

## Theme: Who's **ALMIGHTY**?

### Topic: God's Patience

### Date:

**Opening:** Start by playing a multiple choice game on medical trivia. (Note: We're talking today about God's "patience", so we'll kick it off by talking about "patients", as in medical patients!). Have people select their answers by facing a direction in the room you designate for each answer. Have them sit down if they are wrong and award a prize to the winner. Here are the questions and answers. (Correct answer is underlined and bold.)

1. What field of medicine is an "X-ray doctor"? (a. pathologist, b. oncologist, c. orthopedist, **d. radiologist**)
2. What was the first human organ to be successfully transplanted? (a. heart, b. lung, **c. kidney**, d. liver)
3. The first hospital in the U.S. was established by Benjamin Franklin in what city: (a. Boston, b. Washington, D.C., **c. Philadelphia**, d. New York)
4. How many ribs does man have (and no, he doesn't have one less than a woman)? (a. 28, **b. 24**, c. 20, d. 16)
5. What is the most common blood type? (a. A+, **b. O+**, c. B-, d. AB+)
6. Which disease is thought to have caused the most harm to the most people? (**a. malaria**, b. mumps, c. AIDS, d. chicken pox)
7. According to a report on NBC news in Nov. of 2006, the average wait time in the emergency room across the country is how long? (a. 52 minutes, b. 74 minutes, c. 136 minutes, **d. 222 minutes**)
8. The most common reason for hospitalization in the U.S. is: (**a. pneumonia**, b. heart attack, c. fractures and sprains, d. mood disorders)
9. As of April 13, 2009, there were how many registered hospitals in the U.S.? (a. 3,708, b. 4,708, **c. 5,708**, d. 6,708)
10. Bonus tie-breaker question: How many beds were in those hospitals? (**945,199**)

Today we'll tackle a sixth attribute of God's character – His longsuffering and patience.

**Small Groups:** Split up into small groups and answer these questions:

1. Share your name and answer this question: What's the longest you think you've had to wait in line or at a spot? What were you doing?
2. Are you generally a patient person or an impatient one? Why do you think some are some way and others are not?
3. What is the danger of focusing our attention on God's patience?

Get some feedback on the first two questions. Question #3 we'll talk about together at the end.

Our focus today will be on God's **patience**. When we talk about God being patient, we are not referring to Him being able to wait for long periods of time. We are specifically referring to Him delaying punishment, being desirous of our change. We can also call that "longsuffering".

There are many verses from both the Old and New Testaments which reveal God's patience:

"Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.'" Exodus 34:6-7

This description of God being "slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness" can also be found in Numbers 14:18, Psalm 86:15, Psalm 103:8, Psalm 145:8, Jonah 4:2, etc.).

It's easy to think of God's patience and take it so much for granted. So today, we're going to play a little game of "**What would you do if you were God?**". In each of these scenarios describe the actions and attitudes of the offender(s). This should help us appreciate how different God is from us, particularly when it comes to His longsuffering.

## **PATIENCE WITH PHARAOH**

In Exodus, God has come through Moses to deliver His people from the oppressive domination of Egypt's dictator, Pharaoh. "Let My people go," was the command to Pharaoh. Take a moment to describe any time in your life when you knew God was wanting you to do something, and you disobeyed. All of us should be able to relate AT LEAST this first time when God told Pharaoh something and Pharaoh blew Him off.

But then God did something a little unique. He gave Pharaoh a sign to prove he better listen up. Aaron's (Moses' brother) walking stick turned into a snake right before Pharaoh's eyes! Pharaoh bowed up and had his magicians do a trick so their staffs became snakes as well – and then Aaron's snake ate theirs! Yet still, Pharaoh was a hard-hearted man. So God sends a plague on the land – all their water turned into blood! And this was just the first of 10 TOTAL PLAGUES!

1. Water to blood
2. Frogs invading the land
3. Gnats all over the land
4. Flies
5. Livestock diseased
6. Boils on skin
7. Hail
8. Locusts
9. Darkness for three days
10. Death of the firstborn of livestock and people

So now we ask, **“What would you do if you were God?”** Talk about this for a moment, allowing them to be creative in what new plagues they would send, or in what way they would annihilate Pharaoh.

