

5



PATIENCE

LIFE ON THE VINE

PREPARE

Read all the assigned Scriptures listed on page 3 of the participant guide. Reflect on the way God is characterized in the two Old Testament passages. Then compare them with the 2 Peter passage and consider this question: What is the purpose of God's patience?

Read Chapter 5 in Life On the Vine, paying attention to the connections Kenneson highlights between patience, peace, and forgiveness. Think about what it means to say that "Christians are called to be patient for the sake of others."

During the week, as part of your preparation, try going without a watch.



Invite a group member to supply the fruit to share during the meeting time. This week's suggestion is watermelon.

Set up the room: Have the items ready for the welcome table as well as Bibles and copies of the learner guide for group members.

Also, if there is a clock in the room, make arrangements to cover its face with dark construction paper. To open the session you'll need a basket or other container in which to collect all the watches from group members.

PRAY

As part of your discipline of preparation this week, pray Psalm 37:1-9.

GATHERING AT THE TABLE OF PATIENCE

In Advance

Prepare the welcome table by arranging the bowl(s) or tray(s) of fruit brought in to share. Open the Bible to Galatians 5 and place the white pillar candle or taper nearby. Be sure to have matches or a lighter handy for the person designated to light the candle.

As People Arrive

Greet everyone. Introduce newcomers and visitors to other class members. Keep in mind that bearing the fruit of the Spirit begins the moment the first person walks in the door.

To Open

Just prior to getting started, pass around the fruit so those who've arrived can enjoy it. Reserve a portion of the fruit as a display on the worship table. Once it's time to start, call attention to the worship table. Invite everyone to focus on the fruit on the table as you read aloud Galatians 5:22-23. Light (or have someone else light) the Christ candle on the worship table.

Conclude the gathering time with prayer. Consider using Psalm 145:8-10 as the starting point.

EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF PATIENCE

An action parable: To begin the study time, go around the group with a basket and collect everyone's wristwatch or timepiece. Explain that the lesson will be dealing with how our view of time affects our cultivation of the fruit of patience. Then leave the room. Offer as little explanation as possible; place the basket of watches on the welcome table and simply leave the room. Plan to remain out of the room for several minutes. The point is to simulate a situation where some people in the room begin to feel impatient. Use your own judgment as to when to return.

Once you come back into the room begin discussion with these questions:

- ◆ Who began to get impatient? Why?
- ◆ Who tried to check one of the watches in the basket?
- ◆ What does the phrase "wasting my time" mean to you?

Key to understanding the fruit of patience is understanding the many ways our lives are regimented by time. Talk about why unexpected delays—traffic jams, doctor appointments, lines in the check out counter—become such obstacles to patience? How does your own relationship with your watch or a clock affect the way you think about and try to cultivate patience?

Read aloud Psalm 145: 8. Then form two groups. Instruct one group to read Jonah 3-4 and the other group read the story of God's giving the Israelites a second set of tablets in Exodus (Exodus 32:1-19 and Exodus 34: 1-10). Provide these questions to guide both group's discussion:

- ◆ How does each story's portrayal of God's patience support the claim of Psalm 145: 8?
- ◆ In each story, what does God's patience or "long-suffering" make possible?

Come together as a total group and read aloud these two statements Kenneson makes:

- (1) *"God's patience—God's slowness to anger—represents a willingness to yield control"*
- (2) *"God doesn't seem to be in a hurry . . .but instead waits patiently for us to respond to God's initiatives in reaching out to us (page 110).*

Talk about how the story of Jonah and the story of the second set of tablets illustrate either of these two statements.

EXAMINING THE FRUIT OF PATIENCE

Character of the Fruit

Kenneson notes that in both 1 Corinthians 13 and Romans 15, Paul says that the reason Christians are called to embody patience is the same reason God embodies it—*for the sake of others*. This connection between divine and human patience is illustrated in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant. Hear Matthew 18:23-35 read aloud and consider these questions as a total group:

- ◆ What is Jesus condemning in the parable?
- ◆ In light of the parable, how should patience, mercy, and forgiveness be connected in our lives as Christians?

Obstacles to Bearing the Fruit

Examining how our culture shapes our lives, particularly in terms of understanding and managing time, may reveal why the fruit of patience is so difficult to cultivate. According to Kenneson, culture's view of time can be characterized in at least three ways:

- (1) as a resource to be carefully regulated,
- (2) as a possession to be hoarded, and
- (3) as the key ingredient in productivity.

Take a look at the three images of ancient timepieces on page 2 in the participant guide: a sundial, an hourglass, and the bowl of a water clock. Ask persons to imagine (and then discuss) how their experience of time and daily living would be different if the day was governed not by the tick of a clock but by some rhythm of nature, say, the movement of the sun, the sifting of sand, or the flow of water.

BEAR FRUIT OF PATIENCE IN THE WORLD

Cultivating the Fruit

Daily living is for most people “constantly productive and incessantly busy.” Ask the group to what extent that is true for them. Does such a way of living make *being patient* feel like passivity? Kenneson suggests that cultivating the fruit of patience requires embodying a different posture toward time (you may want to read a portion of the paragraph in the book under the subheading “Reckoning time differently” on page 124). Take time to reflect on what embodying a different posture toward time would look like in your life.

Offer these suggestions as opportunities this coming week to cultivate the fruit of patience.

- ◆ During worship, remember that at the heart of the Christian story is a God who is patient, slowly and diligently at work to create a people who bear witness to him.
- ◆ Reclaim and practice Sabbath keeping. Try wasting your time with God.
- ◆ Cultivate some way that resists the notion that fast is better. Walk when there is no reason to drive. Sit by a window. Bake bread.

What other ways can you think of to put priority on cultivating patience rather than simply productivity?

Close your time together by returning the watches from the basket. Have everyone read silently the poem by Denise Levertov on page 2 of the participant guide. Gather in a circle and pray Colossians 1:9-12.