

The Long Suffering of God

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of long suffering in our relationships and in our walk with God, using the example of Jesus as a model for dependence on God's power in our weakness.

Duration: 42:00

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1

Topics: "Long Suffering"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the foundation of God's goodness before trying to live up to His commandments. He encourages the audience to read Ephesians 1 to 3, which focuses on what God has done for us, to find encouragement and assurance. The speaker also highlights the significance of Jesus becoming a man and experiencing weakness and temptation, allowing Him to sympathize with our struggles. The sermon concludes with the message of love, as the speaker references 1 John 4 and encourages believers to love one another as a reflection of knowing and experiencing God's love.

Transcript

Let's turn to Exodus, Chapter 34. This is the time when the Israelites had sinned against God by worshipping the Golden Calf. And after all that He had done for them in delivering them from Egypt, it was quite disappointing that they went and made a golden calf and said, this is the God that delivered you from Egypt.

And then Moses was praying there before God and he says in verse 18 of Chapter 33, Moses had a desire. He said, I pray you, show me your glory. Now what do you think is the glory of God? We get the impression of tremendous brightness and great display of power because there are some words used by Christians very frequently in their language which we don't normally use in secular speech.

One is the word bless. And I think most Christians don't know what they are asking for when they say the Lord bless me. And the other is the word glory.

If you were to ask the average Christian, what do you mean by that word glory? They wouldn't really know, wouldn't really answer, have an answer and yet it's a word very frequently used by Christians in speech and in prayer. So Moses said, I pray you'll show me your glory and God replies saying, I will make all my goodness pass before you. So the glory of God is His goodness.

Because when Moses asked saying, Lord show me your glory, he said, I'll make my goodness pass in front of you. And later on we read that God answers that prayer. And when Moses was before the Lord, it says here in Chapter 34, the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord and the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, verse 6, I am the Lord, the Lord thy God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and truth, who keeps loving kindness for thousands, forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.

Yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers and children, grandchildren, third and fourth generation. So when God manifested His glory to Moses, he first of all spoke of himself as compassionate. And the King James Version translates that word as longsuffering.

And the word longsuffering itself indicates what that means. That means God suffers and suffers and suffers and suffers and waits and waits and waits without wanting to judge. He is longsuffering.

That is a unique characteristic of God's love, that He's not quick to take action. Very often we wonder why God doesn't judge so many people who are persecuting His children or mocking Him and doing all types of things against Lord. And the reason is that He is longsuffering.

He's not in a hurry to judge. And as I said, that's one of the characteristics of love that we read of in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians chapter 13, 1 Corinthians chapter 13, it says, love is patient.

That is longsuffering. 1 Corinthians 13 verse 4. So if that is a definition of God's love to us, it is longsuffering. And in verse 7 it says, endures all things.

Again, longsuffering. And in Romans chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, tells us how God leads us to repentance, it's the same word used. Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and longsuffering in knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? The purpose of God being longsuffering is to lead us to repentance.

But people take advantage of it. That because God doesn't judge immediately, we think He will never judge. But He doesn't judge immediately because He's patient and He's longsuffering.

Now, the reason I mentioned that, it comes a number of times in Scripture, that word, if you look up a concordance, it's very interesting to see how often that word comes. But the reason I mention it here is to say that when the Holy Spirit fills our hearts, you know, we talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit. He wants to bring into our heart the very nature of God.

And the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5.22 includes this word, longsuffering. Patience meaning longsuffering. Sometimes the word patience doesn't hit home to us as much as the word longsuffering.

To be patient means to suffer long with people who are difficult. And that's one of the fruit of the Spirit. And then I want to turn to Ephesians chapter 4, where, after telling us in the first three chapters of the wonderful position into which God has brought us in Christ, blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, and seated us in the heavenly places in Christ.

