

## **The Patience of God**

Psalm 145

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A Praise of David.

I extol You, my God, O King, and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness and shall sing of Your righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, and Your saints shall bless You. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom and talk of Your power, to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord upholds all who fall and raises up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and all flesh shall bless His holy name forever and ever.

Let's bow for prayer.

Father, we look to You expectantly to share with us the truths of Your word. I pray that You give us keen ears to understand the truth of patience. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This morning I'll be preaching on patience as it is described in the Bible. And today's message will come from one verse, and that is verse 8. But before we get there, I shall give you the greater context of the psalm to help

us understand the nature of David's words that characterize his theology here. As you might be aware from reading the subheading, the psalm is a psalm of David. It's actually the last of David's psalms. This psalm was written as a Jewish acrostic piece, which means that each letter of the Hebrew alphabet in sequential order begins each verse of praise. The book of Psalms has a total of nine acrostic psalms, and of the nine, five of them are written by David. When you think about the acrostic format David uses, you begin to wonder at his giftedness in the arts and in music. He wasn't merely a shepherd boy and a king. He was also a musician and an artist of sorts. The expression of his faith is well articulated through his music, and it provides a platform of basic theology by which we can grow upon and use as a template for worship. According to Jewish practice, this psalm was recited three times a day, twice in the morning and once in the evening. What you would have noticed as we read through it was the rich theological worship and reverence David intricately weaves with his words, which express adoration for God because of His marvelous works and His awesome nature.

What is interesting to note about this psalm is the diverse use of verbs, words which David employs, words of action. If you look at verse one, it says, "We'll extol, we'll bless." Verse two, "we'll bless, we'll praise." Verse four, "shall praise, shall declare." Verse five, "we'll meditate." Verse six, "shall speak, we'll declare." Verse seven, "shall utter, shall sing." David says, "I will extol You," which means I will lift You up and worship enthusiastically. He says, "I will bless You, I will praise You, I will declare You, I will meditate upon You, I will sing about You." This is a mark of a man who has a deep relationship with God. It shows his heart of gratitude because only from a place of thankfulness can one truly act in this way, where the object of worship is Yahweh.

Of Yahweh, what are the focal areas of worship where David attributes praise? Well, let's look. Verse one, "His name, I will praise His name." Verse two, "His greatness." Verse three, "His mighty works." Verse five, "His glorious splendor." Verse six, "His awesome acts and greatness." Verse seven, "His great goodness and righteousness." In the first seven verses are the qualities noted by David that are worthy of adoration and praise. Here David is saying that these things in particular have caused such a stir in my soul that it has made me to sing of His majesty. These are the things that cause a ceaseless spring of praise found deep within my soul. When we pray and reflect on God, what are some of the things that cause you to spring with utmost joy, in which the God you reverence becomes a centerpiece of worship on the throne of your heart? What are the attributes of God that you think about mostly? Is it the mighty work of salvation when God pulled you out of the miry clay of sin and destruction and set you anew on higher ground with a heart of flesh in new desires? Is it that the all-wise

God and counselor freely bestows wisdom, which informs your every decision before you take action? Perhaps the spring of joy comes from the fact that God is miraculous and answers our prayers, going above and beyond what we could ever think or ask. These are things that cause you to leap for praise, to leap for joy.

Two weeks ago, at Tuesday Night Bible study, we studied mystery as it pertains to God. Perhaps this is something that may have caused you to see God in a new light because what we cannot comprehend about God does in fact put Him on a higher level because He is divine, beyond human reason and human expectations. For instance, in the book we are going through, the term "mystery" is used in the sense of not only God revealing what was hidden, but that we lack the capacity to properly understand theological concepts, and sometimes our words fall short, or they cannot fully encapsulate the true meaning and person of God. You can look at mystery in this way: that our language can be seen as sometimes limited in trying to fully explain God. Romans 8:26 says, "Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses, for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." In times of severe distress and weakness, we don't even know what to say; we don't even know what to pray for or how to pray. Sometimes we can't even put into words what we're feeling or what we're going through, but the Holy Spirit knows exactly what is wrong. He knows exactly how to intercede for us. One theologian put it this way: "The Spirit does our praying in us and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs and our aching groans." Sometimes words cannot fully account for our troubles. Even more so, how can words fully describe God?

