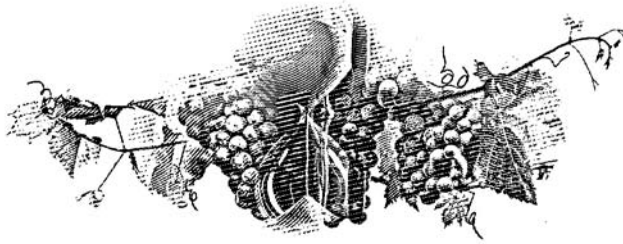


# The Fruit of *the* Spirit Is Patience



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Gen. 6:3; Exod. 34:6; Mark 4:26–29; Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:1, 2; James 1:2–4.*

**Memory Text:** “For you have need of endurance [patience], so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (*Hebrews 10:36, NKJV*).

In the Greek, two words express the meaning of “patience,” another fruit of the Spirit. The first is *hupomone*, translated “endurance, steadfastness, and fortitude” in circumstances that cannot be changed. The second word, *makrothumia*, means “great” or “long tempered.” It is the opposite of short-tempered, impatient, and easily frustrated. In general, it means being able to stick with things and not to be derailed by adversity. The word is usually applied to having patience with people.

A patient person is mild, gentle, and constant in all circumstances. The real test of patience is not in the waiting but in how one behaves while waiting. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (*James 1:4, NKJV*).

Reaching this point in one's life takes practice, takes God's grace, and takes a willingness to put aside self and to surrender to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The good news is that if we learn patience, we are in a position to receive many other blessings from God, as well.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 30.*

## Patience Is an Attribute of God *(Exod. 34:6)*

**“And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth’ ” *(Exod. 34:6, NKJV)*.**

One of the many Bible stories illustrating the patience of God was His dealing with Nineveh. The prophet Jonah recognized God’s patience: “ ‘Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm’ ” *(Jonah 4:2, NKJV)*.

Note some of the other qualities that patience is combined with in Exodus 34:6. God’s grace, mercy, lovingkindness, goodness, and truth protect and sustain even the most hardened sinners in order to give them the maximum time and advantage to turn their lives around. If God struck out at people as quickly as humans frequently do, we’d all be dead.

**Why** is God patient with sinners? *(See 2 Pet. 3:8, 9.)* **How** have you seen the reality of this truth manifested toward yourself or toward others?

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If someone were to ask you how you picture God in your mind, how would you describe Him? This is revealing, because the way a Christian thinks of God has a lot to do with his or her worldview and how we treat others. If we see God as angry and quick to punish, how would we likely treat others in the church and in our homes?

**How can we learn to do what the Lord calls us to do in Romans 15:5?**

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## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *James 1:2–5, NIV*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Accept the reality that exercising patience can be difficult.

**Feel:** Earnestly desire to develop patience.

**Do:** Practice patience in situations of trial and difficulty.

► **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Know: Learning Patience

- A** The key text joins together two gifts of the Spirit: joy and patience.
1. How do we know we need patience? Why do we find it difficult to show patience? In what situations is it most difficult to exercise patience?
  2. Ask the class members to recount situations in which they have been impatient. How do they think the situations could have been avoided?
  3. Where does joy enter into situations that demand patience?

### II. Feel: The Need for Developing Patience

- A** The development of patience, like all the gifts of the Spirit, calls for the exercise of choice. How can we deal with failures to show patience?

### III. Do: Practicing Patience in the Midst of Conflict

**A** Because conflict is often an inevitable part of life, how can we most usefully prepare for it?

**B** James tells us to know, or understand, that enduring the trial of our faith leads to patience and spiritual maturity. How can we respond to testing in a way that helps us to avoid becoming impatient? How is a preoccupation with self at the root of impatience?

► **Summary:** Developing patience is often difficult. Contemplating God's patience with us helps. Understanding that egotism or self-centeredness is a major hindrance to growth leads us to seek God's grace to become spiritually mature.

## Patience Required *(Eph. 4:1, 2)*

**Read** Ephesians 4:1, 2. Look at the elements Paul presents for those who are to “walk worthy” of the Lord. Among them is patience. How is patience linked with the other attributes presented? That is, how do they feed into each other?

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The church is made up of a mixture of people from various backgrounds and cultures. It also includes people who are on different rungs of the maturity ladder. Patience is necessary to be able to get along where there are so many differences. It is a temptation for those who are mature to be impatient toward those less so. In spite of the fact that it took years for them to arrive at their present level of knowledge, often the mature are unwilling to give the immature the same amount of time and study to reach their level of knowledge and understanding.