He says, therefore... You know, there's one thing very interesting about the book of Ephesians, that it's one of those rare New Testament books where you go through three whole chapters without a single exhortation. I don't think there's any other book in the Bible like that, where you have... book in the New Testament... episode in the New Testament where you go through three whole chapters, and there's no

exhortation there. It's all telling us what God has done for us, what God's done for us, what God's done for us.

If you want to read something that'll really encourage you, because there's no exhortation in the whole passage, read Ephesians 1 to 3. You can be quite safe, because there's no exhortation there. Not even one. It's only telling us what God has done.

It's a great section of scripture to read when you're tempted to be discouraged, or you go back from a Sunday meeting and you feel you've heard so many commandments, you just get... say, how in the world will I keep it? Go back and read Ephesians 1 to 3. But Ephesians 4 to 6, it's full of exhortations. Now, the point I want to say is, Ephesians 4 to 6 is based on chapters 1 to 3, and the trouble with a lot of Christians is they're trying to keep the exhortations without the foundation of chapters 1 to 3. But having led that foundation of God's tremendous goodness for us, and this prayer that God will give us power, chapter 3, verse 16, through His Spirit. You see, you need the power of the Holy Spirit to live up to what you read further.

Then he comes to chapter 4 and says, Therefore, therefore means since God has done all these fantastic things for us, I entreat you, please walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called with all humility and gentleness and long-suffering. Again that word patience, long-suffering in the King James Version. So, this long-suffering of God, when He's been long-suffering with us, He expects us to be long-suffering with one another.

And how to do it? In the Living Bible paraphrase, it's very beautiful here, I want to read it. Be patient or long-suffering with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. So, there it says that everybody's got faults.

I mean, every believer has got faults just like an unbeliever because we haven't yet become perfect. And the need for long-suffering comes when you see that fault in somebody else. It says here, make allowance for each other's faults.

Don't be so demanding. Husbands and wives make allowance for each other's faults because of your love. So, when I don't make allowance for another person's actions to say, well, I don't want to judge him for that, he may have been under some type of pressure that I don't understand right now.

That's making allowance. To say that, well, he may be under some pressure right now because of something he's facing which I don't understand and maybe that's why he's a little irritable. Now, when we don't make that allowance, we're not long-suffering.

We're acting as though God was not long-suffering with us. To make allowance for each other's faults because of your love. In fact, this is a great requirement for spiritual leadership.

And when you talk about spiritual leadership, I'm not just talking about elders. There are very few elders. But every one of us has got to be a leader to somebody else.

If you're a husband, you're a leader to your wife. Even if you were converted yesterday, you're a leader to your wife. If you are a teenager, you're a leader to all the small children who are looking up to you.

If you're a young brother, you're a leader to the teenagers. And one of the requirements for leadership is this willingness to make allowance for other people's limitations and faults. What a different home our

home will be if we make allowance for each other's faults because of our love.

If we meditate on this one characteristic of God called long-suffering and ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with this fruit of long-suffering in our lives. It says in Hebrews chapter 5, for every high priest taken from among men, Hebrews 5.1, is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God in order to offer sacrifices and gifts and sacrifice for sins. And listen to this.

This is leadership. The high priest was the leader back there in Israel. He can deal gently with ignorant people and he can deal gently with misguided people.

We are surrounded by ignorant people and misguided people. Our children are ignorant and misguided. Your husband and wife may be ignorant or misguided in some area.

Not evil, but ignorant. There's a difference between an evil person and an ignorant person. Not evil, but misguided.

If a person took the wrong turning, it's not because he's evil, it's because he made a mistake, he's misguided. And he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided because he himself is beset with weakness. Beset means surrounded with weakness in every area.

And it's very interesting that this chapter begins with the word for. For means, it's going back to the previous chapter, to the previous verses. And the previous verses tell us, verse 15 of chapter 4, we don't have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but who has been tempted in all things as we are.

