

Longsuffering: The Fruit of the Spirit

James 5:7-11

November 17, 2019

Years ago, a newly married young woman got into a car accident. She suffered a severe brain injury. After weeks in a coma, she gradually regained consciousness. However, it soon became apparent that her recent memories had been erased. She recognized her parents and her siblings. She could remember the things that happened a long time ago.

But when her new husband came to see her, she could not recognize him. She had no idea who he was. She had no memory of ever meeting, let alone marrying him. When he came close to her, she rebuffed him. It was impossible for him to get close to her.

After many days of her family convincing her that she really loved him and married him, she slowly accepted the fact that she had married him, but it was clear that she knew nothing about him and she was very uncomfortable with the fact that she married him.

It was difficult especially for the husband. He did not know how to help her remember things, but he remained faithful to her. He cared for her in her convalescence. He provided for all her needs. He did everything for her, and eventually, he took her home to the place she had decorated in her own unique style. But to her, everything was unfamiliar.

Life was difficult for them. They had to get acquainted all over again. She had to learn a lot of things as if it were for the first time. Intimacy was almost non-existent. Counseling helped them get through some of the roughest times, but her husband remained faithful to her and was very patient in the relationship despite the difficulties and hardships he had to endure.¹

The Bible describes this kind of endurance as “patience” and “long-suffering.” In 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul gives the list of the attributes of love, the very first thing he mentions is patience. He says, “Love is patient, love is kind.” That is how he begins. When he says, “Love is patient,” he uses the term

¹ <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/sabbath-school/2010/01/24/meaning-patience>

“*makrothumia*.” “*Makrothumia*” would be the appropriate word to describe the husband’s endurance, the husband who cares for wife who does not remember him.

“*Makrothumia*” is often translated as “patience”, “long-suffering”, or “endurance” in the Bible. *Makrothumia* is a compound of two words: *makro*, which means large or long; and *thumia*, which means temper. So, *makrothumia* literally means long-temper. In other words, a patient person can take a lot of provocation before he reacts.

In Galatian 5:22-23, Paul lists the qualities of the Fruit of the Spirit. In that list, he says one of the qualities of the Fruit of the Spirit is *makrothumia*. In our pew Bible it is translated as “patience”, and in some translations, as “long-suffering.” What Paul is saying is that the person, who is obedient to the Lord, develops the character of patience, the character of long-suffering.

In our text this morning, James says, “Be patient and stand firm, because the coming of the Lord is near.”²

This patience (*makrothumia*) that both Paul and James talk about is something very different from passively and quietly waiting for something to happen. James is not saying that we should sit down and wait for the Lord’s return. That is not what he is saying. What James is saying is that we need to have persistence in doing what is good and what is right until the day we meet the Lord face to face.

Like the husband who took care of his wife, whether she remembered him or not, we should also remain faithful in the work that we do.

To illustrate this kind of patience, James gives the example of Job. Job is probably the best example of long-suffering. Job lost all his possessions, his children, his health, his wife’s support, but he endured all of these patiently. When his wife told him to “Curse God and die,” Job responded, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?”³

Job knew God had control over his life, his situation, and his suffering. He had an unwavering faith in God. He says, “Though he (God) slay me, yet will I hope in him.”⁴ His faith in God was not shaken at all. His heart was always

² James 5:8.

³ Job 2:9-10.

⁴ Job 13:15.

focused on God. That is what *makrothumia* is. That is what patience is, the patience the Bible talks about.

Another example James gives is of God's prophets. He says, "As an example of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Among the prophets, we can think of Jeremiah as a good example.

Jeremiah prophesied to the nation of Judah for 40 years, but no one listened. He was persistent in delivering the message. Much of his message was the charges against the nation of Judah and its people. His message was not a pleasant one. It was a warning. It was a call to repentance.

His message not only included the charges against the nation of Judah. Also, it was a prediction of Judah's destruction and the deportation of its people, but no one paid attention to him. The people of Judah harshly criticized, despised, and abused him.

Yet, Jeremiah remained faithful. He endured all the criticisms. He endured all the hardships. That is "*makrothumia*." That is what the patience and long-suffering is. James says we ought to have such character, such quality.

Paul says patience is the result of being obedient to God. It is a characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit.

I will give you an example of such patience and long-suffering.

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was a British politician. In the late 1700s, English slave traders raided the African coast on the Gulf of Guinea, captured between 35,000 and 50,000 Africans a year, and sold them into slavery. It was a profitable business. Many wealthy and powerful people had become dependent upon these slaves. They became so dependent that it was almost impossible to live without them. No one dared to do anything about it.

But there was a small group of people who saw evilness of slavery. One of them was William Wilberforce. He was elected to the Parliament in 1780, and in 1786, he had a spiritual rebirth. He dedicated his life to the Lord. And as a politician he wanted to do what God wanted him to do. He worked on many issues related to societal morality and the issue of poverty, but more than anything, he worked on the issue of slavery. He wanted to abolish slavery in the entire British Empire.

So, he pushed the British Parliament to outlaw slavery, but he faced powerful forces of slave owners and slave traders. He lobbied and introduced bills. Each time he would be laughed at, shouted down, and voted down. Every time he submitted the bill, it was defeated. In 1791, 92, 93, 97, 98, 99, 1804, and 1805, every time he submitted the bill related to slavery, and every time it was defeated. But he remained persistent.

In 1833, William Wilberforce died, but three days before he died, he learned on his death bed that British Parliament finally signed into law the bill called Slavery Abolition Act, which ended slavery throughout the entire British Empire. That was 30 years prior to American Emancipation Proclamation. Isn't that something? Do you know how long it took for William Wilberforce to make that happen in his Parliament? Fifty years!⁵ Fifty years of long-suffering, fifty years of patience, fifty years of unwavering persistence. That is "*makrothumia*."

Long-suffering is not a passive resignation that does not do anything to solve a problem. Long-suffering is a consistent and persistent effort to solve a problem while trusting that God is helping you. This requires endurance and patience.

Being obedient to the Lord requires persistence, endurance, and patience. James says, "Be patient, be persistent until the coming of the Lord."

The quality of our faith must have two things: obedience and trust. When we obey the Lord and trust him, we will certainly have the strength to endure hardships and long-sufferings.

⁵ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/activists/william-wilberforce.html>