**What** is Paul’s counsel on how we are to deal with those who may be weak in faith? *Rom. 14:1, 15:1.*

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Patience in the church is one thing. But what about patience at home? What are some of the things that make us impatient with other members of our family? How long should we pray for family members who are out of the faith? Have you ever known anyone who had to pray for a loved one for many years before the person gave his or her heart to the Lord? What are practical ways in which we can learn to cultivate patience with family members? Why is death to self so important here too?

If we can be patient at home, with those who are always “in our face,” then we likely will be patient with others, as well.

**Think about how patient the Lord has been with you. How does keeping that reality constantly before you help you learn to show patience with others? If the Lord treated you as you treated others, what do you think would be your fate?**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1**—Motivate

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Patience is a godlike trait that bears long with weakness. It gives us the opportunity to learn, grow, and turn to God.

**Just for Teachers:** In order to demonstrate patience in action, locate someone who is willing to demonstrate, as an object lesson, some process of a craft that takes care and time. Take some time with your class to observe the process, or a part of it, and discuss it. Then share the following quote:

“All who in this world render true service to God or man receive a preparatory training in the school of sorrow. The weightier the trust and the higher the service, the closer is the test and the more severe the discipline.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 151.

**Consider This:** It takes patience and carefulness and much time to craft something of quality. God has put all those things into His work with us. A skillfully handcrafted item generally is highly valued. Why is this so? How does God value the work of His hands? How do His long efforts with us give us patience to work long and carefully with others?

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### ► **STEP 2**—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** We are pilgrims on a heavenward journey. An important part of our spiritual walk is patience. Lead your class this week to focus on the following questions: What is patience? How is patience related to God’s character? Why is patience so important for our spiritual walk and growth?

## Bible Commentary

The apostle Paul in Galatians 5:16–26 presents the Christian life as warfare between the life of the flesh and the life of the Spirit. After warning Christians to renounce the works of the flesh, the apostle charges them to live so as to bear the “fruit of the Spirit.” Fruit bearing is an essential part of the salvation experience and spiritual growth. After describing three

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## Patience in the Gospel *(2 Tim. 4:2)*

Preaching and teaching the gospel is one of the most difficult areas in which to exercise patience. Most of us are too impatient with people who don't know the truth or who don't seem to care about it. But in a world full of false doctrine and prejudice against truth, we must be longsuffering as we seek to lead people to Christ. It is too easy to shake our head and say, "Why don't they understand? The truth is so plain."

The truth always is plain to the person who is not looking at it through glasses tinted by false doctrine, tradition, family, and so forth. We must be patient as we seek to open minds and untie the tentacles of prejudice and false teaching that bind them to error and tradition.

**Read** Mark 4:26–29. What are some practical lessons from this parable about patience in the area of soul winning?

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We are prone to think that when someone studies a particular Bible doctrine and doesn't accept it immediately, it must mean the person has rejected the truth. That, however, is not necessarily the case. The fact is that conversion can be a long, complicated process that could take years in some instances. Though many of us might be eager to see the immediate fruit of our labors, it doesn't always happen that way. What's important is that, in our zeal, we don't become a hindrance to someone; that is, we must not push so hard that the person gets turned off. Most important, we never must condemn or judge someone who doesn't make a commitment to the truths that we love and care so deeply about at the precise time that we think the person should. Your labors, your work for the person, could very well be an important step in a process that might not bear fruit for years. You just don't know. The crucial thing is not to ruin it all by being condemnatory or judgmental.

**What crucial point found in 1 Samuel 16:7 should we always keep in mind in this context (and in all contexts, really)?**

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

aspects of this fruit—love, joy, and peace—the apostle stresses a fourth significant aspect: patience.

**I. Patience: A Biblical Definition** (Review Galatians 5:22 and Exodus 34:6 with the class.)

The New Testament uses two words for patience. First, *hupomone*, translated as “patience or endurance” (*Rom. 5:3, 2 Cor. 6:4, 2 Thess. 1:4*). Patience here means endurance of every affliction that one confronts on one’s spiritual journey. Second, *makrothumia*, translated as “long-suffering,” a fruit of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22*). The word, also translated as “patience,” indicates a characteristic that a Christian should have toward others, even if they are hostile, provocative, and vengeful. Without patience we cannot walk worthily of our Christian calling (*1 Cor. 13:4, Col. 3:12, 1 Thess. 5:14*).


