

## The Fruit of the Spirit

### Part 3 – Longsuffering

An old train was crawling slowly through the countryside when it suddenly came to a complete stop. The solitary traveller in the carriage, a salesman, asked the conductor why they had stopped. The conductor said, “Nothing to be concerned about, sir. There’s a cow on the tracks.” About ten minutes later, the train started off again, but after creeping along for only another couple of kilometres, it ground to a halt again. “This is just a brief delay,” said the conductor. “We’ll get going again soon.” The frustrated salesman asked, “What is it this time? Did we catch up to the cow again?”

How we hate to wait!

We are continuing to look at the fruit of the Spirit.

#### **Galatians 5:22-23**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

#### **Hebrews 6:11-15**

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “*Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.*” And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

### 1. What is longsuffering?

The Greek word used is “*makrothumia*,” and it means “the prolonged restraint of anger or agitation.”

That means the holding back of anger for a long period of time.

It especially applies to holding back the natural anger or inner turmoil that you might feel as a result of having to wait.

Think about this: How many times do you have to wait?

There’s a time when God calls us, and there’s a time when He releases us into that calling.

There’s a time when God promises something, and there’s a time when He fulfils that promise.

A time when we sow, and a time when we reap.

And in all these things, there’s a waiting time.

There’s a great example of this in the Bible.

You’re probably familiar with Joseph’s story in Genesis 37.

God gives him these dreams which tell him he is going to be a great man.

This doesn’t work out so well for him.

He doesn’t handle the promise of greatness so well.

He brags about it.

And his brothers get really jealous.

And they sell him into slavery.

Joseph winds up in Egypt.

And he's such a good slave that his master puts him in charge of everything.

Then his master's wife falsely accuses him of attempted rape.

He ends up in prison.

Finally, he interprets Pharaoh's dreams.

He's released from prison and made Prime Minister of Egypt.

It took thirteen long years between when he had his dreams and the fulfilment.

What allowed Joseph forgive brothers in face of cruel mistreatment?

What gave Joseph the stamina to hang in there for thirteen long years of slavery and imprisonment?

What gave him the ability to hang on to his faith in God's promise despite every setback?

It was this quality of longsuffering.

## **2. Why do I need longsuffering?**

### **James 1:2-3**

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

I'll be honest.

This verse baffled me for a long time.

Imagine me talking to God, giving Him the benefit of my wisdom.

So Lord, let me get this straight.

I need longsuffering to get through trials.

And I need trials to get longsuffering.

Aren't we just going round in circles?

Why not just cut out the trials?

And I won't need the longsuffering either.

I thought I had Him there.

Here's what I discovered.

1. God wants sons not sissies.

Good sons are strong not weak;

They are reliable not unreliable;

They are tough not wishy-washy.

Question: What's your perception of heaven?

Do you think that we're going to be sitting around doing nothing?

I don't.

The Lord will have stuff for us to do.

Imagine receiving an assignment from the Lord.

And your response is, "But it's too hard."

I don't think the angels would be impressed.

2. God wants us to forgive others

### **Colossians 3:12-13**

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

3. God wants us to inherit the promises

#### **Hebrews 6:12**

... do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Longsuffering is a condition for receiving God's promises.

Faith is not enough.

Think of Abraham.

It was decades between the promise of God that he would have a son, and the time when Isaac was born.

We are so impatient.

If I plant tomatoes, you know when I want tomatoes?

Here's a little scenario:

I go out and plant tomatoes.

The next day I go and check them out.

"Still no tomatoes," I say to my wife.

"Well, you only just planted them," she replies.

That's normal, isn't it?

There's always a time gap between the call of God and the release into the call; between the promise and the fulfilment of the promise; between the sowing and the reaping.

4. Longsuffering brings out the true quality of other fruit.

Let me give an example.

Love is part of the fruit of the Spirit.

Let me describe my ideal day.

My wife wakes me gently, bringing me breakfast in bed.

She smiles and tells me she's planned a relaxing day trip.

Then we'll go see the latest action movie.

We get home, and I say, "I love you. You are such a beautiful wife."

But what if it were different?

I've had a restless night because my wife's been snoring.

She shakes me awake.

In between chewing her gum, she says, "Get up, ya lazy slug, and get to work. Money doesn't grow on trees, ya know. And you know where the kitchen is. Make something for me too."

That's when the quality of your love is tested.

And longsuffering brings that quality out.

### **3. How do I get longsuffering?**

Three things.

And you're not going to like the first one.

1. Suffer long!

**John 16:33**

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

2. The Holy Spirit

**Galatians 5:22-23**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Longsuffering is fruit.

So how does grow fruit?

When we were living in Brisbane, we planted a passionfruit vine.

And it grew and grew and grew, and produced hundreds of delicious passionfruit.

So how does fruit grow?

It grows naturally.

Provided you have the right conditions.

When we bought the passionfruit, we asked, “What’s the best way to grow this?”

The guy said, “When you dig the hole, put a calf’s liver in the ground. Then put the passionfruit on top of that.”

It worked.

Combined with the Queensland weather, which is beautiful one day, and perfect the next, the passionfruit went nuts and produced hundreds of passionfruit.

So what’s the right conditions for longsuffering to grow in?

This leads me to my final point.

3. Obedience

I’ve been a Christian now for over 45 years.

I’ve seen countless people not last the distance.

How is it that some drop out of the race, and others have this enduring quality of longsuffering that enables them to last the distance?

According to Jesus, one thing separates them.

Obedience.

**Matthew 7:24-25**

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”

Then there was another guy.

**Matthew 7:26-27**

“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

Notice they both built a house.

They both experienced the same floods.

They both experienced the same rains.

One house collapsed and the other stood strong.

So what was the difference?

One had a foundation of obedience, and the other had a foundation of disobedience.

And there's no third option.

According to Jesus, the cause of lasting the distance is obedience.

And the cause of not lasting is disobedience.

I know, we all want to be compassionate and say something like, "But I know people who fell away because they were hurt by a church."

I know; so do I.

But frankly, if you've never been hurt by a church, you've never been to a church.

We've all been hurt by a church.

Because the church is full of flawed humans.

And you are one of those, as am I.

But here's the thing.

Forgiving others is one of the principles Jesus commands us to be obedient to if we are to last the distance.

So three important ingredients for longsuffering.

1. Suffer long; 2. The Holy Spirit; 3. Obedience to Christ's commands.

Allow these principles to take root in your life, and you will reap the benefits of longsuffering.