

*Nine*  
F R U I T S  
*of the*  
S P I R I T

A Bible Study on Developing Christian Character

*Patience*

R o b e r t   S t r a n d



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## Contents

	<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>5</i>
	<i>The Fruit of the Spirit Is . . . Patience .....</i>	<i>7</i>
	<i>The Relationship between Patience and Forgiveness.....</i>	<i>11</i>
	<i>Patience in Action.....</i>	<i>16</i>
	<i>Patience and Some Rules for Holy Living .....</i>	<i>22</i>
	<i>Patience, Suffering, and Perseverance.....</i>	<i>29</i>
	<i>Patience unto the Very End.....</i>	<i>34</i>
	<i>In Summary .....</i>	<i>41</i>
	<i>One More Time .....</i>	<i>44</i>

## *Introduction*

There is an ancient story out of the Middle East which tells of three merchants crossing the desert. They were traveling at night in the darkness to avoid the heat of the day. As they were crossing over a dry creek bed, a loud attention-demanding voice out of the darkness commanded them to stop. They were then ordered to get down off their camels, stoop down and pick up pebbles from the creek bed, and put them into their pockets.

Immediately after doing as they had been commanded, they were then told to leave that place and continue until dawn before they stopped to set up camp. This mysterious voice told them that in the morning they would be both sad and happy. Understandably shaken, they obeyed the voice and traveled on through the rest of the night without stopping. When morning dawned, these three merchants anxiously looked into their pockets. Instead of finding the pebbles as expected, there were precious jewels! And, they were both happy and sad. Happy that they had picked up some of the pebbles, but sad because they hadn't gathered more when they had the opportunity.

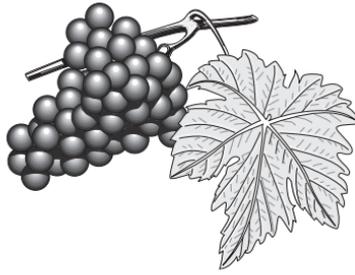
This fable expresses how many of us feel about the treasures of God's Word. There is coming a day when we will be thrilled because we have absorbed as much as we have, but sad because we had not gleaned much more. Jewels are best shown off when held up to a bright light and slowly turned so that each polished facet can catch and reflect the light. Each of these nine jewels of character will

be examined in the light of God's Word and how best to allow them to be developed in the individual life. That is how I feel about the following three verses from Paul's writings which challenge us with what their Christian character or personality should look like. Jesus Christ has boiled down a Christian's responsibility to two succinct commands: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and body, and love your neighbor like yourself. Likewise, Paul the apostle has captured for us the Christian personality in nine traits:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-25).

At the very beginning of this study, I must point out a subtle, yet obvious, distinction. The "fruit" of the Spirit is a composite description of what the Christian lifestyle and character traits are all about — an unbroken whole. We can't pick only the fruit we like.

Unlocked in these nine portraits are the riches of a Christ-centered personality. The thrill of the search is ahead of us!



# Patience

*MAKROTHUMIA*, (Greek)  
pronounced mak-roth-oo-meh'-ah,  
meaning: forbearance,  
long-enduring, fortitude,  
long-suffering, and patience.

*THE FRUIT OF THE  
SPIRIT IS . . . PATIENCE*



Have you ever exclaimed or prayed: “Lord, I want patience and I want it right now!”? What we have failed to recognize is that the Lord has been patiently waiting to give us patience long before we even thought of asking for it. God doesn’t have to try to be patient — He is! I’m so thankful that He is patient with us through all of our ups and downs, our ins and outs. Of all of the fruit of the Spirit, it’s easier to joke about patience than it is to become a patient person.

Before we get too far into this study, I must make a confession. I am not an expert on this subject. I’m still

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learning. It's still a process over which there is a lot of struggle going on. Patience is something I have to continually keep working on. Too often there is a churning going on inside. So if you understand this, perhaps we will be fellow learners, fellow travelers. All of us are still in search of more patience, especially how to develop a harvest of fruit called patience. The benefits of developing patience are more than worth the process and pain. So fellow Christian . . . let's embark on this study together.

When dealing with the subject at hand . . . have you learned of the Chinese bamboo tree? The Chinese plant the seed; water and fertilize it, but the first year nothing happens. The second year they water and fertilize it, and still nothing happens. No sign of life bursting through the earth. The third and fourth year they

water and fertilize it . . . and sometime during the course of the fifth year, in a period of about six weeks, this bamboo tree grows to a height of approximately 90 feet!

The question is: Did it grow 90 feet in six weeks or did it grow 90 feet in five years? The obvious answer is that it took all of the five years because without the nurture and care of the preceding period of time, there would be no tree.

Now, another question: When does a person develop patience? At the point of the new birth? How long does it take to cultivate this fruit to maturity? What does it take to make the process happen?

The special application of this quality of character is most often exhibited in our dealing with other people — relationships. Perhaps it's easier to approach this from the negative side. Lack of patience can poison relationships and too often ruins what would otherwise be wonderful and maybe even brilliant personalities. We understand the opposite of patience is temper, shortness with other folk, and very destructive to long-lasting relationships.

When dealing with patience, we all must acknowledge it is the little things that seem to drive us to despair. The enemy of our souls doesn't often concentrate on the big battles but continuously pounds away at the little things. Because we are prepared to handle the big things, we fail to recognize the continued erosion going on. The unknown poet of the following has captured our threat and dilemma:

I thought, if defeat came at all,  
It would be in a big, bold  
Definite joust  
With a cause or a name,  
And it came.

I had not thought the daily skirmish  
With a few details, worthwhile;  
And so I turned my back upon them  
Year on year; until one day  
A million minutias blanketed together  
Rose up and overwhelmed me.

Oh, how elusive patience can become. And just think of all the little enemies we deal with on a daily basis that do all within their power to destroy any vestige of patience we might have or have attempted to cultivate. In the natural . . . the cultivation of the fruit of patience is well nigh impossible. How do I know that? Because I have attempted it without the help of the Spirit at work within. We are so vulnerable to these little foxes that are spoiling the vines. But do not despair completely! There is hope! Real hope! It's found in the Word of God. So let's begin. . . .

When Paul writes about this, the word “long-suffering” may have been more appropriate in his case. It could best have been defined as “endurance” in all situations.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: BEARING FRUIT in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that YOU may have great endurance and PATIENCE (Col. 1:10–11).

Phillips Brooks has captured the essence of Paul's challenge to his readers with these words: “Do not pray for easy lives; pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks.

Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle, but you shall be a miracle. Every day you shall wonder at yourself, at the richness of life which has come to you by the grace of God.”

*THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN  
PATIENCE AND  
FORGIVENESS*



We have already alluded to the importance of patience in relationships. The following study brings it into focus. In this portion of the Word, the teaching of Jesus points out how important it is that all good relationships with others must include patience as well as forgiveness and mercy. It's a cry that could be echoed from each with whom we have any kind of friendship, "Be patient with me. . . ."

Let's put that into a context by reading Matthew 18:21–35.

**Theological  
Insight:**

*The Greek word for patience, makrothumia, as used in verse 26, is interesting in its construction. The first half means "anger" and the other half means "long or slow." So we have the word meaning: "being able to handle one's anger slowly." Here is a major clue as to how patience is to be applied to interpersonal relationships.*