As a virtue to be developed in a redeemed person, patience cannot have its origin in human beings. The very nature of humans is sinful (*Rom. 3:23*), and as such, human nature is prone to anger, haste, impatience, and intolerance. On the other hand, a redeemed person with a new life in the Spirit is expected to have its fruit: patience.

Patience is more than tolerance; it is *makrothumia*—long-suffering in a world noted for quick revenge and senseless retaliation. For example, 2 Corinthians 6:3–10 mentions how the “long-suffering” fruit of the Spirit will motivate the Christian to face life’s testing trials and annoying hurdles. Long-suffering is turning the other cheek (*Matt. 5:39*). It is patience with a redemptive purpose. It is a garment of the Spirit, given to the Christian to set forth a new fashion of moral conduct (*Col. 3:12–17*).

**Consider This:** Some people may consider patience as a characteristic of weakness, but the Bible presents patience as a virtue. Discuss the two positions.

**II. Patience: God’s Character** (Review Exodus 34:6 with the class.)

In one of the most awesome and intimate self-revelations of God, God reveals Himself as “merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (*Exod. 34:6*). If His mercy and grace seek to save us, if His goodness and truth establish us in the path of righteousness, it is His long-suffering that enables us to walk the long and narrow way, to place our confidence in Him, who, even when we fall, has given to us “an advocate

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## Patience Has Its Limits *(Gen. 6:3)*

No greater demonstration of patience can be found than that shown by God toward humans. But we must understand that even God's long-suffering has a limit.

The long-suffering of God lasted for 120 years in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared (*1 Pet. 3:20*). But the time came when the stubbornness of the people exhausted the long-suffering of God, and He destroyed the earth with a flood.

### **Read** Genesis 6:3. What important principle is seen there?

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In the cases of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel in the wilderness, and the Babylonian captivity, what attitude on the part of the people prompted the consequences that the people suffered? *Deut. 31:27, Ps. 95:8, Jer. 17:23.*

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It might be argued that, inasmuch as God ran out of patience, this gives us permission to do the same. But when we study the history of God's long-suffering, it becomes evident that His patience was not for a day, a week, or even a year. Often generations would pass before His long-suffering would be exhausted, which, of course, is not an option open to us.

Is there a point where our patience legitimately can run out when dealing with folks in a difficult situation? It depends on what that means. We might decide that we've had enough of a certain situation and conclude that it has to end. But that's not the same thing as being judgmental, unloving, or cruel in the process. It might be time to take action, but that action never must be out of harmony with the principles of kindness, love, and caring.

**Dwell on situations in which your patience ran out legitimately and illegitimately. What was the difference between the two? What have you learned from these experiences? If you had to do them over again, what would you do differently?**



Learning Cycle CONTINUED

with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (*1 John 2:1*). God’s patience enables saints’ perseverance.

**Consider This:** God is holy, just, and righteous. He also is loving, gracious, and long-suffering. How do these two sets of characteristics complement each other?

### III. Patience: The Spirit’s Mandate to the Christian (Review Romans 15:5; 1 Timothy 6:11, 12; and James 1:2–4 with the class.)

The Christian walk and growth mandate that our conduct reflect God’s character. Hence Paul’s prayer that “the God of patience” grant us “to be likeminded one toward another” (*Rom. 15:5*). This command to be patient is to be reflective of the God of patience, with neither limit nor frontier (*Rom. 15:5; James 1:2–4; 1 Tim. 6:11, 12*).

Thus, the “man of God” is called to “pursue” patience along with “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, . . . gentleness” in order to finish the fight of good faith that leads to eternal life (*1 Tim. 6:11, 12, NKJV*). Without pursuing patience, Christian growth and maturity will not reach their glorious consummation (*James 1:3, 4*).

**Consider This:** The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering. In what sense can the last one be linked to the first three?

## ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to give examples of things that try their patience most in the following areas: with themselves, with their families (parents, siblings, children), at their workplace, in the church, and in the community. Ask for one or more groups to role-play a situation that tests their patience. Discuss how to relate to these situations with godly patience, using examples from the biblical stories to inform the discussion. Write suggestions from the class on a blackboard.