Because, chapter 5, verse 1, every high priest, verse 2, deals gently with ignorant and misguided because he himself is beset with weakness. So it's connecting it with Jesus, that Jesus, I mean, God is long-suffering. He could be long-suffering in heaven with man.

But there was another dimension added to that. When Jesus became a man and was beset with temptation all around him, and he saw his own weakness as a man, and he had to cry out to God for help. In fact, he felt so weak.

You know, it's only a weak person who cries for help, who's really helpless. And it says here in chapter 5 that, remember, this context is of Jesus becoming a man surrounded by weakness, not by sin. Remember, not by sin, but by weakness.

His flesh was not sinful flesh, but because he had a flesh, he was weak. And that weakness exposed him to temptation all the time. And that is how he can sympathize with our struggles, with our weaknesses.

It says in verse 15 of chapter 4, he can sympathize with our weaknesses and our struggles. He understands when we're struggling, that it's not easy. Those particular temptations you're struggling with, I mean, God always understood it in heaven, theoretically.

But one thing you had to say, that even Almighty God did not experience it practically, because God cannot be tempted. I mean, God is perfect and He's long-suffering, as perfect as God can be. But God could not say, yes, I understand your weakness because I have experienced it.

He had not experienced it. He could only say, I understand your weakness. All through the thousands of years from Adam to Christ, God could say, I can understand your weakness, I can understand your

struggle, I can understand your struggle.

But after Jesus came and lived on the earth, He could say a little more, I can understand your struggle because I have experienced it myself. That's something significant, because Jesus came to earth. And so, when we're struggling with anything, it could be a trial, it could be a complicated situation.

You know, very often, haven't you found this, supposing you have a brother or a sister who's a wonderful counselor, whom you've had much experience with going to again and again and again, and he always has a wise word of counsel. Isn't it great to be able to be in touch with such a person? And particularly if he's not hard on you, when you tell him that you have failed, that he's sympathetic and understands and probably puts his arm around you. That's great.

I mean, I would just love to have a brother or sister like that. I mean, many brothers and sisters like that in our church, to help others. Brothers helping younger brothers, sisters helping younger sisters.

I would just love to have many brothers and sisters like that. I'm sure God would too. And think of Jesus, He's exactly like that.

That when you're going through a struggle, you can go to Him and say, Lord, I know you understand this, because you came like me. You were made like your brothers in all things. You were made like me in all things and you can understand what I'm going through right now.

I'm not trying to get an excuse for my failure, no. But you understand the struggle, Lord. It's not been easy.

You know, it's great. I mean, it's great to have that picture of John the Apostle leaning upon Jesus' breast. Beautiful picture.

That's how we're supposed to live all through life. You read in the Song of Solomon about, who is this that comes from the wilderness? It says, leaning upon His Beloved. Where is that verse? I'm getting old, I can't always find it.

But, 8 verse 5. OK, thank you. Chapter 8 verse 5, who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning on Her Beloved. You see how the bride comes forth from the wilderness? It's a beautiful picture of the bridegroom coming out of the wilderness, strong, mighty man, and the bride leaning.

And I love that, I love to think of Song of Solomon as a picture of Christ in the church. And I love to think of every passage in scripture where it speaks of husbands and wives as Christ in the church. You know, in Ephesians 5, it speaks about husband and wife.

But then He says, I'm not just speaking about husband and wife, I'm speaking about Christ in the church. You know that great passage in the Wives and Husbands, chapter 5, verse 22 to 33. But right at the end of it, He says, this is a great mystery, this relationship, but, verse 32, but I'm really speaking about Christ in the church.

So in other words, everything there refers to Christ in the church, for example. He loved me and gave Himself for me, verse 25, and He sanctifies me, cleanses me by the washing of water with the Word, and is absolutely determined, verse 27, to present me to Himself as His bride one day, in all my glory. Not His glory, my glory.