When J.I. Packer ends a section of mystery which we studied, he says we should never forget that in any case, theology is for doxology; that doxology is glorying in God. The truest form of expression of trust in a great God will always be worship, and it will always be proper worship to the praise of God for being far greater than we can know. To sum up what I've said so far, the reasons for our worship are as clear as day. When we consider what God has done for us, like saving us from death and giving us new life, and sometimes our worship is informed by our inability to understand God. It's like saying, "God, Your ways are higher than my ways. Lord, Your thoughts are higher than my thoughts." God is far too great to be understood by my finite and fallible mind, and because He is too great and beyond my intellect, I worship Him, I glory in Him, I reverence Him.

When we consider Psalm 145 in its entirety, David's theology of worship is multifaceted. There is so much about God that you could glean from this text. There are so many angles in which you could approach this text in seeking to understand the character of God. The breadth of this

text is deep, and the content is rich. But I'd like to be more acute with one specific attribute of God, which can sometimes travel under the radar. Sometimes we can forget that God is a patient God. We know that God is gracious, we know that God is compassionate, we know that God is merciful, but all these things stem from the fact that God is patient with us. God's grace, God's compassion, God's mercy are all underpinned by God's patience. Think of it as cogs in a machine, where the turning of one cog directly influences the turning operation of another cog or gears. If I could draw your attention to verse 8, it says, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy." What I specifically want to focus on is the phrase "slow to anger."

In the Bible, the phrase "slow to anger" is synonymous with the word patience. "Slow to anger" carries the same idea as forbearance, long-suffering, which are all connected with the idea of patience. In terms of defining patience, it is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious. It is not simply passively waiting, but it is to endure suffering without retaliation. When Jesus was put before the high priest before His crucifixion, where He was unjustly accused, spat upon, and physically assaulted, Jesus remained composed and silent among His persecutors. It wasn't that He receded in manliness or that He didn't know the words to say, but Jesus was displaying patience with a rebellious people. Isaiah 53:7 says, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." If there's a grain of truth you could collect from this verse, it's the fact that had Jesus not been patient, the complete destruction of His persecutors, though justified, would have occurred. Had God removed His patience, the plan of salvation would not gain any traction. In Matthew 26:53, Jesus said to Peter in Gethsemane, "Should I wish it, I could call on twelve legions of angels to deliver me." "I don't need your sword, Peter. I don't need an army. I don't need soldiers. I don't need your sword." Do you know how many angels constitute twelve plus legions? Seventy-two thousand angels. We already know the damage one angel can do. In 2 Samuel, we read one angel destroying over seventy thousand men as judgment for David numbering the people. In 2 Kings 19:35, we read about one angel killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers camped outside Jerusalem. If one angel could destroy thousands upon thousands, what do you think 72,000 angels could do? What do you think they could do to a city, to a nation, to the world? This is my own personal belief I'm about to express here, so don't take it as gospel, but I don't believe Jesus would have called 72,000 angels simply to provide an entourage of deliverance. Now, I'm convinced that had He called those angels, we would be finished. I believe He would have cleansed Jerusalem and the world. And He'd be right in doing it. But God's patience with us shines through. His grace, His compassion, and His mercy upon a broken

people like us continue to shine through.

