

Subject: Are You Testing God's Patience?

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2 Kings 21:1-15 (Pentecost 20)

Dear Christian,

Patience is hard! How hard is it for children to patiently wait on the ride to grandma's house, for an exciting event like Christmas, or even just for dinner when they are "so hungry"? How hard is it for adults to patiently wait for things like test results, viruses to be gone, masks to come off, or even a day off from work. How hard is it to be patient with other people? You get impatient with people when they put your patience to the test. You expect grandma and grandpa to get to your house but they aren't there yet. You expect your coworkers to get things done but they are taking the slow approach to their work. You expect your children to do what has been asked of them like pick up their toys, but they aren't doing it or just refuse to pick up. Patience is not easy to have. It's even harder when people test your patience sometimes doing it just to see how far that patience extends. They want to see how long it will be until you react. Even the most patient of people in the world eventually run out of patience. How about God?

God is extremely patient with people. People sin every day and sometimes commit the same destructive sins day in and day out. Many people don't even see their sins because they have grown so callous to what they are doing and their consciences become so numb guilt is not felt. God is patiently waiting for people to repent of their sins and then to see fruits of that repentance and fruits of their faith in him as their Savior. However when repentance and faith are not seen, God still patiently waits, but how far will that patience extend. Like me, they put God's patience to the test. Perhaps as you hear the shocking story of my story, let me ask you to consider this: Are you testing God's patience?

My name is Manasseh. When you think of great men of faith in the Bible, you think of people like Abraham, Moses, King David, even my father King Hezekiah. They were not perfect, but they were people who trusted God's promises. Let me put it to you this way: You would not put me in the same category, not even close. I was quite possibly the worst king who reigned in Jerusalem. If there ever was an example of someone who needed God to be patient with, I would be that person. I became king at a very young age. I reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. During that time, my wickedness knew no bounds as I did so much evil in God's eyes. Some might say I was a very religious man, but God calls my actions disgusting and looking back on my life, he would be right.

I basically undid all that my father, Hezekiah, had worked so hard to do restoring worship of the only true God in the kingdom of Judah. Then I made things worse. I followed the disgusting practices of the surrounding nations which God had driven out. I restored the high places, the old worship sites on the hill-tops surrounding Jerusalem. I set up altars to Baal, the bloodthirsty god of the Phoenicians, as well as an Asherah pole. Asherah was Baal's sister-spouse. That pole was a post which was part of the fertility cult rituals. So her worship was associated with adultery and temple prostitution. I worshiped the stars. I practiced witchcraft seeking omens and telling fortunes. I consulted mediums and other spiritists. It was plenty to do all this, but I took those disgusting practices into God's own house. I built altars to the stars in the courtyards and placed an image of Asherah in his own temple desecrating it.

Then my disregard for God led me to a devaluing of human life. In my zeal to serve all of these other gods, I sacrificed my own son to one of them. The streets of Jerusalem were filled with the blood of innocent people who tried to disagree with me or correct me. My life left such a horrible reputation behind that Jewish

tradition says I sawed the prophet Isaiah in half. Living my life of sin I had grown so callous and my conscience so numb that I no longer felt guilt nor did I care what God wanted. Yet it was one thing that I was so wicked committing every evil imaginable, but I also led the people I ruled to do the same. Like a shepherd leading sheep, the people followed my lead doing the same disgusting sins.

Fifty five years in total I reigned in Jerusalem and for many of those years my life was a disgusting toxic pool of sin. I wouldn't listen to the prophets' calls to repent, and neither would the people. I began to equate God's patience with indifference toward my sin. Yet God was unbelievably patient just in letting me rule for as long as I did patiently waiting for me to repent. Would you have been that patient with me? My callousness toward my sins as if they didn't matter was putting the Lord's patience to the test.

Your life probably looks nothing like my life, but he is no less patient with you. Yet you too could take that patience for granted. You could grow callous and your conscience could become so numb committing sin and after sin thinking that it doesn't matter what you do because God won't punish sin. You begin to equate his patience, that is so graciously given, with indifference toward sin so that you no longer care if a particular action is sinful or not. Earlier I asked you to consider this question: Are you testing the Lord's patience? Have you become so callous and your conscience so numb to certain sins that you see no need to repent and no need to change? If so then you are indeed testing God's patience and abusing his grace?