Having no spot, no wrinkle, or any such thing, but I'm going to be holy and blameless. Isn't that great, to look at that verse as something which is going to be true of me? That one day Jesus is going to present me without a spot or wrinkle. Great.

I have a few spots and wrinkles, quite a lot of spots and wrinkles right now, but one day I'm going to be without a single spot or wrinkle. You can examine me carefully in that day, and you won't find it anywhere in my behavior, in my conduct, in my speech, in my thoughts, in my attitudes, in my actions. It's going to be absolutely perfect.

Just like one day He cried out on the cross, it is finished. One day He'll say about me and you, it is finished. It's really going to be true.

Jesus is working on us like that, and that is our hope. He's long-suffering. He's not going to give up.

I praise the Lord for that. And in that connection, if I read also 1 Peter 3, in verse 7, we've always seen this verse in relation to husbands, how they should treat their wives. Right? OK, let's look at it another way now.

If there's one person who obeys that perfectly, who's that? It's Jesus Christ. He's our bridegroom and husband, and He obeys that perfectly. How does He treat me? He treats me in an understanding way.

Praise God. Men may not understand me, but He always, He understands a lot of things other people won't make allowance for. He makes an allowance for my life, and He knows that I'm a weaker vessel compared to Him.

And He grants me honor. Great. As a fellow heir with Him, of the grace of life.

And that's why His prayers are not hindered. He keeps treating me like that all the time, so He prays all the time and His prayers are always heard. So, it's great to see that Jesus liked that because He Himself was a man.

And in everything I face, He can say, Hey, I know that. I know what you're going through. A friend who sticks closer than a brother.

And turning back to Hebrews 5, He deals gently with me, Hebrews 5 verse 2. Because I'm ignorant and misguided. I don't believe I'm evil. I don't believe any of you sitting here today.

I think I know all of you. I don't think any of you are evil. You may be ignorant, you may be misguided, but you're not evil.

The worst person sitting here, I don't know who it is. I don't even want to guess. He's not evil.

But you may be ignorant. You may be misguided. And He deals gently with us.

I praise God for that. He deals gently with the ignorant and the misguided. Because He knows what it is.

He lived on earth surrounded by weakness, misunderstanding, trial, reproach, struggle, so many things. And during those days, He was so weak that it says here in verse 7 of chapter 5, Hebrews 5, 7. In the days of His flesh, He offered up prayers and supplication with loud crying and tears. Now, a strong man doesn't cry.

Right? Strong men don't cry. Only weak women cry. Strong men don't cry.

Jesus was a weak man. But the difference was, He never cried for anything concerning Himself. He shed no tears for His own griefs.

The trouble with a lot of people in the world is, they are shedding tears for their own griefs. Jesus never shed one tear for His own griefs. He had plenty of them.

He was a man of sorrows, but He never shed one tear for them. He shed tears for me. And He also prayed with tears that He might not sin.

That He might not displease God. So, we can say He shed tears for His Father and for me. Not for Himself.

And there He saw His weakness when it came to sin. When it came to temptation. Can you believe this? That Jesus felt weak when He was tempted? Because that's what it says in Hebrews 4.15. He can sympathize without weakness because He was tempted.

Meaning that in temptation He was weak. We get the idea that Jesus was very strong in temptation. No, He wasn't.

If He was strong, He would not have prayed. And even if He did pray, He may have prayed like we pray. Casual prayers.

Lord, keep me from that. No, He prayed with loud crying and tears. And that's why He often went out to the wilderness.

Because that's the only place He could pray with loud crying and tears. He prayed with loud crying and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death. He was weak.

It says in 1 Corinthians 13. 1 Corinthians in chapter 13 and verse 4. Jesus was crucified because of weakness. Yet He lives because of the power of God.

His entire life on earth was by the power of God. He was a weak person. Strengthened by an almighty God.

Filled with the Holy Spirit. Refusing to use His power as God. He lived on earth as a weak person.

He could have called 72,000 angels, but He didn't call them. He could have turned stones into bread, but He didn't do it. So many things He could have done.

