dealing with our sin and our faults. But sometimes we want to see God pour out his wrath on other people who, in our minds, deserve the wrath of God more than we do.

When God finally got Jonah to the city of Nineveh Jonah proclaimed that the wrath of God was coming. When the people of Nineveh repented of their sin and turned away from their evil, God relented of the destruction he was planning to bring to their city. It seems like a happy ending to the story, but it wasn’t what Jonah wanted to happen.

**Jonah 4:2 ESV — 2** And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Jonah knew that God was a patient God, slow to anger, longsuffering. He should have known, because God was awfully patient with him and his own rebellion. Jonah had just received the grace and mercy of God and yet he was sitting there waiting for the Ninevites to be blown away by God’s wrath because they were so much worse than him.

Jonah wanted God to patient and longsuffering with him, then turn around and be wrathful and unrelenting with the Ninevites. That’s not how God works. This patience and longsuffering is a part of his character. As you read through the Old Testament and look at just how much God put up with from the Israelites it’s amazing that he didn’t wipe them off the face of the earth and start over. They abandoned him and betrayed him over and over again. But in his great love and mercy, God was patient with them, just like he is with us.

God is patient with us because we are slow to do the right thing. We let other things crowd God out of our lives, and so God is patient, longsuffering, and slow to anger with us. But notice that God is slow to anger, not never to anger.

The Israelites were given chance after chance to be faithful to God. He sent prophet after prophet to warn them of what would happen if they didn’t follow after him. After hundreds of years of being patient and longsuffering with their continual rejection of him the Israelites finally experienced God’s wrath.

The Northern nation of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722BC because they refused to turn away from their idolatry and follow after God. The nation of Judah was only saved from the same fate because of King Hezekiah’s faithfulness and prayer that God would save his people so that all the kingdoms of the earth would know that he was God alone.

A couple hundred years later, the same kind of idolatry was rampant in Judah again, and this time God sent the Babylonians to conquer the Israelites and carry them off into exile for 70 years. But the amazing thing about God is that he still did not abandon his people. He told them that they would be sent into exile and in the same breath told them there was hope for their future. He had a plan to restore them back to their homeland one day.

Even in punishing his people and giving them the consequences they had earned over hundreds of years, God was still longsuffering and patient with his people. I don’t know about you, but when I’m doling out consequences to my children I’m not nearly so patient. There’s not much of a chance that I’m going to tell them that after they serve their time they are going to get a treat or get to do something fun. When I’m angry with my kids, I tend to want them to feel the consequences. That’s because I’m nowhere near as patient with my kids as God is with his.

I think that the reason God had the prophets write down what happened to the Israelites and chronicle their continual failure to follow after God is so that people would be able to see a picture of themselves in Scripture. We may not turn to idolatry in exactly the way the Israelites did, but we certainly abandon God over and over again. We turn our backs on him and give him every reason to give up on us. God gives us chance after chance to turn to him. He is longsuffering and patient with us because it’s who he is.

But that patience and longsuffering won’t last forever. When this life is over and Jesus returns, there will be a day when God will hold us accountable for our lives. On that day, those who never turned to God and never accepted him will know what it means for God’s patience and longsuffering to end. Those people who chose to live their lives without God will know in that day what it is like to live for eternity without him. But that’s not what God wants for us.

Beyond just being a part of God’s character, there is a purpose to his patience with us.

**2 Peter 3:9 ESV — 9** The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Paul says the same thing in Romans 2. In 1 Timothy he says this:

**1 Timothy 1:15–16 NIV — 15** Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. **16** But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

God doesn’t want us to end up living for eternity without him. He sent his son to die for us so that we would not suffer that fate. He gave his life and gives us every chance to accept him and follow after him. What Jesus did for us on the cross gives us the chance to avoid the eternal consequences of our sin against him. It gives us the chance to be forgiven and redeemed. It gives us the chance to put on the righteousness of Christ in place of our own sinfulness.

God’s patience with us is meant to give us an opportunity to accept the gift of God’s grace and mercy. It is meant to point us toward the sacrifice Jesus made for us so that we can know his love and ultimately spend eternity with him.

Jesus tells a story in Matthew 18 about a servant who was forgiven a debt by the King that he never could have repaid if he had worked his entire life. He had simply asked for more time to pay off his debt, and the King had mercy on him and forgave his entire debt. The man then immediately went out and began to throttle a man who owed him just a small fraction of what he had just been forgiven. The King in the story found out what he had done and had the man thrown in prison for the rest of his life because of his attitude of unforgiveness.

Jesus finished that story with these words, **Matthew 18:35 ESV — 35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

That’s a pretty sobering statement. Just as God has been patient and forgiving of us, we are called to be patient and forgiving of others. In the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6, Jesus tells the disciples to pray, **Matthew 6:12 ESV — 12** …forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. How many of us are brave enough to pray that prayer? How many of us would like to be forgiven with the same measure as we have forgiven others?

Longsuffering in our lives means to hold back or restrain our anger, wrath, or indignation. Sometimes it means holding back from what we really want to do whether that’s to yell at someone, gossip about someone, try to hurt them the way they hurt us, or maybe write a scathing Facebook post about why we’re upset. Longsuffering means we hold back from doing what we want to do and instead doing what God has called us to. It means to hold back our natural response to our feelings of anger, bitterness, or entitlement and give them over to God.

When we treat others with love instead of the rudeness of a person in a hurry, then we are practicing patience. When we are slow to anger and forgiving of others, then we are practicing the longsuffering that is inherent in the nature of God. That’s exactly what we are called to do.

The fruit of the Spirit is what the Holy Spirit produces in us as we grow closer and closer to Christ. The Holy Spirit does the work of changing our hearts so that our character begins to look more and more like the character of Jesus. Paul urges us to treat others with patience and love as we strive to follow after Jesus.