One of the things we see from God’s patience in this instance is that **He is more concerned with demonstrating His power and authority than in punishing people.** Over and over in this story we see God’s purpose that Israel and Egypt “know that I am the Lord”.

## **PATIENCE WITH ISRAEL**

So the people of God ALSO saw these signs which God did in Egypt. Then in power and great celebration the people are sent out of Egypt carrying all kinds of gifts and treasure. And THEN the problems grow. Throughout the books of Exodus and Numbers we see the people of Israel complaining and trying God. And in a very interesting comment, God notes **10 times** they tested Him:

“Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs, which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice...” Numbers 14:22

It’s probably not a coincident there were 10 plagues over Egypt and 10 times Israel tested God. Here are the 10 times they tested God:

1. They complained about having to work harder (Exodus 5:15-23)
2. They wouldn’t listen to Moses at the beginning (Exodus 6:9-13)
3. Cry out in complaint to Moses as Pharaoh’s army presses in at Red Sea (Ex. 14:1-12)
4. Cry out in complaint to Moses for food (Ex. 16:1-3)
5. Cry out in complaint to Moses for water (Ex. 17:1-3)
6. Built the golden calf to worship (Ex. 32)
7. Complain of adversity, hardship (Num. 11:1-3)
8. Complain about wanting meat to eat (Numbers 11:1-6)
9. Aaron and Marion murmur about Moses being sole voice (Num. 12:1-9)
10. Spies sent into land, show cowardice and lack of trust (Num. 13:30-14:10)

So ask again, **“What would you do if you were God?”** How would they respond to this complaining people? Give up? Deal out wrath? Specifically what would they do, and when?

Now let’s shift to a couple scenes from the life of Christ, again focusing on God’s patience. Jesus had been conducting His ministry of teaching and healing, and almost from the very start the Pharisees and other religious leaders had problems with Him. They frequently questioned Him, trying to trick Him with elaborate questions. They talked poorly about Him to others, plotted to trick Him, and generally were a thorn in His side (not to mention a huge physical threat). Look at Matthew 21:23:

“And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?’”

Now, let's imagine the rudeness of being interrupted by this group once more. You're Jesus and you have unlimited power (as you have already demonstrated). **So what would you do if you were God?** Again, take some time to question them here.

Lastly, let's look at Jesus on the cross. Read **Matthew 27:33-42**. This same group of leaders has had Jesus arrested, beaten without mercy, and now He is about to die...**FOR THEM**. If **you were Jesus, what would you do as they mocked you?**

As we have walked through these scenes, we can clearly see God is very different from us. We may SAY we are patient, but our patience is different from His. He is an extremely patient God, who withholds punishment from us.

Ask them what they said was the danger of focusing on God's patience. Likely, they realize one danger is that we become calloused to the punishment and wrath of God if our mind lands shallowly on His patience. But God's patience does not mean He WON'T punish...it just means He has put it off. The very first verse we looked at today, which highlights God's goodness and patience, concludes this way...

"...yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

Exodus 34:7

The book of Revelation is filled with the wrath of God on a world which has taken His patience for granted. The point is that He WILL punish, even if in our sight it has been put off for so long.

Our real point today is not just to focus on this attribute of God's character. Look at Paul's words to the Romans:

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that **the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**" Romans 2:4

There it is! We focus on God's patience because His kindness and patience to us **LEADS US TO TURN BACK TO HIM**. His love woos us home.

Maybe talk about some time in your own life where that is exactly what happened. God showed you His patience; you understood His kindness toward you; and you responded by coming back to Him.

We typically fear that focusing on the kindness and patience of God leads us to take it for granted and ends up in our disobedience. Yet this verse just told us His kindness leads us to repentance. True understanding of God's patience calls us back to Him, and that has been our intent today.

Wrap up today with a time of prayer, giving thanks to God for His patience. Maybe spend some time also confessing our flippant attitude for His patience. And certainly close out with an invitation for us to come back to Him.