When you look at our broken sin-cursed world, you wonder why a holy God continues to interact with us. There are people in the world today who mock and scorn God's patience directly and indirectly. 1 Peter 3 tells us that scoffers mock the second coming of Christ because of their lust and ignorance. They say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." Nothing has changed. Have you ever had people come up to you and say, "If your God is real, why doesn't He show Himself?" Have you ever had people come up to you and say, "If God is real, why doesn't He stop suffering?" Or, "If your God is real, why hasn't He done this or that?" And these are, for some, genuine questions. These are real questions that people ask. But on the other hand, these questions are tainted by arrogance because scorners weaponize these questions to disprove God and make a mockery of His plans. God does not operate on our calendar. God is outside of time. God does not operate on our moral convenience. We can't contain Him by our worldly wisdom. His plans are perfect, though we lack understanding and wisdom to comprehend Him.

When you read the Psalms of Asaph, like Psalm 73, he writes about the prosperity of the wicked against the afflictions of the righteous because he can't seem to reconcile this common injustice. Asaph wrestles with the reality that wicked people seem to thrive in the world without repercussion, so it seems, while the righteous seem to suffer. But then Asaph wrests his faith in the hope that all things will work out, that the just will be delivered, and that the wicked will be punished. One of the key takeaways, if you've ever read the Psalms of Asaph, is this: If you don't have a long-term view of hope, your faith will falter. If you base your faith on a calendar, you will lose hope. Our hope is a patient hope, guarded by a patient God. Our hope is a patient hope, guarded by a patient God. How many times have people predicted the second coming of Christ with set dates, yet nothing happened? Imagine what that does to a person's faith if it were to run on a calendar. When you think about the prosperity of the wicked, and perhaps where you've come from, you can only reflect on God's grace and patience with you and with others. It's almost as if God gives people a long rope before He pulls them in.

With God's patience, God's grace is magnified. If God is willing to practice forbearance with us, we must also practice a long obedience in the same direction, a steadfastness and patient endurance that builds a sturdy faith. We must accept the long-end view, where we trust God to avenge the righteous, and that the wicked will receive their due reward. It is the nature of faith to see and understand things with a patient heart. Only then can we truly thrive in faith and grow.

We see vivid examples of patience all throughout the Bible. Consider Moses as one example. He spent 40 years in the wilderness with the Israelites, a people who constantly complained and murmured against God. His brother Aaron and sister Miriam speak against Moses, and Miriam ends up diseased with leprosy, to which Moses prays for her healing. The people complain about food and drink, and Moses beseeches God to provide more variety and abundance. God threatens to destroy the Israelites in the wilderness and start again by making a nation from the seed of Moses. Yet Moses doesn't even entertain a thought and swiftly intercedes for the Israelites to be saved. Time and again, both God and Moses display phenomenal patience with a rebellious and difficult people.

Another example, Abraham and Sarah. They waited 25 years from the time God promised them a child to when Isaac was born—25 years of patiently waiting, enduring, and trusting. Abraham was 75 when God promised him a seed, and it was fulfilled when he turned 100. Imagine for a moment you're 100 years old, your body is as good as dead, and your wife is about 90, and her body is the same, her womb is shut. Do you really think they could have a baby? Do you really think they could conceive? When you think about the nature of reproduction, do you think that this could happen? Against all logical expectations, Abraham believed the God of miracles. Romans 4:19 says of Abraham, "And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." The strength of Abraham's faith lay in his patient anticipation for God to work a miracle in dead flesh. The faith of Abraham endured with patience. For 25 years, he did not waver in unbelief. He remained steadfast with patient hope.

From the time God promised redemption in Genesis 3 to the time of Jesus was about 4000 years. Seventy-six generations from Adam to Jesus, across 4000 years. If there's anything you can take away from this, it's the fact that God is not in a rush. God is not in a rush. God's patience must never be shaped by our impatience. God's patience must never be shaped by our impatience. Let me put things in perspective. It takes divine patience for God to settle on earth among sinners who blaspheme His name and break His laws daily. God's incredible patience is most clear in the person of Jesus. John Piper says, "Jesus' ministry was one of patience, for to be with us was to bear us." He lived here as light among darkness, sinless among sinners, and straight among the crooked. Understanding God's slowness to anger is most clearly seen in the ministry of Jesus. Words cannot fully describe the grace and power of this truth, to have the perfect God

physically dwell among imperfect human beings.

