

The Good News and Bad News About Longsuffering

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The Church commemorates Righteous Job the Longsuffering. Scripture tells a lot about that quality of "longsuffering" which is often ascribed to God in Church prayers, and sometimes refers to Job and other human beings.

A modern definition of longsuffering might be "putting up with a lot for an extended length of time." That is what God the Father does, according to the Old Testament. We read in Joel 2:12-13 an urgent plea to the wayward people of Israel to "return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." God asks His people to "rend your hearts and not your garments."

The Book of Nehemiah speaks about God's patience, His warnings, His punishment when His people absolutely refuse to listen, and His unchanging love: "Many years Thou didst bear with them, and didst warn them by Thy Spirit through Thy prophets; yet they would not give ear.

Therefore Thou didst give them into the hands of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless in Thy great mercies Thou didst not forsake them; for Thou art a gracious and merciful God" (9:30-31).

II Chronicles 33 offers a story of God dealing in a similar way with one specific person, the proud and evil-doing Manasseh. When the Israelites under Manasseh's rule "pay no heed" God allows the Assyrian army to take him with hooks and bind him with fetters, bringing him in disgrace to Babylon. Yet when he repents and entreats God, he is allowed to return to Jerusalem as a humbled and better ruler.

In the New Testament it is clear that Christ's patience caused Him suffering. He asks, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" (Mark 9:19). Another time He says, "O, Jerusalem...How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Matthew 23: 37). Yet He continues in "perfect patience" as Paul calls it in I Timothy 1:16.

The New Testament gives us several reasons why we ourselves should be longsuffering. One is simply that it is the only way to share in Christ's life as fully as we can. The bad news is that without patience and suffering we can't really become like Christ.

The good news is that our longsuffering can be the means for others to be saved, including those we love. Paul says he endures everything "for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).

Troparion - Tone 1

As an indestructible pillar of courage,
you repulsed the attacks of Belial and remained unmoved in temptation.
Therefore, O wise Job,
the Church praises you as a model of endurance and an example of virtue;
and she is made radiant by your great deeds.

The good news of longsuffering is also for us personally. In I Peter 5:8-10 we are encouraged to resist the devil who prowls like a roaring lion. Then, "after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, establish, and strengthen you."