**Ephesians 4:1–2 ESV — 1** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

**Colossians 1:10–11 ESV — 10** … walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; **11** being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

**Colossians 3:12–13 ESV — 12** Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13** bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

If we are walking closely with Jesus and following what he tells us to do, we will seek to treat people the way Jesus treats people. We will seek to be loving to the people we come into contact with. We will do whatever we can to be patient and forgive people who hurt or offend us.

But just like the rest of the fruit of the Spirit, patience is hard. It’s hard to be hurt or offended and not do something about it. It’s hard not to get back at the people who do things against us. It’s hard not to say what we really think to the person who has just hurt our feelings. It’s hard to treat people with the love of Jesus when what we really want to do give them a piece of our minds.

Again, that’s why these things aren’t the fruit of our own efforts. We can’t do these things on our own. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Something the Holy Spirit does in us as we strive to follow after Jesus. What we can do is cultivate our hearts to prepare them for the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Be humble

I think you’ll find humility is a prerequisite for all the fruit of the Spirit. If we are only focused on us, then we won’t have much patience for the needs or desires of others. If we want to cultivate the fruit of patience in our lives, we have to keep the focus off of ourselves.

You’ll find it difficult to be patient with someone who is slowing you down and messing with your schedule for the day if all you’re thinking about is how annoying it is that you aren’t getting your way. You’ll find it difficult to be longsuffering and forgiving of someone who has hurt or offended you if you are only thinking of your point of view and how frustrated or hurt you are. Be humble and look to the interests of others and you’ll find it is much easier to have patience as well.

1. Forgive as you have been forgiven

Forgiveness really gets at the longsuffering aspect of the fruit of patience. It’s hard not to say what we think when we’ve been offended. And in case you hadn’t noticed, we live in a world that gets offended at everything. What would happen if instead of speaking our mind or taking to social media with some kind of defense we just forgave the person instead? What would happen if Christians all over our nation and our world began to produce and live out this fruit of the Spirit? Do you think the world would notice?

What if we forgave others as we have been forgiven by Christ? What would that look like?

I think it would look a lot like Jesus to a world that desperately needs to know him.

1. Endure

I have often heard that patience is one of the most dangerous things to pray for. The Holy Spirit doesn’t cultivate patience in us by giving hitting us with a bolt of lightening and suddenly we’re patient people. You don’t wash off all the impatience you have within you when you are baptized. We learn and grow in patience when the Holy Spirit guides us through situations that require patience.

That means we will be put through situations that aren’t much fun. Maybe you get delayed when you have an important meeting to make. Maybe your car is in the shop for longer than you expected. Maybe you don’t heal very quickly from the injury or surgery you had. Maybe you have people in your life that require a lot of patience and you have to deal with them over and over again.

Sometimes we look for the quick fix. We look for a short cut around the situations that require patience in our lives. Like driving another block down to avoid driving behind a bus. When we try to avoid those situations we stifle the work of the Holy Spirit. In order for him to work at producing patience in our lives, we have to endure those trying times when our patience is tested. It’s only in the testing and stretching our patience that it can really grow. Don’t be afraid to endure and don’t be afraid to pray for patience.

1. Give up control

A part of patience means giving up control. In the Middle Ages anyone who suffered patiently while waiting for medical treatment came to be called a patient. We still use that terminology today. Whether you are a patient of a doctor or you are trying to be patient in traffic or in line at the grocery store, you are putting the control of the situation in the hands of another.

Patience means you don’t try to hurry people along. You don’t mumble your frustration under your breath just because you happened to pick the slowest and chattiest checkout lady in the store. You don’t honk your horn because the car in front of you is being more cautious than you might.

When we were in New York, I was glad to take the Subway everywhere we went, because driving in that city was absolutely miserable. To make it that much worse, whenever any car would stop for any reason, the honking started up. One night a group of us got to our restaurant a little earlier than we expected, and we sat outside and watched what was happening on the street for a while. Whenever the light would turn red and the first car would stop, without fail the cars behind them would begin honking their horns and didn’t stop until it turned green again. Their honking didn’t accomplish anything besides just adding to the noise of the city, and probably irritating the drivers in front of them.

Sometimes patience means that you give up control for a while. You wait for the light to turn without honking. You don’t have a look of irritation on your face in the line at Walmart. You don’t complain or tip less because your food took a little longer than you would have liked at the restaurant. You don’t lash out and go on the offensive at a person because they offended you or hurt you somehow. You give up control for a bit.

You’ll find as you do things like that, people will notice. They expect impatience. They expected to be berated when they don’t move fast enough. They expect angry customers because they had to wait in line at the grocery store. What they don’t expect is patience. They don’t expect longsuffering. They don’t expect grace. They don’t expect forgiveness. People will notice if you have the fruit of patience in your life. You will never meet anyone who is not thankful to be treated with patience.

That’s when we have an opportunity to show people the difference between Jesus and the world. That’s when we have the opportunity to show people what it means to live differently as a Christian. That’s when we get the chance to make a difference in the world around us for Jesus.

I’m going to ask the worship team to come back up now. Right now, you have the chance to respond to the patience and longsuffering of God. Paul said the purpose of God’s patience is that we might come to repentance and come to know everlasting life because of his patience for us. If you need to make a decision today to respond to that patience and give your life to Jesus today, we invite you to come do that now.

If you are a believer in Jesus, but you have never been baptized, then we invite you to come do that as well.

And if you are a believer in Jesus who does not have a church to call home, we would love for you to call Agape your home.

If you have any questions or concerns about those things, come and talk to me, or Rod, or one of our elders.