So then, what does patience lead to? What does the patience of God lead to? Well, if we go back to Psalm 145, verse 8 is lodged between two verses which highlight the goodness of God. Verse 7 refers to God's great goodness, and verse 9 articulates, "The Lord is good to all." You might ask about the significance of this. Well, if we look at Romans 2:4, God's goodness is tied together with forbearance and long-suffering, which are two other biblical terms for patience. The verse says, "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Forbearance means patient self-control and restraint, and long-suffering means long-tempered, someone who shows restraint when stirred to anger or someone who endures suffering without retaliation. Paul is saying here that God's goodness and patience actually lead you to repentance. Not only are you gifted with repentance, but your salvation as a whole is dependent on God's patience, God's goodness, God's forbearance, and long-suffering.

Now that we have some idea what patience is and what comes of it, what are some of the things we should not do when it comes to God's patience? Well, first of all, we must not despise it. I reiterate Romans 2:4 that says there is a danger in despising God's goodness, mercy, and long-suffering. If you should fall into the trap of despising God, then you risk storing up wrath and judgment. Let us not take for granted the marvelous grace He has shown on us, but live to obey in all areas of our lives. Learn to live with gratitude, as David did. We must reflect daily on the mercies of God and offer praise and adoration, as David did. Proverbs 25:15 says, "By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, and a gentle tongue breaks a bone." To display enduring patience and restraint is enough to persuade people in the highest forms of government or office. Here, the scripture identifies the power of one to persuade a ruler, a king, an emperor, someone in office, through patience and forbearance. The idea of this verse carries the sense that one should not speak or babble for too long or say too much because your ability to restrain yourself is a great tool of persuasion. Think of the meekness, the meekest man Moses, who was able to persuade God not to destroy the Israelites in the wilderness. See, the breaking of a bone by a gentle tongue referred to here is that a gentle tongue or a soft answer is firmly able to disarm the strongest or deepest resistance to an idea. It is able to quell and persuade one from hard and destructive emotions. We must not despise God's patient character, nor should we underestimate the power of patience in our relationships. Do not despise God's patience, but embrace it.

Secondly, we must not delay in responding to God's display of patience and goodness. In light of Asaph's lament, patience does not mean the abdica-

tion of justice and judgment, but rather it showcases God's grace before justice and judgment are executed. Before salvation, you experience the salvific grace of God, apart from common grace that God shows upon all people. God's patient and gracious character has allowed time for you to be converted from sin and death to life everlasting. To delay is to rob yourself of freedom and liberty in Christ.

And thirdly, we must not mistake God's patience for inability or slackness in judgment. God will accomplish His plans in His own time, not ours. Just because God isn't doing what we want when we want, that doesn't mean God is unable or that God is slack. Rather, it may not be God's will. Some people confuse God's patience with slackness or inactivity, saying God isn't proactive in the world today, and we mustn't fall into that trap that God is distant from us, He's not working in us or in the world. The Bible says in Nahum 1:3, it says that the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all quit the wicked. The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. You see, God's tolerance cannot be measured by human numbers. It is beyond the horizon of man's understanding.

So how then are we to view patience here and now? How are we to apply the truth of God's slowness to anger in our lives? Well, Colossians chapter 3, verses 12 to 13 says, "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." Because we are recipients of God's holiness and love, we are to embrace and put on. We are to dress ourselves with not only mercy and kindness and humility, but with long-suffering. We are to dress ourselves with patience, with forgiveness. The same idea here is echoed in Galatians when Paul described the fruit of the Spirit, one of which is long-suffering. The normal Christian life is a life exercising patience.

