

# #32 Northside Natter

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Today, I'm taking a brief look at **Longsuffering**.

There are many times in our lives where we have said things we regret and we can't seem to apologise for them because we either don't know who we've offended, or we feel too much shame to bring it up. Sometimes our actions or words offend people who were just passing by and became accidental eavesdroppers. How would we know if they were offended?

We can sometimes tell when we've offended another person. They start to avoid us and are not as friendly towards us as they used to be. We don't always know why we have offended them and we're too afraid to ask; it might make matters worse, right?

We know we should always apologise for our offences so why is it so hard to say, "*have I offended you in any way?*" Yet in some circumstances, our shame prevents us.

This is where longsuffering comes in and relies on the offended person to change their mind. Yes, being offended is a choice. God is merciful, gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth; **Exodus 34:6**. And guess what? God expects us to be the same. Why? Because he made us in his spiritual likeness and we are, being spirit-filled creatures, equipped with the same capacities.

Longsuffering is about our ability to endure injury (hurt) caused by others, trouble or provocation. It is long and patient endurance.

Let's say we have a friend who we spend a lot of time with and get really close to; we find it easy to long-suffer his quirks and weirdness. We go along with him for many years like this when suddenly, our friend loses his job and is now fumbling about at home trying to redefine his place in the world. It's odd how when a person loses his job or retires, his self-identity evaporates and his self-worth takes a tumble. (Sometimes, a serious illness can affect a person in the same way). Our friend struggles to find his niche in life but eventually falls into something that he feels quite passionate about. However, we look at our friend and think he's gone a little bonkers, and after a while, we become very tired of hearing about this new passion ad infinitum. We're no longer on the same wavelength. We just want to offload this old friend onto some other unsuspecting person and move on. He's become more than we want to put up with.

Where is the longsuffering now? Was it only while the longsuffering was easy that we could do it? Longsuffering is like the marriage vow that states: *in sickness and in health*. Longsuffering really comes into its own when people are at their worst. Think about this for a minute. Would we continue to long-suffer our friends, family and acquaintances if they suddenly became high maintenance? Or would we abandon them because we want an easier life?

Longsuffering has other aspects to it other than endurance or perseverance. It relies heavily on forgiveness and compassion. We need to ask ourselves: '*What if it was us instead of him who was redefining their existence – answering the question 'who are we now?'*' Would he

dump us if we became too obnoxious for him, or would he forgivingly, compassionately long-suffer us?

Human nature deals with relationship issues in a selfish way, but this isn't how the Lord deals with things. He works with people to help them get past the struggles they are going through.

Notice how I said 'going through?' Imagine a long tunnel. Imagine this friend of ours walking through that long tunnel to get to the other end, which seems such a long way off. Would God abandon *his* friend before he reached the end of the tunnel? Or would he be patient and wait for his friend to work his way there? Of course, God would be longsuffering and encourage the person to make it to the other end, enduring all the outbursts and weirdness of the person along the way. He wouldn't abandon him or cast him over for someone more interesting and less effort. He'd have compassion on him for what he was experiencing, knowing he'd be fine once he emerges from the other end of that tunnel.

Longsuffering can be hard. Longsuffering can mean we have to put in a lot of time, effort, and energy to help our friend to settle with his situation. Longsuffering means we have to forgive his tiresome zealousness and offences. We must foster compassion for him for what he is now experiencing. But what if it takes a year? Two years?

Guess what? Hasn't our friend put up with us with our quirks and weirdness for years? Hasn't he forgiven our offences and shown us compassion when we've gone gaga at some point in our lives? Why can't we do the same in return?

### **Romans 9:22**

*What if God, willing to show his wrath and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?*

The things the Lord has to long-suffer are far worse than we will ever have to long-suffer. Someone said something we didn't like hearing. Big deal. Get over it. Forgive it. Show some compassion. That person may have been going through a great deal of stress, struggle or hardship that we don't even know about. There was certainly an issue there, that much we do know.

### **Colossians 3:12**

*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.*

Longsuffering is a fruit of the Spirit and one that we need to exercise in order to perfect. Fellowships are the ideal place to exercise this spiritual gift. I wouldn't be surprised if we had to exercise longsuffering at every single meeting we went to. What a blessing. By the time we go out to witness to people, we are well used to longsuffering people's weirdness and idiocy and do it with great patience and finesse.

### **1 Timothy 1:16**

*Howbeit for this cause, I obtained mercy that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.*

We only need to look to Jesus for our example in long-suffering injury, trouble, provocation, slander, hatred, spite and even murder. Could he have saved himself from execution? He had thousands of angels at his command, yet he saw that for the greater good it was more expedient to long-suffer it.

Forgive offences; quickly. Forgive those who take offence at us in our stupidity. Forgive those who avoid us and judge us in our weirdness, and forgive those who fail to long-suffer us. Forgive them and long-suffer them instead. Show them compassion for they do not understand. Work out how to apologise to them, or even just to ask the question: *'have I offended you in some way?'*

As it was for Jesus, so it is also expedient for us to long-suffer.