What God is patiently waiting for is fruits of repentance and faith. I had neither. Eventually his patience would run out. Finally the Lord gave his ultimatum. **"Because Manasseh king of Judah has engaged in these disgusting practices and has done more evil than all that which the Amorites who had gone before him had done, and he has caused Judah to sin with his filthy idols, therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says. Pay attention! I am bringing such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of all who hear of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Israel the plumb line that was stretched out over Samaria and the level used on the house of Ahab. I will wipe away Jerusalem just as someone wipes a bowl clean and turns it upside down. I will hand over the remnant of my possession and give them into the hand of their enemies, so that they become plunder and spoils for all their enemies, because they have done what is evil in my eyes and have provoked me to anger from the day when their fathers came out of Egypt until today."** (vs. 11-15)

Because of such wickedness, God was going to bring a shocking, almost unbelievable destruction on Jerusalem. People's ears would tingle when they heard about it. God's patience was running out with Israel and it was running out with me. His declaration was meant to be yet another call to repentance, repentance that I still didn't listen to. There will come a time when God's patience will run out with the world too and final judgment will come. Yet until then just as shocking as his patience is despite the wickedness you see in your own life and in the people of this world, so too is God's grace which keeps reaching out to save.

As shocking as my story might be to you, more shocking is the story of God's grace. In 2 Chronicles 33, the chronicler gives you the rest of my story. After being taken captive into Babylon, I finally heard God's call to repentance once the bronze shackles were clamped on my hands and feet and a hook put through my nose. I humbled myself and cried out to God. Despite all the wickedness I had done for so long and how callous I had grown toward the disgusting sins I committed, God forgave me. Listen to how the chronicler summarizes what happened in Babylon. **"When he was in distress, he sought the favor of the Lord and humbled himself deeply before the God of his fathers. He prayed to the Lord, and the Lord responded to his prayer and heard his plea for mercy. He brought him back to Jerusalem into his own kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is the true God."** (2 Chronicles 33:12-13) God had patiently waited for fruits of repentance and faith. Now he saw

that fruit in my life. I removed the altars, got rid of false gods, worshiped the true God, and encouraged all of Judah to do the same.

With repentant hearts, you cry out for mercy too. You trust the forgiveness and salvation given to you by the same God who describes himself as compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love. You see all of that clearly through his own Son Jesus whom he sent to take your sins on his cross. Recognizing the greatness of God's mercy and love leads you to diligently want to produce the fruits of repentance and faith that he patiently waited for. Those sins you had become so callous and numb to doing are now things you don't want to do. Instead of testing God's patience, you rejoice in that patience desiring to live your faith every day in the God who saves you by his grace.

My life had been wasted by sin. When people think about me, they will always see a wicked king who did so much evil in God's eyes and rightfully so. But maybe you could also remember me as an example of whom God demonstrated tremendous patience with. I rejoice that God was patient with me. If he had not been patient with me I would not have repented and neither would I have salvation. Yet even though my sins were forgiven, what I had done had lasting consequences for the people I had led astray. The people continued to follow in the ways I had seduced them into for more than fifty years of ruling.

Sometimes the sins you commit or have grown so callous to doing can have lasting consequences on your life, your family, and on those around you. You can dwell on the actions of your past, but you can't change it. Oh, how I wish I could go back and do everything right the first time, but I can't. Instead of dwelling on the past and how you tested God's patience, rejoice now that he has been and will continue to be patient with you. Rejoice that his grace sent his Son to save you. As you rejoice, remember that he is still being patient with you every day. Dear Christian, God is patiently waiting for fruits of repentance and faith. Looking to the future, that is what you want to do. Live that change of heart about sin. Live your faith in the God who saved you every day. May the prayer which was spoken earlier be your prayer every day. "Almighty God, in your bountiful goodness, keep us safe from every evil of body and soul. Make us ready, with cheerful hearts, to do whatever pleases you."

King Manasseh



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