Even though David had been anointed to become king, it took many years of waiting and living a dangerous, rough, hard life before he was able to take the throne (*1 Samuel 16–24*). He learned to depend completely on God for comfort and support. Often he wouldn’t make a move before he sought counsel from God. But these long years of leaning on God for every need taught David the lessons he needed to be a wise and God-

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## How to Develop Patience *(James 1:2-4)*

**“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4, NKJV). What has been your own experience with the reality of these verses? What have you learned from the various trials you have faced that, in the end, has made you a better person, one who better reflects the character of Jesus?**

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The Greek word for “trials,” sometimes translated “temptations,” is the word *peirazo*, which has the broader significance of “proving” or “testing.” The devil tries us or tempts us to do evil. The tests and trials that God allows to come into our lives are for the purpose of developing our characters.

“The trials of life are God’s workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling, their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace.” —Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 10.

This doesn’t mean, however, that every trial is in God’s providence. Often we bring suffering upon ourselves through disobedience; often, too, trials and suffering are just the results of what it means to live in a fallen, sinful world where we have an enemy who hates us (*1 Pet. 5:8*). What this does mean, however, is that through a complete surrender of ourselves to the Lord, to grasping hold of Him in faith and obedience, no matter what we go through, we can come out better or more refined if we allow God to work in us. No one said it will be fun. Life here often isn’t fun, but we are given this wonderful promise: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (*Phil. 1:6*).

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

fearing king. “It was through the training in the school of hardship and sorrow that David was able to make the record . . . that he ‘executed judgment and justice unto all his people.’ 2 Samuel 8:15.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 152.

**Consider This:** What experiences have you been having that are teaching you patience? How might they be useful in your future service for God?

**Life Application:** Where do limits to patience enter the picture? What is the difference between tolerance and patience? Some parenting dilemmas deal with questions of how long to be patient with kids learning lessons and when to use consequences and tough love. Similar situations occur in adult situations in which a peer or family member makes bad choices, and we need to set boundaries at some point or another. What principles come into play in these situations? (A good resource on this topic is Henry Cloud and John Townsend’s book, *Boundaries* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992].)

## ► STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Draw a simple outline of a piece of fruit on a piece of paper and title it “Patience.” Make enough copies for each member of your class, or hand out paper and have them draw an outline of a fruit themselves. Or, alternately, draw the fruit on a blackboard. Ask class members to identify a situation in their lives in which they need to work on patience. Ask them to write out a favorite text on patience in the center of the fruit, as well as a reference to a particular Bible character who models the type of patience they need.

Discuss how to write out an action plan that helps your class members identify the steps by which they focus on God’s character and learn to transfer their thoughts from feelings of frustration, which lead to loss of patience, to dependence on God for an attitude adjustment. Part of their action plan may include setting boundaries and setting limits on patience.

**Closing Activity:** Go back to the texts and promises regarding patience. In a symbolic gesture of claiming those promises, ask class members to place their hands on the texts and promises in their Bibles or on their papers as someone prays for the fulfillment of those promises in the coming week.

**Further Study:** “In His dealings with the human race, God bears long with the impenitent. He uses His appointed agencies to call men to allegiance, and offers them His full pardon if they will repent. But because God is long-suffering, men presume on His mercy. ‘Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.’ The patience and long-suffering of God, which should soften and subdue the soul, has an altogether different influence upon the careless and sinful. It leads them to cast off restraint, and strengthens them in resistance. They think that the God who has borne so much from them will not heed their perversity. If we lived in a dispensation of immediate retribution, offenses against God would not occur so often. But though delayed, the punishment is none the less certain. There are limits even to the forbearance of God. The boundary of His long-suffering may be reached, and then He will surely punish. And when He does take up the case of the presumptuous sinner, He will not cease till He has made a full end.” —Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1166.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ To say that God is patient is not the same as to say that He is tolerant. What is the difference between patience and tolerance, and why is it easy to confuse the two?
- ❷ As we look at the life of Christ, how does He reveal what patience means? What are some powerful examples that He gives of patience? What examples does He give, if any, of situations in which patience was no longer appropriate?
- ❸ Dwell more on the question of trials and character. Sure, trials can make our character better in many cases. At the same time, what happens when trials embitter people, turn them away from God, and make them cynical and doubtful? Have you ever seen that happen to someone? If so, what can you learn from that experience?
- ❹ Besides trials, what are other ways the Lord can teach us patience? How have you learned (or are still learning) the lesson of patience?
- ❺ Is there someone you need to apologize to because of your lack of patience? Why not humble yourself and make the apology and do whatever else it takes to make things right? Isn't that what being a Christian is all about?