They wanted to make Him a king. He could have been a king, but He didn't become a king. He was weak.

And that's why Paul said, I've learned the glory in my weakness. Because I've learned one thing from Jesus Christ. The weaker I am, the more dependent I am on God.

And the more God's almighty power can manifest itself through me. You know what true Christianity is? True Christianity is not a bunch of strong men and women trying to show Christ to the world. No.

It's a bunch of weak men and women who are so conscious of their weakness that they lean upon almighty God and seek for His power in prayer. And cry out to Him and say, God help me. I can't manage

this.

And cry out and cry out and cry out. That's how Jesus lived. It says, He frequently would slip away into the wilderness to pray.

And a weak man frequently slips away and says, God, cries out to God. Even if we don't have wildernesses close by where we can go and shout out loud. And most of our houses are so close to each other that if we start crying loud, some people wonder what's happening.

But we can still have a... I found we can have a cry in our heart without any sound coming from our mouth. You got that? And I think when Jesus was in places where there were lots of people, He wouldn't have made a noise and create a commotion. But there would have been cry in His heart which never came out of His mouth.

Loud crying in His heart. We can do that. You can develop the habit of crying in your heart without any sound coming from your mouth.

And there can be tears in your heart even though there are no tears in your eyes. A crying to God, God help me. And the assurance that He understands.

He can say to us, yeah, I know what you're going through because I've experienced it. That's our strength. I don't know, some of you may be going through some trial and you can feel sorry for yourself.

You don't have to feel sorry for yourself at all. God will never allow you to be tested beyond your ability. We look at struggles we have with our children, sicknesses in our children and other things where we have fears concerning our children, how it's going to be in the future.

These are all, I mean, signs of our weakness. Good. Let's turn to God and seek Him.

He will never, never let down His children. There's nothing He cannot do. There's no situation that He cannot save us from.

There's no problem He cannot solve. He's just waiting for us to acknowledge our weakness and cling to Him and lean upon our beloved and say, God, I can't make it without You. I just got to lean on You.

I got to tell You everything. I can't go through life without leaning on You. And the more we lean on Him and we feel His heartbeat, we listen to His heartbeat and we see how compassionate and long-suffering.

He understands our weakness. He understands our struggles. He knows we are a weaker vessel.

Like we said the other day, He recognizes we are made of dust. He doesn't treat us like a stainless steel vessel, bang us on the table. He keeps us gently like an earthen vessel.

The more we drink of that spirit and lean upon Him, you know what's going to happen? You know what's going to happen? We will become like the God we worship. This is Psalm 115, it says, those who worship idols become like them. We become like the God we worship.

What will happen is, over a period of time, your whole personality will change. And you'll become long-suffering with all the multitudes of ignorant and misguided people around you. And you'll be qualified for spiritual leadership.

You can be a spiritual leader. As a sister, as a brother. To all those people younger than you, whom you can lead to a godly life.

Because you are leaning on your beloved and listening to His heartbeat and experiencing something of His tremendous long-suffering with you. Do you want to see the glory of God? Like Moses did. Moses said, show me your glory.

God passes by and says, I am long-suffering. That's His glory. And we can taste of it, drink of it, more and more.

I really believe, we need it more and more and more and more and more and more. We need a drink of that spirit, like anything. And manifest it more and more in our lives to one another.

We are a bunch of hard people. Hard men, hard women. You know why? Because we are children of Adam.

And ever since he ate of that forbidden tree, he became a hard man. It's amazing how quickly hardness took over his life. He didn't even take a few seconds.

As soon as God comes, he accuses his wife. And even accuses God. Think of that.

What a hard man he had become. And that hardness is just accumulated through the generations. And it's come down to all of us.

And we are a bunch of hard people. That's what we are. Our flesh is hard, unyielding.