Now I know it's not easy at times to practice patience. Indeed, many opportunities we found ourselves in have wildly exposed our shortcomings when we may have lacked the grace and patience to bear difficult people. We come across many situations in life that require us to exercise patience beyond what we think we're capable of. How many times have we exerted frustration in Sydney traffic? It can be a horrible commute in and about Sydney, and just sitting in the car in peak hour traffic is painfully vexing, especially when you're time conscious and have places to be. How many times have we fallen short in the workplace with another colleague? There may be a particular person you might consider a thorn in the flesh, someone who may push all your buttons and bring out the worst in you. Thankfully, when we read about how Jesus dealt with people, we see a blueprint in how we must conduct ourselves with others, especially in frustrating circumstances. The Bible describes this example through Jesus in this way:



"A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench." A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench. This speaks into the gentle, caring nature of Christ as King above all, and yet He remained patient, compassionate, and merciful towards humanity. We as humans can easily be angered, yet Christ patiently dwelt with vexing souls on a day-to-day basis throughout His ministry. Looking to Jesus empowers us by His love and grace to be as He is and live as He did. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can minister to the hardest of hearts, to the harshest of characters.

So what do we do when we are thrust into these hard situations that require patience, whether at home, or at work, or in a car, or in our relationships? Well, firstly, we must see it as a test and not temptation to sin. Must see it as a test. The main aim of the test is to prove your mettle and increase your growth, increase your faith. As Christians, we face many tests, and these are simple ways in which God opens our eyes to see where we triumph and where we lack, where we fall short. These tests are formative. They educate us in where we need to improve. Being patient or slow to anger is but one of many tests. James says, "Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces what? Patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

A test is not a bad thing. Tests are not created to embarrass you. A test is there to measure your growth. A test is a gauging instrument God uses to allow you to see how your faith measures up. Secondly, we must use the hard situations as opportunities to glorify God. Sometimes in the heat of the moment, we don't think about the glory of God or how God will perceive our actions. We act from impulse and from the immediate emotional frustration we feel. Only after, we feel regret. To be God-conscious is to have God in sight and God in mind. The natural outworking of God's character is only possible through obedience in the Holy Spirit. When you obey the Holy Spirit, you live the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The love, the joy, the peace, the long-suffering will all come natural. Every interaction you have must reflect the character of God. One person put it this way: to lose patience is to lose the battle. To lose patience is to lose the battle.

So there's a challenge for us, that we must not lose patience, especially in the hardest circumstances. Thirdly, when we are thrust into these difficult situations, we must learn to listen before we act. We must learn to listen before we act. Be a good listener. James urges us in chapter 1, verse 19, it says, "Slow to speak, slow to wrath, slow to anger. For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." There are two types of listeners in the world. There are those who just hear noises and words, and the second group of listeners are called active listeners. Those who

listen with intent, those who listen to understand, those who listen within context. We need to be like the second group of listeners. We need to be active listeners. If everybody practiced active listening, it would alleviate misunderstandings as well as being misunderstood, which fuel frustration and anger and demise. To be an active listener is to be a patient person who seeks to understand every situation within its scope. Jesus was an active listener, even with His critics. He never cut them off, but He showed how wrong they were by understanding their motives and answering their questions. It starts by listening to the Holy Spirit, listening to godly counsel, listening to the Word of God. Only then can we truly develop an understanding, patient heart to deal with our own critics, however unfair or unjust the criticisms may be.

So let me encourage you with this truth as I close: He who masters patience masters everything. He who masters patience masters everything. This was a quote by an English politician from the 17th century who was quite familiar and often thrust into the woes of political party wars and party struggles. We need patience in our lives because it plays a key role in how we exemplify Christ to a dying world. We must not show patience individually in our own personal lives, but as a church, as a collective whole. We need to bear one another with patience, with forbearance, long-suffering. Let us not fall short in failing to do what God has called us to do, but be patient. Wait on the Lord. In due time, the author of patience, our great God, will deliver us according to His perfect plan and in His perfect timing.

Let's bow for prayer.