

The Goal of Longsuffering

by Steve Klein

A housewife sits alone in the kitchen late at night. Her husband comes in after midnight. Drunk again. He is sour and abusive. It upsets her to see him this way. Her hope and prayer is that he can get help, turn his life around, and be the good man she knows he can be. In the morning she'll be up early to fix his coffee -- strong and black. And maybe she'll plead quietly with him to attend an AA meeting. Or maybe she'll just sit in silence and weep.

A parent is at the end of his rope. His teenager has broken curfew again. So many nights, waiting up late, wondering if this could be the night an automobile accident occurs, or the night his child falls in with evil companions, or the night fornication is committed. Wondering where the child could be. Then, the child comes in. Maybe there's a quiet talk about the importance of getting home on time. Maybe there are heated words, lame excuses, revoked privileges and another sleepless night for all.

Why does the housewife put up with it? Why doesn't the parent just take away the keys permanently!?! What motivates their longsuffering? Is it not love for the one who is doing wrong and hope that the person will change?

In 2 Peter 2:3, we learn that *"The Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* God is longsuffering toward us, not because He is "overlooking" our sins and shortcomings, but because He wants us to repent -- to change our minds and our lives! God's forbearance and longsuffering are designed to *"lead to repentance"* (Romans 2:4). When we continue in sin, we are showing great disrespect for God's goodness.

Like God, Christians are to be longsuffering (Colossians 3:12; Ephesians 4:2), but few of us probably have a very clear idea about what longsuffering is and why we should practice it. Longsuffering is not overlooking sin and error or pretending that they don't exist. It does not involve failure to rebuke and reprove sin, for these things are to be done *"with all longsuffering"* (2 Timothy 4:2). Nor is longsuffering some kind of Chinese water torture that God has devised to see how much pain His children are willing to endure for no good reason. Longsuffering has a goal, a purpose. The reason we show longsuffering to others is the same reason God shows it to us -- We are patient in dealing with the sins and faults of others because we love them and we want them to change for the better.

Even when we know what longsuffering is and why we are to show it, it is seldom easy to do so. Paul prayed that the Colossians would be *"strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy"* (Colossians 1:11). Indeed, we all need to pray for God's strength that we might be longsuffering with others, in the home, on the job, at school, at play, and in the church.

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