And the Lord says, I'll take away that hard heart from you and give you a soft one. That's His promise in the New Covenant. He'll write His laws upon my heart and mind.

That means He'll give me a soft heart. He'll make me long-suffering. And the more God's able to work that in us, the more He's able to give us a ministry to other people.

I know I've gone through years of this hardness and my whole life was so limited in a small circle. I could see only in a small circle. I was short-sighted.

My vision was small. And my ministry was also very, very limited. I wasn't qualified for leadership because I was hard.

The only one qualified for leadership is the one who can deal gently with the ignorant and the misguided. A few years ago, the Lord spoke to me through a chapter. It was a chapter with which the Lord called me forty years ago when I was seeking the Lord when I was in the Navy.

In May 1964, I was reading Isaiah 49. And the Lord called me out for His service from that. And... But even though I had read that chapter many times since that day when the Lord called me forty years ago, it was only a few years ago.

It was only... You know, it's just one of those amazing things how you can read Scripture, read Scripture, read Scripture and miss something. Miss it completely. What a difference it would have made if I had been gripped by this thirty years ago.

You folks may not have had to suffer so much with me in those early years. But I'm going to make up for it, don't worry. It says here in Isaiah 49 in verse 10, the last part, He who has compassion on them will lead them.

Great! That really gripped me just a few years ago. That it's the one who has compassion who can lead people. If you don't have compassion, you can't lead people, sorry.

Do you want to lead your children? Father, mother, have compassion on them. Do you want to lead your wife? Have compassion on her. Do you want to be a blessing to the teenagers, to the young people in the church? Have compassion on them.

Don't be hard on them. God is compassionate. Isn't He strict? Sure.

He scourges His children. But with compassion. We need to punish our children too.

Otherwise they'll go astray. So we got to do that to save them from hell. But with compassion.

Everything has to be done with compassion for leadership. He who has compassion on them will lead them and guide them to springs of water. We can't guide people to springs of water.

We just guide them to a barren desert if we don't have compassion. But when we have compassion, we can lead our children, our family members, people younger to us, to springs of water, to refreshing times. It's great.

It's God's will for us. So I pray that we learn to make allowance for one another's faults because of our love. Pursue this my brothers and sisters.

Pursue it. God is love and I love that the way John writes his letters in 1 John 4. I want you to see this. You see this is a man who has walked with God for 65 years.

He's seen the Corinthian church backslide, the Ephesian church backslide. He's seen the Laodicean church which started out so well backslide. He's seen so much of backsliding in Christians all around him.

All the apostles are dead. He's the only one all killed. Christians persecuted, killed.

All the apostles killed. And this man towards the end of his life, he writes his letter and he says, little children love one another. That's the greatest thing of all.

He says in chapter 4, verse 7, Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and he knows God. If you know God, you know how to love others. The one who does not love, he doesn't know God.

He doesn't know God at all. Because God is love. How can a person say, I know the Lord? If he can't love somebody.

If he can't love... I mean, it's easy to love somebody who is perfect. Do you have a difficulty loving Jesus? Anybody has a difficulty loving Jesus? No. Because he's perfect.

And the more perfect a person it is, the easier it is to love him as a human being. But God's love is seen in that he can love people who are not perfect. And the way to find out whether my love is human or divine is by seeing do I love people who are more perfect or can I love people who are imperfect? Can I love

people who are ignorant and misguided? The one who does not love, doesn't know God.

Yeah, beloved, verse 11 If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. Verse 16 We have come to know and believe the love which God has for us. That's something which we've been talking about this evening.

The long-suffering of God and aspect of His love. God is love and the one who abides in love abides in God. God abides in Him.

And this love is perfected in us. I'm more and more convinced that when we seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our life, we must seek to be filled with love and long-suffering. Because that is the characteristic of God.

And when we talk of the Spirit of God, it's this Spirit that He wants to communicate to us. And if we hunger and thirst for this, I believe God will give it to us. Amen.

Amen.

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