

KNOWING GOD

STUDY 4: GOD IS PATIENT AND FAITHFUL

"The patience of God is that excellency which causes him to sustain great injuries without immediately avenging himself."

A.W. Pink

Consider God's history of patience with us. Our God who is fully good, out of His great compassion, offered us mercy and grace at the cross. But, not just at the cross. Not only did Jesus, God's one and only Son, suffer unspeakable pain when He hung on that cross where you and I deserved to be, but His very arrival on earth was a point of suffering. For the perfect, spotless Lamb of God to come to take away the sins of the world meant that He chose to live AS a human WITH humans for over 30 years. Amazing, really.

And equally amazing is the reality of God's faithfulness. The Hebrew and the Greek word clusters around this word "faithful" occur in the Bible more than 1500 times. The adjective can be translated to faithful, trustworthy, believable; the noun forms can be translated to faith, trust, belief; and the verb forms can be translated to have faith in, trust in, believe in. These are words with which "people of faith" are very familiar. Maybe, sometimes, we are overly familiar with these terms and need to become reacquainted.

READ TOGETHER:

- **2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)** *"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."*
- **Romans 9:22-23 (ESV)** *"What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory,"*
- **Lamentations 3:22-23 (NIV):** *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*
- **Galatians 4:4-6 (NIV)** *"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"*

Patiently slow (2 Peter 3:9) God is not slow. Though it may seem that way to us, He is not slow in keeping His promises. Think about this for a moment. When we are believing God for some breakthrough in our lives, and we wait, sometimes impatiently, we might think God is slow. In reality, one of the few ways in which God IS slow is in His anger, not in His goodness. With His patience, He is withholding the consequences that humanity justly deserves. Generation after generation, from the Garden of Eden to the wickedness of the immediate offspring of Adam and Eve, to the wickedness of the whole earth in Genesis 6, to the rebellion of the nation of Israel in the wilderness and then again in the Promised Land, and then in exile, and then in rebuilding Jerusalem, and to the nation of Nineveh... God patiently offers mercy. He patiently withholds consequences. He patiently offers grace. God patiently forgives. Again.

DISCUSS: *In what ways do you see God's patience with you as you look back through the past month, year, decade? Share examples of God's long suffering for which you are grateful.*

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DIG DEEPER: Patience with a purpose (Romans 9:22-23) Stephen Charnock, an English Puritan from the 1600s, explains that God is patient BECAUSE He is all powerful. This is the major reason we fail with our own patience. As humans, when it comes to our patience, we have very limited power over it. In other words, we are unable to restrain our impatience. Consider this – God is patient because His power and love and wisdom are all working together to accomplish His purposes on the earth. *Discuss the imagery at work in these verses — He waits for those who deserve death to come to their senses, repent and receive His mercy. What a beautiful picture – those who were vessels, containers, vases deserving wrath are transformed into vases containing God’s mercy. How does this imagery change the way you view yourself and your purpose on earth?*

Forever faithful (Lamentations 3:22-23) This verse links some thoughts in our previous study on God’s compassion and His loyal love, hesed, with related thoughts found in this word “faithful”. The idea conveyed with this Hebrew word is one of complete integrity, dependability, consistency. When used with hesed, it reinforces the loyal, covenantal love of God for humanity by reminding us that this loyal love is steadfast and consistently good. In the midst of His lament, Jeremiah reminds himself that the only reason the unfaithful people of God are not consumed is that, even while they are UNfaithful, God remains faithful. What a beautiful picture is painted across the sky, here. In a setting that deserves destruction, it is a new morning. God’s compassions never fail. They never run empty. With every sunrise, it’s as though God offers a new dose of compassion. That is the beauty of God’s faithfulness. He is fully trustworthy.

DISCUSS: *Discuss what is meant by God’s compassions being new every morning. Consider the combination of God’s attributes mentioned here — love, compassion, faithfulness. What impact does that trio of characteristics have on you? What impact COULD it have on you in the following days if you thought of it at every sunrise?*

Faithful in the timing (Galatians 4:4-6) There is something so comforting about the old-English phrase “in the fullness of time”. When the perfect time, the appointed time, the set time arrived – God acted. Jesus was born into the perfect setting, politically and spiritually and historically, to redeem humanity. From our flawed perspective, there was nothing about a weary Mary and Joseph, a birth in a stable, under a threatening Roman governance... that seems perfect. But it was perfect for the purposes of God.

DISCUSS: *In what ways does picturing God, waiting for the perfect time, help you in your own waiting? Check out a similar passage in the prophets, in Isaiah 60:22, “I am the Lord; in its time I will do this swiftly.” How is your waiting easier to handle when you know this truth — God is faithful and His timing is trustworthy?*

RESOURCES:

- **Book:** A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*
- **Book:** Sharon Kohring, *Oh My God! Let Me Tell You About Him: A journey through the characteristics of God*
- **Book:** JI Packer, *Knowing God*
- **Book:** AW Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*